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English Teachers' Perceptions and Experiences of Language Learning Strategies

A Qualitative Study in Sweden

Isak Altsäter
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Supervisor: Asha Tickoo
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Abstract

Language learning strategies (LLS) in the English language classroom has been a well-researched topic in recent years. The potential benefits of teaching strategies, that is strategy instruction (SI), to learners is a central part of this. In this, teachers have a key role in designing SI that is valuable for the learners. This qualitative interview study therefore aims to elicit Swedish EFL teachers' perceptions on LLS, as well as eliciting their teaching practices in relation to SI and their experiences of it in the English classroom in Sweden. Data was collected by interviewing five English teachers at upper secondary school in Sweden. The data was then thematically analyzed which yielded several themes that had surfaced in the interviews. The findings indicate that the teachers' perceptions of LLS coincide with several scholars in that strategies can be effective tools for learning and that strategies can foster learner autonomy. The study also elicited the teachers' self-reported teaching practices regarding SI, in which the amount of explicitness in the instruction and the types of strategies promoted are analyzed and discussed. However, some interesting issues were raised by some teachers regarding their experiences of SI. These are issues regarding learners' retention of strategies after the SI and that the teachers experienced some difficulties in observing and assessing strategies. Finally, limitations with the study, suggestions for future research, and some pedagogical implications are discussed.

Table of Contents

1	Introduction	1
1.1	Aim and research questions	1
1.2	Definitions and categorizations of language learning strategies	3
2	Literature review	5
2.1	Teacher perceptions of language learning strategies	5
2.2	Strategy instruction research.....	8
2.2.1	Characteristics of strategy instruction.....	8
2.2.2	The effects of strategy instruction.....	9
3	Method.....	13
3.1	Participants.....	13
3.2	The interview	13
3.3	Data analysis	15
3.4	Ethical considerations	15
3.5	Limitations with the method	16
4	Findings.....	17
4.1	Themes relating to teacher perceptions of LLS in the EFL classroom.....	17
4.1.1	Strategies facilitate language learning	18
4.1.2	Strategies as tools that lead to more autonomous learners.....	18
4.2	Themes relating to teacher experiences of SI	19
4.2.1	The effects of SI on language learning	19
4.2.2	The approach to SI.....	19
4.2.3	The types of strategies taught.....	20
4.2.4	Concerns regarding learners' retention of strategies after SI.....	22
4.2.5	Observing and Assessing LLS	23

5	Discussion	24
5.1	Analysis of the teachers’ perceptions of LLS.....	24
5.2	Analysis of the teachers’ experiences of SI.....	25
5.3	Limitations and suggestions for future research.....	28
6	Pedagogical implications	30
7	Conclusion	31
	Reference list	32
	Appendix A: Interview guide, English	
	Appendix B: Intervjuguide, Svenska	
	Appendix C: Informed consent	

1 Introduction

A key interest within linguistic educational research is the improvement and facilitation of students' language learning. One topic is that of the learner's capability to learn a new language. From this interest in improving students' language learning, Rubin (1975) called for an examination into the characteristics of a good language learner and what researchers and educators can learn from this examination. She reasoned that some learners would learn a language regardless of whatever teaching method or classroom materials are used. Rubin thereby contended that there was a "need to isolate what the good learner does – what his strategies are – and impart this knowledge to less successful learners" (Rubin, 1975, p. 43). Rubin's paper was an early inspection into the topic of *language learning strategies* (LLS), which are defined as approaches that learners of language apply to "enhance their own learning" (Oxford, 1990, p. 1). Although the topic of learning strategies originated within the field of cognitive science, LLS has since evolved into a topic in its own right within linguistic educational research (O'Malley & Chamot, 1990).

By the early 1990s, LLS had been recognized as a topic of interest by many scholars in the field of linguistic educational research. Some influential books were published during this period containing taxonomies or classifications of strategies that language learners employ (e.g., Oxford, 1990; O'Malley & Chamot, 1990). In the years since, a great body of literature has emerged studying various aspects of LLS. Some themes that have been explored range from what kinds of strategies learners use, individual and contextual factors that influence the use of strategies, and the effects strategy instruction (SI) can have on language learning performance (Chamot, 2008).

1.1 Aim and research questions

As has been stated, there is an abundance of literature on the topic of LLS where various aspects of the use of strategies for language learning have been explored. Many studies focus on the learner's perspective on the use of strategies and use quantitative methods, such as questionnaires, to measure the employment of strategies by learners. The *Strategy Inventory for Language Learning* (SILL), for example, is a common questionnaire used for gauging learners' use of strategies (Oxford & Burry-Stock, 1995). In strategy instruction research (SI), one common method is to evaluate the instruction based on student language performance after an SI intervention program (for a meta-analysis on SI, see Plonsky, 2011). However,

studies on the topic of LLS and SI have not as often addressed teacher perceptions of LLS and their experiences of SI in the English as a foreign language (EFL) classroom (Psaltou-Joycey et al., 2018).

Strategies are mentioned in the syllabus for the English subject in upper secondary school issued by the Swedish National Agency for Education (Skolverket, 2011). The syllabus states that one aim of the subject of English is that it should address “the ability to use different language strategies in different contexts” (Skolverket, 2011, aim of the subject). The syllabus also states that the course *English 5*, for example, should cover “Strategies for listening and reading in different ways and for different purposes” and “Strategies for contributing to and actively participating in discussions related to societal and working life” (Skolverket, 2011, core content). In short, strategies for language learning are part of the English subject syllabus in Swedish upper secondary school. This explicit mention of strategies thus underscores the need to review strategies in the English language classroom in a Swedish context. Considering the teacher’s role in implementing the curriculum, teacher perceptions of strategies related to language learning should be a topic of interest.

To summarize, the teacher perspective is to some extent overlooked within the literature on LLS and SI. Although teachers’ perceptions of LLS have been studied (e.g., Griffiths & Parr, 2001; Griffiths, 2007), in contrast to other aspects of LLS research, to focus on teacher perceptions seems to be far from extensive in the literature. Additionally, the Swedish school environment does not appear to be explored within the relevant literature found for this study. This seeming lack of data is within a context where the syllabus for the English courses overtly mentions language strategies. Strategies are consequently intended to be a part of the English classroom in Swedish upper secondary school. It is with this background that the present study will aim to discover what Swedish teachers’ perceptions of LLS in the English as a foreign language (EFL) classroom could be, and what their teaching practices concerning SI are as well as what their experiences of teaching strategies are. The goal is to explore what issues there can be concerning LLS and SI in the classroom. The research questions developed for this study are thereby twofold:

1. What perceptions do English teachers at upper secondary school have regarding language learning strategies in the Swedish EFL classroom?
2. What are the teachers’ teaching practices in relation to strategy instruction and what are their experiences of it in the Swedish EFL classroom?

1.2 Definitions and categorizations of language learning strategies

Before reviewing previous research, some definitions and categorizations of language learning strategies that are relevant for this study will be presented. This includes several terms that will be used throughout this paper. The term *language learning strategies* (LLS) has been very common in strategy research. It is relevant to note, however, that many other concepts or terms which are identical or related to LLS have been used previously by other researchers, such as *learner strategies*, *L2 learning strategies*, and *self-regulation strategies* (Oxford, 2017). This paper will nonetheless henceforth use the term LLS when referring to all strategies used by learners of a language.

On the surface, LLS can simply be defined as ways that learners use to enhance language learning in various ways (Oxford, 1990). Reaching a more conclusive definition of the concept of strategies for language learning has been fairly complicated, however. This has made some researchers refer to vagueness in defining LLS (e.g., Dörnyei, 2005, as cited in Rose, 2012). Dörnyei and Skehan (2003) criticized the concept of *learning strategies* by raising doubts concerning the fact that strategies include too many aspects of learning. For instance, they questioned that strategies can be cognitive and behavioral at the same time, which some scholars had previously posited. They thereby claimed that “To satisfy all these criteria, either learning strategies must be some sort of superordinate magic tools, or the term has been used in far too broad a sense” (Dörnyei & Skehan, 2003, p. 610). Dörnyei (2005, as cited in Rose, 2012) argued for a shift from the concept of LLS to *self-regulated learning*, a concept related to LLS. Rose (2012) met this criticism by arguing that self-regulated learning is just as vague as LLS and that the two concepts are compatible. Rose (2012) further argued that this reconceptualization of LLS would be to disregard many years of research over definitional issues, something he referred to as “throwing out the baby with the bathwater” (Rose, 2012, p. 92). Although LLS is a well-studied topic within linguistic educational research, “an agreed-upon definition has yet to surface” (Thomas & Rose, 2019, p. 249).

Prompted by the notion of definitional ambiguity, Oxford (2017) conducted an ambitious study of multiple definitions of LLS from numerous sources. The aim was to find previous definitions and compare these in order to highlight commonly described aspects of strategies used for learning. Oxford’s result was a comprehensive definition that includes a multitude of features:

L2 learning strategies are complex, dynamic thoughts and actions, selected and used by learners with some degree of consciousness in specific contexts in order to regulate multiple aspects of themselves (such as cognitive, emotional, and social) for the purpose of (a) accomplishing language tasks; (b) improving language performance or use; and/or (c) enhancing long-term proficiency. Strategies are mentally guided but may also have physical and therefore observable manifestations. Learners often use strategies flexibly and creatively; combine them in various ways, such as strategy clusters or strategy chains; and orchestrate them to meet learning needs. Strategies are teachable. Learners in their contexts decide which strategies to use. Appropriateness of strategies depends on multiple personal and contextual factors. (p. 48)

There are some aspects of this comprehensive definition that are relevant to consider for the present study. Firstly, it is important to note that strategies are employed for enhancing language learning, which includes *using* the language. Oxford (2017) argues that “language learning and language use are not opposites” (p. 148) and contends that a learner may very well improve their learning of a language in situations where they use it. Consequently, this definition underscores that strategies are used for learning a language, but that can also mean strategies for producing the language. Secondly, the definition suggests that strategies *may* be observable. Although certain strategies are observable, strategies are internal processes and are therefore not always visible to an observer. The observability of strategies will be relevant for this study as teachers’ perceptions of students’ strategy use will be addressed. Finally, the fact that strategies can be taught is necessary to consider, as this study will address the topic of strategy instruction in the EFL classroom. In sum, Oxford’s (2017) comprehensive definition includes many facets that researchers of LLS have argued constitute strategies. This is the chief definition that has informed this study.

Another common topic that has occupied LLS research is the categorization of strategies learners use. Some common categorizations have been provided by Oxford (1990) and O’Malley and Chamot (1990). This study will use Oxford’s (1990) taxonomy to categorize strategies discussed throughout this paper. The taxonomy divides language learning strategies into six major categories. The categories Oxford (1990) refers to as direct strategies (pp. 18-19) are memory strategies (e.g., placing new words into a context; semantic mapping), cognitive strategies (e.g., using resources; translating), and compensation strategies (e.g., using linguistic clues; using mime or gesture). The indirect strategies (Oxford, 1990, p. 20-21), on the other hand, consist of metacognitive strategies (e.g., planning your learning;

evaluating your learning), affective strategies (e.g., rewarding yourself; using music), and social strategies (e.g., cooperating with peers; asking for clarification). Additionally, Oxford (1990) illustrates how to apply these six categories of strategies to the four language skills, and further addresses how teachers can teach LLS in the classroom. Oxford's (1990) taxonomy of strategies has had a great influence on research and is the foundation of a questionnaire called the *Strategy Inventory for Language Learning* (SILL) which has been employed in numerous studies worldwide (Oxford & Burry-Stock, 1995).

To sum up, in this paper I will be using Oxford's (2017) overarching definition of strategies to define the concept, while also applying the term *language learning strategies* (LLS) to refer to these strategies. Additionally, Oxford's (1990) categorization of strategies will be used to make sense of the data when analyzing strategies addressed by teachers in this study. Before this, however, previous research on the topic of teacher perceptions on LLS will be addressed.

2 Literature review

There are numerous aspects of the topic of LLS that have been considered in linguistic educational research. Some of them will be presented here that are relevant to this study. Firstly (2.1), although not very common in LLS research, some studies have observed teachers' perceptions of LLS in the English language classroom. Secondly (2.2), the topic of strategy instruction (SI) has occupied some of the research on LLS.

2.1 Teacher perceptions of language learning strategies

The important role of teachers in the topic of LLS has been recognized by many researchers throughout the years. Oxford (1990) asserted that there was a new role for teachers in the classroom where they function as facilitators rather than authority figures. She argued that learners would take on more responsibility and so LLS had an important part to play in this new context. In other words, teachers have an essential role as instructors of strategies in the new context where greater self-direction is needed. Furthermore, Chamot (2005) posited that as there is a growing interest in research on learner-centered teaching, "instruction in learning strategies will assume a greater role in teacher preparation and curriculum design" (p. 126). This emphasizes the importance of the role teachers have regarding LLS in the classroom, as well as the importance of research on the teacher perspective of LLS. This notion was also

held by Griffiths (2007) who argued that “Because of their pivotal role, teacher practices and perceptions are critically important since they have the potential to influence the effectiveness of the teaching/learning process” (p. 91). Despite this, the body of research on teacher perceptions of LLS is not large according to some researchers (e.g., Psaltou-Joyce et al., 2018). Similarly, no studies found for this review address teachers in a Swedish context related to LLS in the EFL classroom.

Some of the studies that have explored teachers’ perceptions have investigated the amount of agreement between the frequency of learners’ use of strategies and how teachers perceived the frequency of learners’ use of strategies. Griffiths and Parr (2001), for example, looked at 569 learners of English in various school contexts in New Zealand and their use of strategies. They used the six strategy categories developed by Oxford (1990) by using the previously mentioned SILL questionnaire. This result indicated that the learners used social and metacognitive strategies the most, while memory strategies was the least frequently used strategy category. Additionally, Griffiths and Parr distributed a teacher questionnaire to 30 teachers regarding their perceptions of the learners’ use of strategies, which revealed some interesting findings. The teachers believed that the learners employed memory strategies most out of the six categories while this was indeed the least employed strategy category by the learners. According to the researchers, this indicated a possible discrepancy between the learners’ strategy usage and the teachers’ perceptions of it.

Rivera-Mills and Plonsky (2007) discussed the difference between student and instructor perceptions of what is effective language teaching. The authors called this a gap that could hinder proper strategy instruction. They argued that differences in perceptions such as this could impede L2 learning when teachers and learners do not agree on what constitutes effective teaching. As was found in Griffiths and Parr’s (2001) study, there seemed to exist a mismatch between the learners’ use of LLS and the teachers’ perception of it, something which may lead to this negative impact Rivera-Mills and Plonsky implied.

In a later study, however, Griffiths (2007) returned to the issue of teachers’ perceptions regarding LLS and found a larger agreement between the students’ use of strategies and the teachers’ perception of the effectiveness of these strategies. 34 teachers and 131 English learners from various countries ranging from elementary to advanced levels participated in this study. This time, Griffiths found that the teachers considered 71 percent of the strategies learners used most frequently to be highly effective. Griffiths posited that this more encouraging finding in contrast to her previous study “may, perhaps, reflect a growing

awareness of the importance of language learning strategies in the language teaching and learning area generally” (p. 98). Ardasheva and Tretter (2012) found a similar agreement between teacher perceptions of the effectiveness of strategies and the strategies employed by their learners. They argued that their results “suggest a strong awareness of the effectiveness of LLS among teachers working at all educational levels” (p. 573), which would further reinforce Griffiths’s (2007) conclusion.

Other studies have used Oxford’s (1990) taxonomy of strategy categories to identify which strategies teachers perceived they promoted the most in the classroom. Psaltou-Joycey et al. (2018), for example, studied 92 EFL teachers in Greece and found a generally high promotion of LLS in the EFL classroom. The teachers believed they focused most on metacognitive and cognitive strategies while social and affective strategies were the least common strategy categories to be promoted. Sen and Sen (2012) studied 70 EFL teachers at a university in Turkey and likewise looked at their self-reported promotion of strategies. They also found metacognitive and cognitive strategies to be the most promoted strategy categories, although compensation strategies were common as well. Similar to the findings of Psaltou-Joycey et al., Sen and Sen found that affective strategies were the least promoted strategies by the teachers. Additionally, they elicited qualitative data through semi-structured interviews, aiming to examine teachers’ perceptions of the impact of LLS in the EFL classroom. Generally, the teachers argued that LLS may aid the learners in being more autonomous in their learning process. In conclusion, the findings of these two studies thereby seem to indicate that certain specific categories of strategies are often more promoted in the classroom than other categories. In these cases, metacognitive strategies and cognitive strategies seemed to be more common, while social and affective strategies were less common to promote. They also showed that, at least in Sen and Sen’s study, the EFL teachers had an optimistic view of promoting LLS in the EFL classroom.

In sum, the pivotal role of teachers on the issue of LLS has been highlighted by scholars. Nevertheless, research on teachers’ perception of LLS in the EFL classroom is comparatively low. Chamot (2005) stated that more research should be done on teachers concerning this topic, because “it might be that effective learning strategy instruction is closely tied to specific individual teacher characteristics and experiences” (p. 126). It is this gap in the data, and especially the perceptions of EFL teachers in a Swedish context, that I seek to fill with this study. Although teacher perceptions of LLS seem to have been underresearched, data on the efficacy of strategy instruction (SI) is richer in comparison.

2.2 Strategy instruction research

The possibility of teaching strategies to language learners is a central feature in the concept of LLS. Rubin (1975), in one of the earliest examinations into the topic of LLS, argues for the potential of studying the good language learner's use of strategies and teaching these to less successful language learners. In more recent years, strategy instruction (SI) has come to be a prominent theme within the topic of LLS (Chamot, 2008). This part of the study will address the literature on SI in relation to English language learning. The studies presented here are from numerous geographical regions and most have mainly focused on the English as a foreign language (EFL) classroom, which fits the situation of English learning in the Swedish classroom. A couple of studies (i.e. Olson & Land, 2007; Olson et al. 2012) are situated within an English as a second language context but were nevertheless included due to the interesting methods and findings. First, however, a discussion on what characterizes SI will be presented.

2.2.1 Characteristics of strategy instruction

Plonsky (2011) defined SI "as explicit instruction on specific practices or techniques that can be employed autonomously to improve one's L2 learning and/or use" (p. 994). Rivera-Mills and Plonsky (2007) described the basic principle of SI as: "A trained learner will be better at learning than an untrained one" (p. 537). According to this principle, SI would teach the learner to employ strategies that can better the learner's actual learning of a language. In short, the belief is that SI can facilitate language learning. It is relevant to note an additional aspect of strategies, which is the idea that strategies are related to learner independence, more commonly referred to as *learner autonomy*. For example, Rivera-Mills and Plonsky (2007) stated that "A strong relationship also has been shown between learner autonomy and the use of learning strategies because they both promote the self-directed nature of learning" (pp. 536-537), which illustrates this connection. In short, the idea of teaching strategies is consequently that it may give learners tools that can facilitate learning but also that strategies can make learners more autonomous.

There are variations to how SI can be performed. Chamot (2008) discusses the difference between *explicit* and *implicit* SI. In essence, explicit SI means consciously working with the strategies, discussing them, making learners aware of them, and teaching learners

how to apply them to learning tasks. According to Chamot, most researchers agree that explicitness is preferred over implicitness in SI. Oxford (1990), for example, promoted what she called “completely informed training” (p. 207). This is SI where explicitness in the teaching of strategies is valued, such as making the learners aware of many strategies, their transferability to other tasks, demonstrating them, and making the learners practice the strategies. Later, Oxford (2017) once again argued for explicitness in SI. She maintained that research has emphasized the importance of making learners aware of the effectiveness of strategies and how they may be transferred to other tasks during the instruction. In short, many scholars agree that explicitness in SI is superior to implicit instruction.

2.2.2 The effects of strategy instruction

SI has been under examination in various EFL contexts, in relation to numerous language skills, and by implementing various individual strategies or strategy categories in the SI program (Plonsky, 2011). A common method is to conduct a pretest-posttest design on a specific language skill (i.e., either reading, writing, listening, or speaking) with an SI intervention in-between, consisting of either some individual strategy or cluster of strategies. The efficacy of the SI program is in that way assessed based on the student’s performance after the SI intervention, often in comparison to a control group that was not exposed to the SI intervention.

In one such study, Wichadee (2011) looked at the effects of metacognitive SI on EFL students’ *reading* comprehension. The objective was to employ a fourteen-week metacognitive SI intervention on 40 EFL learners at a Thai university where the researcher conducted the SI program. The results showed significant improvement in reading comprehension in subsequent comparison with the control group, as well as an increase in the learners’ use of metacognitive strategies. Wichadee (2011) thereby concludes that SI could raise EFL learners’ awareness of their thought-process which may lead to more success when performing EFL reading tasks. The same conclusion has been drawn by other researchers looking at metacognitive SI on EFL reading comprehension through similar approaches (e.g., Cubukcu, 2008; Manoli et al., 2015).

Interestingly, another comparable study in China on 66 university EFL learners showed contrastive results, finding no significant difference between the control group and the experimental group after the metacognitive SI intervention on reading comprehension (Pei, 2014). Pei argued that one reason for this result may be the attitudes of the learners and

the context they are in. In subsequent interviews, it was elicited that they saw the SI as something they already had been taught in elementary school. Pei stated that “they do not appreciate the reasons why such strategies are useful and do not show interest or enthusiasm in the instruction” (p. 1151). In short, explicit metacognitive SI generally seems to have at least some impact on the learners’ reading comprehension. Pei’s study, however, showed contrastive results, indicating that not *all* SI programs will lead to a positive effect. This may suggest that the efficacy of metacognitive SI might not be an intrinsic part of the program but rather the effectiveness is grounded in the context and the needs of the learners.

Metacognitive SI has also been examined with the *writing* skill. Al-Jarrah et al. (2018) found that metacognitive SI on the EFL writing skill for twelve weeks significantly improved 44 EFL learners’ writing performance in Jordan. Like the previous studies, this was in comparison to a control group that received a more traditional writing instruction program. This metacognitive SI program consisted of several strategies taught to the learners, such as “self-preparation, self-monitoring and self-assessment” (Al-Jarrah et al., 2018, p. 331). In contrast, other studies look at one strategy in particular. Negari (2011), for example, examined 90 EFL learners in Iran on the strategy called *concept mapping*. Negari likewise found a significant improvement in the learners’ writing performance after the explicit SI on concept mapping had been executed.

The SI programs implemented in the studies above typically last a few weeks to a few months. In another study, Olson and Land (2007) address SI concerning both reading and writing and do so in a longitudinal study. They report on the Pathway Project which was a development program for ESL teachers in several schools in the USA, aiming to instruct teachers on how to promote cognitive strategies for reading and writing. The approach included “weaving the intervention into the fabric of the curriculum” (Olson & Land, 2007, p. 297), meaning that the teachers promoted this SI program several times in a course and over many years. It showed positive results for the ESL learners’ language performance consecutively through all the years that the project was in motion, once again showing positive effects of SI on language performance. Noteworthy is the fact that Olson and Land (2007) report on the teachers’ perception of this SI program. Overall, the teachers stated that they had noticed that the strategy instruction approach had aided the students in the Pathway Project classes. The teachers claimed that the students seemed more confident in their reading and writing ability than did students from other classes that had not been exposed to the SI program. This study is notable since it provides teacher-centered qualitative interview data on

the teachers' perspective of SI in the English language classroom, something that is unusual in the studies found for this paper. Olson et al. (2012) later replicated the study, once again showing significant improvement in the classes where the teachers were instructed on how to promote cognitive strategies. They finally stated that "Our findings highlight the efficacy of implementing a cognitive strategies approach for ELs using a range of pedagogical strategies" (Olson et al., 2012, p. 348).

In contrast to the studies hitherto presented, other studies have similarly utilized the pretest-posttest design but instead focused on the *listening* and *speaking* skills. Some studies employed metacognitive SI on the listening skill. Mohaved (2014) and Maftoon and Alamdari (2020) studied metacognitive SI for Iranian EFL learners and found a positive impact of the SI program on the learners' listening comprehension. Ngo (2016), on the other hand, employed a more comprehensive listening SI program on 27 EFL learners in a Vietnamese university. The SI program in Ngo's study included strategies such as "monitoring, evaluation, identifying main ideas, inferencing, prediction, note-taking, elaboration, summarising and deduction/induction" (Ngo, 2016, p. 249). The results in Ngo's study were equally positive for the learners' listening comprehension, further suggesting that explicit SI has a positive impact on the learners' language performance across various skills.

For the *speaking* skill, some studies have focused on strategies in oral communication. Rabab'ah (2015) conducted a study where 44 EFL learners at a university in Jordan got a communication SI program containing strategies such as "circumlocution" (p. 632) or "appeal for help" (p. 632). In comparison to a control group, the students of the experimental group had a better score on the language posttest as well as increased use of oral communication strategies. This made the researcher argue that the communication SI program had benefitted the learners. El-Sakka (2019) also conducted a study to improve the speaking performance of 40 EFL university learners in Egypt while implementing an explicit SI program on affective strategies as defined by Oxford (1990). These could be strategies for self-encouragement or lowering one's anxiety, for example. Similar to the previous studies on SI, El-Sakka's study indicated a significant improvement in the experimental group over the control group regarding the learners' speaking performance. El-Sakka argued that the results indicated that the affective strategies had aided the learners in controlling and regulating their negative emotions regarding speaking in English.

As has been seen thus far, the studies on SI mostly indicate a positive impact of many kinds of strategies on various skills. In a meta-study on SI research, Plonsky (2011) sought to

examine the effectiveness of SI in previous research. The results of the meta-study indicated that the effect size of SI was small to medium which therefore indicated only a modest effect of SI on learners' language performance overall. He also identified several factors that may influence the effectiveness of the SI. For example, SI was most effective for speaking and least effective in listening, and there seemed to be a benefit to provide longer SI programs as these seemed to have a better effect on learning than did shorter SI interventions. These findings prompted Plonsky (2011) to insist that "caution must be exercised in designing SI programs due to the range of variables found to relate to L2 strategy use and the effectiveness of SI" (p. 1013).

This may highlight the importance of context when designing SI, which has been emphasized in research on LLS. Oxford (2017), for example, discusses the cultural context in connection to SI. She argued that "Context, which includes cultural influence as well as all the affordances of the immediate environment (and the contexts inside us), should be taken into account in the design of strategy instruction" (p. 310). In other words, it may be paramount to consider the context of the learner regarding which strategies are appropriate. This suggests that teachers should not simply promote any language strategy without considering the context of the learners and the needs they have. Moreover, this emphasizes the role of the teacher in constructing SI that can be appreciated by their students.

Interestingly, while Plonsky's (2011) meta-study showed moderate effects of SI on language learning, most other studies presented here generally show significantly positive effects of SI on language learning and use. However, some issues can be raised regarding these studies. Firstly, as has been stated, no studies found for this review examine LLS or SI within the Swedish EFL context. Considering the recently mentioned importance of context, the lack of a Swedish perspective of SI is noteworthy. Secondly, the studies discussed here show SI programs as part of experimental SI interventions functioning as isolated units rarely embedded within any pre-existing curriculum. This issue then further accentuates the discrepancy between the studies above and the Swedish EFL context, seeing as language strategies are an integrated part of the English subject syllabus in Swedish upper secondary school (Skolverket, 2011). Lastly, the teachers' perceptions of implementing SI are seldom addressed in these studies. In fact, in several of the studies on SI presented here, the researcher is often the teacher of the SI program (e.g., Pei, 2014; Manoli et al., 2015).

In sum, the literature presented in this review suggests a gap in the research on Swedish teachers' perceptions of LLS and experiences of implementing SI in an authentic

EFL classroom context. Considering the role teachers have in this, their perceptions of LLS and SI would be valuable. Furthermore, the Swedish curriculum for upper secondary school explicitly mentions strategies across various contexts (Skolverket, 2011), further emphasizing the relevancy of strategies in the Swedish EFL classroom. I thereby contend that research on teachers' perceptions of LLS and their experiences of teaching strategies in the EFL classroom would prove beneficial for the LLS research community.

3 Method

3.1 Participants

This study aimed to explore Swedish upper secondary English teachers' perceptions of LLS and their experiences of SI in the EFL classroom. To answer the research questions, qualitative data was gathered through semi-structured interviews with five English teachers at upper secondary school. The teachers that participated were all employed in schools located in the western part of Sweden. Data collection began by emailing the headmasters of various schools around the Gothenburg region asking for permission to interview English teachers. One teacher was found through this approach. Four more teachers were then found as samples of convenience through personal contacts. The teachers were ensured confidentiality in this paper and have therefore been presented as teachers A, B, C, D, and E. Although all respondents were teachers of English in upper secondary school in Sweden, they all had a varying range of experience as English teachers.

3.2 The interview

According to Edwards and Holland (2013), the qualitative interview may elicit data on the perceptions, experiences, and feelings of the respondent. It is therefore used to investigate the understandings and beliefs of the participants of the interview. Qualitative interviews may in other words provide valuable insight into the experiences of the respondents and can thereby provide more detailed information in contrast to quantitative methods (Edwards & Holland, 2013). The interview as a concept consequently suited the aims of this study as the teachers' perceptions and experiences were the objectives.

Edwards and Holland (2013) suggest that the various types of interviews used in research can be viewed as a continuum ranging from structured to unstructured interviews.

For this study, a semi-structured interview guide was designed (see appendix A or B). The interview guide contained questions and topics that the interviewer sought to address. Additionally, excerpts from the English subject syllabus in Swedish upper secondary school (Skolverket, 2011) were presented to the respondents, to stimulate the conversation and contextualize the topic of LLS. The nature of the semi-structured guide allowed for more room to maneuver the discussion in pursuit of interesting topics that arose during the interview. In other words, the interview guide had some structure all the while allowing for flexibility, as the conversation could move back and forth with the interview guide as the interviewer saw fit.

The structure of the interview guide was inspired by the research questions of this study. The interview guide had three distinct parts: A, B, and C. Part A consisted of a short introduction as well as providing a definition of strategies for language learning. This definition was inspired by Oxford's (2017) definition presented in section 1.2. The teacher was then asked general opening questions regarding their time as a teacher. This part served the purpose of gaining some insight into who the respondent was while intending to get them comfortable with the interview situation.

Part B of the interview guide was mainly inspired by the first research question of this study, which was to elicit teacher perceptions of LLS in the Swedish EFL classroom. An excerpt from the aim of the English subject syllabus mentioning language strategies was read to the interviewer (Skolverket, 2011). This excerpt was read to stimulate the conversation and prompt the teacher to consider the role of strategies in the EFL classroom. The reading of the excerpt was then followed by questions of a more general and open nature regarding the teacher's perceptions of LLS in the EFL classroom.

Finally, part C contained further excerpts from the English subject syllabus (Skolverket, 2011) and subsequent questions which related more to the second research question. These were excerpts where strategies are mentioned. They were all taken from the English 5 course, both in the core content and the knowledge requirements (Skolverket, 2011). This part of the interview aimed to focus more on the teacher's teaching practice and their experiences of promoting strategies in their classroom. The excerpts from the English 5 course were thereby intended as examples of the subject syllabus to prompt the teacher to contextualize strategies and SI in their language teaching. The purpose was therefore not to review the curriculum and the content of the English 5 course, but to address the topic of the respondent's teaching practice concerning strategies overall. After the interview guide had

been designed, it was piloted with peers which proved useful when considering the effectiveness of the questions.

The interviews were all held in Swedish. This choice was made to ensure that the respondents could discuss more freely in their first language. All interviews were held via the video communication platform *Zoom*. The interviews were recorded through this platform's recording tool and were subsequently transcribed to analyze the interviewees' responses. The quotes from the interviews presented in the findings (4) section of this paper are translations from Swedish to English by the author.

3.3 Data analysis

The analysis of the data was informed by a thematic analysis approach provided by Braun and Clarke (2006). Thematic analysis is a method for identifying key topics, or *themes*, by analyzing patterns within the data. The analysis loosely followed Braun and Clarke's step-by-step guide. The first step was to read and re-read the transcribed interviews. At this stage, ideas for broad themes begun to emerge. To more specifically locate and identify patterns within the material, the transcripts were coded and subsequently collated. This generated a list of some potential themes within the data. Finally, in reviewing these themes, two major groupings of themes were observed. The first group related to some perceptions the teachers expressed regarding LLS's role in the EFL classroom overall (4.1), while the second group, containing much richer data, related to the perceptions and experiences of SI in the classroom (4.2). The themes were again tried and tested as the report was written and had to be revised accordingly, leading to some themes merging into one. These themes will be presented in the findings section of this paper.

Furthermore, to analyze some of the data, Oxford's (1990) taxonomy was used; this is more thoroughly discussed in section 1.2 of this paper. This was relevant when the teachers discussed the implementation of SI in their teaching practice, such as which specific strategies they taught or which strategies they regarded as effective. Oxford's (1990) strategy categories were therefore used for classifying and analyzing the strategies that the teachers discussed.

3.4 Ethical considerations

Ethical issues were taken into consideration before, during, and after the interviews. Before the interview, the participants were informed of the purpose and gave their consent to

participate in the study, which follows the Swedish Research Council's guidelines on good research practice (Vetenskapsrådet, 2017). The participants were contacted through email with a short introduction to the study, asking if they would be interested in contributing with an interview. To get the consent of the respondents, they were informed via email more in detail what the subject of the paper was and the aim of the study. They were at this point told that some extracts from the Swedish curriculum would be included out of which they would be asked to discuss their perceptions of LLS. The procedure of the interview was given in this email. The email included an estimated length of the interview as well as stating that the interview would need to be recorded. Additionally, they were notified that their identities would remain unknown throughout this study (Vetenskapsrådet, 2017). Thus, the teachers have been labeled letters ranging from A to E. Moreover, they were informed that they would be free to withdraw from the interview at any time without there being any negative implications. They were also invited to send further questions to me, should they be interested in knowing more about the project. Appendix C of this paper shows an example in Swedish of this email sent to the teachers. Before the interviews, they were once again given the premises of the interview and asked if they consented to be recorded.

3.5 Limitations with the method

Certain limitations of this study should be addressed. Although this study aims to examine Swedish EFL teachers' perceptions, this is a small study with five teachers of EFL in one part of Sweden. The notion of generalizing this data to other contexts can consequently be problematic. McKay (2006) states that this is often the issue with qualitative research, where "statistical measures cannot be used to achieve generalizability" (p. 14). In the case of this study, the teachers' perceptions may not necessarily correlate with the experiences of other teachers in Sweden or teachers in other geographical contexts. This, however, was not necessarily the purpose of the study. Rather than eliciting data on Swedish EFL teachers' perceptions overall, this study aimed to illuminate what perceptions and experiences the teachers interviewed had and thereby discussing what issues may exist within the Swedish classroom context relating to LLS and SI. Ultimately, it is "the readers themselves [that] must determine to what extent the findings are applicable and transferable to other contexts" (McKay, 2006, p. 15).

Additionally, one limitation that needs to be recognized in qualitative interviews is the power relationship between the interviewer and the interviewee (McKay, 2006). That is, the

interviewee's responses may be influenced by what they believe is the desired answer or what they believe is expected of them. Researchers should therefore consider this when analyzing the data, and "not necessarily assume that what an interviewee says reflects reality" (McKay, 2006, p. 55). In the case of this study, the elicitation of the teachers' perceptions may therefore have been influenced by the situation of the interview, and their perceptions do not automatically illustrate their actual teaching. This limitation will be addressed further when reviewing the data in the discussion section of this paper.

4 Findings

This study aims to (1) elicit what perceptions teachers at upper secondary school have regarding language learning strategies (LLS) in the Swedish EFL classroom, and (2) to investigate experiences of strategy instruction (SI) in the Swedish EFL classroom. Data was collected through semi-structured interviews with five teachers (teachers A, B, C, D, and E), where some themes were identified in the subsequent data analysis. For clarity's sake, the themes have been divided into two groups that were inspired by the two research questions. The first group of themes relates to the teachers' perceptions of LLS in the classroom overall, while the second group contains themes relating more to the teachers' experiences of SI in the classroom. Naturally, the themes overlap to some extent. The themes will be presented here, with some illustrative excerpts from the interviews.

4.1 Themes relating to teacher perceptions of LLS in the EFL classroom

Teacher perceptions of LLS were elicited which yielded results relating to the role of LLS in the EFL classroom. This was about strategies as facilitating language learning or that strategies make learners more autonomous in their learning process both in and outside the classroom context. No teacher argued that LLS were fruitless in the EFL classroom, although perceptions on the actual effectiveness of teaching strategies varied, as will be seen in the next section.

4.1.1 Strategies facilitate language learning

One perception that surfaced in the interviews is that LLS facilitates language learning. In other words, this meant that the teachers seemed to believe LLS to be an effective way of learning a language. This finding is especially noteworthy, seeing as all teachers expressed this belief. Teacher E, for example, stated that language learning “can’t be too simple, and then they need help... you have to have strategies when you take on a text, for example”. Some teachers contended that strategies could be tools learners can use for not giving up when using a language. For example, they argued that strategies can be used for keeping a conversation going, such as asking a peer for aid or to paraphrase when not knowing a linguistic item which would improve language performance. They also reasoned that several strategies can be used when not knowing words or phrases during language tasks which would facilitate language learning.

4.1.2 Strategies as tools that lead to more autonomous learners

Another clearly emphasized aspect of the purpose of strategies is the possibility of them making students more autonomous. This meant that strategies were regarded as tools that learners can use to get by on their own while using the English language. While the concept of *learner autonomy* was rarely explicitly mentioned, the idea of the learner’s independence was expressed by all teachers. This could mean using English in the classroom more independently or using English in authentic contexts outside the classroom. For example, when discussing the purpose of strategies mentioned in the curriculum in the subject of English, teacher C argued that he understood this as: “They should simply have the abilities and strategies to get around the world with English”. This notion could also be extended to other classrooms or learning situations. As teacher A noted:

And I sometimes think that some of these language strategies can be linked to subjects that are not only in, for example, English or French [the teacher’s other subject]. For example, this thing I mentioned, to read the title first and try to activate their prior knowledge and so on, I think these are strategies that can be useful in other subjects as well, even when reading in Swedish for example, or when reading history or social science and so on.

This idea that teaching strategies in the English classroom could be extended to other subjects was held by other teachers. Teacher D reasoned that similarly to how strategies learned in the

English classroom can be used in other subjects, so can strategies learned in other subjects be used in the English classroom.

4.2 Themes relating to teacher experiences of SI

A large part of the interview data regards the teachers' experiences of strategy instruction (SI) in the English classroom. Naturally, their belief regarding the effectiveness of teaching strategies was discussed. The interview data also revealed the teachers' approach to performing SI. Furthermore, teachers seemed to divide strategies between different language skills, often further dividing them into strategies for reception and strategies used for production. Interestingly, all teachers voiced an optimistic view of LLS and SI for EFL learners, but every teacher also expressed some issues with teaching strategies in the EFL classroom. This could be about concerns regarding learners' retention of strategies, or that the teachers experienced difficulties in observing and assessing the strategies employed by their students.

4.2.1 The effects of SI on language learning

As has been stated, all teachers believed strategies could facilitate language learning. The teachers often also expressed the belief that SI could potentially be helpful for learners. This is exemplified by teacher C, who stated that:

[...] I am somewhat convinced that you need a strategy to learn, regardless of the subject [...]. You must have your strategy there. Then, yes, I do not know how in upper secondary school... I think that some may have found their approach, their strategy already, maybe. But yes, for those who do not have that I definitely believe that it is helpful to be taught [...].

4.2.2 The approach to SI

The approach of the teachers' SI practice was elicited through several questions. It seems that many teachers performed some form of SI. Teacher E explained that she discussed strategies for various language skills and situations explicitly, for example reading texts together with students and practicing strategies together. Teacher B likewise stated he explicitly discusses strategies in class and asserted that he has encouraged the students to use the strategies he taught in other contexts outside of the classroom. Teacher A had a seemingly similar approach. She had, for example, discussed strategies the learners can use during listening

tasks, such as listening for keywords. Teacher D, on the other hand, stated that she explicitly talks about strategies at the beginning of the course. Later, she provides opportunities to practice these strategies although not overtly addressing the concept of strategies with the students.

When asked if they taught strategies in their English classroom, the four teachers above claimed that they did, while teacher C claimed he did not. While claiming that he did not explicitly address strategies in the classroom, teacher C stated that he introduces texts before a reading task where he asks the students to think about the texts before reading by, for example, drawing from previous knowledge. This is defined by Oxford (1990) as a metacognitive strategy. Furthermore, teacher C talked about experiences of addressing language strategies individually with students rather than explicit SI with the whole class. This may suggest that teacher C did perform some form of SI while asserting that he did not do so explicitly with the whole class. In short, most teachers claimed that they conducted some form of explicit SI but the approach to teaching strategies seemingly varied to some extent between the teachers. It should be acknowledged here that the exact nature of the SI is difficult to evaluate as these were self-reported accounts. For example, the amount of explicitness of the SI is difficult to assess.

4.2.3 The types of strategies taught

A common topic in the interviews was to address what types of strategies the teachers taught. Often, they regarded strategies as applicable to specific language skills. Teacher B noted that strategies "are connected to the four different skills, so it can be when you read, when you listen, when you speak, when you have written communication with each other, and so on". Most teachers also divided the strategies into strategies for reception (i.e., listening or reading) or strategies for production (i.e., speaking or writing). This notion is exemplified by teacher E:

I differentiate between receptive and productive tools, here, I must say. Because we are talking about learning strategies when it comes to reading a text, if it's a bit too difficult [...] So, what should they do then? What should they do to tackle a more challenging text? And then there are the reading strategies that I use in both Swedish and English [...] Summarize, ask questions about the text, guess in advance, all of them as well. And they are also useful for listening. They work mainly for reception. Then when it comes to production, it is more about... and then I actually mainly think of speaking... then it's about paraphrasing, when you

lack vocabulary and so on, to function in a conversation, that you have phrases for turn-taking and those types of strategies.

Some teachers suggested that they regard strategies for listening and reading to be very similar, that is, the strategies used for reception, to *learn* rather than to *use* a language. The teachers claimed that they often talk about tasks on a metacognitive level. For instance, asking the students to link a specific text or a listening task with the students' own pre-existing knowledge was a strategy that the teachers frequently asserted they taught as part of listening and reading exercises. Oxford (1990) refers to this as "overviewing and linking with already known material" (p. 138), which is a metacognitive strategy. Other strategies that several teachers mentioned related to cognitive strategies (Oxford, 1990). Teacher C, for example, stated that:

[...] a little bit cognitively, think about the content before you get started with it can be a thing. And then also to get through a text, like: yes, how do you prefer? Do you prefer, like I do, to first quickly read through it, take down notes, maybe a little dog-ear or underline what was difficult, what words I did not recognize?

As can be seen from teacher C's statement, these strategies could be taking notes, summarizing, and highlighting during language tasks. These are strategies used for "creating structure for input and output" (Oxford, 1990, p. 47), and are defined as cognitive strategies in Oxford's taxonomy.

When it comes to strategies for *using* the target language, i.e., in speaking and writing, the teaching of specific strategies was not equally clear. Many teachers focused on oral communication while also addressing strategies that seemingly referred to *social strategies* as defined by Oxford (1990). For example, teacher A discussed what strategies she has observed students use in oral communication:

I have also seen them, for example, ask for help from their classmates, that they get stuck on a certain wording, and so on. And either the classmates step in or they explicitly ask like: "yes, but do you understand what I mean" or "how would you say this" and so on... so these are some of the strategies that I see quite clearly in... when they talk to each other, for example.

Thus, one key category of strategies used in oral communication according to the teachers was social strategies, which most teachers regarded as important strategies for language production. However, the teaching of strategies for production was seemingly more uncertain. Teacher E stated that she explicitly addresses how to be a good discussion partner, while teacher B said: "I must confess that I probably haven't talked about strategies, that is discussion strategies". The teachers' experiences of teaching strategies for writing were similarly not as detailed in the interviews. At times, some teachers mentioned strategies used in writing interchangeably with strategies for the reading skill. Teacher E, however, contended that strategies were needed for distinguishing which style to write a text in and that she explicitly address this in her EFL classroom.

At times, the strategies that the teachers talked about were not in relation to any specific language skills. Several teachers often discussed compensation strategies (Oxford, 1990) in more general terms with learning and using the English language. That could be paraphrasing, reverting to their first language when not knowing linguistic items, and miming in oral communication. Teacher B also stated that he explicitly discusses daring to take risks in language learning, which he considered a strategy. To take risks is defined by Oxford (1990) as an affective strategy. Furthermore, some teachers asserted that they address strategies for vocabulary acquisition, most notably relating to memory strategies as defined by Oxford (1990). For instance, teacher B stated that he has asked his students to use "memory tricks" to ease the vocabulary acquisition process:

[...] I tried to spend a couple of lessons on this [learning vocabulary] so that they would later write their own sentences with the words [...] or at first it was just to find the meaning of the words and to find some memory trick for how they would remember that. By the way, that is also a learning strategy that I tried to teach, to come up with a rhyme for it, write a little story about it, some alliteration, some words that look similar, a memory trick. And then I said... I gave them that as a task, at least five of these [words] here you must have a memory trick for, write which memory trick you also use as well.

4.2.4 Concerns regarding learners' retention of strategies after SI

Although all teachers viewed SI to be potentially beneficial, some voiced concerns regarding their experiences of implementing it. For example, one concern regards the learners' retention of strategies after having been instructed. The teachers stated that either the students regarded strategies as exclusively part of the EFL classroom not helpful in other situations or that

strategies may be too theoretical and consequently difficult to retain. Teacher A, for example, asserted that there is a risk that the learners may simply forget the strategies:

It often feels like you do it like an exercise in a lesson, and then they [the learners] do it. But later when they are actually going to read a text in another context, they have forgotten these strategies. So that it feels like they... a little difficult to make the student work with it, even if you try to work with it explicitly and so on.

Teacher D noted that the frequency of strategy use by learners after the SI can be mixed, meaning that some learners are good at utilizing the strategies while others prefer to complete language tasks without using the strategies that the teacher has taught them. Teacher D thereby argued that one concern of explicit SI is that it may be too theoretical for some learners and that some learners simply prefer traditional language teaching where they do some language tasks without explicit SI. Similar concerns were raised by teacher B who suggested that students may consider the concept of metacognition to be too abstract when discussed explicitly in class.

4.2.5 Observing and Assessing LLS

Another noteworthy topic regarding difficulties with LLS and SI that arose with all teachers was that of observing and assessing strategies. In other words, most teachers expressed some concerns regarding the difficulties of detecting strategies in the classroom. This was especially true for the case of strategies in reading and listening, in other words for reception, which all teachers expressed difficulties in identifying. Some teachers argued that these were internal processes, which often makes strategies difficult to detect. For instance, teacher B asserted that when assessing a learner on their performance during the national tests for the English subject on the listening skill, it is difficult to know what goes behind the student's reasoning. Teacher B said that it could simply be a lack of sufficient vocabulary or any other factor that influences the learner's performance, rather than the student's lack of proper strategy usage. This difficulty in observing strategies in listening and reading was expressed by most teachers, although teacher B stated that writing strategies were difficult to observe as well. In oral production, on the other hand, most teachers asserted that observing strategies was significantly easier.

As most teachers expressed difficulty in observing some language strategies, this prompted many of the teachers to express frustration when assessing strategies. This became relevant because this is part of the knowledge requirements in the English subject syllabus in the Swedish upper secondary school (Skolverket, 2011). Some teachers pointed out that the success of the strategies learners use in fact shows in the final product. Teacher C, for example, remarked that “it is above all else the result that you assess them on”. This prompted some teachers to claim that in order to gauge students’ use of LLS in listening and reading, they would need to talk with the students about their strategy usage or have them write down what strategies they employ during a task. In sum, most teachers expressed difficulties when assessing the learners’ use of strategies in certain skills.

5 Discussion

The discussion below has firstly been divided into the two groups of themes that were inspired by the research questions. The research questions are: (1) what perceptions do English teachers at upper secondary school have regarding language learning strategies in the Swedish EFL classroom, and (2) what are the teachers’ teaching practices in relation to strategy instruction and what are their experiences of it in the Swedish EFL classroom? The discussion will then conclude with a comment on the limitations of the study which will lead to suggestions for future research.

5.1 Analysis of the teachers’ perceptions of LLS

Regarding the first research question, the perceptions of the teachers interviewed indicated a generally positive view of LLS’s role for the learner in the Swedish EFL classroom. They believed strategies could be facilitators of language learning and that they may enhance learners’ autonomy inside and outside the classroom. Overall, this may indicate a certain awareness of the teachers regarding learners’ use of LLS.

The perception that LLS may facilitate language learning is similar to the EFL teachers interviewed by Sen and Sen (2012) who also found that the EFL teachers viewed LLS in an equally positive manner. Additionally, in Oxford’s (2017) study of previous definitions of LLS, she found that 30% of the definitions explicitly mentioned *facilitation* in some form, suggesting that the teachers’ notion of LLS as facilitators of language learning aligns with the notion of many scholars in the field. Furthermore, the idea that LLS helps in

fostering learner autonomy has also been suggested by researchers. For example, Rivera-Mills and Plonsky (2007) stated that previous research has indicated a connection between learner autonomy and LLS, which is a reason behind teaching strategies to learners. In other words, the teachers' optimistic view of strategies as tools for language learning and learner autonomy is supported by researchers in the field.

These teacher perceptions also imply some amount of teacher awareness of the effects of strategies in the Swedish EFL classroom. Concerns have previously been raised by researchers regarding teachers' lack of awareness of strategies (e.g., Griffiths & Parr, 2001), although this was later questioned (e.g., Griffiths, 2007; Sen & Sen; 2012). Since all teachers seemed optimistic about the role of LLS for the learner, this may suggest that the teachers interviewed certainly are aware of learners' use of LLS in the classroom and the impact strategies may have on the learners' language learning and use.

5.2 Analysis of the teachers' experiences of SI

To answer the second research question, SI was addressed from several different aspects. Firstly, all teachers believed SI to be beneficial for the learners. Secondly, according to their self-reported teaching practice, most teachers performed SI in some form while the explicitness of it seemingly varied. Thirdly, the teachers' experiences of SI addressed in the interviews also included many examples of strategies and categories of strategies that the teachers taught in the English classroom. Finally, some concerns were raised relating to learners' retention of strategies as well as observing and assessing certain types of strategies.

Four out of five teachers stated that they taught strategies in some form, once again indicating an awareness of the teachers regarding strategies. Although asserting he did not explicitly teach strategies, teacher C discussed some classroom contexts where he had talked about ways the students can tackle a language task, indicating at least some form of SI. Nevertheless, all teachers believed SI to aid the learners in language facilitation. This perception of the teachers is similar to the perception of the teachers interviewed in Olson and Land's (2007) study, who likewise found the SI program in that study to be useful for learners.

On the other hand, the concerns some teachers raised regarding learners' retention of strategies after the SI is noteworthy. For example, one teacher had experienced that the learners did not appear to use the strategies in the following class, while another teacher believed discussing language learning on a meta-level might be too abstract for learners.

Teacher D stated that she had experienced that some learners may simply respond better to doing language tasks rather than learning how to be successful in them. This experience of the teachers could suggest that some of the learners prefer more traditional language teaching rather than being exposed to SI. This raises the question of how much SI should take from “other” subjects in the EFL classroom. In Plonsky’s (2011) meta-analysis of SI, he found that longer SI treatments were more effective than shorter treatments. He says that some researchers may therefore question the value of SI if it demands too much time to be effective. Plonsky also states that some researchers have previously argued: “that time in the classroom is better spent learning and using the language rather than learning how to learn and use the language” (p. 1015). This experience of some of the teachers could therefore raise the issue of what amount of SI is to be preferred in the classroom. In light of this finding, it is regrettable that the respondents were not asked how much time they spend on SI in the classroom.

Furthermore, the needs of the learners must also be considered. Pei’s (2014) study showed no positive effect of the SI program, and it was hypothesized that the learners of that study did not recognize the need for the strategies they were taught. As was stated, the teachers of the present study experienced that some learners may simply prefer other forms of teaching or that strategies may be too theoretical. This experience of the teachers could indicate that not all forms of SI are always helpful for all learners, but rather that the efficacy of the SI is dependent on the learner. The importance of context in SI has been discussed by scholars previously (e.g., Chamot, 2008; Oxford, 2017). Altogether, this puts much emphasis on the role of the teacher in constructing SI that is considered effective and in choosing an appropriate amount of SI needed in relation to the context and the learners therein. Nevertheless, it should be emphasized that although some teachers raised these concerns discussed above, all teachers seemed positive towards the impact SI can have and considered it a valuable approach to teaching language.

In discussing SI, the teachers brought up examples of their approach to teaching strategies. As has been stated, one important finding of this study is that most teachers claimed they performed some form of SI. However, the amount of explicitness is somewhat difficult to examine as these are self-reported accounts. Researchers have previously argued that explicitness in SI is to be preferred (see Chamot, 2008). This notion is held by Oxford (1990) as well. She argued for SI to be completely informed, meaning that it should notify the learner of the strategy’s effectiveness, demonstrate how strategies can be used, and how they can be transferred to other contexts. Some teachers in the present study asserted they did, for

example, talk with their students about moving the strategies to other contexts. Teacher E also brought up the importance of demonstrating to learners *how* to learn a language. This data from the interviews suggests that, at least to some extent, several teachers did perform SI that would be regarded as explicit. This finding may be encouraging for those promoting this form of SI to be part of the language classroom. One limitation of this study, however, is that what was examined was the teachers' perception of the SI rather than the actual instruction in the classroom. Consequently, the effectiveness or the amount of explicitness in the teachers' SI have naturally not been examined and some caution should therefore be taken when considering this finding.

As was stated in the findings section of this study, there was an interesting division of strategies relating to specific skills in the interview data. Mainly, the teachers discussed strategies used for reception skills and strategies used for production skills as separate groups. This clear division between reception and production may be noteworthy, but it is not surprising if considering the interview guide used for this study. The Swedish subject syllabus for the English courses divides the course objectives into these two categories (Skolverket, 2011). Therefore, the teachers' responses may have been influenced by the structure of the interview guide, as the English subject syllabus was used to prompt the teachers to consider LLS in their English teaching.

To analyze data, I used Oxford's (1990) taxonomy to classify the strategies the teachers described. The strategy categories were never explicitly addressed in the interviews but were rather identified in subsequent analysis. This analysis suggested that all six categories of strategies were mentioned in some form relating to the teachers' experiences of LLS and SI. It was not the purpose of the study to show any specific frequency of these strategy categories promoted in the classroom, which has been done by previous studies (e.g., Sen & Sen, 2012; Joycey et al., 2018). However, the data indicated that specific strategy categories were more frequently addressed in the interviews. This finding is interesting because these strategy categories in the interviews are somewhat similar to the results found in quantitative studies where they have explored EFL teachers' promotion of strategies in the classroom (Sen & Sen, 2012; Joycey et al., 2018). In these studies, metacognitive and cognitive strategies were the most common to promote in the classroom. Interestingly, these categories were frequently addressed in the interviews by the teachers of this study. Equally, affective strategies were not commonly mentioned by the teachers of this study, and it was the least promoted strategy category in the studies by Sen and Sen (2012) and Joycey et al.

(2018). As has been stated, this study did not empirically observe the teachers' SI but rather their experiences of it, and thus their specific teaching practice remains unobserved. Nonetheless, this correlation is interesting. It may suggest that some strategies that are in specific categories defined in Oxford's (1990) taxonomy, such as metacognitive and cognitive strategies, are more readily available when considering strategies for the EFL classroom.

When defining strategies, Oxford (2017) stated that learners control strategies mentally. While they may be observable, Oxford contended that not all strategies are so. Chamot (2008) likewise discussed the observability of strategies when researching LLS and emphasized that strategies for learning are in fact often unobservable. She stated that most often, "the only way to find out whether students are using learning strategies while engaged in a language task is to ask them" (p. 267). This seems to justify the notion of the teachers interviewed in this study regarding the difficulty of observing strategies. This issue is therefore not unexpected, but rather confirming that which scholars on the topic of LLS consider a distinctive trait of some strategies for language learning.

It is interesting, however, that most teachers found assessing strategies employed by learners to be challenging. Several teachers voiced frustration with assessing strategies. This was especially true for strategies in listening and reading, according to most teachers. Production strategies, most prominently strategies for speaking, were more easily observed and consequently assessable. A couple of teachers stated that to observe strategies for assessment, they would need to ask the learners about their strategy use. This reinforces Chamot's (2008) statement that elicitation of strategies may only be done through asking the learners. This finding could suggest that teachers in the Swedish context may experience difficulty with assessing strategies in the English language classroom. This is particularly noteworthy when considering the situation of these teachers: strategies are included in some of the knowledge requirements of the English subject syllabus in Swedish upper secondary school (Skolverket, 2011). In other words, assessing strategies is required of the teachers. Their frustration with the difficulties of observing and assessing some strategies is therefore not surprising, although it is certainly a noteworthy issue within the classroom.

5.3 Limitations and suggestions for future research

In this section, an acknowledgment of some limitations with this study will be addressed along with some suggestions for future research. One limitation relates to the elicitation of teachers' perceptions. To contextualize strategies in the Swedish teachers' EFL classroom,

some extracts of the curriculum were read to the teachers. Although this approach was largely successful in eliciting their perceptions, this may have to some extent limited the teachers' perceptions of LLS in the classroom. Rather than prompt considerations, this may have instead impeded their reflections of LLS and SI in the classroom overall to only consider strategies in relation to the curriculum.

The importance of considering the context, which could mean cultural context, when constructing SI has been previously emphasized by scholars (e.g., Chamot, 2008; Oxford, 2017). Oxford (2017) states that "Any relationship between strategy instruction [...] and its outcomes can only legitimately be understood in reference to contexts in which they occur and to those individuals and cultures represented in those contexts" (p. 309). The outcomes of the teachers' SI in these interviews are consequently influenced by the context in which they are situated. This study would therefore have benefitted from having more explicit questions on the teachers' perceptions of the context of the learners to address this dimension of LLS and SI. The context of the learner, including cultural context, would be an interesting focus in future studies on LLS and SI from an English language learning perspective in Sweden.

The teachers seemed to regard LLS and SI optimistically but also raised some concerns regarding learners' actual retention of strategies and the prospect of assessing the learners' use of strategies. There is, however, uncertainty in the extent of these perceptions and experiences in the English teaching community in Sweden as a whole. As was noted in the method section of this paper, one limitation of this study is the limited generalizability of the findings considering this was a small-scale study with five respondents. Future research on LLS and SI could therefore focus on Swedish EFL teachers' perceptions through a quantitative approach to identify more general perceptions in this population.

It has been stated that no empirical observation of the teachers' teaching practice was made in this study, which could be considered a limitation. The teachers' approach to the SI or the types of strategies that the teachers taught is self-reported in this study rather than being empirical observations. Future research could focus on observations of Swedish EFL teachers' teaching practice concerning LLS to assess the actual effectiveness or the explicitness of the SI. This would be valuable considering the key role teachers have in constructing SI in authentic English language classrooms and the importance of explicitness in SI emphasized by scholars (e.g., Chamot, 2008).

6 Pedagogical implications

The teachers interviewed for this study believed strategies could facilitate language learning and they believed strategies could nurture autonomous students. The teachers' experiences of teaching strategies were therefore largely positive. Additionally, most teachers interviewed claimed that they did provide SI. These two findings in combination are interesting. It is possible that their positive attitude toward LLS and SI could be taken as evidence for the success that they may have faced in teaching LLS in the language classroom overall. In educators' pursuit of assisting learners in language learning as well as making learners more independent, the teaching of LLS may consequently have some worth.

On the other hand, the teachers experienced some difficulties with SI which may also have implications for the pedagogical practice. Some teachers experienced that learners may lack in retaining strategies and that some learners may respond better to more "traditional" methods of language teaching. This shows the importance of considering the needs of the learners and the context of the classroom. As was mentioned in the discussion, scholars have emphasized the importance of context when creating SI (e.g., Chamot, 2008; Oxford, 2017). Furthermore, Pei's (2014) study suggested that the learners did not recognize the need for the strategies which led to no significant effect of the SI program on the learners' reading comprehension. Additionally, Rivera-Mills and Plonsky (2007) argued that differences in learner and teacher perceptions of what is effective language teaching could be discouraging for many learners. Simply put, this shows that teachers should be conscious of the context of the learner and the needs they may have when designing effective SI.

Another interesting finding of this study indicated that there were difficulties in assessing strategies, that is strategies that are internal and therefore unobservable. This highlights issues of strategies in the English language classroom in Sweden, seeing as they are part of the knowledge requirements of the English subject syllabus (Skolverket, 2011). Furthermore, in the pursuit of constructing effective SI, assessing the success of strategies employed by learners could be essential. All teachers interviewed for this study experienced this difficulty, which suggests that they were not certain *how* they should proceed to assess unobservable strategies. To identify unobservable strategies, some strategies may need to be self-reported by the learners (Chamot, 2008). If unobservable strategies are to be assessed, an implication of this can be that there may need to be some form of agreement in approaches to identifying these strategies and subsequently how to assess them. Simply put, this issue calls

for an agreed-upon approach of educators to assess strategies in the classroom that are difficult to observe.

7 Conclusion

This study aimed to explore the perceptions of teachers regarding language learning strategies as well as their experiences regarding strategy instruction. The reason for this was due to a lack of focus in LLS research on the teacher perceptions of strategies and strategy instruction, and particularly in the Swedish upper secondary English language context. Additionally, it was argued that teachers have a key role in forming effective SI and thus their perceptions would be valuable.

The two research questions were answered through semi-structured interviews with five English teachers at upper secondary school. Concerning the first research question, which examined the perceptions of teachers regarding LLS in general, the study found that the teachers regarded strategies optimistically. They considered strategies to be facilitators of language learning and played an important role in learner autonomy both inside and outside the classroom. The second research question was answered by presenting various aspects of SI. The teachers believed SI to be helpful. The way they teach strategies was also considered which led to a discussion on the amount of explicitness in their teaching. The types of strategies that the teachers promoted in their language teaching were also analyzed. However, some issues in teaching strategies were raised regarding the retention of strategies as well as experiences of difficulties in observing and therefore assessing strategies in the classroom.

In short, this study has highlighted some teacher perceptions and experiences of LLS and SI, as well as bringing to light some issues that teachers in the upper secondary English classroom in Sweden may experience in their promotion of strategies. The concept of strategies seems to be a viable approach to language teaching for the teachers interviewed in this study. In the pursuit of improving students' language learning, this may be encouraging when considering the potential benefits of SI. The outcome of Rubin's (1975) call for a focus on the good language learner many years ago ultimately led to the topic of LLS. This study seems to show that Rubin's contribution still resonates today in the teaching practice of some Swedish EFL teachers.

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Appendix A: Interview guide, English

Part A. Opening questions, to gain some information of who the respondent is as well as warming up:

1. *How long have you been working as a teacher?*
2. *What courses do you usually teach?*
3. *What subjects do you have, other than English?*
4. *How many schools have you worked at previously?*

Part B. Teacher's perception/experience of LLS in the classroom

To read:

From the English subject syllabus, "aim of the subject" (number 3): "the teaching in the subject of English should give students the opportunities to develop **the ability to use different language strategies in different contexts**".

5. *What is your understanding of this core objective from the English curriculum?*
6. *What are your experiences of language learning strategies?*
7. *Can you recognize when a student uses a strategy?*
8. *What kinds of different contexts do you believe strategies can be used?*
9. *Do you believe students' use of strategies to help facilitate language learning?*

Part C. Teacher's perception/experience of teaching LLS

To read:

English 5, core content:

"Strategies for listening and reading in different ways and for different purposes"

"Strategies for contributing to and actively participating in discussions related to societal and working life".

10. *Do you consider these objectives when planning your teaching?*
11. *Have you constructed tasks specifically from these two core contents?*
12. *Do you teach/have you ever taught strategies, as they are mentioned in the core content?*
13. *What are the primary reasons behind this choice?*
 - a. *Do you teach implicitly or explicitly?*
 - b. *In what language skills do you primarily teach language strategies?*
14. *Do you believe the teaching of strategies to be helpful for language learning?*
15. *What are the benefits and weaknesses of teaching strategies?*

To read:

English 5, knowledge requirements: :

”Students can choose and with some certainty use strategies to assimilate and evaluate the content of spoken and written English.”

”In addition, students can choose and use essentially functional strategies which to some extent solve problems and improve their interaction”

16. *What are your experiences of assessing and grading a student on strategies?*

Appendix B: Intervjuguide, Svenska

Del A. Öppningsfrågor, för att få information om vem respondenten är samt uppvärmning.

1. *Hur länge har du arbetat som lärare?*
2. *Vilka kurser brukar du undervisa i?*
3. *Vilka ämnen har du mer än engelska?*
4. *Hur många skolor har du arbetat på?*

Del B. Lärarens upplevelser/erfarenheter av LLS generellt

Att läsa:

Från läroplanen för engelska, ämnets syfte (punkt 3): ”Undervisningen i ämnet engelska ska ge eleverna förutsättningar att utveckla: förmåga att använda språkliga strategier i olika sammanhang.”

5. *Vad är din förståelse av det här syftet med ämnet i klassrummet?*
6. *Vad är din erfarenhet av språkliga strategier?*
7. *Har du sett/kan du se när en elev använder en strategi?*
8. *I vilka olika sammanhang upplever du att elever kan använda språkliga strategier?*
9. *Upplever du att elevers användning av strategier hjälper eleverna lära sig språket bättre?*

Part C. Lärarens upplevelser/erfarenheter av att lära ut LLS

Att läsa:

Engelska 5, centralt innehåll:

”Strategier för att lyssna och läsa på olika sätt och med olika syften”

”Strategier för att bidra till och aktivt medverka i diskussioner med anknytning till samhälls- och arbetslivet.”

10. *Använder du dessa punkter från det centrala innehållet för att planera din undervisning?*
11. *Har du format uppgifter specifikt utifrån dessa punkter i det centrala innehållet?*
12. *Har du någonsin lärt ut språkinlärningsstrategier?*
13. *Vad är de huvudsakliga skälen bakom detta val?*
 - a. *Har du lärt ut strategier implicit eller explicit?*
 - b. *I vilka språkförmågor lär du ut språkstrategier?*
14. *Tror du att undervisning av strategier hjälper elevernas språkinläring?*
15. *Vilka fördelar och nackdelar ser du med att lära ut språkliga strategier?*

Att läsa:

Engelska 5, kunskapskrav:

”Eleven kan välja och med viss säkerhet använda strategier för att tillgodogöra sig och kritiskt granska innehållet i talad och skriven engelska.”

”Dessutom kan eleven välja och använda i huvudsak fungerande strategier som i viss mån löser problem i och förbättrar interaktionen.”

16. *Hur upplever du det är att bedöma och betygsätta en elev på strategier?*

Appendix C: Informed consent

Hej, [lärarens namn]!

Tack för att du kan tänka dig ställa upp på en intervju. Jag kommer här med lite mer information angående mitt examensarbete och intervjun.

Uppsatsen handlar om lärares uppfattningar om språkliga strategier i klassrummet i engelska. Eftersom jag skriver på engelska är det "language learning strategies" som blir begreppet jag använder mig av. Jag har delvis tänkt ställa allmänna frågor om lärares syn på språkinlärningsstrategier i ämnet engelska, delvis tänker jag be läraren reflektera och diskutera kring några formuleringar i ämnesplanen för ämnet engelska i gymnasiet som berör just strategier.

Intervjun kommer ske på distans och bör ta ungefär 30–45 minuter. Jag skulle dessutom behöva spela in intervjun. Du kommer att vara anonym i uppsatsen. Under intervjun får du givetvis dra dig ur när du vill. Du är naturligtvis välkommen att ställa fler frågor till mig angående mitt examensarbete om du önskar ha något förtydligande.

Låter det här bra? När skulle du kunna träffas?

Tack för hjälpen!

Isak