Attitudes Towards Poetry in the EFL Classroom

A Teacher and Student Perspective

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Abstract

The inclusion of poetry in an EFL context has shown to be a debated topic among scholars in the field for several decades. Many instructors of literature and poetry hesitate to incorporate poetry in their teaching and researchers try to uncover their reasons for being uncertain while also exploring the benefits of poetry in the EFL classroom. This study aims to shed light on teacher and student attitudes in a Swedish upper secondary school context. It further seeks to compare and contrast teachers' attitudes with students' in order to investigate potential similarities or discrepancies. Three teachers and six students participated in a qualitative, semi-structured interview where questions regarding poetry and their attitudes towards it were discussed. The results indicated that both teachers and students generally hold positive attitudes towards poetry and that they, except for one teacher, understand the value and benefits of the genre. Developed knowledge of the English language, self-expression, analytic skills and historical and political understanding were some of the benefits the results of this study revealed. Some challenges were also acknowledged by both teachers and students, mainly regarding the lack of sufficient material, English language skills and experience with poetry. Although this study contributes to the research field of poetry in EFL contexts, there is a need for further research that explores teachers' and students' attitudes and perceptions towards poetry in an EFL context.

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1 Introduction

The inclusion of literature has permeated the English language classroom world-wide for decades and has been a subject of much research. Many researchers believe that teaching literature is beneficial and that, among other things, it is able to help develop students' critical thinking, cultural awareness, self-expression and linguistic knowledge (Savvidou, 2004; Öhman, 2015; Aladini & Farahbod, 2020). Despite these positive aspects, literature has not always been viewed as important for English language learning and some researchers argue that literature is too complex, inaccessible and difficult language-wise (Savvidou, 2004; Khatib, et al., 2011, p. 214).

In contrast to the research conducted on the use of literature in general, the genre of poetry as a means for language learning has not been as extensively researched and explored. Many scholars in the field highlight that the inclusion of poetry in the English language classroom needs to be re-evaluated (e.g. Peskin, et al, 2010; Panavelil, 2011; Hanauer, 2003). The genre of poetry is often perceived as the highest form of literature and thus, carrying the highest literary status. Therefore, poetry is deemed too difficult to understand and too challenging to argue for its inclusion in the language classroom (Melin, 2010, p. 349). However, the positive aspects of including poetry in the English language classroom are many, for example its ability to help students develop multicultural awareness, personal expression, linguistic knowledge and creative writing (Panavelil, 2011, p. 12).

Due to the discrepancies regarding how to view poetry as a means to acquire English as a foreign language (EFL) and the lack of empirical research within the field, there is a need for further research. In particular, the absence of research done in a Swedish context establishes the relevance of this study. In the syllabus for English in the Swedish upper secondary school,[1] the inclusion of literature is a central part of all three English courses. It is explicitly stated in the core content of English 5 that "songs and poems" and "literature and other fiction" should be covered (Skolverket, 2020, p. 2). Furthermore, in English 6, teachers need to include both "themes, form and content in film and literature", "authors in relation to literary periods" as well as "literature, poems and drama from both contemporary works and excerpts from older literature" (p. 6). Lastly, the core content of English 7 includes "contemporary and older literature and other fiction in various genres such as drama" (p. 8). Therefore, teachers need to include literature and poetry in one way or another in their

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[1] Since no relevant translation has been made, all citations from the syllabus are the author's own translations.

teaching.

With the knowledge that poetry often is perceived as difficult to teach and learn, it is of high value to explore what attitudes and perceptions English teachers in Sweden have, and likewise how students in Sweden perceive and regard the genre. The aim of this study is, therefore, to get an insight into teacher and student attitudes and perceptions towards poetry as a means for EFL learning in a Swedish context. It further seeks to explore if the attitudes of teachers and students differ and if so, why? The research field of poetry and its inclusion in the English language classroom is limited and extremely few studies were found researching a Swedish EFL perspective. Therefore, this study aims to add further knowledge to this research field and highlight the attitudes and perceptions of selected teachers and students in Sweden towards poetry. For that reason, the following research questions have been formulated:

1. What attitudes do teachers have towards the inclusion of poetry in the Swedish EFL classroom?

2. What attitudes do students have towards the inclusion of poetry in the Swedish EFL classroom?

3. What differences and/or similarities can be found regarding teacher and student attitudes towards poetry in the Swedish EFL classroom?

This paper will include a theoretical background (section 1) on the definition of poetry as a genre, why poetry should be included in the EFL classroom and some currently used approaches to teaching poetry. Moreover, a literature review (section 2) will be provided on previous empirical studies on teachers' and students' attitudes towards poetry in both EFL and native English contexts. This is followed by a presentation of the method used for the current study(section 4) of this study. Finally, the results will be presented (section 5), analysed and lastly discussed (section 6).

2   Theoretical Background

Poetry is one of the earliest forms of literature; however, people struggle to define the genre. Therefore, this section begins by providing a few definitions of the term poetry in order to

understand the concept better. This will be followed by some information on why poetry is taught in today's English language classrooms and lastly, some approaches to teaching poetry will be presented.

2.1 Defining Poetry

The *Oxford English Dictionary* (n.d.) defines poetry as:

> Composition in verse or some comparable patterned arrangement of language in which the expression of feelings and ideas is given intensity by the use of distinctive style and rhythm; the art of such composition. The product of this art as a form of literature. The expression or embodiment of thought or feelings in a manner regarded as characteristic of a poem.

From this definition, it can be understood that poetry is a form of written text that aims to express emotions and ideas through certain language use.

Another definition can be found in Pierce's (2003, p. 151) article, where he explains that, for the most part, poems can be recognised by specific traits such as metre, rhyme, imagery and beauty. By placing poetry in a literary discourse, poems that consist of a number of these specific characteristics make it easier for the reader to identify the text as a poem. However, according to Pierce (2003, p. 152), poems are situated in social contexts, that is, poetry/poems are defined in the way that they are used by the people who speak and write it. Consequently, poetry cannot be decided by these characteristics alone and a text that does not include any of these specific traits can still be considered a poem (Pierce, 2003, p. 154).

In the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, Nemerov (2019, p. 1) defines poetry as "literature that evokes a concentrated imaginative awareness of experience or a specific emotional response through language chosen and arranged for its meaning, sound, and rhythm". The main distinction of poetry made by Nemerov (2019, p. 1) is the *line*. By changing the positions of the lines on the paper to not look like ordinary prose, the reader perceives the text as a poem and, thus, regulates their speech, breath and syntax to complement the lines and ultimately the poem. This definition indicates that poems are dependent on the reader's knowledge of how a poem is supposed to be read and understood. Furthermore, Nemerov (2019, p. 1) suggests that by understanding the differences between poetry and prose, it might be easier to define the term poetry.

There is no doubt that the concept of poetry is ambiguous. Some common features that can be found in the different definitions given are: (1) poems are usually identified by specific

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language characteristics and (2) the position of the poem on a paper helps indicate, to the reader, that it is a poem. For this study, the concept of poetry will be used for describing a text that does not follow the standard form of language rules. Furthermore, poetry strives to convey emotions and/or awareness through certain criteria, for example, rhythm, repetition or diction. Additionally, this paper uses a broader definition by also accepting song lyrics as a form of poetry.

2.2   Benefits of Using Poetry in the EFL Classroom

The question of whether or not to include poetry in the EFL classroom remains and in order to begin answering this, possible reasons for hesitating to include the genre in EFL teaching, followed by some benefits of its inclusion will be presented.

In recent years, the implementation of poetry in the EFL classroom has become more marginalised and problematised by researchers and teachers (Melin, 2009, p. 349; Savvidou, 2004). The reasons might be found in the increase and promotion of technological tools in today's classrooms (Öhman, 2015, p. 15). The accessibility of social media, podcasts and other digital tools are often prioritised, which results in poetry, and literature in general, becoming more difficult to justify. Moreover, the emphasis on learning communicative competence has been prevalent in EFL classrooms for the last four decades. Methods that promote skills such as producing, comprehending and negotiating meaning in interactive situations are favoured (Rodríguez, 2018, p. 356). An example of this can be found in the aim of the Swedish syllabus for English where communicative competence is highlighted, together with the idea that teachers should encourage students to speak and use English in various situations (Skolverket, 2020, p. 1). On that account, literature and poetry teaching might not be the obvious choice for teachers and instructors.

Naturally, there are other aspects as to why teachers feel a reluctance towards including poetry in their EFL teaching. The genre is often perceived as difficult to teach and learn which leads to fear and avoidance of poetry (e.g. Peskin et al., 2010, p. 498; Panavelil, 2011, p. 11; Alvi & Alvi, 2019, p. 155). A more extensive presentation of these aspects will be discussed in this paper's literature review.

Even though these reasons for hesitation might be understandable, the fact that teachers in Sweden must include poetry still remains. Many of the existing studies made on poetry teaching aim to explore what positive effects poetry can provide for students, and some common benefits have been identified. By exposing students to a large number of poems and

adopting an approach based on students' responses, an increase in motivation and a willingness to read more poetry have been found (Pike, 2000, p. 27). Furthermore, a learner centred approach, which focuses on the students' own interaction and experiences with language and poetry, led to a sense of higher freedom in their creativity and self-expression (VK & Savaedi, 2014, p. 1924; Gönen, 2018, p. 33). Another positive effect that has been revealed when using poetry in the English language classroom is cultural awareness. When exploring themes and background information in relation to the poems, students have gained a broader cultural awareness of both others and themselves (Gönen, 2018, p. 34; Naylor, 2013, p. 76). Moreover, using a non-traditional approach where music was involved led to improved vocabulary and pronunciation as well as better grammatical and lexical skills (Hijazi & Al-Natour, 2012, p. 301). Lastly, including poetry in the English language classroom can help develop a deeper poetic understanding. By analysing and interpreting poems using an integrated approach, students have been able to create meaning (Naylor, 2013, p. 72; Marin, 2017, p. 99).

To include poetry in the EFL classroom might not be an obvious decision for all teachers. The promotion of using technological tools and the requirements of providing students with communicative competence do not necessarily encourage the use of poetry. However, research has presented several benefits of using poetry in the EFL classroom such as language development, cultural awareness, creativity and self-expression, knowledge of the genre and motivation (e.g. VK & Savaedi, 2014, p. 1924; Gönen, 2018, p. 34; Hijazi & Al-Natour, 2012, p. 301).

2.3   Approaches to Teaching Poetry

In order for poetry to become a positive tool for EFL learning, the way in which it is taught is of high relevance. Several approaches for teaching poetry along with other genres of literature exist. Most of the current approaches are in some aspects similar to one another but throughout the years they have been reconstructed and new approaches have been formulated (e.g. Maley, 1989, Carter & Long, 1991, Van, 2009, Lucas, 1994, Savvidou, 2004, as cited in Khan & Alasmari, 2018, pp. 172-173). This section will focus on Carter and Long's (1991, as cited in Savvidou, 2004) three models to teaching literature as well as the six approaches that Van (2009) discusses regarding literary analysis.

The three models to teaching literature that Carter and Long (as cited in Savvidou 2004) present consist of: (1) the cultural model, (2) the language model and (3) the personal

growth model. These three models represent different perspectives on what teachers focus on in their teaching of literature. The cultural model is based on traditional approaches where the text is used as a means for understanding cultural aspects and perspectives. This is achieved by learning about the different social, political, literary and historical contexts of the text. The language model consists of approaches that concentrate on the linguistic features of a text. By dismantling the text, linguistic aspects, such as figurative language or indirect speech, can be exemplified and understood. Lastly, the personal growth model uses the student's own personal feelings and opinions as a point of departure for understanding a text. Through relating the text to their own experiences, students can be helped to grasp the meaning and personal growth can be developed (Carter & Long, 1991, as cited in Savvidou, 2004).

The six approaches that Van (2009, pp. 2-3) presents are often referred to in research on literary analysis. They include: (1) New Criticism, (2) Structuralism, (3) Stylistics, (4) Reader-Response, (5) Language-Based and (6) Critical literacy. New Criticism is based on understanding a text completely without any influence from the author, social context, historical relevance or the reader's own knowledge. The aim is to analyse specific characteristics (rhyme, metre, imagery etc.) by close reading. All other aspects are deemed irrelevant. Analogous to New Criticism, Structuralism focuses on an objective perspective of a text. It seeks to identify literary components, for example elements of a narrative, in order to place the text in a larger hierarchical system. Both the New Criticism and the Structuralism approaches have received critique regarding their pertinence in the EFL classroom.

The Stylistics approach aims to develop the student's linguistic knowledge and awareness by, for instance, understanding the unconventional structure of poetry. Through analysing literary texts, students can learn to interpret the text, understand aesthetic features and express their emotions (Van, 2009, pp. 4-5). In a similar manner, the Language-Based approach also focuses on language. However, in contrast to the Stylistic approach, the Language-Based approach promotes student engagement in a creative and varied way. Teachers encourage and support the students by providing information and outlining the teaching activity. However, the aim is for students to collaboratively interpret and understand the text (Van, 2009, p. 7).

Furthermore, the Reader-Response approach emphasises the reader's experiences and opinions in relation to the text. Each student has their own individual background which affects the way they interpret the text. The active process of connecting personal experiences and thoughts to a text leads to the students' own meaning-making (Van, 2009, pp. 5-6). The

last approach highlights the intricate relationship between language and social power. Critical Literacy aims to challenge existing norms and perceptions which are decided by the governing status quo. By understanding how language plays a role in "producing, maintaining, and changing social relations and power" students can develop critical awareness (Van, 2009, p. 8).

When teaching literature and poetry, the presented approaches are some of the most frequently used. Although some have received criticism, most of the approaches are highly relevant in today's EFL classrooms. Together, these approaches indicate that students' active interactions with a text that strive to promote both language knowledge and personal expression are favoured.

3 Literature Review

This section aims to provide an insight into previous research regarding teacher and student attitudes towards poetry. Little or no research that focuses on both teacher and student attitudes towards poetry in the EFL classroom has been conducted. However, studies focusing on either teacher or student attitudes towards the inclusion of poetry in the EFL classroom have been carried out to some extent and only one study covering a Swedish context has been found. In view of the fact that there is a limited amount of empirical research on the topic of teaching poetry in an EFL context, this section also includes a discussion of research conducted in a native English-speaking context and some studies on prospective teachers' attitudes towards poetry. The studies are presented according to their themes in order to more easily understand the main attitudes that affect the inclusion of poetry in the EFL classroom.

3.1 Teacher Attitudes

As previously established in this papers' theoretical background, the choice of including poetry in the English language classroom is not straightforward. Rather, several factors seem to create hesitation among teachers and many avoid teaching the topic altogether. This section provides an overview of what research has found regarding what attitudes teachers have towards the use of poetry in the English language classroom in order to understand the rationale behind either including or excluding the genre.

One of the reasons for excluding poetry in the English language classroom is teachers' fear of poetry and lack of confidence in teaching the genre. Weaven and Clark (2013) investigated English teachers' reasons for not including poetry in secondary schools in

Australia and found that fear and lack of confidence were prevalent factors. These attitudes were also prominent in Timothy and Obiekezie's (2019) study where prospective ESL (English as a second language) teachers in Nigeria answered a questionnaire and were interviewed regarding their attitudes towards poetry. The results showed that 94% of the teachers did not want to teach poetry. Additionally, in their study where English teachers from Ireland and Northern Ireland answered an online survey, Hennessy et al. (2021) found that the participating teachers also expressed a lack of confidence.

However, the reasons for fearing and, therefore, avoiding poetry varied between the three studies. In Weaven and Clark's (2013, p. 106) study, the participants' fears and low confidence were based on the lack of knowledge about the genre, concern about feeling "professionally excluded" by other colleagues and the fear of poetry being too difficult for the students to learn. The prospective teachers in Timothy and Obiekezie's (2019) study revealed that their reasons for fearing poetry were based on previous interactions with poetry when they attended secondary school. The bad experiences that the teachers had had during secondary school negatively affected what attitudes the prospective teachers had developed towards poetry later in life. Furthermore, Hennessy et al. (2021) found that although their participants expressed high confidence regarding some aspects, such as selecting poems and providing feedback, they felt less confident in encouraging students' authentic response.

Similarly to the results shown in Weaven and Clark's (2013) study, teacher's lack of knowledge regarding poetry has been a prevalent factor as to why teachers seem to avoid poetry in their teaching in several other studies. In a study conducted by Liao (2018), prospective EFL and ESL teachers participated in an interview about their attitudes towards poetry writing. The results showed that 22% of the teachers felt that they lacked knowledge about the genre and expressed an uncertainty towards teaching poetry. The same attitude towards poetry was found in Ray's (2006) study, which consisted of prospective teachers from England. Through a questionnaire, the study revealed that the teachers' attitudes towards poetry had changed over time and that many teachers were less positive towards poetry during their later school years than in their earlier school years. The prospective teachers recognised the value of using poetry in the English language classroom but did not feel that they had sufficient knowledge of the genre in order to teach it (Ray, 2006). Lastly, Mashbuhin and Liao (2017) also discovered that lack of knowledge was one of the main reasons why the participating teachers felt an unwillingness towards incorporating poetry in their teaching.

Additional reasons that appear to make English language teachers hesitant towards including poetry are external factors. The issue of assessment regulations, exam preparations and time constraints were seen as very challenging aspects for the English language teachers in Hennessy et al.'s (2021, p. 345) study. Likewise, Gönen (2018, p. 35) discovered that time was a prominent issue according to the prospective EFL teachers in her study. Through interviews and diary excerpts, the participants pointed out that the effort of finding suitable material to use was difficult and highly time consuming.

Contrasting the negative attitudes that the above studies found, some positive attitudes towards poetry among teachers have also been revealed. From the above mentioned studies, it was concluded that although many teachers had negative attitudes towards poetry, they also understood the value of incorporating poetry in the English language classroom. The results of Gönen's (2018), Ray's (2006) and Hennessy et al.'s (2021) studies showed that even though the teachers expressed concern towards including poetry, they also stated that poetry could be a positive tool for developing students' language awareness. Vocabulary, poetic understanding, figurative language, grammar and other linguistic aspects were skills that poetry could help promote according to the participants.

Moreover, several teachers recognised that using poetry in the English language classroom could help develop students' personal growth and self-expression. The participants acknowledged that poetry could help students express their feelings and emotions (Ray, 2006, p. 409) and "unlock personal reactions" (Gönen, 2018, p. 36). Through poetry, a more personal engagement with language could emerge which also encouraged collaborative interactions. Furthermore, self-expression and personal growth could also be achieved by the increased self-confidence and the ability to create their own meaning through the teaching of poetry (Hennessy et al., 2021, p. 344; Liao, 2018, p. 8).

According to the teachers, another reason for including poetry was the increase in students' motivation. The participants in Gönen's (2018) study found that engaging students in poetry could provide them with a higher appreciation for language and poetry, which also led to a higher motivation for learning English in general. Similarly, Ray's (2006) study showed that the teachers believed poetry could be entertaining and enjoyable for their students, which would increase their motivation.

Lastly, in order for poetry teaching to be successful and effective in the English language classroom, some factors have been put forward. In a study conducted in Sweden (Sigvardsson, 2020), fifteen EFL teachers, who were personally interested in poetry,

participated in an interview. The aim of the study was to investigate what EFL teachers, who were keen readers of poetry, regarded as effective poetry teaching. The results suggested that the effectiveness of incorporating poetry in the EFL classroom depended on the teachers' own interest in poetry, their ability to make students personally connect with the poems and their skill to create a safe classroom environment. However, the teachers recognised that poetry could be intimidating and difficult for students to understand and interpret, which was also a finding in Weaven and Clark's (2013) study. The participants in Sigvardsson's (2020) study concluded that teachers need to make poetry more accessible for students and, through scaffolding, help them analyse and interpret the poems.

From the above mentioned studies, it becomes apparent that the attitudes towards poetry among teachers are ambiguous. Many teachers express negative attitudes towards the genre but most teachers do understand the potential value of incorporating poetry in their English language teaching, regardless of whether they operate in a native English-speaking context or in an EFL context.

3.2   Student Attitudes

Student attitudes towards the inclusion of poetry in the English language classroom will most likely affect the outcome of poetry teaching as much as teachers' attitudes do. This section will present empirical research on student attitudes and perceptions towards poetry and their reasons for liking or disliking the genre.

Generally, research within this field shows that students' initial reactions towards including poetry in the language classroom are negative, especially if they are asked to produce poetry themselves. The most common attitude among EFL students is that of fear or anxiety. When Chinese EFL students answered a questionnaire on what literary genre they feared the most, the majority replied poetry (Hirvela & Boyle, 1988). The reasons appeared to be the students' own lack of knowledge about the genre and its unique language. The same answer was given by the Chinese EFL students in Garvin's (2013) study. The participants wrote poems and reflected on their process through written responses. Many of the students felt fear and anxiety towards poetry writing at first since Chinese poetry culture holds high status. The study revealed that "some felt poetry writing was unattainable and were fearful because they had never imagined themselves as Chinese poets, much less English poets" (Garvin, 2013, p. 90). The EFL students in Liao and Roy's (2017) study also expressed anxiety towards poetry through an online survey. Their low confidence was based on the

perception that poetry needed to uphold a certain standard which these students did not believe they could achieve.

The negative attitudes that students seem to have are based on several different perceptions. A common reason for students' disinterest towards poetry are the different language aspects. The EFL students in Salameh's (2012) study participated in a survey and the results showed that 90% felt that the English language made it difficult to comprehend the poems. Moreover, 40% of the participants had difficulties interpreting the poems due to the figurative use of language. Correspondingly, the participants in Iida's (2012) study found poetry writing to be challenging language-wise. The EFL students wrote poetry and reflected on the process through journals. The results showed that a majority expressed linguistic aspects to be challenging, for example, structural, lexical, and semantic issues. Finally, Liao (2017) interviewed EFL students about their perceived poetry writing ability and found that the students who focused more on grammar and structure felt less positive towards poetry than the students who focused more on personal emotions.

Another frequent reason for students' negative attitudes towards the inclusion of poetry in the EFL classroom is motivation. The lack of motivation appears to be related to the teacher's approach when incorporating poetry in their EFL classroom. Comparing the studies conducted by Khatib (2011) and Alvi and Alvi (2019), both results revealed that using traditional approaches to teaching poetry did not promote positive attitudes among students. Alvi and Alvi's (2019, p. 162) study was conducted in Saudi Arabia and investigated current approaches to teaching poetry through questionnaires with EFL students. The results revealed that the students had a high disinterest in poetry teaching because of the traditional approaches being used. Almost 50% of the EFL students perceived poetry to be less important than other subjects in school and many felt poetry teaching to be impractical, tedious, insignificant and boring (Alvi & Alvi, 2019, p. 163). The EFL students in Khatib's (2011) study took part in an experiment where a modern, learner-centred approach was tested. The results showed that students felt a dislike for poetry because of the lack of personal engagement with poetry. Additional studies that also highlighted motivation as a factor for negative student attitudes are Liao and Roy's (2017) and Hanratty's (2011) studies. Interestingly, the study conducted by Liao and Roy indicated that a high frequency of poetry reading in the students' first language and in English led to a lower interest and desire to read and write poems. In Hanratty's study, the students read poems and answered a questionnaire. The results showed that a large majority of the participants disliked poetry.

A final contributing factor to the disinterest in poetry among EFL students appears to be whether or not the students believe that poetry can be mastered. Both Salameh (2012) and Liao (2017) found that a few students in their studies believed that poetry could only be learned by certain people. In Salameh's (2012) study, 35% of the participants felt that "poetry is something that you either have the talent to enjoy and appreciate, or there is no way to make it accessible" (p. 44). From the results, some of the students in Liao's (2017) study perceived themselves to possess low poetry writing abilities. It was further indicated that these students might not view poetry writing ability as something everyone could acquire.

Comparable with the ambiguity of teacher attitudes, student attitudes are not only negative. The negative attitudes among students such as fear, anxiety, language difficulties, or lack of motivation can, according to the presented studies, be changed into positive attitudes towards poetry learning. It has been revealed that poetry can help students gain higher self-confidence and motivation. At the end of both Garvin's (2013) and Liao's (2017) studies, the participants felt more confident in their poetry writing abilities and were able to create more personal connections with the poems. The participants in Khatib's (2011) study changed their attitudes from negative to positive and expressed an increased motivation and higher involvement during the poetry lessons. Correspondingly, Hanratty (2011) discovered that the students were more motivated during their poetry lessons than they initially expressed. The result suggested that the selection of poems and the importance of active engagement with the texts are crucial when it comes to student motivation.

Furthermore, a few studies also found that students felt they understood poetry better and realised its value, which contributed to more positive attitudes. This was partly due to an increased language awareness. The participants in Garvin's (2013) study developed their vocabulary, phonemic awareness and understanding of poetic devices which made them overcome their fear of poetry and understand the genre better. Similarly, the students in Iida's (2012) study acquired a higher linguistic awareness but also the ability to negotiate meaning which in turn led to the development of voice and self-expression. The results further indicated that the literacy skills gained by engaging in poetry were valuable aspects in other subjects too.

There is no doubt that both teachers and students in EFL and native English-speaking classrooms perceive poetry as difficult; their attitudes are often that of fear, anxiety, disinterest and apathy. Both teachers and students base these attitudes on their lack of knowledge, insufficient language skills, time restraints, resources and traditional methods. However, as

research has shown, positive attitudes do exist and teachers understand the value of including poetry in their English language classrooms. They acknowledge that poetry can help with linguistic awareness, personal growth and motivation. Likewise, students realise these aspects too, which ultimately leads to more positive attitudes towards the genre.

4   Method and Material

Since the aim of this study is to investigate Swedish EFL teachers' and students' perceptions towards poetry, a qualitative research approach was adopted. Because this study tries to understand nuances and in-depth perceptions of the participants and not the general opinions of a greater population, the number of participants was limited and a quantitative approach was, therefore, not deemed appropriate (McKay, 2006, pp. 7, 17). Instead, qualitative interviews were chosen as the preferred method since they allow the research to better explore and understand the informants' experiences, thoughts and feelings (Dalen, 2015, pp. 14-15). This section presents information on the chosen participants, how the interviews were conducted, both practically and ethically, as well as how the data was analysed.

4.1   Participants

The participants consisted of three active upper secondary school teachers and six students, all teaching at and attending the same school. The school is located in the region of Västra Götaland and is considered a larger upper secondary school. When choosing the participants, a sample of convenience (McKay, 2006, p. 37) was used since the author had access to the particular school from previous courses in the Teacher Education Programme. Thus, asking and being allowed permission to conduct interviews was more easily accepted. The three teachers are currently teaching more than one course of English and all three courses (English 5, 6 and 7) were divided between the three of them. Moreover, all three teachers also teach at least one additional subject.

Since this study is strictly confidential regarding its participants, the teachers will be renamed and called: Teacher A, Teacher B and Teacher C. Correspondingly, the six students will be mentioned as Student A, Student B, Student C, Student D, Student E and Student F. In this study, they will also be addressed as s/he and his/her in order to ensure their confidentiality. All teachers are above 30 years old and have been teaching English for more than five years. The participating students are between the ages of 16-18 and are currently studying either English 5, 6 or 7. The students were selected from three different classes in

order to strive for diverse and objective responses. The students are studying in different vocational programs and all students are on different proficiency levels language-wise. When choosing students to interview, language proficiency was not taken into consideration. Furthermore, the students were not chosen based on whether or not they had any personal interest in poetry previous to the study.

4.2   Interviews

The interviews took place between February and April 2022. The interview questions that needed to be asked in order to reach the aim of this study varied depending on whether the participant was a teacher or a student. Thus, two semi-structured interview guides were created, each written in both English and Swedish and consisting of 16-18 questions, including some possible follow-up questions (see Appendix A and B). A semi-structured interview allows the interviewer to be flexible regarding the order of questions as well as change and expand the questions depending on the participants' answers. Moreover, the participants were allowed to develop their answers freely and elaborate on their thoughts and ideas without restrictions (Denscombe, 2018, p. 269). A structured interview would not be suitable for this study since it does not permit any flexibility with regard to the interview questions, whereas unstructured interviews are more suited for research where no pre-made interview guide is needed.

The interviews were conducted individually in person and were recorded via audio and then later transcribed. By recording the interviews, detailed and precise language is maintained which is beneficial when analysing the data (McKay, 2006, p. 56). In order to allow the participants to express themselves as authentically and spontaneously as possible, all participants were given the option of doing the interview in Swedish or in English. Since all participants chose to speak in Swedish, citations used in this paper have been translated by the author. The interviews began with 5-6 general questions about the participants' background and current situation, followed by questions regarding poetry and their attitudes towards the genre. Furthermore, questions about the students' and teachers' attitudes towards using poetry as a method for English language learning were asked.

4.3   Ethical Considerations

The research was conducted following the national ethical guidelines (The Swedish Research Council, 2017). Since the interviews were conducted with teachers and students of a

particular school, the principal overseeing the concerning programs was initially asked for permission to carry out the research. After consent was given by the principal, the teachers were contacted and the objective for the interviews was explained. Permission to interview the six students was also asked and approved by their teachers. The students were then asked directly if they would consider participating in the study. Each participant was informed about the topic of the study, what their role as participants would entail, the protection of their identities and their possibility to withdraw from the study at any moment (The Swedish Research Council, 2002). Since one of the participating students was under the age of 18, a consent form was also sent to their parents asking for permission to include their child in the study (see Appendix B). Ethical considerations are especially important to acknowledge and adhere to when interviewing minors (Dalen, 2015, p. 28).

4.4 Data Analysis

The collected data was analysed by drawing inspiration from *theoretical thematic analysis* (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 79). The term provides a way to identify, analyse and report on patterns/themes of the data in order to extract meaning from it. Theoretical thematic analysis focuses on specific details within the data set and identifies themes in close relation to the already existing research questions. Contrasting to a theoretical thematic analysis, an *inductive* approach constructs themes independent of any specific research question or already existing coding frame (Braun & Clarke, 2006, pp. 83-84). Since this study includes pre-determined research questions, a theoretical approach was deemed more suitable. The stages of thematic analysis presented by Braun and Clark (2006, p. 87) were taken into consideration when conducting the analysis. The interviews of this study were transcribed using a transcription software in order to ease the workload. The data was then revised and read several times to get familiarised with the data. Moreover, with the research questions in mind, initial codes and later themes were identified and reviewed. Definition of the genre, general attitudes, benefits of poetry teaching and challenges are the established themes.

5 Results

This section will present the results of the nine interviews conducted. It will begin by introducing and explaining how the three teachers define the concept of poetry and their attitudes and perceptions towards the genre. This will be followed by the teachers' perceptions regarding benefits and challenges of including poetry. In a separate section, the

results from the six student interviews will be presented and described. Firstly, the students' definition of poetry will be provided. Secondly, their attitudes and reasons for them will be presented. Lastly, the section will introduce the students' perceived challenges with poetry. Since all interviews were conducted in Swedish, citations used in this section have been translated by the author.

5.1   Teacher Attitudes Towards Poetry in the EFL Classroom

When asked about how the teachers would define poetry, teachers B and C had similar answers. They both described poetry as being expressions of emotion and a way to convey one's identity. Teacher C stated that poetry is an artform that "expresses problems, complexity, questions, life issues and so on". Teacher B described it as "the fuzzy and vague rather than the hard facts that are measurable". From the interviews, it also becomes apparent that their definition of poetry conforms to a traditional view, mentioning examples of texts clearly categorised as poems. They both mention William Shakespeare's sonnets and poems by Maya Angelou. Furthermore, Teacher B includes speeches as being a part of poetry and s/he often incorporates speeches from movies when s/he includes poetry in his/her teaching. Teacher A had a more traditional definition where s/he first and foremost connected poetry to poems, but also song lyrics and other texts that do not necessarily follow the normal structure of a poem. Song lyrics were mentioned by all teachers as being a form of poetry, and the three teachers mentioned that they had worked with music and song lyrics when previously incorporating poetry-themes in the EFL classroom.

The results from the teacher interviews showed that all teachers were generally positive towards including poetry in their teaching and no one expressed a dislike for the genre. Both Teacher B and Teacher C considered poetry to be an important part of English language learning. Teacher B stated that s/he had a more positive attitude towards including poetry today than s/he had had earlier in his/her teaching career. S/he explained that this was a result of his/her initial decision to first include poetry in the English classes. Teacher B further expressed that, depending on the student group, learning about poetry and poems could be a positive challenge for them. S/he mentioned that the students did not necessarily have to love poetry for it to be a rewarding teaching opportunity and that they should be free to choose what to think about poetry as long as they were able to have a conversation about it. Teacher B stated that:

Everyone can read a short poem during class. That can be equally as good as reading something else and I think that has calmed some students down a bit. Like 'ah this poem sucks!' 'I know, right! It is useless. I hate this part, which part do you hate?' Like this, it is still a conversation about a poem.

Teacher C quickly stated "absolutely" when asked if s/he considered poetry to be important to include in the EFL classroom. S/he considered poetry to be an interesting art form and thoroughly enjoyed working with poetry in the EFL classroom but noted that some teachers perhaps felt they lacked knowledge regarding how to teach the genre and worried about how their students would receive it. Teacher C further believed that most students do not engage with poetry today and, therefore, it would be beneficial to at least let them explore the genre in the classroom. S/he explained that having knowledge about poetry can be considered as a part of being well-read and that s/he was extremely positive towards introducing poetry to the students. Teacher C further expressed that his/her personal interest in themes that revolve around society and people contribute to his/her positive attitude towards poetry since s/he views poetry to often highlight societal issues and themes.

Contrasting teachers B and C, Teacher A did not perceive poetry to be a priority in today's English courses. According to this teacher, the absence of poems in EFL text-books indicates that poetry does not hold any significant role in today's EFL teaching. Teacher A acknowledged that s/he has included poems in his/her teaching before and that s/he enjoyed doing so, but in recent years, s/he has worked more with song lyrics than with classic poems. S/he argued that the only thing close enough to poetry in today's EFL textbooks are song lyrics. Teacher A pointed out that people hardly ever encounter poems in their everyday life and that poetry reading requires a high degree of maturity and the fact that poems perhaps are outdated. S/he explained that poetry teaching rarely is a topic at English teacher conferences. Another perception that Teacher A had was that poetry is not something that is naturally or easily assessed. S/he argued that poetry teaching/learning is difficult to fit in any of the syllabus criteria and that one would have to make an effort in order to find a relevant criterion which would include poetry.

Regarding the teachers' perceptions on what poetry could be beneficial for, they all mentioned various aspects of language learning but highlighted different areas. Teacher A and Teacher B brought up vocabulary and language expressions as benefits. Teacher B stated that working with poetry "demands a high vocabulary knowledge since poems play with words,

and the words can mean many different things". Teacher A further mentioned pronunciation and fluency as beneficial learning aspects for the students. Moreover, all teachers felt that poetry teaching could help students develop their analytic skills and mentioned English 6 as the preferred course for incorporating poetry analysis. By reading and analysing the poems, understanding the historical and political contexts and learning about the author's life conditions, students can learn to interpret and understand a poem. Finally, Teacher B also mentioned poetic knowledge as a learning aspect. S/he explained that s/he often introduces the terminology of poetry in his/her classes, such as stanza, line, repetition, voice and imagery.

Other perceived benefits of poetry among the teachers were motivation, self-expression and cultural awareness. All teachers believed poems to be beneficial since they were shorter than other types of literature and, therefore, more students would feel motivated to read it. Teacher A explained that "students rarely think it is boring if it is short and easy, and in that regard, poems are a good starting point for students to begin reading, it becomes more appealing for them". Furthermore, both Teacher B and Teacher C argued that poetry could create opportunities for self-expression and cultural awareness. Teacher B stated that if students understand that poems are "a window into different people's realities", they could also use a poem to reflect and understand themselves. Additionally, Teacher C indicated that making poetry accessible to students by not only including older poems with strict poetic compositions, can make them realise that they are able to express themselves through poems.

When discussing teachers' attitudes and perceptions towards poetry in the EFL classroom, the teachers did mention some potential challenges. Teacher A highlighted that the absence of poetry in EFL textbooks contributed to his/her lack of material. S/he thought it difficult to find relevant and interesting poems to include and felt that s/he did not have enough knowledge regarding English contemporary poets. Teacher A and Teacher B further argued that it can be challenging to find the right poems to introduce to their students. If the initial poem is not interesting, it can be difficult to keep the students motivated. Additionally, Teacher B pointed out that it is important not to restrict students to one or two poems since that could generate disinterest.

Another aspect that Teacher B and Teacher C believed could be challenging for the students was language difficulties. Teacher B explained that limitations in vocabulary can make it more difficult for students to understand and analyse the poems. Correspondingly, Teacher C stated that, because of many difficult and complex words, it can be challenging for

students to interpret the poem and understand its meaning. However, Teacher C argued that by making the poetry lessons interesting and working collaboratively, the students can gain more self-confidence and view poetry as more accessible to them.

Furthermore, both Teacher B and Teacher C perceived students to be more negative towards poetry previous to their lessons compared to after finishing a teaching segment involving poetry. Teacher B explained that s/he imagined some hypothetical challenges when s/he first started to incorporate poetry in his/her EFL classroom, for instance, that students would outright refuse to read poems. However, that has never happened which has made Teacher B rethink his/her attitudes towards using poetry as a means for English language learning. S/he continued by arguing that even if some students were initially negative towards poetry and voiced their opinions against it, they always chose a poem in the end and were able to engage with it successfully. Teacher C expressed similar thoughts and stated that some students often felt unsure about working with poetry in the beginning and that they regarded it as difficult or boring. Nevertheless, after some time had passed and they were actually reading the poems, most students became more positive towards poetry and believed it to be interesting.

5.2   Student Attitudes Towards Poetry in the EFL Classroom

When the students who participated in this study were asked to define poetry, most associated poetry with music. Student A, Student C and Student E referred to rap and Student D stated that alternative, more sad music, rather than pop songs, can be considered poetry. Beyond that, most students argued that poetry has to do with expressions and emotions. Student A described poetry as a way of speaking from the heart, Student B defined it as short texts, used to illustrate things that everyone comprehends and understands differently. Additionally, Student C explained that poems require people to reflect on what is said, Student D argued that poems allow you to convey emotions and Student F defined it as a way for people to express themselves about things they have gone through.

Regarding student attitudes towards poetry in the EFL classroom, all students were more or less positive towards the inclusion of poetry; however, the reasons for their perceptions varied. A common perception that all students had was that it was enjoyable and interesting to compare and interpret the meaning of a poem. The fact that poetry allows for different interpretations encouraged the students to discuss with their peers, and as an effect, form their own interpretations, opinions, thoughts and feelings. Student B exemplified by

stating that "normal texts do not leave room for my own interpretations, which is why poems are more fun". Student F continued by arguing that his/her analytical skills can improve by reading and discussing poems. Furthermore, Student A, Student C, and Student E highlighted their own interest in music and explained that the connection between poetry and music made learning about the genre more enjoyable.

Through poetry reading, the students were able to recognise themselves in it, which contributed to further interest in learning more about different poets and historical contexts. Students A, D, E and F brought up that it is interesting to learn about other people's life stories and the eras in which these people lived. They pointed out that a poem or lyric can "touch your heart" and help young adults to process their feelings and experiences. Student E highlighted the importance of learning about the poets' lives in order to fully understand the meaning of a poem. Student A explained that s/he would like to learn about older poets and compare them with more modern, contemporary poets in order to expand his/her knowledge about the genre. Student A also mentioned that s/he believed it would be better if students could engage with poetry earlier in their school years, not only in upper secondary school. Furthermore, Student C stressed that poetry could increase his/her cultural awareness by learning about poets from different social and political backgrounds. S/he stated that learning about poetry in the EFL classroom had made him/her curious about the pioneers of the genre from other cultural backgrounds since "in some genres, there are only white men who dominate". Similarly, Student D highlighted that it is interesting to learn about more female poets since s/he had mostly associated poetry with writers such as William Shakespeare.

Another reason for the students' positive attitudes towards including poetry was the new outlook on the English language. Student C, Student F and Student E explained that poems illustrate a varied and different way of using English than other types of texts which makes them more interesting and enjoyable to read. For example, Student E, who had previously worked with poetry during an EFL class, stated that s/he thoroughly enjoys how poems or rap lyrics play with rhymes. Additionally, Student B mentioned that s/he had become more positive towards the genre after the poetry lessons and that s/he would like to learn more about the genre. Moreover, the majority of the students felt that poetry could help them develop their vocabulary. Student C exemplified by stating that, since poems often include a large number of new unfamiliar words, s/he is able to develop his/her vocabulary. Additionally, Student D described that poems often include a more formal language that learners do not experience in other text types, which is why s/he thought it useful to also

include poetry in the EFL classroom. Student A and Student C also mentioned that if they were to read poems out loud in class, poetry could help improve their fluency. Student A argued that "when you read poems you have to have a flow, you cannot sound like a robot".

Finally, one student discussed the importance of the teacher's attitude towards poetry. Student C explained that his/her positive attitude towards poetry was partly due to the teachers' attitude and stated that "our teacher personally thinks poetry is fun, thus, I become more interested in learning it". Student C continued by explaining that sometimes teachers do not seem particularly interested in what they are teaching which negatively affects the students' interest in learning and that it is easier to learn if the teacher enjoys the subject or theme too.

The majority of the students represented in this study did not express any negative attitudes towards including poetry in their EFL classroom. Almost all perceived poetry to be fun and interesting to learn about. The only time they indicated any negative attitudes was when asked about upper secondary school students' general perceptions towards including poetry. The participants assumed that most, or at least some students regard working with poetry as boring, outdated or silly. They also believed that students' lack of knowledge of what poetry is, make them automatically disinterested and unmotivated. Only Student E gave any indication of a negative attitude. S/he stated that external factors such as the lack of a calm learning environment and a constant change of teachers made him/her feel unmotivated towards learning poetry or any other aspects of EFL learning.

When discussing what the students perceived to be challenging aspects of poetry learning, the majority mentioned poetry writing. Student A and Student C explained that it might be difficult to come up with themes to write about and that in order to write good poems, one has to be creative. Student B argued that since one has to think about several aspects when writing poetry, for example rhythm, it is more difficult to write poems than ordinary texts. Correspondingly, Student F perceived poetry writing to be difficult because of all the different aspects to think about when writing. Student E pointed out that it can be difficult to write a cohesive poem that actually tells a story.

Additionally, many of the students regarded the lack of English language skills as a challenge when reading poems or lyrics. Students B and D explained that, because poems often consisted of complex and older words, it was sometimes difficult to comprehend what the author wanted to convey. Furthermore, Student D also argued that it can be difficult to relate to the aspects brought up by poets from older literary eras and mentioned that it would

be fun if the teacher included more modern authors. Student F stated that s/he enjoyed reading poems in his/her first language since s/he could easily understand them but since s/he did not know enough English, it was difficult to enjoy poems in English.

Another challenging aspect was the lack of experience and knowledge about poetry. Both Student A and Student C explained that they had had very little previous engagement with poetry in school. Therefore, they found it difficult to learn about poetry, understand what poetry is and how to use it for their own EFL learning. In order to improve their poetry writing abilities, Student D argued that it is valuable for them to receive guidance from the teacher in the initial stages of poetry learning.

6 Discussion and Pedagogical Implications

Since the aim of this study is to investigate the attitudes of a few selected teachers and students in Sweden, no generalisation for a broader population can be made. However, some of the findings in this study allow for a discussion which will still contribute to the limited research field of poetry teaching in an EFL context. This section will use the research questions and the themes found in the results as a point of departure when presenting the discussion. It will further draw on previous research when analysing the results as well as the author's own inferences based on the main findings. Moreover, some pedagogical implications will be provided for the purpose of, hopefully, supporting EFL teachers who wish to use poetry in their classroom.

The initial reaction from all three teachers showed that no one was disinterested or had any obvious negative attitudes towards poetry, which contradicts much previous research. Most previous studies indicate that teachers are negative and reluctant towards including poetry in their teaching (e.g. Weaven & Clark, 2013, p. 106; Timothy & Obiekezie, 2019, p. 4; Liao, 2018, p. 9). Teachers A, B and C all stated that they enjoyed teaching poetry in their EFL classrooms. The results of Sigvardsson's (2020, p. 962) study indicated that the teachers' personal interest in poetry affects the learning outcome, which was further corroborated by Student C who mentioned that s/he enjoyed poetry more since his/her teacher personally enjoyed poetry. This suggests that students will become more interested and motivated if teachers are personally interested in what they teach. For that reason, teachers would most likely benefit from planning and including themes that they themselves enjoy or are interested in. Although teachers might not enjoy poetry personally, the lessons could still be effective and interesting if they based their poetry teaching around themes that they were interested in.

Perhaps the most interesting finding in this study was the overall positive attitudes of all six participating students. Contrary to previous research, which has revealed generally negative attitudes towards poetry (e.g. Alvi & Alvi, 2019, p. 162; Khatib, 2011, p. 168; Liao & Roy, 2017, p. 60), the students of this study perceived poetry to be enjoyable and intriguing. Interestingly, students A, B, C and E presumed that there existed a general disinterest among students towards poetry. However, they did not share these attitudes. The positive perceptions might correlate with the fact that the majority mentioned music when defining poetry. Since music is perhaps more easily relatable and listened to by young people today than classic poems, poetry might not have seemed too distant and complex to them. Furthermore, existing research shows that the most common attitudes among students are fear or anxiety towards poetry (Hirvela & Boyle, 1988, p. 180; Garvin, 2013, p. 90; Liao & Roy, 2017, p. 60). The students of this study did not have any extensive poetry teaching previously and, therefore, were perhaps rather curious about the genre and wanted to learn more about it. This result might ease some teachers' uncertainty and encourage them to include poetry in their EFL classrooms more often. By further including music and other forms of contemporary poetry, a continuing interest and curiosity around the genre might emerge.

When the teachers began to discuss poetry further, it became apparent that they perceived the genre rather differently. Teachers B and C had similar attitudes in that they acknowledged the importance of incorporating poetry in the EFL classroom and regularly used poetry in their teaching. When defining poetry, they described it in terms of emotions and as a form of expression which suggests a rather philosophical approach to poetry. Interestingly, Teacher A did not consider poetry to be particularly important. His/her definition of the genre was not as elaborate as the other two teachers' which might suggest a more neutral attitude towards the genre. Although Teacher A acknowledged the fact that teaching poetry could be entertaining for the students, s/he had not included poetry in his/her teaching for many years. Teacher A's reasons for excluding poetry were partly based on the perception that poems were mostly advantageous to be used as a filler-type exercise and that these did not necessarily need to be graded. Contrary to previous studies on teacher attitudes (Weaven & Clark, 2013, p. 106; Timothy & Obiekezie, 2019, p. 4; Hennessy et al., 2021, p. 346), Teacher A did not express any lack of confidence or fear towards poetry. This indicates that his/her attitudes are merely a product of him/her not valuing the genre and not understanding the possible benefits poetry can have for the students.

Regarding the perceived benefits of including poetry, teachers and students were

mostly in agreement. They all mentioned that poetry could help students improve vocabulary, fluency, analytic skills, historical and political knowledge and self-expression. Most of these aspects have also been put forward in previous research as positive benefits of poetry teaching (e.g. Hennessy et al., 2021, p. 344; Ray, 2006, p. 409; Gönen, 2018, p. 36). Interestingly, developing students' analytic skills was not an aspect that existing research has mentioned, which might indicate that teachers in Sweden tend to focus on other teaching goals than the participants of other conducted studies. Furthermore, since developing students' analytic skills is a focal point in the Swedish syllabus for the subject of English (Skolverket, 2020), the teachers of this study might be more prone to using poetry reading as a method for literary analysis. If teachers are aware of the many ways in which they can use poetry as a method for EFL learning, they might be more inclined to use the genre in their teaching. Hence, there is a need for more knowledge on poetry teaching and how to work with the genre in the EFL classroom.

Moreover, the results showed that two of the teachers emphasised the importance of letting students discuss different poems together in order to interpret and understand the meaning. Teacher C indicated that, through collaborative exercises, the students were able to engage with poetry effectively. Teacher B stated that as long as the students were able to have a conversation about the poem, it did not matter if they liked or hated the poem. This correlates with Sigvardsson's (2022, p. 963) study, who concluded that teachers need to make poetry more accessible to students and, through scaffolding, help students analyse, discuss and interpret the poems. This result can be further reinforced by the majority of the students of this study who mentioned that their positive attitudes towards poetry were based on the opportunity to engage and discuss poetry with their peers. Consequently, this study suggests that teachers should let students engage with poetry collaboratively since it will most likely promote positive and effective EFL learning opportunities.

However, some challenges were recognised by both teachers and students of this study. The importance of finding a suitable poem, perceived language difficulties among students and the perception that students would object to learning poetry in the EFL classroom were some of the challenges teachers identified. Even though the students did not have any negative attitudes or feel any apprehension towards poetry, they did acknowledge some challenging aspects of poetry learning such as poetry writing, difficulties in interpreting older poems, insufficient knowledge of the English language and lack of experience and knowledge of poetry. These attitudes correlate with previous research regarding student

attitudes (e.g. Hirvela & Boyle, 1988, p. 180; Salameh, 2012, pp. 42-43; Iida, 2012, pp. 1481-1482). This indicates a general consensus among students concerning challenging aspects of poetry learning regardless of country or level. It is, therefore, important that teachers are aware of these challenges and keep them in mind when incorporating poetry in their EFL classroom. In this way, teachers might be able to adapt their poetry teaching more efficiently and, hopefully, the students will not perceive the genre to be too difficult.

Furthermore, Teacher A expressed that the complete lack of poems in today's EFL textbooks makes it difficult for him/her to find any suitable poems at all. The same challenge was also confirmed by participants in Gönen's (2018, p. 35) study. The data from this study suggests that this challenge was the most prominent reason for Teacher A's exclusion of poetry from his/her EFL classroom. If poetry is to play a larger role in today's EFL classroom, it becomes apparent that there is a significant need for more material on how to teach poetry. Including chapters regarding poems in future EFL textbooks would minimise teachers' workload and facilitate their instruction.

Apart from Teacher A, the teachers of this study do not seem to experience any challenges that prevent them from including poetry in their EFL teaching. Even though they had some initial apprehensions when using poetry, teachers B and C perceived their students to successfully engage with the poems and that they became more positive towards the genre afterwards. This change of attitudes has also been found in other studies on students' attitudes (e.g. Khatib, 2011, p. 168; Garvin, 2013, p. 88; Iida, 2012, p. 1483). This suggests that even though students might seem apprehensive towards including poetry in the EFL classroom at the start, it should not prevent teachers from incorporating the genre in their teaching. Rather, by introducing poetry to the students, their attitudes could change for the better and teachers should, for that reason, not discard poetry teaching even though it might be met with disapproval from the students at first.

7 Conclusion

The aim of this study was to investigate teacher and student attitudes towards the inclusion of poetry in the EFL classroom in Sweden. Furthermore, this study sought to compare and contrast teachers' and students' perceptions towards poetry as a means for EFL learning in order to identify differences and similarities. The main findings of this study showed that teachers and students are generally positive towards the inclusion of poetry in the EFL classroom. Except for one teacher, all of the participants seemed to acknowledge the value of

poetry teaching and learning. Teachers and students recognise that incorporating poetry in the EFL classroom can be beneficial for developing self-expression, language skills, historical and political knowledge and poetic understanding, among others. Some challenging aspects in relation to teaching and learning poetry were, however, noted by the teachers and students of this study. The lack of material, insufficient language skills and lack of experience with poetry were some aspects they highlighted. Since the research field of poetry in an EFL context is rather limited, this study provides some insight into teacher and student attitudes and perceptions towards poetry in the EFL classroom. It compares and contrasts teachers' attitudes with those of students which contributes to a better understanding of the differences and similarities that exist between them. However, research within this field needs to be further explored in order to better understand how teachers and learners perceive poetry and how they approach the inclusion of the genre in the EFL classroom. Since this is a small-scale study, it would be highly interesting to investigate the same research questions on a larger scale, both in terms of participants and the number of schools in Sweden. An extensive study would be able to provide more generalisable claims which would greatly benefit the extremely limited research field of poetry in the Swedish EFL classroom.

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Appendix A

Interview Guide for Teachers

Background
- How old are you?
- What is your first language?
- What is your educational background?
- How many years have you been teaching?
- What does your teaching role look like at the moment?

Poetry
- How would you define poetry?
- Do you personally enjoy/like poetry?
- What are your views on implementing poetry in your EFL (English as a foreign language) classroom?
    - Do you believe poetry is important to teach?
    - Do you plan on implementing poetry in your EFL teaching during the course of English 5, 6 or 7?
- Do you believe your personal stance towards poetry affects the way you think of the genre as a means for English language learning?
- What would you like your students to learn if implementing poetry in your EFL teaching?
    - Would you focus more on the genre itself or use poetry as a method for other learning areas? Or both?
    - Would you be more cultural, factual or language oriented?
- Have you included poetry in your EFL teaching before?
    - If so:
      * What did you do?
      * What were the students' reactions to working with poetry?
      * What was the outcome?
      * Did your attitudes change in any way towards poetry after implementing it in your classroom?

                     * Would you like to use poetry in the EFL classroom again?

● What advantages do you believe poetry would have if used in the classroom?

● What disadvantages do you believe poetry would have if used in the classroom?

● Do you think students are reluctant or willing to engage in poetry in their EFL classrooms?

       - Why do you think that is?

● Do you think teachers are reluctant or willing to implement poetry in their EFL classrooms?

       - Why do you think that is?

Appendix B

Interview Guide for Students

Background

- How old are you?
- What is your first language?
- What year are you in?
- What programme are you in?
- Do you like school in general?
- Do you like to read?

Poetry

- How would you define poetry?
- Do you enjoy/like poetry?
- What are your thoughts on working with poetry in your English language classroom?
    - Do you feel positively or negatively towards it? Why do you think that is?
- Do you have any experience when it comes to working with poetry in the English classroom?
    - If so:
      * How did you work with poetry?
      * What did you think about poetry as a means for learning?
      * Did your attitudes toward poetry change in any way after working with it in the classroom?
      * Would you like to use poetry in the classroom again?
- What are your thoughts on reading poetry in the classroom?
- What are your thoughts on writing poetry in the classroom?
- If poetry were taught in the classroom, what about the genre would you like to learn?
- How do you think the teacher could help you with learning about poetry?
- In what way do you believe poetry can help you to learn English?
- Do you think students are reluctant or willing to engage in poetry in their EFL classrooms?
    - Why do you think that is?

- Do you think teachers are reluctant or willing to implement poetry in their EFL classrooms?
  - Why do you think that is?

Appendix C

Permission letter

Hi,

My name is XX and I am currently studying the teacher education program at Gothenburg University. At the moment, I am doing my teaching practices at XX upper secondary school until week 12. Since I am in the last term of my education, I will soon begin to write my degree paper.

During our teaching practices I will, therefore, need to collect data for my degree paper, in which I will write about teachers' and students' attitudes towards including poetry in their English classes. Consequently, I will need to contact some students in order to conduct an interview.

I am writing to you because I want to ask if it is okay for XX to participate in the project I am working on as one of my informants. It is of course entirely voluntary, strictly confidential and will in no way affect the students' classes or grades.

I would much appreciate it if you would allow this, since it will help my degree project a great deal. If you are okay with your child participating in this project, please sign this Email and send it back to school with XX.

Thank you in advance.
Sincerely
XX
YYYY-MM-DD

Hereby, I give my consent for XX to participate in your degree project on poetry

_____