FACULTY OF EDUCATION
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CHALLENGES AND STRATEGIES OF TEACHING SWEDISH TO LOW -LITERACY SKILLED IMMIGRANTS

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Supervisor:	Irma Brkovic
Examiner:	Sverker Lindblad
Keywords:	Low-literate adults, Teaching challenges, Swedish for Immigrants, Teaching strategies

Abstract

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Aim: The present study aims to investigate the challenges SFI teachers face when teaching basic Swedish to low-literacy skilled immigrants, and the strategies they implement to teach these groups. Particularly, this study looks for any indications of Vygotsky's sociocultural theory (SCT) in the teaching methods used while teaching SFI to individuals who lack literacy.

Theory: Concepts from Vygotsky's sociocultural theory (SCT) are used in this study as a framework in analyzing data and answering research questions.

Method: The study employs a qualitative research approach to acquire information from SFI teachers through in-depth interviews.

Results: Findings revealed that language barrier, limited literacy skills, unwillingness to involve in cooperative learning due to lack of confidence, and limited exposure to information technology are among the most typical challenges that SFI teachers face in teaching to low literate immigrants. Teachers reported to use varieties of strategies to address the perceived challenges. They include using some scaffolding techniques such as visual aids and simplified language, applying collaborative learning, incorporating digital literacy and language learning tools, motivating students to more exposure to out of class activities, and collaborating with other teachers and community organizations to support the students. This study emphasizes the importance of supporting and training teachers in meeting the requirements of low-literate students and identifies possible directions for further study in this area. Overall, this research helps to advance knowledge of the difficulties and teaching methods associated with teaching Swedish to low-literate immigrants. It also offers guidance to researchers, policymakers, and educators who engage in this field.

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List of Abbreviations

LESLLA	Literacy Education and Second Language Learning in Adults
SFI	Swedish for immigrants
L2	Second Language
L1	First Language
KoS	Knowledge of Society
LTS	Language Teaching Strategies
SCT	Sociocultural Theory
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
IOM	International Organization for Migration
CEFR	Common European Framework for Languages
SLA	Second Language Acquisition
ZPD	Zone of Proximal Development
MAE	Municipal Adult Education
SDG	Sustainable Development Goals
IT	Information Technology

1. Introduction

Sweden, like other European countries, is currently hosting many refugees and immigrants, mostly from politically unstable nations such as Somalia, Syria, Iraq, and Afghanistan (Skolinspektionen, 2013). In the Nordic countries' conventional policy framework, education has been seen as a tool against unemployment and social marginalization (Arnesen & Lundahl, 2006). To meet this challenge, the Swedish government established Swedish for immigrants (SFI) in 1965 to give newly arrived immigrants a basic understanding of the Swedish language (Skolverket, 1997). The Swedish Municipal Adult Education (MAE), which has a long history and has undergone some significant modifications over the past several decades, is the larger framework within which the SFI program is executed (Loeb, 2007). According to the Swedish Education Act, SFI education must be customized to each individual adult student's needs and prerequisites (Skolverket, 2020). The SFI syllabus also states that individual learner's interests, experiences, knowledge, and objectives would be accounted for while designing instruction (Skolverket, 2018a).

Since the end of the 1990s, SFI enrollment has increased more than ever. In 2014, there were over 125,000 students, while in 2021, there were 132.753 students (Skolverket, 2014; 2021). It is stated that 18% of these students had been in school for no longer than six years, prior to coming to Sweden (Skolverket, 2018b). To fulfill the varied academic and linguistic demands of low-literacy adults in learning Swedish, teachers need extra help due to the ongoing influx of immigrants to SFI schools. Few studies have been done on the language teaching strategies (LTS) developed by teachers to teach adult second language learners with low-literate skills and SFI programs, which have a particularly pragmatic objective.

Teaching Swedish to immigrants with limited literacy skills presents a variety of difficulties for SFI instructors. Learning to read and write can be challenging for students with low literacy abilities, which can make it struggling for them to comprehend and use the language. Additionally, a lot of these students have varied linguistic and cultural backgrounds, which can make teaching challenging. Furthermore, immigrants with low literacy levels may have trouble accessing outside-the-classroom educational services and support. SFI teachers can use efficient teaching techniques that are specifically adapted to the needs of immigrants with poor levels of literacy to overcome these difficulties. These techniques could involve the use of visual aids, interactive teaching techniques, and incorporating the students' original language into the curriculum. However, the effectiveness of these strategies must be assessed to make sure they are suitable for both the context of the SFI program and the needs of the adult immigrants.

The present study will explore the challenges and strategies of SFI teachers in teaching Swedish to low-literate immigrants. I will apply Vygotsky's sociocultural theory (SCT) approach for this study as a framework in analyzing data and answering research questions. The study will employ a qualitative research approach to acquire information from SFI teachers through in-depth interviews. Thematic analysis of the data will be used to find significant themes pertaining to the difficulties and strategies of teaching Swedish to low-literate immigrants. Previous studies have paid little attention to how language teachers employed SCT-based instruction in their classes to guide second language instruction to low-literacy immigrants. The researcher will investigate whether any SCT theory may be found in adult low-

literate students' SFI instruction. The findings of this study can be employed by teachers in their classes, policy makers and program administrators to enhance the quality of the SFI program and assist immigrants with poor literacy levels in successfully assimilating into Swedish society.

Aim of the Study

The present study aims to investigate the challenges SFI teachers face when teaching basic Swedish to low-literacy skilled immigrants, and the strategies they implement to teach these groups. Particularly, this study looks for any indications of Vygotsky's sociocultural theory (SCT) in the teaching methods used while teaching SFI to individuals who have low literacy. The other goal of the study is to further knowledge of the specific requirements and difficulties faced by low-literate immigrant learners as well as the instructional approaches that can facilitate their language learning. By examining the specific difficulties that SFI teachers encounter and the strategies that they employ, the research intends to determine the most successful methods for teaching Swedish to low-literate immigrants.

Research Questions

The following research questions serve as the basis for the study:

1-What challenges do the SFI teachers face when teaching Swedish to low-literacy skilled immigrants?

2-What strategies assumed by sociocultural theoretical perspective do the SFI teachers implement to overcome the challenges they face in teaching Swedish to low-literate immigrants?

2. Literature review

This chapter will address literature searching methodology and relevant previous studies in the field of second language acquisition in low-literate immigrants. Then, it will discuss research on strategies of teaching adult second language learners with low literacy. Following that, Swedish for immigrants (SFI) and relevant research will be highlighted, and finally research on teaching and learning strategies framing sociocultural theory will be discussed.

Literature Searching Methodology

The methodology for conducting systematic reviews used in this literature review is that proposed by Kable et al. (2012). This process is carried out according to the following steps. First, I created Research questions. Then, I chose the appropriate databases and defined keywords or terms for searching. Third, I established criteria for including and excluding material to provide search efforts with clear direction. Fourth, I used predetermined quality standards to assess the publication's quality. Finally, I completed the process of extracting data in response to study questions.

Databases and items for searching Literature

I performed searches in three regularly used electronic databases by scholars from various disciplines: Google Scholar, Web of Science, and ERIC hosted by EBSCO. In order to base my review on the most recent research on information retrieval and synthesis in the digital age, I restricted the publication date to 1992 and 2022. Exactly 485 results from the initial search were found using Google and individual journal databases including CINAHL and ERIC (EBSCO), and the GU library.

Following research terms were used in searching the articles:

"Second language" OR "Swedish" OR "Language learning" OR "SFI" OR Swedish for immigrants" OR L2

AND illiterate OR "low-literate" OR "non-literate" OR "low-educated" OR "emergent" OR literacy AND migrants OR "immigrants" OR adults

AND teaching strategies OR teaching methods OR "teaching techniques" OR instructional approach AND challenges

AND Sweden

Selection process

Based on an initial title screen for relevance, an abstract review of possibly relevant papers, and a complete paper review for the remaining articles, all the publications found through search terms were included. The following inclusion and exclusion standards were used during this scanning process:

- Only academic material in English, such as journal articles, reports, peer-reviewed

articles, dissertations, and books is considered for review.

- For the purpose of review, only studies pertaining to second language teaching strategies to low-literate immigrants are included, studies in other fields are therefore not included.
- Studies carried out by any professional researchers involving teachers or other educators that concentrate on their perspectives and strategies with second language teaching to low-literate adults are included.

55 items were chosen for full paper review after applying inclusion and exclusion criteria.

Extraction of initial data and checking quality

I looked through and assigned labels to chosen publications after screening and coding them according to evaluation criteria. (Table 1)

30 articles out of the 55 items evaluated for full-text review required to pass a quality check by adopting 12 Kable et al. approaches to remain in the review as they met the inclusion and exclusion criteria (2012; see table below).

Table 1: Kable et al. (2012) 12-step framework

	Steps
1	Purpose statement
2	Databases, search engines used
3	Search limits
4	Inclusion and exclusion criteria
5	Search terms
6	Exact searches per database, search engine and the results
7	Relevance assessment of retrieved literature
8	Table reporting literature included in the review, accompanied with key data such as title, author, but also research subject and findings
9	Document final number of search results
10	Quality assessment of retrieved literature
11	review
12	Accurate, complete reference list

Analysis of Data and Review

For a thorough evaluation, it was necessary to use the articles whose first data extraction fulfilled the quality standards.

I utilize a theme synthesis to analyse the data in this literature review. According to Braun & Klarke (2006), thematic analysis is essentially a technique for finding and analysing patterns in qualitative data. Since employing a qualitative data analysis software tool was not an option for me, I made the decision to manually code the data. Initially, I combined some codes and left out the others to create descriptive themes, which I then utilize to produce analytical themes to address different facets of the research questions.

Several themes have emerged from the critical examination of the qualifying literature. These topics are divided into four primary categories: second language acquisition in low-literate adults, Teaching Strategies and Teaching Challenges Related to Adult Second Language Learners with Low Literacy, Swedish for immigrants (SFI) and relevant research, and teaching and learning strategies framing sociocultural theory. In answer to the study questions, some themes have emerged.

Second Language Acquisition in Low-literate immigrants

Low-literate learners (LESLLA-learners[1]) are migrants who, for various reasons, have not had the opportunity to attend school or have had their education interrupted, leaving them with no or very little literacy in their first language (Rocca et al., 2020). According to UNESCO`s 2021 report, over 14% of the world's population is still illiterate, meaning that 773 million adults lack even the most basic abilities in reading and writing (UNESCO, 2021). On the other side, illiteracy makes it harder for people to get along in society since they have less prospects for job and income creation, a higher propensity to turn to crime and/or rely on social services, and a higher risk of being unwell (Cree, 2012).

The International Organization for Migration (IOM) recently estimated that 281 million people worldwide are migrants. Support for literacy development is crucial for these groups of people, especially those who relocate to a nation where a language other than their L1 is spoken and who have limited or no formal schooling, to actively integrate into the host society (IOM, 2022). Learning a second language is essential for migrants to successfully assimilate into a new society since it gives them access

[1] The abbreviation LESLLA stands for Literacy Education and Second Language Learning in Adults, and the term "LESLLA-learners" refers to adult second language learners with minimal prior education and/or low levels of literacy. See https://www.leslla.org/research.

to the labor market, information, health care, and education, as well as a grasp of the administrative procedures that are necessary for daily life (IOM, 2022).

Even though it is theoretically feasible to meet the minimal spoken language standard without having a working understanding of the alphabet, official language certificates frequently include a reading (often at the lowest levels) and writing section. Indeed, the Common European Framework for Languages (CEFR) beginner level criteria (A1), upon which certificates in most of Europe are based, were designed with the idea that students had a basic degree of literacy abilities (Piccinnin & Dal Maso, 2021).

Similarly, Rocca, et al., (2020) have written a report on the 2018 Council of Europe and Alte Survey on Language and Knowledge of Social (KoS) Policies for Migrants. Their report aimed to map out the learning possibilities offered to migrants in the Council of Europe member states, as well as the language and KoS requirements. According to their report, over the past two decades, an increasing number of European nations have instituted language and knowledge of society (KoS) requirements as part of their immigration and integration strategies. Prior to 2000, explicit language and KoS requirements were uncommon, but today many European nations have these criteria for citizenship, residency, and/or entry. However, as this report's findings demonstrate, the real level of language proficiency needed varies greatly from one nation to the next, as does the extent to which states offer migrants learning opportunities through customized and cost-free language and KoS courses (Rocca, et al., 2020).

Tarone (2010), claims that although there is a large body of research on adult second language acquisition, less attention has been paid to adult learners who have little to no formal education in their first language. She also points to the centrality of SLA research on intelligent, highly literate learners, hoping in some way that the results gained for these learners may be generalizable for all learners, thus also for learners with little to no literacy.

Research on Teaching Strategies and Teaching Challenges Related to Adult Second Language Learners with Low Literacy

Adult second language (L2) learners from all over the world who begin their formal study without or with minimal print literacy are the focus of a professional group called LESLLA (Literacy Education and Second Language Learning in Adults, www.leslla.org, Forum & Faux, 2007; Young-Scholten, 2008). Each host country faces special challenges in teaching a second language to new immigrants. How to teach to low-literacy adults and what teaching methods the teachers should implement are assumed to be an essential issue in teaching a second language. The section that follows reviews the literature related to emergent literacy.

The shift to writing is a process that is frequently wrought with difficulty and sacrifice, as well as empowering and independence, as scholars have long known. They have also noted that many adults who are new to reading bring with them rich oral traditions from their past (Bigelow & Vinogradov, 2011). Making classroom activities that properly incorporate the oral literacy of adult and teenage refugees can be a useful way to introduce the L2 to print literacy. For instance, Bigelow (2010), in her ethnographic research with Somali adolescent girls, discovered that one participant was intensely driven

to share her favorite Somali folktales with English speakers so that they might both learn from and enjoy them. She was aware that her folktales, which were initially given orally in Somali, needed to be carefully documented and polished for her audience to be interested in reading them. Her desire to share her stories led to numerous changes that paid attention to both form and purpose.

Similarly, Perry examined the use of personal narratives and folktales to instruct English literacy skills in qualitative research with Sudanese families. The study discovered that the individuals who were refugees took part in storytelling and talked about its cultural relevance. Young refugees were shown the value of acquiring an education in the US while maintaining their Sudanese identity and community by transforming the act of storytelling by modifying its aims, audiences, and media. The need to educate non-Sudanese about the problems of refugees clashed with the desire to preserve a sense of the Sudanese community and orphan identity (Perry, 2008). However, the application of this strategy is limited to developing speaking skills and may not be implemented to improve other skills in learning a second language.

By bridging first language (L1) oral traditions and L2 literacy, these studies open new pedagogies within Western educational practices that reduce obstacles to the literacy required in the modern, literate society. In other words, new pedagogies can develop through cultural resources of communities by using oral traditions, which can incorporate learners' experiences of migration and conventional methods of instructing, informing, and amusing (Yosso & Garcia, 2007).

Moving on to other strategies, Walker-Dalhouse and Dalhouse (2009), in a study with Sudanese families in the U.S., discovered that through discussions with parents, there are numerous ways for teachers to connect to their students' native tongues and cultures. These studies shed light on how social and cultural traits of learners can significantly influence and enhance learning. Teachers might consider the complex processes occurring within and among their students as well as in the classroom, as opposed to viewing literacy as a collection of skills to be acquired.

In addition, teachers can consider the complex processes taking place in the classroom, as well as inside and among their learners, rather than viewing literacy as a set of skills to be acquired. Developing adult and adolescent readers need instruction that meets two requirements: Adults require explicit, methodical education that is meaningful, age- and level-appropriate, and that emphasizes phonemic awareness, phonics, and word identification. The whole-part-whole method of teaching literacy is a balanced method (Bigelow & Vinogradov, 2011).

This section of the research review explores established principles for teaching adult emergent readers who lack prior schooling in U.S. contexts. While not all practices have a strong research foundation, DeCapua and Marshall (2011) propose the mutually adaptive learning paradigm (MALP) to guide educators in understanding and accepting learners' unique cognitive and social orientations, creatively combining learners' and U.S. schools' processes, and focusing on U.S. learning activities with familiar language and content. Several studies support the importance of incorporating students' lives into teaching basic literacy through balanced literacy instruction (Condelli et al., 2008; Weinstein, 2006; Auerbach ,1992 cited in Bigelow & Vinogradov, 2011).

Another significant point, learner-generated texts, also known as the language experience approach (LEA), are an effective means of utilizing learners' listening and speaking skills to develop literacy

(Geva & Zadeh, 2006). Tarone, Bigelow, and Hansen (2013) highlight the interdependence between oral processing skills and print literacy skills. Thus, as learners improve their oral abilities, learner-generated texts serve as a tool to connect these skills and present oral language on paper, leading to a variety of engaging readings for students.

It appears important to note that many research findings with young learners of L2 literacy may also apply to adults, provided that the content and presentation are modified appropriately. Older students at the same level must study the fundamentals of literacy just as children must to become literate in a second language (L2) (i.e., alphabetic, vocabulary, fluency, comprehension) (Bigelow & Vinogradov,2011).

As such, in another study Huntley (1992) studied pedagogic principles of teaching English to illiterate adults. The researcher took advantage of systemic functional linguistics (SFL) strategy in teaching a second language to illiterate newcomers in the USA. In using a functional approach, the teacher examines the students' daily activities to understand what types of language the students demand. Seven literacy related functions are listed, illustrating American culture and the uses that a less educated, less scholarly section of society puts literacy to. These functions are helpful for planning appropriate education. Among these are instrumental, social, interactional, informational, memory-supportive, a replacement for oral messages, the creation of a permanent record, and affirmation of attitudes or views.

Other important factors such as motivation and contact with people in the host country are considered to assist illiterate adults to learn language effectively. Elmeroth (2003) did research on learning conditions of refugees in learning Swedish. She wrote the research considering her teaching experiences, as well. She interviewed twenty-two participants. Half of them belonged to the SFI group with previous schooling and half of them belonged to the basic adult education (BAE) group with low education. The focus of this research was the BAE group which she intended to provide students with the reading and math skills necessary for them to function in Swedish society. They did not have any contact with other Swedish speaking people, and it caused them to have trouble learning language. Other than the teacher, no other Swedish speakers interact with the BAE participants. Regarding motivation, Alhussain (2018) used a rote learning approach to teach illiterate immigrants especially refugees in the UK. The participants could not read or speak English. The approach allowed them to be self-reliant and socially integrated. The participants' selection of themes was prioritized. The results of this study showed that all illiterate refugees had remarkable progress in relation to self-reliance and integration which helped them find a job.

Unfortunately, not all illiterate adults who intend to learn to write can benefit from the rote learning strategy. This method is limited to just teaching speaking skills. The researcher did an interview with six participants, and this can be quite a limited sample for investigating the effectiveness of that strategy. Other methods could be employed to investigate the rote learning approach, too.

Additionally, motivation factor is emphasized by other researchers in learning a language. For instance, Jonasson (2012), in his qualitative study, investigated illiterate adults' motives for becoming literate. The results showed no differences in goals or motives among the informants, who all shared the desire to get employment. High motivation and a positive outlook are said to be the most crucial elements for success in the literacy task, according to this study. The researcher considered social context and contact

with Swedish people outside school and work as important elements for adults' motivation in learning a second language successfully.

On the other hand, there is no standard method for teaching a language, according to research on second language teachers. Some argue that training for second language teachers should emphasize teaching skills rather than linguistics and language acquisition (Freeman & Johnson, 1998). This claim is obvious in the following study.

Colliander's (2018) study focused on teaching a second language to illiterate adults. The research sought to investigate what it means to be and become a teacher of literacy education and second language learning for adults (LESLLA) learners. It aimed to show how the professional identities of LESLLA teachers may be understood through their memberships in various communities of practice. The findings demonstrated how teachers built their professional identities according to the unique characteristics of their students, who were both adult emergent readers and second-language learners settling into a new community. The outcomes also showed that learning to teach LESLLA was a continuous process. Each teacher has a different relevance in relation to the other groups to which they belong, and power is crucial in forming identity. Additionally, LESLLA teachers have not received much investigation, despite these connected difficulties (Colliander, 2018).

Regarding research on illiterate immigrants, Reichenberg (2019) also conducted research using survey data collected from adult immigrants in Sweden. The goal of the study was to determine factors that are predictive of immigrants' views about language learning in Swedish training programs. The results showed the students' satisfaction with the program while other factors like socioeconomic class or sex did not appear to be significant predictors of satisfaction; instead, factors like educational level, arrival age, and language exposure through social networks did. Additionally, teacher's personalities that are under the control of the language programs are important.

In another study, Naif & Saad (2017) discussed language learning strategies (LLS) used by Arab adults in Finland. The findings revealed a variety of obstacles to learning a second language, including the learners' low literacy levels, their lack of interaction with the Finnish community, and their difficulty with reading in Finnish. The researchers are convinced that learning how to employ LLSs, particularly affective and social LLSs, will improve adult immigrant learners' ability to learn Finnish or increase their odds of doing so.

In response to the demands of today's mobile populations, innovative teaching techniques are emerging around the world that aim to regulate language for migrants. Simpson & Whiteside (2015), in their book offer critical analysis of policy and practice in adult language education, demonstrating how possibilities for language acquisition are impacted by policy decisions as well as the policies themselves. In chapter 18 of the book, they focus on using native language curriculum that can benefit adults from all linguistic groups, and careful program design is essential to prevent the exclusion of adults. These programs struggle to teach adults with emerging literacy skills in a way that does not bore or infantilize them. Additionally, they admit that low-literate adolescents are capable adults who successfully balance work and family. Instructional resources must be exciting and engaging to these groups, and also address socioemotional issues in creating the programs.

With respect to the study of second languages, Räihä (2021) examined teachers' perceptions of teaching a pluricentric national minority language as a SL in Finland—in this case, Swedish—and compared those perceptions to those of teachers of national majority languages in Denmark, Norway, and Sweden. The researcher intended to investigate how Finnish language teachers teach Finnish Swedish to immigrants in Finland in relation to Sweden and other Nordic nations. Defining the normal setting of teaching as a "one nation only" scenario; they focused on how teachers perceive and respond to contextual obstacles. The overall findings of this study are stated in the following paragraph: Finnish teachers failed to exhibit any knowledge of the fact that Swedish is a pluricentric national minority language in Finland. Teachers simply used phrases like grammar, pronunciation, illiteracy, etc. teaching SSL, a minority language, or the native language was all treated equally. A monolingual teaching strategy was also favored in every interview. The teaching approach used by Finnish teachers is most in line with the opinions of Danish instructors of non-pluricentric languages.

Regarding the challenges of teaching to immigrants, Obondo et al., (2016) studied teachers' challenges in addressing the pedagogical requirements of immigrant students in classes with diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds. The biggest obstacles according to the findings were structural and organizational issues at the municipal council, as well as in the classrooms and schools. Additionally, they reported the pressure of designing welcoming and safe learning environments for students from varied ethnic and linguistic backgrounds. However, the instructors' pedagogical strategies showed attempts at cross-cultural instruction that draw from students' cultural and language experiences and correspond favorably with the tenets of culturally responsive pedagogy.

Similarly, Sandwall (2010), asserted that due to the teachers' precarious employment status and increased financial control, they may be forced to choose between the needs of their students and the objectives of the curriculum on the one hand, and the providers' objective of obtaining data that demonstrates how their education leads to employment on the other (p. 546). It can be discussed that the quality of education that low-literate immigrants receive when learning a second language may be affected by this issue, making it especially pertinent to this study. For instance, it could make for a less productive learning environment for the students if teachers prioritize the curriculum's goals and the demands of the providers over those of their students. Furthermore, if teachers are under pressure to produce employment-related statistics, they can put job preparation ahead of language acquisition, which might have a negative influence on the students' ability to communicate successfully in their new language.

Swedish for Immigrants (SFI) and Relevant Research

Swedish for immigrants (SFI) was established in 1965 to provide newcomers with basic understanding of the Swedish language (Skolverket, 1997). The goal of the SFI program is to develop fluency in oral and written communication for use in day-to-day activities, social interactions, career pursuits, and academic undertakings. Those who are unable to read or write in their native language can access it, providing them with a chance to learn. (Skolverket, 2022).

SFI offers the 1, 2, and 3 study tracks. Study track one is for people with limited education or who cannot read and write in their home language, whereas study track three is for those who are more accustomed to studying. Each study track has four courses (A, B, C, D). All study plans are objective and tailored to the intended audience (Skolverket, 2022).

According to the latest Skolverket statistics (2021), the total number of SFI students was 132.753. It can be argued that the number of students participating in SFI classes are dramatically increasing compared to the previous years (see for instance, Skolverket, 2014) due to the influx of immigrants to Sweden 42141 people from all countries according to the Sweden statistics of the first half of 2022 immigration (Population statistics, 2022). The shortage of qualified teachers can be a result of high immigration, which has contributed to discussions about SFI's deficiencies. Currently, there are significant differences amongst service providers in the student/teacher ratio, the proportion of competent teachers, and the overall quality of education (Lindberg & Sandwall, 2017). As discussed earlier in the introduction, some of these students lack former education and need to learn Swedish to integrate in the Swedish society. Some questions arise here and are controversial: How do they learn Swedish while they are low-literacy adults and cannot read and write in their native language? What strategies do teachers implement to teach these groups?

SFI teachers are given the course outlines and curricula to use in their instruction. However, it is essential to consider the students' needs and conditions in teaching. For instance, Sandwall (2013), provides an example of how SFI teachers are forced to choose between curriculum requirements for language instruction and municipal demands for instruction that focuses on workplace learning (p.98). The knowledge and skills of teaching a second language, understanding of the experience of refugees and immigrants, and attitudes toward students appear to be the three main areas of competence for second language teachers (Colliander, 2018). So, teachers' role and their authorities seem to be able to identify the gap in their classes and adjust teaching methods in relation to the students' situation.

In the evaluation of SFI, Reichenberg (2015) concluded that both students and teachers are on average happy with their professional lives and the environment in which they learn. But there are still difficulties with schooling and learning. Particularly, there are differences among students in how helpful they perceive their teachers to be. Additionally, students' perceptions of the learning environment at SFI were generally influenced by their former educational experiences. The pupils were less satisfied as their prior education was higher and vice versa. Although SFI is viewed by many as a privileged program (due to its status within the Swedish educational system and the funding it receives from the government), Lindberg and Sandwall (2007) argued that many issues arise from the emphasis that has been placed on the program as a tool for the labor market.

Moreover, Zachrison (2014) has noted several intriguing phenomena related to the SFI program. She contends that students separate the course material from their daily lives, concluding that the program is unconnected to the students´ social reality. So, they experience emotions of otherness and non-belonging while also strengthening their ties to their own ethnic institutions, which causes them to become increasingly isolated from most of the population. This problem is especially related to the present study since it raises a potential difficulty that SFI teachers may experience when instructing low-literate immigrants. Students may be less motivated to learn the new language and their language learning outcomes may suffer if they feel alienated from the course material and experience sentiments

of otherness and non-belonging. Additionally, if students distance themselves from the community, this may make it more difficult for them to acquire work and other services as well as limit their capacity to integrate into their new society.

Research on teaching and learning strategies framing sociocultural theory

In a study done by Condelli and Wrigley (2006) considering Vygotsky's theory in adult's literacy, they advise adopting resources with communicative and realistic language, particularly real-life dialogues using genuine language. Moreover, they suggest that the first emphasis in second language instruction should be on oral abilities, separating listening and speaking skills from writing and reading skills. The value of a bilingual instructor is further emphasized since reading comprehension and oral communication abilities in the target language can both be enhanced by using the learner's native tongue as a clarification tool.

Similarly, according to Krashen's Learning Acquisition Hypothesis (1982), pupils learn a language when they are given opportunities to use it in genuine contexts. Children are not exposed to grammatical rules and forms when learning a native language, but they nonetheless pick up the language quickly. This is because, in accordance with this theory, they are in actual circumstances that call for the genuine use of the language.

Applying collaborative learning of Vygotsky's sociocultural theory (SCT) in Chinese context, Dongyu et al. (2013) discussed the three ideas of Vygotsky thoroughly. The SCT was critically analyzed and was further examined by evaluating collaborative learning in the Chinese setting. In order to implement teacher-student cooperation, their study determined that the way learning is seen, and the teacher-student interaction needs to be modified.

One of the many facets of teaching and learning a second language in an LESLLA classroom was just briefly discussed in another study by Strube (2015). The researcher discussed using scaffolding in LESLLA classes. Learning in a classroom requires adaptation for LESLLA students who have had little or no formal education. The teacher is an important participant in this process. Her ability to build a learning scaffold depends on the feedback she selects and the way she expresses it. The benefits and drawbacks of each sort of feedback are highlighted. This study demonstrated how different scaffolding strategies in LESLLA classrooms might affect students' learning.

Similarly, Hansson (2012) conducted research on "the complexity of relations between mathematics teaching and learning in multilingual classrooms" in Sweden. He based his investigation on Vygotsky' zone of proximal development (ZPD) hypothesis. His research showed that when teachers took charge of fostering an engaging learning environment and providing students with amiable learning support, student achievements in mathematics improved. Nevertheless, when classes were multilingual and there were more students learning a second language, teachers tended to shirk their obligation to create a setting that is more engaging and supportive of those students (p. 119). Hansson (2012) emphasized the value of scaffolding in mathematics classrooms for all students, and particularly for the students learning the language for the first time. Teachers must promote second language acquisition in addition to math abilities to effectively teach second language learners. In this instance, teacher assistance for second language learners is crucial to students' learning even when they are learning mathematics.

Applying sociocultural theory, Butler-Auld (2020) discussed literacy practices of immigrant women from Ghana and Mexico with limited ESL literacy. His study described the literacy activities that two low-literate learners over the age of sixty engaged in throughout their lives—in both their native tongue(s) and in English. The results revealed that participants valued autonomy, that classroom dynamics influenced participants' perceived requirements and unfavorable literacy claims, and that participants' participation in English literacy activities was positively influenced by English-speaking family members.

All the studies in the literature review address some of the strategies applicable to teaching a second language to adults. Teachers may use these techniques according to their students' needs and literacy levels. Furthermore, reviewing past studies on teaching second language to low-literate immigrants and SFI, there were some shortcomings in their teaching strategies or research methodologies that may not be used as guidance for other educators. Only a few study results and strategies may be applicable in working with low literates such as motivation, contact with native speakers, and using some concepts of Vygotsky's sociocultural theory in teaching. Notwithstanding the development of SFI (Swedish for Immigrants) instruction, the issue of providing adult learners with an appropriate education and the preparation of capable teachers remains a matter of considerable importance. So, it seems necessary to conduct research to understand if SFI teachers' strategies are in line with Vygotsky's theory in educating low-literacy adults to solve the immigrants' basic problem in learning a second language.

Definition of key terms

In this study, five key concepts need to be defined:

Literacy: According to UNESCO's draft definition from 2005:

> Literacy is the ability to identify, understand, interpret, create, communicate, and compute, using printed and written materials associated with varying contexts. Literacy involves a continuum of learning in enabling individuals to achieve their goals, to develop their knowledge and potential, and to participate fully in their community and wider society (UNESCO, 2005, p.13).

Second Language Acquisition (SLA): Based on Ortega's definition (2009), "SLA is the scholarly field of inquiry that investigates the human capacity to learn languages other than the first, during late childhood, adolescence, or adulthood, and once the first language or languages have been acquired" (p. 1).

Swedish for Immigrants (SFI): Immigrants have the chance to learn Swedish when they come to Sweden as adults. They should be over 16 years old and personal number to participate in the program. SFI stands for Swedish for Immigrants. Participants at SFI not only learn Swedish, but also about Swedish culture (Skolverket, 2022). The study site for this study was three SFI schools in Gothenburg.

Challenges: According to IGI Global dictionary's definition, "challenge is something that by its nature or character serves as a call to make special effort, a demand to explain, justify, or difficulty in an undertaking that is stimulating to one engaged in it."

The other definition of challenge according to Cambridge dictionary's definition is, "a job, duty, or situation that is difficult because you must use a lot of effort, determination, and skill in order to be successful."

Teaching strategy: Based on IGI Global dictionary's definition, teaching strategy is "a set of teaching forms and teaching methods used in a lesson in accordance with a lesson goal to facilitate student learning."

In the chapter that follows, I will present the theoretical framework for this study and explain the key concepts used in the research.

3. Theoretical Framework

This chapter discusses the theoretical framework adopted for conducting the present study. I will start with introducing Socio-Cultural Theory (SCT), then the fundamental concepts in Vygotsky's theory including zone of proximal development (ZPD), scaffolding, mediation, and cultural mediation will be outlined.

The theoretical framework for this research is based on Vygotsky's sociocultural theory. Lev Vygotsky was a Russian-Jewish psychologist and educator who is well-known all over the world due to his ideas. Later, his works were translated into English and published in the 1970s-1980s. Vygotsky stated that adult mediation leads to children's learning and development. His colleagues in Russia expanded and developed his concepts to the point that they could be used in instructional and practical programs (Karpov, 2014).

According to Sociocultural Theory (SCT), social interactions are the primary source of human cognitive and higher mental function development. People are drawn to utilize their cognitive and communicative skills in social situations in ways that support and "scaffold" their development (Ai-Min, 2013).

Vygotsky's sociocultural theory has significant educational applications when it comes to teaching second languages to students from various linguistic and cultural backgrounds. As the focus of this research is on the challenge and strategies of teaching Swedish to low-literate immigrants, it may be appropriate to apply this theory to better understand the challenges that SFI teachers face and the strategies they employ to deal with these difficulties in teaching Swedish. Some of the fundamental concepts in Vygotsky's theory are discussed in the following paragraphs.

Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD)

One of the key concepts in Vygotsky's theory is the zone of proximal development (ZPD). Vygotsky utilized the concept of ZPD as a metaphoric tool to describe the potential learning that occurs when children work together with an adult or peer to solve problems. ZPD is typically defined as follows, as stated in the book "Mind in Society":

> "The distance between the actual developmental level as determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem solving under adult guidance, or in collaboration with more capable peers" (Vygotsky, 1978, cited in Yamagata-Lynch, 2010, p.18).

To encourage language learning in the current study, teachers should be aware of each learner's ZPD and offer the proper challenges and support. To meet the requirements of a varied group of students and support their language development, teachers can use differentiated instruction and culturally responsive teaching.

Scaffolding

The other key concept in Vygotsky's theory is scaffolding. Vygotsky believed that a child would perform better with assistance than they would on their own. Vygotsky's concept of scaffolding in the ZPD is used to characterize this prospective performance. When a novice and an expert collaborate to achieve the desired outcome during an interactive activity, ZPD typically occurs. Advocates of SCT stress the roles that other people play in students' life, especially those who serve as mediators to lead them to succeeding zones (Aziz et al., 2022, cited in Sarmiento-Campos et al., 2022).

The concept of scaffolding, according to Vygotsky, refers to the support and guidance provided by a more competent individual, such as a professional or a peer, to help them comprehend difficult concepts and accomplish objectives they would not be able to do on their own. A variety of strategies may be used to give students simpler language and context for better comprehension, such as cooperative learning, hands-on learning, visuals, graphics, and instructor modeling (Ovando, et al., 2003 as cited in Sarmiento-Campos et al., 2022). As a result, each of these provisions can be seen as a different type of scaffolding tool.

Donato (1994, cited in Turuk, 2008) asserts that the idea of scaffolding comes from research in L1 and cognitive psychology. It claims that in a social engagement, a knowledgeable participant can set up favorable circumstances through speech and encouragement so that the student (novice) can engage and develop existing skills and knowledge to a high level of competence. Yet, scaffolding is an instructional structure used in educational settings where the teacher first demonstrates the intended learning technique or activity before progressively handing over control to the learners.

Teachers can provide explicit instruction and assistance for fundamental language abilities to lay a solid basis for language learning while teaching Swedish to low-literate immigrants, such as phonetics, syntax, and vocabulary. To offer the required scaffolding and support for language learning, teachers may utilize a variety of instructional techniques, including modeling, questioning, and feedback.

Peer interaction and collaborative learning are also crucial concepts in Vygotsky's theory. As students engage in meaningful dialogues and interactions, Vygotsky contends that peer engagement and collaboration can advance language learning and cognitive development (Wentzel & Watkins, 2002). According to Donato (1994), collaborative language learning offers the same chance for scaffolded support in an L2 classroom as expert-novice interactions in natural settings. According to Van Lier (1988, mentioned in Donato 1994), L1 scaffolding research can help L2 teaching methodologies recognize how classroom activities already discreetly use these strategies. To encourage language acquisition, peer interaction, and the development of opportunities for learners to engage in genuine dialogue, teachers might use group work and collaborative activities.

Vygotsky’s Notion of Mediation

Vygotsky developed the idea of "mediated action" as a concept to explain the semiotic process that enables cognition to evolve through contact with tools, artifacts, and social others in an environment. Mediated action helps people discover new meanings in their surroundings. Vygotsky assumed that there were changes over time in the relationships between objects, tools, and social beings. Vygotsky

claimed that signs were impressions generated on people while interacting with objects/tools, and that these impressions facilitated individual speech development as well as consciousness. Vygotsky explained human speech development as a mediational process including thinking and speech. (Yamagata-Lynch, 2010, p.16).

Similarly, Karpov (2014) discussed mental processes and an analogy between human mental processes and practical activity that Vygotsky and the scholars who embraced his concepts have made. The human capacity to interact with the environment and overcome obstacles is attributed to cognitive faculties such as thinking, attention, memory, and problem-solving. Humans, unlike animals, have special mental adaptations that let them effectively adapt to their environment. Human practical activity is enhanced by tools such as hammers and spades, while human mental processes are empowered by psychological tools like language and symbols. These tools greatly increase human abilities, making even a weak person with a spade more efficient than a strong person without one.

To summarize, *mediation* is a process of teaching children new psychological tools through joint activities with an adult. The adult presents an external device and guides the child in its use until the child masters the tool. As the child internalizes the tool, it becomes an internal mediator of their mental processes. The adult gradually steps back, and the child transitions from using the external tool with guidance to using the internal tool independently, indicating the development of a higher mental process (Karpov, 2014).

Cultural Mediation

Although many psychologists and educators had mostly concentrated on biological and psychological influences, Vygotsky was one of the first academics to emphasize the role of the social environment in learning. The cultural mediation of educational practice has consequently benefited largely from Vygotsky's work (Rublik, 2017).

As all human behaviors, including acts of thought, depend on the use of such artifacts (also known as "tools and signs"), they are fundamentally social in nature. This is true whether an action is started by a single agent or a group of agents, and regardless of whether it is carried out alone or in collaboration with others (Vygotsky, 1935, cited by Moll, 2000, p. 256).

Answering the research questions in this study requires knowledge of the concept of cultural mediation, as well. All mental processes, according to Vygotsky, are culturally mediated, and culture has a significant impact on how people think and learn. The term "cultural mediation" describes the processes by which cultural tools and objects, such as language, literature, and technology, mediate or support human activity and learning. These cultural items and tools provide people with the means to connect with their surroundings, communicate with others, and learn new information and skills (Moll, 2000).

Using these concepts from Vygotsky's sociocultural theory as a foundation, a theoretical framework for research question two might entail examining the methods teachers employ to mediate language learning through cultural context and background and the ZPD of low-literate immigrant students. The framework might also consider how other social and cultural aspects, such as the classroom environment, student motivation, and language policy, affect how immigrants with limited L2 proficiency learn languages.

Teachers will certainly face several difficulties while instructing low-literate immigrants in a second language as stated earlier reviewing previous studies in the literature review. It may be challenging for the students to adjust to a new learning environment because, for instance, they may originate from countries with quite dissimilar educational systems. Also, a lot of these students could have poor reading abilities in their native tongue, which can make learning a second language difficult. To solve these issues, teachers might need to employ techniques like scaffolding, using visual aids, and facilitating peer engagement.

An exploration into the experiences of teachers who have worked with low-literate immigrants using Vygotsky's sociocultural theory as a framework could focus on the difficulties they encountered and the strategies they used. Interviewing SFI instructors could be a good step to acquire knowledge about their struggle with the topic. The research may shed light on the best ways to instruct this group of students as well as provide guidance for the creation of pedagogical strategies that are attentive to the demands of varied students.

Overall, Vygotsky's sociocultural theory offers an insightful lens for comprehending the difficulties and instructional techniques involved in teaching second language to low-literate immigrants. This theory underlines the key role of the teacher in supporting language acquisition and offers a framework for creating educational techniques by highlighting the significance of social interaction and cultural environment in learning.

4. Methodological framework

In this chapter the researcher provides an overview of the research strategy, the research methodology, the research instrument, the research setting, the sampling strategy, the type of data analysis used, the study's quality criteria, and its ethical considerations.

Research strategy and design

Research strategy serves as a basic guide for how social research should be conducted (Bryman, 2016, p. 32). The researcher used a qualitative research approach using interviews in data collection. Qualitative research differs from quantitative research in that it emphasizes “words rather than qualification in the collection and analysis of data” (Bryman, 2016, p. 374). According to Creswell (1994), the definition of qualitative research is an evolving scenario that occurs in a natural setting and enables the researcher to gather extensive information by close participation in the real occurrences.

This study used constructivist ontology and interpretivist epistemology by adopting a qualitative research approach. The question of “what is the nature or form of the social world?” is at the center of ontology, according to Warning (2012). He also holds that "under constructivism reality is neither objective nor singular, but multiple realities are constructed by individuals" (p. 16). The question “how can what is assumed to be known?” is one that epistemology poses. As stated by interpretivism, “knowledge never comes directly, but it is developed through the process of interpreting people's social world” (Warning, 2012, p. 16). Furthermore, qualitative research stresses the development of ideas through an inductive approach to the link between theory and research (Bryman, 2016, pp. 32–33). In the present study, the researcher adopted an impartial stance in conducting the interview, analyzing the data, and interpreting the findings.

Choice of the method

Qualitative interviews were deemed to be the most suitable strategy for gathering data for this study. Creswell (2012) claims that the goal of interviews is to learn what individuals say or believe about various phenomena, which is in line with the objectives of this thesis and the study topics.

To learn more about SFI teachers' ideas about teaching strategies to low-literate students and their challenges, semi-structured interviews were used. Bryman (2012) asserts that it is critical to get "interviewees' perceptions" regarding topics that the researcher is interested in. A semi-structured interview is a type of interview in which interview subjects can freely express their opinions on the predetermined themes by researchers while still being guided by some basic themes rather than specific questions (Given, 2008). A semi-structured interview is appropriate for a study in which a small number of respondents are thoroughly questioned and in which the researcher hopes to record some aspects of casual discussion (Creswell, 2012).

Brinkmann & Kvale (2015) proposed six quality criteria for doing a semi-structured interview:

- “The extent of spontaneous, rich, specific, and relevant answers from the interviewee”
- “The shortest interview’s questions and longest subjects’ answers possible”
- “The degree to which the interviewer follows up and clarifies the meanings of the relevant aspects of the answers”
- “To a large extent, the interview being interpreted throughout the interview”
- “The interviewer attempting to verify his or her interpretations of the subject’s answers over the course of the interview”
- “The interview being “self-reported,” a self- reliant story that hardly requires additional explanations” (p. 192).

The last three of the proposed six quality requirements for semi-structured interviews, specifically, refer to the ideal interview by implying that the meaning of what is said is interpreted, confirmed, and reported by the time the sound recorder is turned off. This calls for skill and experience and assumes that the interviewer is knowledgeable about the subject being covered, as well as the whys and methods involved (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015). These criteria can be applied as guidelines for good interview practice.

According to Bryman (2012, p. 482), "Qualitative researchers are frequently interested in both what people say and how they say it." Due to the significance of documenting what was said and how, all interviews were audio-recorded, and transcriptions were made to facilitate analysis.

Sampling, Participants’ Selection Criteria, and Interview Settings

The participants for this study were eight teachers (five women and three men) who teach Swedish to low-literate students (course A-B). The researcher interviewed the participants to collect data and complete findings using the semi-structured interview. Sampling criteria in this study are highlighted as follows:

- All teachers are involved in teaching basic Swedish (A, B) to low-literacy adults in Gothenburg, Sweden.
- All participants have a teaching ID (qualified and licensed teacher).

The sampling method is selected to be a purposive sampling method. Purposive sampling involves selecting sample units based on attributes or traits that make it possible to thoroughly explore and comprehend the main themes and issues that need to be investigated (Bryman, 2012).

In other words, it is a type of non-probability sampling in which the researcher makes decisions about who should be included in the sample based on a range of factors, such as the person's capacity and willingness to participate in the study or their level of expertise in the research topic (Oliver, 2006).

Reasons for limiting the number of language institutes was due to time constraints for collecting data and conducting research.

The study setting was a municipal adult education (MAE) provider in the city of Gothenburg, Sweden. In addition to SFI, this institute has a strong tradition in adult education and provides a variety of other

courses. The context is selected from three language schools teaching Swedish for immigrants at different levels (A-D).

Research instrument

The researcher created an interview guide that was used as a guide for the interviews. A list of nineteen questions was created as a reference for conducting interviews to learn teachers' viewpoints regarding strategies and challenges of teaching to low-literate students. Questions were included about the teachers' demographic information and length of working as a SFI teacher, teaching experiences, teaching methods, challenges they face in teaching to low-literate students, out of class activities, collaborative work, and who supports them. During the interview, additional follow-up queries were also raised.

Initially, I went to the SFI schools and requested the school managers to allow me to start collecting data by interviewing SFI teachers in course A and B.. The managers sent me the SFI teachers' emails to contact with them. Prior to each interview, I sent an informed consent form to the participants' email to get their permission. Only a few of the interviews were conducted face-to-face due to the restricted time and resources. The majority were conducted online via Zoom or WhatsApp. Each interview lasted between 12 and 30 minutes, and both the laptop and a mobile device were used to record it. The names of all the teachers and schools should be kept secret in this study due to concerns about confidentiality. Six interviews were conducted in English while two teachers preferred to speak Swedish. Following the interview, the author wrote up all the audio recordings. I translated the Swedish interview into English and analyzed the English version of the interview.

In the study, I interpreted the data using thematic analysis. The following steps were used as an analytical technique (Rapley, 2011):

- The researcher became familiar with the interview transcripts to devote a significant amount of time to engagement and contemplation,
- Initial codes were found in the dataset.
- Similar codes were gathered into prospective themes.
- The selected themes were incorporated by creating categories.

I employed the combination of inductive and deductive coding approaches to code the data. Deductive codes are derived from the theoretical framework or prior study. I used Vygotsky's sociocultural theory as a guiding framework for coding deductively. It means that I employed a set of predetermined codes based on the constructs and key concepts of Vygotsky's theory, such as scaffolding, social interaction, ZPD, mediation, and collaborative learning. On the other hand, inductive codes were generated directly from the data. New codes are emerged from the data as I familiarize myself with the interview transcripts. This approach helped me to capture the insights and perspectives that might not have been explicitly covered or anticipated by the deductive codes.

Criteria of Trustworthiness

The term "Trustworthiness" was offered by Lincoln and Guba (1985 and 1994 in Bryman 2012) as an alternative criterion for evaluating qualitative research. It frequently replaces concepts more commonly associated with quantitative research, such as validity, reliability, and replication (Bryman, 2012, p. 390). Four separate criteria—credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability—are used to establish trustworthiness (Bryman, 2012, p.390). This section will describe how the researcher aimed to address the reliability criteria in this study.

Credibility

The qualitative investigator's corresponding notion, credibility, according to Merriam, addresses the issue of "How congruent are the findings with reality?" As Lincoln and Guba (1985 in Shenton 2004) contend, ensuring credibility is among the most crucial elements in creating trustworthiness. According to Bryman (2012, p. 391), establishing the credibility of findings is related to both verifying that the researcher is using ethical procedures and disseminating the research's results to the public. Moreover, it is referred to as "respondent validation." Finding that "the researcher's findings and impressions are congruent with the views of those on whom the research was conducted and to seek out areas in which there is a lack of correspondence and the reasons for it" is known as "respondent validation" (Bryman 2012 p.391). As a result, the researcher presented the findings to all the interview participants and their confirmation was requested. The peer debriefing was also used by the academic staff to support the scholarly guidance of this paper and give feedback.

Transferability

Due to the nature of this research's methodology, generalizing its results is not the goal. Qualitative research, according to Bryman (2012, pp. 390, 392), typically necessitates intense study of a small group or persons who share unique features. Depth rather than breadth is necessary for qualitative research. As a result, findings from qualitative research frequently emphasize "the contextual uniqueness and significance of the aspect of the social world being studied" (Bryman 2012, p. 392). Thus, the researcher concentrates on special and in-depth information from a limited sample of SFI teachers who instruct low-literate adults at SFI schools in Gothenburg rather than attempting to generalize the findings. This fulfills the need for "thick descriptions," which enable others to determine if the information is transferable. Rich details are needed to come to this conclusion.

Dependability

Dependability is communicating to the readers how the study is documented and recorded. Bryman (2012) asserts that documentation of each stage of the research process is necessary to explain it to readers. Participants' research processes, interview transcripts, data analysis, and issue formulation will all be preserved for this study and made available to readers upon request. The methodology part of this paper presents extensive information about the steps involved in doing the research.

Confirmability

Confirmability illustrates that the researcher can demonstrate that the research was carried out with reasonable care and that the researcher did not expressly allow personal views or theoretical biases to influence the research's conduct (Bryman, 2012). This study provides a detailed explanation of the research procedure to accomplish that.

Ethical considerations

According to Bryman (2012), adult participants can be protected by claiming anonymity and confidentiality to respect participants' rights and prevent any harm. Therefore, researchers must guarantee that they will use pseudonyms during the study. All participants will be informed about the purpose of the study, and they should give their consent letter. The informants should be informed that taking part in the interview is completely voluntary and that they can stop at any time. Two issues should be considered during collecting data: the first issue is related to presenting students' information by the teachers. It is important to keep confidential the low-literacy immigrants' data as vulnerable groups. The recording raises another issue. It is required to record the interviews for this study. The data and recording should be treated carefully and in compliance with the above-mentioned ethical guidelines.

Regarding my research, I created the proper consent letter, delivered to the subjects for signature. In addition, a brief explanation of the nature of my study and the participants' rights is given at the same time. These recordings will only be used for studies related to my master's thesis. Participants' pseudonyms were also utilized by the researcher during the transcoding and presenting of the data.

Sustainability relevance

My research could contribute to achieving two of the Sustainable Development Goals and Objectives listed in the Global Indicator Framework for the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Goal four is the first and calls for providing all people with access to inclusive, equitable, high-quality education opportunities as well as promoting possibilities for lifelong learning. To achieve goal 4.1:

By 2030, ensure that all girls and boys complete free, equitable and quality primary and secondary education leading to relevant and effective learning outcomes.

Target 4.6:

By 2030, ensure that all youth and a sustainable proportion of adults, both men and women, achieve literacy and numeracy.

My study can contribute to this goal by highlighting the difficulties teachers have in providing quality education to low-literate immigrants and suggesting solutions to deal with these challenges.

Target 4.a

Build and upgrade education facilitate that are child, disability, and gender sensitive and provides safe, non-violent, inclusive, and effective learning environments for all.

Goal 10.7: reduced inequality

Facilitate orderly, safe, regular, and responsible migration and mobility of people, including through the implementation of planned and well-managed migration policies.

My research can help achieve this objective by examining how language instruction can reduce social inequality between immigrant populations and the population in general.

Sustainable Development Goals

17 Goals to Transform our World

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5. Data Analysis & findings

The aim of this research was to study the challenges that SFI teachers face in teaching Swedish to low-literate immigrants and the strategies they employ to overcome the difficulties. Particularly, this study looked for any indications of Vygotsky's sociocultural theory (SCT) approach in the teaching methods in teaching SFI to individuals who lack literacy. The lack of previous studies and literature highlighting this issue intrigued my interest, so I made the decision to investigate it further. The study's design was qualitative in nature. Interview research methodology was used to guide the data gathering and analysis, and the result is a synthesis of teachers' perspectives that provides a deep understanding of their experiences. In addition, I developed a framework for my study based on two main questions to investigate what kinds of strategies the SFI teachers employ to tackle the challenges.

This chapter will outline the framework used to analyze the data and the findings that were discovered after interviewing a total of eight instructors from different SFI schools in Gothenburg.

Participants

The findings of this study were derived from information gathered during eight semi-structured interviews with teachers from SFI schools in Gothenburg, Sweden. Each teacher had prior experience teaching Swedish in Course A-B, which was a requirement for the sampling. The group of three men and five women, all aged between 34 and 62, turned out to be a decent demographic balance. All the teachers are qualified teachers and have a teacher's license except one participant. Their experience ranged from 12 to 25 years. Six out of eight participants can speak more than two languages while the other two participants can only speak two languages. Interview was conducted in English with six participants while two of them preferred to do it in Swedish then I translated to English and analyzed the English text. Table 2 shows the samples' demographics description.

Table 2 ***The participants*' *characteristics***

participants ' ID	age	sex	Years of teaching experiences	Years as SFI teacher	Teacher's ID (license)	Teaching hours a week	Languags they speak
P-A	63	F	20	2	No	Full time	Swedish-English
P-B	55	F	25	15	Yes	18	Swedish-English-Italian
P-C	34	F	12	8	Yes	18	Swedish-English-French-Arabic
P-D	55	F	20	5	Yes	40	Arabic-English- Swedish
P-E	40	F	12	3	Yes	18	Swedish-English- Italian
P-F	43	M	14	12	Yes	Full time	Swedish-English-French-Arabic
P-G	48	M	15	5	Yes	Full time	Swedish-English

Emerging initial themes

I found several distinct expressions that were pertinent to the research during the investigation. In the context of the participant's responses to my interview questions, I reviewed the meaning of initial categories and then I did the coding of all answers again. These categories were initially split up into twenty coded clusters: The initial codes for challenges included: *lack of IT knowledge, limited literacy level, language barrier, limited time, lack of confidence, difficulty in working collaboratively, limited exposure to the second language*. The initial codes for strategies included: *sharing, use cooperating learning, encouragement, deliberately selecting groups, positive feedback, using images, using supporting methods, focus on tasks according to the students' levels, teaching through tools, employing technology information, role play and genuine activities, using different instruction, study visit, and language café.*

Response tables were updated and cross-referenced as concepts and final themes developed with each subsequent cycle of coding. Several first- and second-cycle coding operations were used to further improve the data. According to the research objectives and research questions, the first-cycle coding process entails the first process of finding and categorizing data into draft codes or themes. This is typically accomplished by reading the data several times while underlining crucial phrases, words, or ideas that stand out as important. The tentative codes created in the first cycle are further examined during the second cycle of coding. This is accomplished by grouping related codes into larger categories or themes and then figuring out how these themes are related to one another.

The dynamic code clusters continued to change as data was processed via various strategic lenses. Several data clusters expressing different layers of meaning were created from the initial twenty coded key clusters. The inquiry led to the discovery of nine fundamental themes that characterize the SFI teachers' experiences. Four themes about what challenges Swedish teachers face in teaching to low-literate immigrants and five themes about which strategies they employ to deal with those challenges emerged from the data, and they are listed as follows:

Challenges: Theme 1**:** Difficulties in communication and interaction

Theme 2: Limited literacy skills and less exposure to the second language

Theme 3: Unwillingness to involve in cooperative learning due to lack of confidence and motivation

Theme 4: Limited exposure to information technology

Strategies: Theme 5: Supporting students by developing instructional design

Theme 6: Fostering students' confidence through collaborative learning and peer work

Theme7: Incorporating digital literacy and language learning tools

Theme 8: Motivating students to more exposure to out of class activities

Theme 9: Collaborate with other teachers and community organization to support the student

Tables 3, 4, and 5 illustrate the initial codes and emerging themes for challenges and strategies as follows.

Table 3 ***Initial codes for challenges and emerging themes***

Initial Codes for Challenges	Sample Quotes	Initial Codes Grouped to Form Themes for Challenges
Language barrier, lack of common language,	*"There will be basically challenges because I can't speak their languages and I can't know if they are on the right path or understand and also with special low-literacy is hard because they are not generally used to imagining certain things. They have to be concrete in their own life."*	**Theme 1:** Difficulties in communication and interaction **Theme 2:** Limited literacy skills and less exposure to the second language **Theme3:** Unwillingness to involve in cooperative learning due to lack of confidence and motivation **Theme4:** Limited exposure to information technology
Lack of confidence, trust, motivation, limited literacy, pedagogical barriers, trauma and emotional barriers, difficulty in working collaboratively	*"They don't have confidence in their capacities, and they don't trust other students either."* *"We have to put in a lot of work to have a dynamic group, and everyone feels safe. Sometimes they have doubts that their friends know the right things. They think only the teacher has the right answer. So, I try to encourage them to trust other students, too."* *"I have conversation discussions during term. Some students argue that they have suffered war, conflict, and abuse before their journey and are uncertain about their future. They have had to leave their family behind, and all of these affect their language learning and integration with others."*	
Lack of time, limited exposure to the second language, cultural differences	*"I think speaking skill should be emphasized first as it is important to have basic spoken vocabulary before starting to read and write. Reading is also challenging when they want to learn the difference with the name of the letter and the sound…it can create problem when you start reading and it takes a lot of time to get reading speed up…."* *"As they were not used to learning a second language before and have limited literacy it needs more time and effort to teach them writing and reading in Swedish.*	
Less knowledge in IT, inappropriate devices, limited resources	*"Mostly, they forget their username and password to log in their course platform (canvas), but after a few weeks or a month they can usually do it. The other problem is källkritik (source criticism) not to trust everything online. They think everything written online to be true. So, we should work a lot on analyzing who has written what and why."* *"They are not used to using computers and phone programs. Some students do not have computers and WIFI at home or they use old phones and can't use applications that we're using."*	

Table 4 ***Initial codes for strategies and emerging themes***

Initial Codes for Strategies	Sample Quotes	Initial Codes Grouped to Form Themes for Strategies
Breaking down tasks into smaller, using visual aids, group works, playing memory cards, showing flash cards, circle model,	*"I teach new words with pictures. I use a lot of examples and repetition. I think using flash cards is useful for them to comprehend and memorize new words."* *"During teaching, I repeat everything with many examples because if you teach to highly educated students maybe you have one example with a certain grammar, but we don't speak so much about grammar in these low groups. So, we do it using different examples and maybe ten examples or more. They do not know study techniques, so we have to do that at school with repetition."*	**Theme 5:** Supporting students by developing instructional design - Scaffolding techniques **Theme 6:** Fostering Students' Confidence through Collaborative learning and peer work **Theme7:** Incorporating digital literacy and language learning tools **Theme 8:** Motivating students to more exposure to out of class activities **Theme 9:** Collaborate with other teachers and community organization to support the students
Using google translate, regrouping them according to their common language, gestures, body language, role play, doing reading with using projector.	*"I write the sentences with different colors on the board and ask them to read and underline it. Sometimes they do role plays about their favorite subject. They like it as they select their group themselves to practice with together."* *"We do different tasks according to the students' levels. I often write a task for them to complete with their peers or do group projects."*	
Motivating, study visit, language café, library, introducing easy- to - read books, conversation discussion,	*"I engage them in cooperative learning by doing some activities. I use food advertising, for example, to teach them what to cook with these things, the price, and where to buy them. By encouraging and accompanying them to the store I support them. We talk all the time, and they enjoy this kind of activity."* *"We have a small library at school, and I ask them to read easy books according to the levels and reading helps with their language. I introduce the language café for their speaking skills, and we have study visits several times during the course."*	
Using technology, portfolio, digital resources	*"We use information technology for teaching and as a platform for students. They have installed different applications and use them for learning languages e.g., they take photos of the new words or record them. They can take a quiz or do some exercises on the computer, and they spell the words."* *"I suggest they use digital technology to practice listening in their free time as they have problems with listening skills, and it helps a lot."*	
Introducing to special education teacher, counselor and study career leader, and native language teacher	*"We collaborate with other teachers, too. We share the materials if we produce something. We participate in programs like teacher education if there is any.""Students get support according to their needs. If they have a personal problem in life, they refer to the counselor and she supports them. Or, if the students start progression, the special education teacher evaluates them and puts them in a special group."*	

Table 5 ***Emergent themes in relation to research questions***

Research Questions	Themes that Address Research Question
Research question 1: What challenges do the SFI teachers face when teaching Swedish to low-literacy skilled immigrants?	**Theme 1**: Difficulties in communication and interaction **Theme 2**: Limited literacy skills and less exposure to the second language **Theme 3**: Unwillingness to cooperative learning due to lack of confidence and motivation **Theme 4**: Limited exposure to information technology
Research question 2: What strategies assumed by sociocultural theoretical perspective do the SFI teachers implement to overcome the challenges they face in teaching Swedish to low-literate immigrants?	**Theme 5**: Supporting students by developing instructional design **Theme 6**: Fostering students' confidence through collaborative learning and peer work **Theme 7**: Incorporating digital literacy and language learning tools **Theme 8**: Motivating students to more exposure to out of class activities **Theme 9:** Collaborate with other teachers and community organization to support the students

Challenges

The first research question addressed the challenges SFI teachers encountered in using scaffolding techniques, working collaboratively, and social interaction while teaching to low-literate immigrants. In the following section difficulties that Swedish teachers face in teaching to the low-literate groups are outlined.

Difficulties in Communication and Interaction (Language Barriers)

All the SFI students come from different countries as mentioned earlier in chapter one. They speak their native language, and it becomes problematic to understand each other and communicate with them. Most of them speak Arabic, Somali, Urdu, Bulgarian, and Farsi. They have limited literacy and have not experienced second language education. Some participants highlighted that they could not use English as a common language while teaching as many students lacked the English knowledge and this was a big problem. As a result, they could not create desirable social interaction. As one participant noted:

"I do not know their language and if I use English for explaining some complex tasks it is excluding other students who don't understand English. So, I prefer to use Swedish." (P-C; A)

The interviewees mentioned that the group they worked with consisted of people from Somali, Iraq, and other countries, and that they did not all speak the same language. They had trouble communicating as a result, which made it difficult for them to cooperate.

"It's challenging to teach students when neither they nor I can comprehend each other. I sometimes think I'm not moving forward at all. We can't interact well." (P-G)

The other participant said:

"There will be basically challenges because I can't speak their languages and I can't know if they are on the right path or understand the lesson, and with special low-literacy is hard because they are not generally used to imagining certain things. They have to be concrete in their own life." (P-C)

Immigrants with low literacy levels may not be very proficient in any second language they have, whether Swedish or some other language, which can pose serious learning obstacles. This might make it difficult for students to follow directions, interact with peers, and participate in class activities. These limitations can be overcome using techniques like visual aids, clear, straightforward language, and translation and interpretation services which will be elaborated in strategies in the next section more.

Limited Literacy Skills and Less Exposure to the Second Language

The other challenge when working with low-literate immigrants is that teachers may run into pedagogical challenges, such as a lack of experience in second language acquisition or a lack of

knowledge about the learners' cultural background. Additionally, as the immigrants have limited literacy skills the SFI teachers encounter major problems in supporting them to teach reading and writing. This may need adopting a more flexible and learner-centered method of teaching languages that takes into consideration each student's particular needs, background, and ability. As one participant states:

"I start with teaching speaking skills in Swedish first, as most of the students lack former education and can't read and write in their mother language. They haven't even been in second language classes in their country. So, we talk and talk most of the time." (P-A)

The other interviewee addressed this problem and said:

"As they were not used to learning a second language before and have limited literacy it needs more time and effort to guide and teach them writing and reading in Swedish." (P-B)

"I think speaking skill should be emphasized first as it is important to have basic spoken vocabulary before starting to read and write. Reading is also challenging when they want to learn the difference between the name of the letter and the sound…it can create problems when you start reading and it takes a lot of time to get reading speed up…." (P-C)

"The biggest concern is a lack of study techniques. This applies to all areas of knowledge. Students want to quickly get rid of the task and do the next one. I give very clear instructions step by step and repeat the same thing several times and "slow down" the students if they are too fast." (P-H)

Unwillingness to Involve in Cooperative Learning due to Lack of Confidence and Motivation

In this study, several teachers indicated that their low-literate immigrant students lacked motivation and confidence to work collaboratively in learning the language. Teachers specifically observed that their students struggled to communicate in the new language, were reluctant to participate in class activities, and frequently remained mute. The teachers struggled to create them working in groups. Additionally, a lot of teachers reported that their students had unfavorable views towards learning a language, frequently calling it difficult, unpleasant, and overwhelming. Some students had unpleasant experiences of their life in their own country and described a terrible situation like leaving their family, children, and experiencing war and abuse. Thus, it was very hard to work collaboratively with them or manage peer work. They had no trust towards other classmates as they believed that all of them lacked prior literacy. Some participants reported that:

"They don't have confidence in their capacities, and they don't trust other students either." (P-C; B)

"We have to put in a lot of work to have a dynamic group, and everyone feels safe. Sometimes they have doubts that their friends know the right things. They think only the teacher has the right answer. So, I try to encourage them to trust other students, too." (P-C; B)

"I have conversation discussions during term. Some students argue that they have suffered war, conflict, and abuse before their journey and are uncertain about their future. They have had to leave their family behind, and all of these affect their language learning and integration with others." (P-C; H; D)

"The students cooperate reluctantly; I am firm and do not allow choosing the conversation partner. The students don't dare to talk. I make small conversation groups with a strong student in each group, I join in and ask support questions. The students have a limited vocabulary. I use pictures." (P-H)

Limited Exposure to Information Technology

It may be difficult to include digital literacy and language learning materials for immigrants with low levels of literacy since they may have restricted access to technology and digital resources. This might necessitate adopting a more inventive and innovative method of language learning that includes low-tech and no-tech techniques. Almost all participants emphasized this issue as a struggling problem that could be considered in teaching and preparing educational materials.

"Mostly, they forget their username and password to log in their course platform (canvas), but after a few weeks or a month they can usually do it. The other problem is källkritik (source criticism) not to trust everything online. They think everything written online to be true. So, we should work a lot on analyzing who has written what and why." (P-C)

They also highlighted that some of these students may lack technological devices at home or may not have IT knowledge which can arouse problems.

"They are not used to using computers and phone programs. Some students don't have computers and WIFI at home or they use old phones and can't use the applications that we're using." (P-B; C; H)

Strategy

The second research question addresses the strategies teachers utilize to overcome the challenges they identify in teaching to low-literate immigrants. Teachers produced several methods to get over linguistic obstacles. To help the low-literate students understand words and concepts, teachers often employed visuals and gestures along with repetition and short sentences. Additionally, they employed collaborative learning to motivate students in learning Swedish. Some teachers supplemented classroom instruction with technological tools like language-learning software and online resources. The last technique that all participants believed to support the low-literate adults in learning Swedish was social interaction by doing out of class activities. The following cases are explained using concepts from a sociocultural theoretical framework (Lantolf, 2000).

Supporting Students by Developing Instructional Design

Scaffolding instruction

Supporting low-literate students is applicable through using some techniques to deal with low literacy levels. These techniques include breaking down complex tasks into smaller and manageable parts by using visual aids, real-life situations, repetition, and providing context.

When introducing difficult grammar rules and vocabulary to low-literacy students, teachers said they frequently found it difficult to interact with them successfully. For some teachers, bridging the communication gap was made easier by using visual aids and nonverbal cues. Others talked about breaking down difficult ideas into smaller, easier-to-manage chunks using scaffolding approaches.

All participants reported that they often had to use visual aids and other types of experiential learning to modify their teaching strategies to meet the needs of students with poor levels of literacy. One teacher talked about teaching grammar principles using real-world examples, while another used practical exercises to reinforce vocabulary phrases. Several teachers explained how they helped low-literate students comprehend and retain new information:

"I teach new words with pictures. I use a lot of examples and repetition. I think using flash cards is useful for them to comprehend and remember new words." (All-Ps)

"During teaching, I group everything with many examples because if you teach to highly educated students maybe you have one example with a certain grammar, but we don't speak so much about grammar in this low group. So, we do it using different examples and maybe ten examples or more. They don't know study techniques, so we have to do that at school with repetition." (P-B)

"I write short sentences with different colors on the board and ask them to read and underline it or complete the sentence. Sometimes they do role plays about their favorite subject. They like it as they select their group themselves to practice with together." (P-D; G)

Additionally, presenting context could help students in understanding words and expressions that they may not be familiar with. For instance, teachers can give context for workplace vocabulary lessons by going over various job positions and tasks and describing how they relate to one another. The other example can be showing directions for using the bus, and training to learn the vocabulary related to each context. Some participants stated that they use real-life situations to support students to learn complex tasks in the context.

"I usually use different methods to teach low-literate students. I ask them to play a role according to their experiences in, for example, cooking special food or when they go shopping. They learn more new words and communicate better when they do something in a context practically." (P-A; B; D)

"I try to teach the low-literate groups the new words by providing context. For example, I show them how to use bus directions and the related vocabulary or which apps they can install. By doing so, we repeat many times, and they remember the words' expressions in the context." (P-E; F; D)

Fostering Students' Confidence through Collaborative Learning and Peer work

Low literate students frequently lacked enthusiasm, according to teachers since they lacked confidence in their abilities or were frustrated by the learning process. Sometimes they are reluctant to learn a

language due to their life problems. To address this, teachers employed a range of strategies, such as peer tutoring, collaborative learning, and positive reinforcement, to encourage students to feel more invested in their education. They discovered that they were better able to encourage student motivation and success by fostering a supportive and cooperative classroom environment. Furthermore, teachers collaborated with other community organizations and teachers to support the low-literate students at school. Additionally, peer support or collaborative learning is a different tactic that can provide students the chance to collaborate and learn from one another. Students can receive guidance and assistance that is catered to their ZPD by working with classmates who are at a slightly higher level of development, which can help them advance more rapidly and successfully.

"We do different tasks according to the students' levels. I often write a task for them to complete with their peers or do group projects." (P-B; D; F)

"I do a lot of group work in my class. I believe creating groups with low- and high-level students can be useful as they can learn from each other much more." (P-B; C; H)

Two teachers talked about their experiences utilizing encouragement and other techniques to help students become more motivated and confident.

"I engage them in cooperative learning by doing some activities. I use food advertising, for example, to teach them what to cook with these things, the price, and where to buy them. By encouraging and accompanying them to the store I support them. We talk all the time, and they enjoy this kind of activity." (P-A; B; G)

Incorporating Digital Literacy and Language Learning Tools

All participants highlighted the use of information technology to support the learning of low-literate students. Although the participants claimed that there were some challenges regarding using IT by low-literate students, they could manage this problem by encouraging the students and guiding them how to use it to learn language more efficiently. They think that using software and language learning apps may also help the low literate groups to learn language faster. Furthermore, they believed that using IT facilitates learning languages especially in people with low-literacy levels because it mediates as a tool to support the students' learning.

"We use information technology for teaching and as a platform for students. They have installed different applications and use them for learning languages e.g., they take photos of the new words or record them. They can take a quiz or do some exercises on the computer, and they spell the words." (All Ps)

"I suggest they use digital technology to practice listening in their free time as they have problems with listening skills, and it helps a lot." (P-C; B)

"I provide my students with a list of language learning websites and encourage them to use it daily to improve in language. For example, apps like Duolingo and Babbel can make learning engaging." (P-G; F; D)

The other participants discussed incorporating social media into Learning Swedish in low-literate students. They believed social media is a powerful tool for practicing writing and reading skills in a real-life context.

"I created a social media group in WhatsApp and encouraged my students to join the group and practice learning Swedish. Sometimes they show me what they have discussed or read. It's fun." (P-H; D)

An experienced participant recommended using IT daily as it facilitates learning and acts as an assistant for teaching.

"*During COVID 19, we had to prepare the materials ourselves and we always used IT. I had a lot of time to provide students with extra educational content and they could use computers or their phones. Then, I now use IT in all my classes as I think it is like my assistant and motivates my students to use it daily."* (P-B)

Motivating Students to More Exposure to out of Class Activities (Social Interaction)

Many teachers reported utilizing a range of tactics to address the problems discussed earlier in this text, despite the difficulties posed by their students' lack of enthusiasm and confidence. As an illustration, teachers developed relationships with their students by frequently taking extra time to get to know them outside of class. Teachers offered varied teaching, providing a range of activities and evaluations that were adapted to the unique requirements of their students. Extracurricular activities are among the things that the teachers apply to expose students to learn Swedish easily. The participants pointed to the language café and using the library for motivating students to interact with other native speakers and more knowledgeable others. Participating in out of class activities fosters students' social interaction. It is crucial to keep in mind that each student is unique and that teachers may need to modify their strategies to fit the needs of their own unique students.

"We have a small library at school, and I ask them to read easy books according to the levels and reading helps with their language. I introduce the language café for their speaking skills, and we have study visits several times during the course." (P-E; C; A; D; F)

"I encourage my students and often accompany them to do out of class activities. I show them how to use words related to transportation and stations, for example. They write the new words for their assignments and share them with each other. We go to language café, and they interact with their friends or other Swedish people." (P-F; G)

The other participant believed that using Swedish out of school can enhance students' motivation:

"I'm happy to do it. You learn faster if you use a living language. Students' motivation increases if they learn something that they can use practically and when they can contribute to the lesson." (P-H)

Collaborate with Other Teachers and Community Organization to Support the Students

All participants mentioned that they support their students to use different resources available at school, for instance, special education teacher, counselor, student career leader, and native language teachers.

"Students get support according to their needs. If they have a personal problem in life, they refer to the counselor and she supports them. Or, if the students start progression, the special education teacher evaluates them and puts them in a special group." (All Ps)

"We collaborate with other teachers, too. We share the materials if we produce something. We participate in programs like teacher education if there is any." (P-C; B)

"I individualize lessons if necessary or sign students up for reading and writing support. If a student has special needs, I receive support from a special educator. In case of personal problems, the students receive support from a counselor." (P-H)

There are some native language teachers, e. g., Arabic and Persian teachers at SFI schools that support low-literate students to communicate in their native language if they have some problems with their studies or other issues. The low-literate students find confidence when they get more help and guidance in their native language.

"As some of my students communicate in their native language, I can't understand well what they mean. We have two SFI teachers who can speak Arabic and Persian and can support our students. I think it is essential to have such teachers, especially in course A for low-literate groups. Students get confidence when they interact with these teachers." (P-C; H; F; G)

As a result, the participants of the study identified the challenges they face in teaching Swedish to low-literate immigrants. They pointed to some challenges such as language barrier, limited literacy skills and less exposure to the second language, Unwillingness to cooperative learning due to lack of confidence and motivation, and limited exposure to information technology. According to the participants, these challenges can be overcome, and language competency can be increased by using some strategies such as supporting techniques, modifying teaching methods, collaborative learning, and peer work, using IT tools, and doing out of class activities. All teachers were eager to facilitate the low-literate immigrant groups in learning Swedish.

6. Discussion

Teaching Swedish to immigrants with limited literacy skills presents a variety of difficulties for SFI instructors. Additionally, a lot of these students have varied linguistic and cultural backgrounds, which can make teaching challenging. The aim of the study was to apply Vygotsky's theoretical position in better understanding of the challenges SFI teachers face when teaching basic Swedish to low-literacy skilled immigrants, and the strategies they implement to teach these groups. The following topics were used to focus the search on two research questions: Firstly, the challenges that SFI teachers face in teaching Swedish to low-literate immigrants. Secondly, the strategies assumed by sociocultural theoretical perspective they employ to overcome the perceived challenges. A qualitative interview approach was adopted to better understand the SFI teachers' experiences. The Sociocultural theory (SCT) served as a framework to connect the study topics with the questions posed to the participants in the interviews. This chapter will include an analysis of the thesis as well as a list of suggestions for further research. We will look at how the results of this study have helped us respond to our two key research objectives in the section that follows.

Regarding the first research question, four categories have been identified as challenging areas that SFI teachers encounter in their classes while working with low-literate adults: *difficulties in communication and interaction, limited literacy skills and less exposure to the second language, unwillingness to cooperative learning due to lack of confidence and motivation, and limited exposure to information technology*. All participants agree that language barrier is the main challenge when the low-literate students want to work collaboratively or learn Swedish. Lack of common language and working with the diversity of students could create limitations for learning Swedish and communicating with others. However, the participants of the study claimed that the language barrier could be tackled by employing some supportive techniques. The other issue that the participants highlighted to be the significant challenge was lack of confidence among low-literate students due to their limited literacy levels which affects the students' confidence and motivation in collaborative working and learning.

The next problem that several participants identified to be challenging in teaching Swedish was the students' limited exposure to information technology. Previous studies did not highlight this problem while the participants of this study believed that lack of knowledge in information technology could make learning language a struggle for low-literate students. All SFI students should have knowledge in using computers and other technology as all SFI programs are provided in platforms nowadays and it is essential for low-literate students to update their information to learn Swedish easier. Lastly, the students' low literacy level poses substantial difficulty since the SFI teachers should provide the appropriate educational content and strategy in the platforms according to the students' levels to facilitate their learning.

Nevertheless, despite the challenges discussed earlier, SFI teachers have created some strategies to overcome the perceived challenges. They include *supporting students by developing instructional design (scaffolding techniques*), *fostering students' confidence through collaborative learning and peer work, incorporating digital literacy and language learning tools, motivating students to more exposure*

to out of class activities, and collaborating with other teachers and community organizations to support the students.

One of the strategies that the participants identified to be effective was the application of scaffolding techniques which include breaking down the complex tasks into the smaller, easier to manage steps. This strategy is in line with Vygotsky's theory in supporting students through scaffolding approaches and using ZPD. All participants reported that they attempted to use visual aids and other types of experiential learning to modify their teaching strategies to meet the needs of students with poor levels of literacy. In addition to scaffolding, they created instructional materials according to their students' levels (ZPD) to support them.

Additionally, collaborative learning and peer work was the second strategy that was found to be useful for low-literate students to learn Swedish properly. Although the participants addressed that collaborative learning and group work might be difficult due to language barriers, they could manage it by applying some techniques to motivate their students. The participants pointed to some interesting methods such as using role plays, providing context for learning, and motivating the learners by performing their favorite activities. This technique is pertinent to collaborative learning and peer interaction of Vygotsky's theory.

The other strategy that almost all participants recommended to be important was incorporating digital literacy and language learning tools to mediate the low-literate students in learning Swedish. As it is highlighted in Vygotsky's notion of cultural mediation, using technology and language can mediate or support human activity and learning. These cultural items and tools provide people with the means to connect with their surroundings, communicate with others, and learn new information and skills (Moll, 2000).

The last technique that participants suggested to be successful was motivating students to have more exposure to out-of-class activities. The study participants highlighted the advantages of applying Swedish out of school and engaging low-literate students to interact with others. By doing so, the students become motivated, and their social interaction improves. Again, the concept of social interaction is related to Vygotsky's sociocultural theory which encourages language learners to be engaged in social contexts and communicate with other people.

The findings of the study seem to be consistent with the previous studies in using some strategies to overcome the perceived challenges. Obondo et al. (2016) mentioned, designing learning environments for students from various ethnic and linguistic backgrounds could be the biggest obstacles at the municipal council and at school. All participants highlighted the language barriers as a significant challenge in teaching and learning Swedish, but they could tackle this problem by applying scaffolding strategies. The findings related to this strategy was related to the previous research such as applying some scaffolding techniques, (Geva & Zadeh, 2006; Biglow & Vinogradov, 2011) in employing language experience approach (LEA) in facilitating learning and the whole-part-whole method of teaching literacy as a balanced method to support the learners. Furthermore, Strube (2015) emphasized the importance of using different scaffolding techniques in LESLLA classes to support low-literate adults in learning a second language.

Correspondingly, in terms of collaborative learning many connections can be found between previous studies and the findings of this study. Donato (1994) believes that collaborative language learning offers the same chance for scaffolded support in an L2 classroom as expert-novice interactions in natural settings. Similarly, Dongyu and his colleagues (2013) employed collaborative learning in the Chinese context and stressed the significance of this strategy.

A surprising finding from the interviews with SFI teachers surfaced during the analysis of the data for my research. The use of digital literacy and language learning tools in teaching Swedish to low-literate immigrants was an unexpected breakthrough. This finding, which had not been thoroughly examined in other studies, added a unique perspective to the body of knowledge already available on the subject. Although some participants attempted to try using information technology in their classes, the introduction of electronic equipment into typical instruction was accelerated by the COVID-19 epidemic and they had to apply IT in their teaching more. It seems to be a new strategy that SFI teachers recommend being necessary All participants believed that using IT facilities learning Swedish especially in low-literate groups.

Moreover, the findings of this study revealed that students' low literacy level pose challenges for SFI teachers and they need more time and effort to deal with this problem. Some researchers pointed to this problem in past studies, (see for example, Naif & Saad, 2017; Reichenberg, 2019). They stated that low-literacy levels were obstacles to learning a second language. They focused on the value of bilingual instruction to deal with this issue. Finally, the results showed that low-literate immigrants lack confidence and cannot interact with others. The participants suggested using out-of- class activities to foster the students' social interaction. They used the language café and library to expose the low-literate students in society to engage in more activities. Previous studies are relevant with this finding to be used by instructors, for instance – (Elmorth, 2003 and Jonasson, 2012) – who emphasized that social context and contact with Swedish people can motivate the students to have social interaction. Nevertheless, this challenge (lack of confidence) was not mentioned in previous studies and the researchers emphasized on the strategy.

Overall, all the participants have experienced some challenges in teaching Swedish to low-literate adults in course A-B as mentioned in the findings section. They could develop some strategies in line with sociocultural theory to deal with these obstacles they face in their classes. Many teachers implemented scaffolding techniques, at least two strategies, to manage their classes. Some participants could speak more than two languages and it could help the language barriers they encounter in the class. The participants who could not speak other languages except Swedish and English were able to use native language teachers to assist low-literate students in learning Swedish. In view of supporting students' learning, all participants of the study employed modification by breaking down complex tasks to the easy and understandable parts to facilitate the students' learning. Although some of them were successful in creating educational contents to adjust to their students' levels and needs, they needed more time and effort to provide these materials. The participants stated that sometimes they cannot follow the SFI curriculum provided by the municipality for low-literate students as some materials are beyond the students' levels. Thus, they would prefer to be free in providing instructional contents for the low-literate groups since they know which material is appropriate for whom. The findings also demonstrated that SFI teachers collaborate with other teachers and community organizations involving

special educators, counselors, and student career leaders to support the low-literate students in case of necessity.

It can be argued that the researcher could not find several studies in the literature review to discuss the challenges of teaching to low-literate immigrants, especially in the Swedish context. Previous studies primarily concentrated on teaching strategies rather than specifically addressing the challenges involved in teaching to low literacy skilled adults. It is essential to understand the unique challenges that teachers face when working with low-literate immigrants to gain insights for developing successful teaching methods. Most of the studies that were previously done lack embodying findings in a learning theories perspective and lacked considering the successful teaching strategies for people with poor literacy levels. One of the challenges that the participants did not address in their strategies is that these people never learnt to write in their own language and teachers could not fix it. The other challenge is lack of reading skill among these people, if they cannot read, they cannot learn a language. Even the literate people that learn Swedish should read something in Swedish if they do not read the zone of proximal development in their terms is narrow. The SFI teachers recognize the challenge of low literacy levels in their students, but they do not report they do something particular to deal with it. Some of these challenges cannot be addressed by SFI teachers because they have nothing to do with it, for instance, lack of digital literacy and information technology in low-literate students. This kind of challenge can be addressed by municipal adult education and policy makers to provide these groups with some educational courses and devices to support their learning. In this study we got some information about challenges and strategies in working with low-literate people, but some challenges cannot be solved by SFI teachers. The SFI teachers mentioned they need more time and effort to provide educational content to fit with the low-literate levels. However, lack of time is something that SFI administrators should organize by adjusting and modifying their plans. All SFI teachers, especially teachers in course A-B, who work with low literacy skilled students need some in-service educational programs to learn how to teach a second language to people with poor literacy levels to meet their requirements.

Additionally, it is essential for educators to get support and help from a variety of groups, including schools, governmental institutions, and community-based organizations, while teaching Swedish to low-literate immigrants. However, in our study, teachers did not mention getting any help from these organizations to deal with their problems with time constraints and the need for more effort in the classroom. This dearth of support may significantly affect instructors' capacity to educate low-literate adults, which may have a detrimental influence on these students' academic development and prospects. The provision of tools and support to educators dealing with this vulnerable demographic must therefore be prioritized and made easier.

Conclusion

Due to the increased immigration to Sweden from different countries, it is necessary for all immigrants to learn Swedish to integrate into the society. Some of the immigrants have limited literacy levels and it becomes challenging for SFI teachers to teach the low-literate adults. As it was discussed in literature review, several studies have discovered challenges of teaching to low-literate adults and the strategies that they employed to work with these groups in different contexts.

Through this study, the researcher explored the challenges SFI teachers encounter in applying some key concepts of Vygotsky in teaching to low-literate adults and what strategies they employed to deal with these challenges. A total of eight SFI teachers were interviewed through the semi-structured interview and Vygotsky's sociocultural theory was adopted to write interview questions and analyze the findings.

We saw some themes and patterns emerging during their interviews, which helped us get closer to answering the research questions. Firstly, the findings revealed that SFI teachers face some challenges in applying scaffolding techniques, collaborative learning opportunities, and social interaction. The identified challenges were categorized into four themes including *difficulties in communication and interaction, limited literacy skills and less exposure to the second language, unwillingness to cooperative learning due to lack of confidence and motivation, and limited exposure to information technology.*

Secondly, despite the perceived challenges, the participants could develop some strategies to overcome the challenges. The strategies were categorized into five themes: *supporting students by developing instructional design (scaffolding techniques*)*, fostering students' confidence through collaborative learning and peer work, incorporating digital literacy and language learning tools, motivating students to more exposure to out of class activities, and collaborate with other teachers and community organization to support the students.*

In this study, SFI teachers' experiences in teaching to low-literate adults was presented and their strategies may be constructive for other SFI teachers, too. However, it should be noted that their perceived challenges and applications of some strategies may not be used in other classes. Every teacher has different teaching methods, and they could have authority to decide upon which strategy is appropriate for each student and class. Support from all policy makers and administrators is necessary to meet the requirements of the immigrants with poor literacy levels in successful integration.

Study Significance and Implications of the Results for Practice and Research

Many SFI instructors face challenges in teaching Swedish to low literacy skilled immigrants. They expect support from the organizers of the SFI program so that they can work efficiently with the low-literate group of immigrants. It is essential that they have more training regarding different teaching methods to gain successful results. Most of the instruction in SFI schools is done through traditional methods. But with COVID-19 and the new circumstances it brought about, many instructors in SFI schools began to experiment with other teaching strategies, using tools to mediate students' learning in Swedish. The value of this research rests in the way it offers a distinct component of instruction by encouraging the low-literate students to use technology and other supportive methods in the classroom and contributes to the discussion of alternative learning strategies. Furthermore, there are not many studies on teaching strategies which are pertinent to sociocultural theory in teaching to low-literate immigrants in Sweden. Our findings highlight the necessity for additional teaching strategies research in Sweden, particularly on the viewpoint of the SFI instructor. This could imply the significance of new theories in education and emphasize the necessity for additional study on key concepts of sociocultural theory used in SFI schools.

In terms of practice, the viewpoints of SFI teachers have been addressed through this study, along with their recommendations for additional practice. One of their primary arguments for teaching to low-literate students was creating an educational environment which is motivating and attractive for the students in addition to supportive techniques. Many of the participants argued that they should be supported by the municipality and organizers of the SFI program regarding providing native language teachers to use in their classes and that they are allowed to adapt educational contents in accordance with their students' levels. The unexpected finding, use of information technology, has significant practical implications. It emphasizes the need of recognizing and embracing the function of digital resources in language learning, particularly those designed to meet the requirements of immigrants with limited literacy. Teachers may design dynamic, inclusive learning environments that accommodate the many requirements and learning preferences of their students by skillfully integrating digital resources. Further investigation is required to determine the best way to incorporate digital literacy and language learning aids in teaching Swedish to low-literate immigrants, as a result of this unanticipated conclusion. Future research should examine the difficulties users have using technology, create best practices, and suggest solutions to any obstacles that might arise.

Additionally, SFI schools should offer initiative to their instructors so that they become familiar with different teaching techniques especially in relation to sociocultural theory and can use them in their low-literate classes. The students might benefit from these techniques, and the teachers would have the chance to experiment, enhance their lessons, and in this case, use sustainable strategies.

Limitation of the Study and Recommendation for Future Research

There are several limitations in this study. First, the sample size is relatively small with only eight teachers being interviewed, despite efforts to assure the sample's variety in terms of gender, age, and experience. It is likely that alternative viewpoints and experiences exist that were not included in this study.

Secondly, the proposed study adopts a qualitative research methodology and relies mostly on semi-structured interviews for data collection. The study's entire reliance on qualitative interviews may have limited its potential to help us understand the phenomenon that was studied. Future research might be conducted about incorporating additional research methods, e.g., quantitative, or mixed methods to offer a more in-depth understanding of the subject.

Thirdly, the study was conducted in one city and within a particular cultural environment, which can restrict the applicability of the findings to the other context. More investigation is required to examine the strategies and difficulties faced by instructors working with various immigrant populations in various circumstances.

Lastly, the study excluded the viewpoints of students and other stakeholders, such as legislators and administrators, and was only limited to the perspectives of teachers. Future research that incorporates other viewpoints could offer a more comprehensive picture of the difficulties faced by immigrants with poor literacy levels when learning Swedish. Similarly, the low-literate students' experiences and responses should be quantitatively measured to provide a strong image of how to learn a second language in the best way possible. Additionally, further research is needed to be conducted to delve into specific

difficulties that teachers face in teaching to low-literate immigrants in different educational contexts to develop more inclusive and effective teaching strategies.

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8. Appendices

APPENDIX A

Informed Consent Letter

Dear colleague,

My name is Saba Monirzadeh, and I am studying International Master Program in Educational Research (IMER) at the University of Gothenburg. I would like to do an interview with you for my master's thesis research with the title "***Challenges and strategies of teaching Swedish to low -literacy skilled immigrants".***

The purpose of the study is to find out what kind of challenges SFI teachers face when teaching basic Swedish to low-literacy skilled immigrants, and what strategies do they implement to teach these groups.

Interview is anticipated to take 20-50 minutes. If you agree, the interviews will be audio-recorded for data analysis. The data will be kept confidential, and participants' pseudonyms will be used in the study. Your participation is completely voluntary, and you are allowed to withdraw whenever you request. The interview will be done in English but if you find it difficult you can switch to Swedish as you choose.

By filling out the consent form below, you participate in this study.

My email address is: saba.monirzadeh73@gmail.com contact number is: 0767821606

☐ I acknowledge that Saba Monirzadeh has informed me of the study plans she has given. I am aware that they are a component of a master's degree project situated at the University of Gothenburg in Sweden. I've read the written information regarding the study and have had the chance to make additional inquiries. I thus offer my permission to take part in the study. The data I provide may be used for future studies and presentations/publications of the study's findings are also covered by the consent.

Name……. Date……

Signature…….

APPENDIX B

Interview Guide

Hello, my name is Saba Monirzadeh, and I just wanted to say how much I appreciate you taking the time to respond to my queries. As you read in the consent form, this interview will be audio recorded. The goal of this interview is to identify some of the challenges SFI teachers face when instructing low-literate students in SFI Path 1 and the strategies used to deal with these difficulties. The findings of the study will be included in the master's thesis I am writing, but your identity will be kept confidential. Feel free to fill in the gaps and switch to Swedish if you ever feel like you are having trouble finding the right words in English. And if you need any clarifications at any time, do not hesitate to ask.

Ahead of time, do you have any questions? Do you feel ready to begin right away?

1) **General information**:

1.1) - How old are you?

1.2)- How long have you worked as a teacher? And how long as a SFI teacher?

1.3)- Which SFI courses do you teach? (A, B, C, D)

1.4)- Do you have a teacher's license?

1.5)- How much time a week do you spend teaching Swedish?

1.6)- What languages do you speak?

a. Do you alternate between two languages while teaching? If so, which languages?

2) The teaching to students in SFI course A-B:

2.1)- Can you provide an example of a successful learning experience that you facilitated for a low-literate immigrant student? How did you support their learning and development using strategies that are based on language and cultural differences?

2.2)- What strategies do you apply during teaching a new lesson?

2.3)-What challenges do you encounter when you offer supporting techniques in teaching to low-literate adults?

2.4)- How much do you employ students' peer work in teaching Swedish?

2.5)- What challenges do you face when students work collaboratively? How do you deal with it?

2.6)- How do you help your students become more aware of their own learning and thinking processes?

2.7)- How do you use technology to support the learning of low-literate immigrant students? How do you ensure that the use of technology aligns with the goals of your teaching and learning strategies?

a). What challenges do you or your students face in using technology (if there is any)?

2.8)- How do you collaborate with other teachers or community organizations to support the learning of low-literate immigrant students? How do you incorporate culturally responsive strategies into these collaborations?

2.9)- Which skills do you teach first? Speaking, reading, listening, or writing? Why, motivate your answer.

a. What is most important for low-literate students to learn first?

b. How much emphasis do you give to each of these skills?

c. What challenges do you face in teaching listening, writing, reading, and speaking? What strategies do you apply to overcome these difficulties?

2.10)- What is your opinion about including the Swedish that students encounter outside of school in your teaching? Advantages, disadvantages? (Social interaction)

a. Are you making any plans on this? If so, in what way?

2.11)- In case of any challenges, how do you deal with them? Do you think you can deal with the problems yourself or do you need support? If so, who can support you to manage the issues?

3) The students in course A-B:

3.1) -How many hours do they learn Swedish at school in a week?

3.2)-What do you know about the students' Swedish usage in their free time? Do you know the students' extracurricular activities where they can use Swedish? How do you guide them?

If you have any further questions you can ask.

Thanks for your participation!