

Using fantasy literature in the EFL classroom for motivation, therapy, and autonomy

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Abstract

This thesis investigates how the use of fantasy literature in English in the EFL classroom can create autonomy, motivation and have a therapeutic effect on students. The theoretical basis is the theory on self-determination by Deci & Ryan from 2009 (Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2015). According to this theory, one of the most important parts of creating inner motivation is feeling independence and having the opportunity to make choices yourself. Fantasy literature for youths portrays the fantastic, heroic, and magical, and often makes it easy for the reader to imagine being in the imaginative world with the narrative choices (Carlsen, 2020; Slettan, 2018; Thomas, 2003). The Norwegian national curriculum in English supports using fantasy literature in the classroom, as it encourages to “read, interpret and reflect on English-language fiction, including young people’s literature” (Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training, 2020). *Harry Potter and the Philosopher’s Stone* by J. K. Rowling is used as an example text to show how fantasy literature can have a therapeutic effect on students.

To understand these relationships, the thesis relies on data from a 2022 survey of Norwegian teachers and students (see 8 Appendix). The findings showed a variety in attitudes towards fantasy literature in English: some students read a lot of fantasy and were comfortable with books in English, and others found it challenging. Most students wanted to choose texts to read themselves, but the teachers saw possibilities with both options. Reading fantasy books in English can initiate awareness of societal issues, have therapeutic effects, and create motivation, while enhancing reading skills, and therefore it is important to include in the EFL classroom. This thesis aims to help teachers see the importance and resource in using fantasy literature in English in their own teaching.

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1 Introduction

This thesis discusses how youth fantasy literature can be integrated in the EFL classroom as a useful and instructive resource. The research question is: **How does integrating fantasy literature in the EFL classroom relate to the Norwegian national curricular learning outcomes, and how can it build students autonomy and motivation, and be therapeutic?** Using *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone* as an example text, I draw on motivational theory to show how autonomy can develop students' motivation, empathy, and ethical judgement and, through these competencies, build their identity. The books about Harry Potter fit into the category of fantasy literature for youths, which can be described as fiction that involves magical, imaginative, fantastic, and unrealistic creatures and happenings (Slettan, 2018; Thomas, 2003).

To support this thesis, a qualitative survey was conducted on 18 students and 2 teachers from a 9th grade class (see 8 Appendix). Two surveys were made, one for the students and one for the teachers. The data was collected and sorted in tables after question numbers, with the students' survey separated from the teachers' survey. The survey was conducted in Norwegian, so all citations are translations by me.

This text starts with a presentation of relevant theory on fantasy literature, motivational theories, purposes for reading, and the Norwegian national curriculum in English. The qualitative method is thereafter described and explained, and the results are then analyzed. In this part I am looking at learning outcomes of fantasy literature, opinions on this genre and the working methods. Then a discussion of the findings follows, with comparing and linking of the data to the theory on motivation, fantasy literature, LK20, and purposes for reading. Finally, I present a conclusion on the learning outcomes of using fantasy literature in the EFL classroom, which are therapy, learning about society, motivation, and reading skills.

2 Theory

2.1 LK20

The Norwegian national curriculum is a public document that provides guidelines and aims for teaching. This thesis analyzes and discusses the competence aims after year 10 from the English subject curriculum (ENG01-04). Two aims that are relevant are: “read, discuss and present content from various types of texts, including self-chosen texts” and “read, interpret and reflect on English-language fiction, including young people's literature” (Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training, 2020). Fiction in English and young

people's literature are stated specifically in the aims, but there is freedom of choice when it comes to which titles and authors. The curriculum also advises that the students should be allowed to choose texts themselves.

One of the core elements for the English curriculum is “working with texts in English”. This paragraph states that students shall reflect on, interpret, and critically assess different types of texts in English. In this way, the students will “build the foundation for seeing their own identity and others’ identities in a multilingual and multicultural context” (Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training, 2020). This is a clear example of the curriculum stating that students’ identity can be formed and build through working with texts in English. It is also stated in the “interdisciplinary topics” that the ability to express oneself in writing and orally in English can help develop a positive self-image and a secure identity (Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training, 2020). One of the genres that can facilitate the development of identity and the ability to see others’ identities, is youth fantasy literature.

2.2 Fantasy literature

Fantasy literature rouse as a genre in the middle of the 18th century, with the first gothic horror stories (Slettan, 2018, p. 9). This genre is different from fairytales and myths because the magic that is happening is impossible, and this can be both fascinating but also scary. Many people are afraid of monsters that they read about in fantasy stories, but they see themselves in the monsters, which in some way is reflecting the society that produced them. Fantasy literature also differs from the science fiction genre because while science fiction often is set to a different time then the present, fantasy is often set to the current time. Slettan (2018, p. 11-17) distinguishes between three types of fantastic literature: “fantastic stories”, “fantasy” and the “fable tradition” (my translation). This thesis will consequently use “fantasy literature”, and by that mean stories that happen both in a realistic world, and in a secondary fairytale-world.

Fantasy literature is a genre that portrays the fantastic, imaginative, magical, supernatural, and heroic. It is usually set in a realistic world that the reader is familiar with but have unrealistic and magical creatures and/or happenings (Thomas, 2003). It can also take place in a secondary magical world, and the characters can sometimes travel between this and the real world through some type of portal (Slettan, 2018). For example, in the books about Narnia, written by C. S. Lewis, the portal between the two worlds is a closet. The reader can meet for example fairies, elves, dragons, talking animals, trolls, and flying objects through

reading fantasy literature. Fantasy books always has a hero, often with a troublesome family relation, and this hero are sent out on a mission of importance and meets both wise persons and evil ones (Thomas, 2003). There is often a change in the main character through the story, and many times they surprise the reader with their bravery and abilities, despite their bad starting point. The heroic main characters are often exposed to ethical and existential challenges, where the choices they make affect the readers opinion about them in a positive or negative way (Slettan, 2018, p. 13). The stories try to convey a certain ethical theme or topic and show the main characters growth.

Therefore, fantasy literature “[...] is an undistilled version of human imagination-momentary worlds and magic that may be at odds with the rational truth, yet continue to reflect our culture and times” (Thomas, 2003). This means that although the genre is supernatural and imaginative, it can portray realistic and lifelike stories and happenings, which reflect the time we are in. It can also portray challenges and difficulties that people face during life. Although it is not likely that one will meet and fight a troll during one’s life, reading about it can teach the reader the importance of facing challenges with persistence. “Fantasy is a genre of overcoming obstacles and achieving goals” (Cheyne, 2019). A problem or challenge is presented, the characters must overcome it, and they always do. In this way, the fantasy genre promises resolution and satisfaction that solving a problem can provide.

A big part of fantasy literature can be categorized as teenage or youth fiction. According to Williams (2021, p. 141), this genre is an “outstandingly valuable resource for the EFL classroom” because of its narrative structure, relevant topics, and ethical dilemmas. One characteristic narrative feature of teenage or youth fiction is the use of first-person perspective (Williams, 2021, p. 147). When reading novels written in this perspective, the reader can easily identify with the protagonist and feel that they know more than the other characters. This shows the world through someone else’s eyes, and the reader can see the world from another point of view than their own. In this way, the teenage reader can get insight and create empathy for others, and this are related to the issues in the “health and life skills” curriculum (Williams, 2021, p. 148). Often, this fiction has young people as their main characters, and the topic and theme in many teenage novels revolves around growing up and creating identity, love, friendship, and family relations (Carlsen, 2020, p. 217). This shows the young readers ways of handling various situations and how to act in moral and social situations. The type of novel which follows the protagonist from childhood to adulthood, through education and experience, is called “Bildungsroman”. This is a typical literary form

for teenage novels (Williams, 2021, p. 148). An example of a teenage novel which is a “Bildungsroman” is *Harry Potter and the Philosopher’s Stone*, which is the first book in a series of seven.

2.3 *Harry Potter and the Philosopher’s Stone*

The book series about Harry Potter written by Joanne Kathleen Rowling are an example of fantasy teenage or youth literature. The first novel, *Harry Potter and the Philosopher’s Stone* (1997), portrays a young, orphan boy who lives in a cupboard under the stairs at his aunt and uncle’s house. This boy, Harry, knows nothing about the magical world, but when he gets his enrollment letter at Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry he learns quickly. He turns out to be famous in this world for the ability to survive when the most powerful dark wizards of all time, Voldemort, tried to kill him as a baby. Harry also shows himself as a talented, brave, and humble young wizard. The book’s narrative structure is third person limited perspective, and the reader see the magical world from Harry’s point of view. Harry and his two friends, Ron and Hermione, face many different challenges, such as fighting a full-grown mountain-troll, a huge tree-headed-dog and Voldemort himself. The three friends get past each of these challenges, all though they all are young, and have not yet learned much about magic. Harry is changing throughout the first book, from a shy boy with low self-esteem and few goals for his life, to one that is popular, talented, social, brave, and able of success. Harry’s personal growth increases when he starts at Hogwarts and can make more choices on his own, and this shows what self-determination can do for one’s motivation and identity.

2.4 Motivational theories

Whether students are motivated or not affects how and if they will learn. The best learning outcome will be achieved when the students have inner motivation, according to Deci & Ryan, 2009 (Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2015). A central part of the theory on inner motivation are the self-determination theory by Deci & Ryan from the year 2000. The claim is that one of three main needs for inner motivation is autonomy or self-determination (Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2013, p. 144; Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2015, p. 66-69). This concept refers to the feeling of independence, that the student is doing something out of his or her own choice and will. Students can feel autonomy when they are being heard, given good reasons for choices that are made, allowed to make own choices, provided answers to their questions, and are allowed to take initiative (Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2015, p. 69). This means, for building the students’ inner motivation, it is important to make them feel autonomy, and you do that by

giving them opportunities to make choices themselves. What choices the students make, depends much on their purpose for reading the specific text.

2.5 Purpose for reading fantasy literature

The Danish pedagogues and authors Møhl and Schack wrote about fantasy literature's purpose for children and youths in the book *Når børn læser – litteraturoplevelse og fantasi* from 1980. According to Møhl and Schack the purpose of reading fantasy literature can be separated into four groups: entertainment, information and didactic means, therapy, and developmental means (Møhl & Schack, 1980, p. 95) (my translation). This does not mean that one should read a certain book only for one of these purposes, but a book often activates several of these. The purposes will also always vary according to the person reading it, and a book can have therapeutic impacts on someone, but not on someone else. Therapeutic purposes refer to different emotions being activated and the lessons about important life problems fantasy literature can teach children and youths (Møhl & Schack, 1980, p. 106; Slettan, 2018, p. 18).

A book's purpose or function for children and youths are not always the same as what the grown-ups or teachers intended it to be (Møhl & Schack, 1980). It is not possible to know for sure how a book will affect a young person, because everyone is different and reacts differently. Despite this, when being theoretically and simplistic, "a realistic book gives information, trivial literature is entertaining, fantasy literature is therapeutic and pedagogical books are developmental" (Møhl & Schack, 1980, p. 96).

Associate professor in English, Christian Carlsen, claims that *extensive reading* projects can give the students freedom of choice and in that way increase their motivation (Carlsen, 2020). Carlsen (2020) defines *extensive reading* as "reading for pleasure", and this type of projects involves the students in the selection of books to read. The students are forced to take full responsibility for their own reading and learning and must communicate with peers to discuss the texts. The aim of this is to get students to read more in their spare time. To find out if students read and discuss whether they find fantasy literature therapeutic or not, I collected data through a qualitative research method.

3 Method

I used a qualitative research method for the thesis. I chose to make surveys with few questions that aimed for long and full answers, and these are included in the end of the thesis as an appendix. I did the survey during my practice period in the spring of 2022. The

respondents for my study were a 9th grade class of 18 students and 2 secondary school English teachers. I made two different surveys: one for the students and one for the teachers. The question-sheet was printed out, and my fellow teacher students gave it to the students in a class when I was not present. This made the survey anonymous because I did not know their handwriting. The teachers answered the survey via mail, and this is a good method to use when you do not have a lot of time for transcribing interviews (Tjora, 2017, p. 173). According to Tjora (2017, p. 172) this is also a method that works if the informants are engaged in the topic, which these teachers were.

I chose to have only few questions in my survey. I did this because I believe that the students answer more and more fully if they see that the survey is quite short. I know that teachers are busy, and therefore I chose to have few questions for them as well. In the start of the survey, I had a paragraph that emphasized the anonymity of the survey and that it was voluntarily. I then had a paragraph where I defined fantasy literature and presented examples like *Harry Potter*, *The Lord of the Rings*, *The Hobbit*, *Narnia*, *Percy Jackson* and *Twilight*. For the students I had 5 questions that focused on which English fantasy books they have read, their favorites, and if they even enjoy the fantasy genre. The last two questions focused on the students' thoughts on their teacher choosing a fantasy book for them to read, and what they can learn from these books. The questions for the teachers focused on their thoughts on using fantasy literature in their English teaching, and in what way and with which goals they have used it. One question focused on which learning outcomes they believe that the students can achieve from reading fantasy literature. The last two questions focused on which genre of literature the teachers like to use, and if the students should be allowed to select a book themselves or not.

I chose this research method because I wanted to get deeper insight and understanding of what fantasy literature in English can do for EFL learners. The reason for using quantitative research methods is often to search for an explanation, but I wanted to use a qualitative method to seek understanding (Tjora, 2017, p. 28). I chose to have a survey with open questions that would force the respondents to write longer and more in depth, and in that way, I would be able to get some of their subjective thoughts and opinions. Surveys are often quantitative with closed questions and few answer alternatives, while interviews are more open and gives the respondents the opportunity to answer in depth (Tjora, 2017, p. 114). The method I used in my study is a hybrid of these two, with open but few questions that aimed for understanding and personal thoughts and opinions.

Another reason for choosing this research method was its practicality. I had a limited amount of time for completing the study because I was only at practice in a school for five weeks. To do in-depth interviews would have taken much time, both for preparations and for transcribing. If I were to record the interview, I would also have to apply to NSD (Norsk senter for forskningsdata), and it often takes a month to get the approval. After considering these factors, I chose to have a survey that the students and teachers could answer in writing. Another practical reason for choosing this research method is that the thesis is quite short. I do not have the space to discuss and analyze several long in-depth interviews, but that is something I can consider doing for my master's thesis.

I analyzed the research materials as qualitative findings. Open questions in surveys should be analyzed textually and not statistically and comparative like quantitative findings (Gleiss & Sæther, 2021, p. 151). When categorizing and analyzing the results I printed out the answers and used markers with different colors. I used green for positive answers, pink for negative, blue for answers that said "maybe", and yellow for anything about learning outcomes for using fantasy literature in the classroom. This color system made it easier to see how many answers were positive or negative, and what answers that were interesting to look further into.

The quality of the study should be discussed. The respondents were quite few, so it can be difficult to generalize these findings. The participants were 18 students and only 2 teachers, which makes the findings from the teachers a bit deficient. It is not possible to look at this as a representation of all 9th grades' English classes because the samples are quite few and from only one class. This is fitting to the purpose of this study: to look at subjective opinions about fantasy literature in English and different students' and teachers' experiences. It is also not possible to be sure if the respondents answered honestly, so this is a possible margin of error. The anonymity of the respondents can also be discussed, because the teachers were not able to stay anonymous when sending the e-mail. I gave them a choice of either printing the answers and handing them to me, or sending them via e-mail, and both chose the last option. Had they chosen the first option, I could have managed to keep the answers more anonymous, but they had the choice themselves. The students' answers were supposed to be completely anonymous, but since I know them, I believe I recognized some of the students because of their answers.

If reflecting on the questions in the survey, there is something that could have been formulated differently. I wrote "English fantasy books" in the survey but should have written

“fantasy books in English”. This first formulation could have made the participants only think of books originally written in English, but what I meant was all types of fantasy books in English, either translated or originally. Because of this, it may be a possibility that I got fewer answers than if I had written “fantasy books in English” and maybe emphasized that it could be written in whatever original language. It is also a possibility that the titles mentioned in the introduction of the survey could have affected the participants’ thoughts. It was meant as a help but could have made it easier for the students to just mention one of them instead of thinking about whether they have read anything else.

4 Analysis

This part of the paper will describe, assess, and analyze the findings that have been gathered through the qualitative study. Since I had two different question sheets for the students and the teachers, I will differ between these by referring to “students’ questions” and “teachers’ questions”.

A large number of the students answered that they do not read fantasy literature or books in general, but the second question showed that almost everybody has read something. This can mean that many of the students used to read, or were read to, but are not doing it in the present. From 18 participants, 12 said that they do not read fantasy literature, and 1 said that they only listen to audio books. It seems like many of the students relate the concept of fantasy literature to titles like *Harry Potter*, *Twilight*, *Narnia*, and *The Lord of the Rings*. These are some of the most popular and most read fantasy books and series amongst youths, so it is not surprising that these titles got mentioned. Student 16 answered that “my dad read all the Harry Potter books to me when I was little” (my translation). This is the same student that answered that they do not read, only listen to audio books. This can show that being read to is something the student is comfortable with, maybe because they grew up with it. Parents can in this way influence the children’s future reading skills and attitudes toward literature and must take this responsibility seriously. For example, student 16’s dad also made a choice of reading *Harry Potter*, maybe because he liked the books himself, or had heard great things about them. It seems like student 16 had not thought through if they have a favorite fantasy book, and therefore answers “so Harry Potter, sure”. This can show that the student has not felt autonomy in deciding which book to read, and that can be a reason for the lack of motivation for reading, according to the motivational theories by Deci & Ryan (Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2013).

Student 17 liked to read fantasy books because “it is English and that is better than Norwegian, but also because I can imagine being in that world” (my translation). Students 18 and 14 also mentioned that it is easy to imagine being in the fantasy world when reading this type of literature, and that it is easier to understand the story and situation better when it is in English. Nine students answered that they do not like to read fantasy literature, and two of them explained this with lack of patience. Student 12 answered that if they are going to read something, it must be “interesting and easily accessible” (my translation). Others described reading English fantasy literature as “original”, “exciting”, and “better than Norwegian” (my translation). This can mean that the students that do not like to read fantasy literature have not been presented with engaging types of literature. Maybe if they were they would feel excited and interested, according to student 6 and 7.

The students were split in their opinions about the teacher choosing a book for them to read. Some of them answered that it depends on which book the teacher assigns them, and if the book is exciting, they would like it. Student 12 said that it is not much fun that the teacher chooses, but that they would read the book because they do what they are told to do. Student 17 also focused on that it is much more fun to find the book yourself, than if someone else is saying “READ THIS” (my translation). The purpose of reading literature for these students are clearly to be entertained and have fun. The focus should therefore be on books that can enable teachers to use the engagement of the students with the books’ content to meet competency goals that aim for discussion and reflection of texts.

For some students, the feeling of not having self-determination of choosing a book themselves can lead to losing motivation for reading. Question number 4 asks what they think of the teacher choosing a book for them to read. Student 15 answered that “I do not read it because if the teacher asks me to read I do not want to read anymore” (my translation). This comes from a student who answered that they have read several fantasy books, and that they like to read. It shows that for some students, being “forced” to read a text can lead to the opposite of joy and pleasure of reading. It is also a possibility that this has something to do with the student’s relation with a specific teacher. This shows that it can be an advantage for the teacher to know the students well before giving them a book or text to read.

Many of the students responded that they could learn grammar and the English language better through reading fantasy books in English. This can show that the focus when reading English fantasy literature in class must have been to learn specific elements, rather than the pleasure of reading itself. Student 12 answered that “by reading English fantasy

books and books in general I can get better at learning new words, conjugations, sayings, formulations, and syllables” (my translation). This is a language-based and grammatical focused statement, and there were 9 students that shared this view. 4 students stated that you can learn certain lessons from reading English fantasy books, for example that “things are not always as they seem” (student 17, my translation). Maybe the student mean that one can learn to perceive people as more than what are visual for the eye, like their inner thoughts and feelings.

Both teachers that answered the survey had used fantasy literature in the English teaching. Teacher 2 had used only excerpts, not whole books, and teacher 1 answered that it is increasingly difficult to use books in the subject. This is because the class has many students that struggle with both reading and writing in English and working with literature can therefore be challenging. As mentioned, most of the students answered that they do not read books because of lack of patience and interest. When these students are supposed to read and work with literature in class, it is likely that their motivation will fall and that can make it challenging for the teachers. Teacher 1 answered that it is “important to choose books/movies that have a message or can make the students think differently” (my translation). Teacher 2 thinks it is a good idea to use fantasy literature in the teaching, because it “reflects our society, and the students can get a better understanding of how our society work through this type of literature” (my translation). It seems like teacher 2 agrees with the students that answered that working with literature depends on which books and themes that are chosen. The teacher mentions that working with fantasy literature can be a narrow interest, so one should be aware of how to present it to the students. Both teachers mean that the students can learn something from fantasy literature if it is used in a comprehensible way. One can use literature as a tool to teach the students specific content, whether English grammar or moral lessons.

On question 4 about the learning outcome of reading fantasy literature, the teachers answered quite similarly. What the students learn from fantasy literature is something you can control as a teacher, by giving them different tasks and such. The teachers answered that the students can learn about the society, work with their reading, use the literature as a start for own writing, learn grammar, and increase their vocabulary. It is also mentioned that maybe fantasy literature can make reading and talking easier for many, because this type of literature is exciting and new for many students. Some also think it is easier to talk about fantasy, while others think the opposite and want more concrete things to write about. This show that it will

always vary if the students like the literature they are working with, and that it is an advantage to know the class well before choosing a book for them to work with.

Teacher 1 answered “To choose a book that are supposed to match everyone can be a challenge. The students are at different levels language wise and not everyone likes the same books/themes. Therefore, it can be an advantage that the students get to choose themselves” (my translation). The teacher concludes with that it can be smart to let the students choose a book themselves. This aligns with several of the students’ answers. Teacher 2 answered both “yes” and “no”, and that they would present a frame or a context, like fiction or biography, to the students, depending on what they want to assess or measure. The positive sides of having the whole class read the same book is that the conversations in the class become more comprehensive. The ones who struggle with English is also able to learn some of the content through the others’ discussion and will in that way benefit from reading the same book as everyone else, according to teacher 1.

5 Discussion

The two teachers that answered my survey both said that they like to vary their working methods for literature. They claimed that the students should be allowed to choose a book to read for themselves, but also that they want to decide sometimes. This is supported by a competence aim from the Norwegian national curriculum: “read, discuss and present content from various types of texts, including self-chosen texts” (Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training, 2020). Since self-chosen texts is emphasized, it can mean that the teachers should have more focus on this because it is more normal for the teacher to decide a text. It may be possible that well-experienced teachers are used to working with certain texts, and that they forget to let the students choose for themselves and which advantages this can give. The teachers from the survey said that what method they choose to use depends on what the purpose for the reading is.

As we have seen, for Møhl and Shack (1980) the purposes for reading fantasy literature can be entertainment, information and didactic means, therapy, and developmental means. But it is hard for teachers to know which books that creates a therapeutic meaning for the students, because everyone is different and reacts individually to information. When therapy is the purpose for the reading, it can therefore be smart to let the students decide which titles to read for themselves, with some context or guidelines. It may be a possibility to give them a few options to choose between, because then you have some control, and the

students can feel autonomy. When the students are reading for entertainment, it is important to let them decide on their own. The teacher cannot fully know what the students find entertaining, and to make them feel good about reading and to make sure it is a positive experience, it can be beneficial that they choose texts themselves. Whether for didactic, or developmental means, it can be smart to give the students options to choose between. In this way, one is ensuring that the students read about a certain theme, and that they learn what they are supposed to. This is supported by teacher 2, that says “I would give them a frame, ex. fiction, biography etc. according to what I want to measure or assess” (my translation). On the other hand, teacher 1 says that it is nice to give the whole class the same book for the discussions to become richer: “The ones who struggles with English, also gets more of the content because of the class discussions” (my translation). So, teacher 1 both supports choosing books for the class, and the class choosing for themselves, and argues that teachers can vary this in the three years they are at secondary school.

When considering the theory on inner motivation and self-determination and autonomy, the advantages of students choosing working methods and books themselves are many. When students get the chance to decide on their own, they are practicing their self-determination, and this creates inner motivation (Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2015). When they influence their own learning, it gives them a feeling of ownership for the work they are doing, and that can create motivation. It may be hard to give the students the full feeling of independence that they are doing something of their own choice and will because they know that it is always the teacher who are in charge. Still, students can feel autonomy just by being heard and given good reasons for choices that are made, and therefore it can be said that building student’s autonomy is a basic goal in the classroom. It is maybe a bit harder in reality, but one can contribute by giving them the chance to make real choices in the literature teaching. The choices may be that the students can pick the working method: for example, reading an abstract and then having class discussions, reading a whole book, and then watching the film, or dramatizing a text. They can also be presented with a few titles that they can choose between.

Professor Christian Carlsen (2020) supports self-determination and claims that “allowing students to make personal choices about what to read, rather than only assigning reading from a textbook, can help to increase their motivation and engagement.” He emphasizes the varying interests and reading abilities in the years 8-13. Extensive reading is also a working method that focuses on autonomy and lets the students choose texts to read

themselves. This creates motivation, according to the theory on self-determination, and will make the students read more. When students read more English, they learn more of the language, according to many of the respondents in the survey, and therefore it is important to create motivation and joy for reading.

In the survey, student 15 responded that “I do not read it because if the teacher asks me to read I do not want to read anymore” (my translation). This is an example that shows the effects of not experiencing self-determination. If this student were to be given a book to read by the teacher, they would not read it. This is maybe because the student would feel forced, and that would “kill” the student’s motivation for reading. Since they did not make the choice of text themselves it is easy to feel distanced from the task, and to not have the motivation they need to finish it. Since a source to inner motivation is self-determination and the feeling of independence, it is likely that the student would not feel motivated enough to be able to read the text. It is also possible that this unwillingness could be explained by the relation between the student and the teacher. It may be likely that the student has a weak relation to the teacher, and to take “commands” from this person is challenging. That can be a reason for the student’s opposition against the teacher and the task given. This shows how important the student-teacher relations are.

Working with fantasy literature in English can be both motivating and challenging. For some students, being allowed to work with fantasy literature in English is a motivation itself. A lot of the students in the survey answered that they like to read these types of books, and that it is exciting and original. Some also said that reading English is better than Norwegian. These findings show that the fact that the text is in English can be motivating for some students. The reason for this can be that when reading in English, the students feel a part of something bigger, a global society. It can also be motivating that increasing one’s competence in English creates opportunities for communication with people from all around the world. When the students read English, they will learn the language better and in that way be able to speak or write to people across borders and continents, and this can be exciting.

According to student 17, reading fantasy literature can be fun if they get to choose the books themselves. For some students that do not like to read, this genre can be challenging. Student 2 said that they do not have the patience to read, student 5 does not like it because it is fantasy, and others do not like to read books in English. This shows that although the students have autonomy in choosing working methods and texts, it does not mean that they will like the genre. It may be that they do not like to read, and for these students, audio books may be a

good choice. Student 16 said that they do not read much but listens to audio books. The teachers also agree on the varying interest in fantasy literature: “Some students find it easier to write when it is about fantasy, but some thinks the opposite and would rather have more concrete things to write about” (my translation). This shows that it will always be challenges when it comes to working with fantasy literature in the classroom, and that one must assess the purpose of the reading before choosing a method and creating a plan.

Many of the respondents in the survey believed that reading fantasy literature in English could contribute to improving one’s skills in the language. This means that their focus is on the informational and didactic and developmental purpose of reading this genre. Examples of skills that they claimed can be improved are grammar, knowledge about vocabulary, syllables, reading in general, and conjugations. According to teacher 2, one will achieve these learning outcomes when using other types of literature as well. What especially fantasy literature can do is “engage more students because this type of literature is exciting and new for many, and one can hope that they get the urge to read more” (my translation). This teacher’s opinion correlates with the theory on fantasy literature, which claims that it is fascinating, involving, and relatable (Slettan, 2018; Williams, 2021).

Many of the students in the survey connect fantasy literature to the book series *Harry Potter* written by J. K. Rowling. The reason for that may be the popularity of the novels and the films all over the world. The books about the orphan boy have almost become a religion for children, youths, and adults alike. In *Harry Potter and the Philosopher’s Stone* the reader views the 11-year-old Harry’s thoughts and feelings. The third-person narrative choice makes it easy for children and youths in the same age to relate to the main character, as they may be struggling with the same in their own lives. It is not likely that they must avoid being killed by a powerful dark wizard as Harry must, but it may be possible that they have difficult relations to family or peers. To these persons, reading about Harry and his challenging childhood may be of help. If that is the case, one can say that the novel has therapeutic purposes. That means that the text activates emotions in the reader and that it can help them through difficult life situations. Reading these types of novels can also, according to Williams (2021), create empathy for others.

When reading about Harry Potter’s childhood in the series’ first book the reader will most likely develop empathy for the boy. Harry has not had the easiest childhood, and he is constantly being bullied by his family and peers at school. The limited narrative perspective gives an insight to Harry’s feelings and thoughts around his life situation. Student 17 stated

that it is easy to imagine being in the imaginative world when reading fantasy literature. This means that *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone* is an example of how fantasy encourages students to imagine being in another world and being another person through reading Harry's thoughts and feelings. This can help them develop empathy for others that they can bring into their own, real lives, according to Williams (2021). This also supports the claim that this novel may have a therapeutic effect on some students.

Further, the first book about Harry Potter can teach the students about ethical and existential challenges. This is, according to Slettan (2018), typical for novels with heroic main characters. Harry is the hero in the books, but there are also others that the reader can learn from. For example, one passage from the novel that teachers might focus on is the scene where Neville Longbottom tries to stop Harry, Ron, and Hermione from going to the forbidden corridor on the 3rd floor in their school Hogwarts. Neville is portrayed as clumsy and coward and seems like someone who would try to avoid conflicts and speaking his opinion. This is proven wrong when he catches his three friends on their way out to do something "illegal":

'You can't go out,' said Neville, 'you'll be caught again. Gryffindor will be in even more trouble.'

'You don't understand,' said Harry, 'this is important.'

But Neville was clearly steeling himself to do something desperate.

'I won't let you do it,' he said, hurrying to stand in front of the portrait hole. 'I'll – I'll fight you!'

'Neville,' Ron exploded, 'get away from that hole and don't be an idiot-'

'Don't you call me an idiot!' said Neville. 'I don't think you should be breaking any more rules! And you were the one who told me to stand up to people!'

'Yes, but not to *us*,' said Ron in exasperation. 'Neville, you don't know what you're doing.'

He took a step forward and Neville dropped Trevor the toad, who leapt out of sight.

'Go on then, try and hit me!' said Neville, raising his fists. 'I'm ready!' (Rowling, 2015, pp. 292-293)

The scene ends with Hermione casting a "petrifying spell" on Neville, but later he gets rewarded by the Headmaster Dumbledore for his bravery. Neville stood up against three persons he adores and admires, for something he believed in. He was facing an ethical dilemma: go against his friends, or what he thinks is right. He chose to protect his schoolhouse, Gryffindor, with the risk of losing three friends. It is never easy to go against one's closest companions, and this can show the young readers that you should do what you

believe in, regardless of what others might think of it. It also shows that if you follow your instincts, you can be rewarded, as Neville was by the highly respected Headmaster of Hogwarts. In addition to this, the passage highlights the fact that everyone and all types of personalities should be, and are, valued in the society. It may be something like this teacher 2 meant when noting how fantasy literature can teach the students about how the society works.

Teacher 2 claimed that fantasy literature mirrors our society and that students can learn about how it works through reading this type of novels. This aligns with Slettan (2018) who stated that a lot of fantasy literature is set to present time. Although it is typically set to a time that students are familiar with, it is also often set to a different world than ours. It is fiction, so it experiences with the boundaries between our reality and worlds otherwise. Some fantasy novels show a world that is in ruin, and this can portray how the world can become if for example pollution are not decreased. Although this is not the reality now, it can show the young reader a possible outcome for the world and can in that way teach them about the society and the world.

There may be some challenges in including J. K. Rowling's works in the EFL classroom, as the author has expressed controversial statements on Twitter about gender and the trans community. She has shown transphobic opinions and support towards a transgender critical scientist and has received a lot of critique from fans and others (Bjørntvedt, 2019). It would be interesting and essential to discuss this case in class when using her texts. A discussion on whether the author's opinions affect the text, or if it is possible to look at the two separated can be both challenging and interesting for students to think about. This is something one should consider before including her texts in class, and this discussion can link to additional learning outcomes. In fact, these sorts of questions in the classroom mirror the broader society in that there are complex debates over the meaning of authorship with real-world consequences. Perhaps the goal of this conversation might be that people can respect each other despite of differences and disagreements.

6 Conclusion

As discussed in this thesis, integrating fantasy literature in the EFL classroom can have a lot of motivational, therapeutical, ethical, and empathic advantages. This type of genre can also be challenging for the students who struggle with reading. For teachers, it is therefore important to build good relations with the students, and in that way know what type of topics and themes they find interesting and with what methods they learn best. To get students to

engage with reading on their own is an important mission for teachers, because it is a means to bring forward information about the society and history, but also because of the entertaining part of reading as a practice. Being a part of a society with other people forces one to be empathic and to know how to navigate ethical dilemmas. Reading fantasy literature in English can teach youths this, and at the same time help them to practice their English. English is a lingua franca in today's world and having the ability to speak this language gives many opportunities of communication with others, from all over the world.

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8 Appendix

8.1 Survey for students

Spørreskjema – fantasilitteratur i engelskundervisningen

Denne spørreundersøkelsen er frivillig og anonym, og du kan velge å trekke deg helt frem til du har levert. Dette er ikke en vurdering, og innhold har derfor mer å si enn rettskriving.

Fantasilitteratur er en type fortellinger som ber leserne godta det fantastiske, utrolige og umulige. De bryter ofte med virkeligheten gjennom å bruke magi, møter med magiske vesener eller reiser til en annen verden/virkelighet. Eksempler på fantasilitteratur er bøkene om Harry Potter, Ringenes Herre, Hobbiten, Narnia, Percy Jackson, og Twilight.

1. Leser du fantasibøker?
2. Hvilke engelske fantasibøker har du lest? Hvilken er din favoritt?
3. Hva synes du om å lese engelske fantasibøker? Hvorfor liker du det/liker det ikke?
4. Hvis læreren din gir deg en engelsk fantasibok du skal lese, hva synes du om det? Er det spennende?
5. Hva tror du du kan lære av å lese engelske fantasibøker? Hvorfor?

8.2 Survey for teachers

Spørreskjema lærere – fantasilitteratur i engelskundervisningen

Denne spørreundersøkelsen er frivillig og anonym, og du kan velge å trekke deg helt frem til du har levert.

Fantasilitteratur er en type fortellinger som ber leserne godta det fantastiske, utrolige og umulige. De bryter ofte med virkeligheten gjennom å bruke magi, møter med magiske vesener eller reiser til en annen verden/virkelighet. Eksempler på fantasi-litteratur er bøkene om Harry Potter, Ringenes Herre, Hobbiten, Narnia, Percy Jackson, og Twilight.

1. Har du brukt fantasisjangeren i engelskundervisningen?
2. Hvis ja, på hvilken måte og med hvilket mål brukte du sjangeren? For eksempel analyse av bok/film eller lignende.
3. Hva er dine tanker om å bruke engelske fantasibøker i undervisningen? Hva synes du om det?
4. Hvilket læringsutbytte kan elevene ha av å lese engelske fantasibøker?
5. Hvilken sjanger liker du best å bruke i litteraturundervisning? Hvorfor?
6. Burde elevene få velge bok selv, eller vil du som lærer tildele?