
Research Article

Teaching literature in foreign language French in Scandinavia 1990-2026: A research overview

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Abstract: In this article, a corpus of 28 academic works from the Scandinavian countries are analysed thematically and divided into three categories: 1) the frameworks of foreign language teaching, 2) the contents of literature teaching, and 3) the methods and motives of literature teaching within the French subject. The analysis shows that studies of curricula and textbooks – frameworks of teaching – are more frequent than studies of teaching practices, and that the educational setting of universities is more often examined than that of secondary school. As many scholars evoke the lack of knowledge in first-term students at universities, it seems urgent to explore literature within modern language teaching in secondary schools. The contents of teaching section addresses articles on literature selection, the question of a literary canon, and literature linked to motivation. The section on methods and motives of teaching literature in French as a foreign language points towards a combination of text analysis, well rooted in the French tradition, and experience- or affect based reading, frequent in Scandinavian classrooms. The concluding section points out possible lines of future research in the field.

Keywords: literature selection and the canon, teaching methods, literary studies and motivation, literature didactics, French as a foreign language, FLE

1 Introduction

The study of foreign languages includes not only grammar, vocabulary and phonetics, but also intercultural competences. Knowledge of cultural phenomena is crucial to intercultural communication and can for instance be achieved with the help of literature written in the target language. Focusing on the teaching of literature within the French subject in the Scandinavian countries, this article provides an overview of a research topic that has so far received little attention.

The contexts and conditions of foreign language teaching, particularly of French, are different in the three Scandinavian countries discussed in this article: Sweden, Denmark, and Norway. Within a Swedish context, the role and function of literary texts in modern language teaching and learning have varied over time. Early research on this topic appears in the 1990's (see Table 1), followed by an increase of studies in didactics in the early 2000's, which can be explained by the new teacher education system launched in 2009 which “attaches great importance to the significance of subject didactics”, as Jörgen Tholin (2015) writes in his

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overview of foreign language learning dissertations from Sweden 2000-2009. Furthermore, there is a shift towards integrating literature in the modern language programs, as mandated by the official curricula for secondary school. Turning away from the methodological approach where literary texts within foreign language teaching serve mainly as a support for language learning, the Swedish National Agency for Education [Skolverket] includes literary texts, songs, poems, and other types of fiction written in the target language as course content in and of itself.

In Denmark, foreign languages as an independent academic discipline is under strong pressure, Lisbeth Verstraete-Hansen and Mette Skovgaard Andersen (2014) state as a conclusion to their analysis of stakeholders' recommendations behind the policies of foreign language education. Their analyses show that it is primarily political-administrative actors who participate in agenda-setting for the development of education in Denmark, and that these actors largely equate the needs of society with the recognized needs of the labour market and therefore equate quality with labour market relevance. According to the two scholars, such a utility-focused view of education can have major consequences for the development of the language disciplines.

Zooming in on language teaching and the potential of plurilingualism, Natascha Drachmann, Åsta Haukås and Adrian Lundberg (2023) present a comparative analysis of language subject curricula in the Scandinavian countries, noting some important differences between Norway, Denmark and Sweden when it comes to foreign language education and plurilingualism in secondary schools. While language subjects in Denmark and Norway are considered as "springboard[s] from one language (subject) to the next: Danish/Norwegian creates transitions to English, and Danish/Norwegian and English creates transitions to German/the foreign language" (p. 334), such links between languages of schooling are absent in the Swedish curriculum for the language subjects. This comparative analysis does not go into the details of literature teaching within the different third-language subjects, and Drachmann *et al.* (2023) stress the fact that curricula objectives and actual teaching practices can of course differ to varying degrees. However, the possibility of a lower degree of crosslinguistic awareness in Swedish students would arguably entail poorer literature reading skills.

Taking a wider, European Union perspective, Ulrika Tornberg (2013) describes education policies as walking the tightrope between utility – foreign language skills serving the EU inner labour market – and a democratic peace-project focusing intercultural understanding and personal growth. Against the backdrop of these statements, it seems important to provide an overview of the research on the role and function of literature in the Scandinavian countries' classrooms of French as a foreign language¹, which is what this article proposes.

The aim of this article is thus to present a thematically organized inventory of different directions in the previous research written in English, French and Swedish on the teaching of literature in the French as a foreign language classroom in the Scandinavian countries.

The study is organized around and will provide answers to the following research questions: 1) What are the frameworks of teaching addressed in the selected corpus? 2) How is the content of literature teaching in French articulated? 3) What methods of teaching are foregrounded? 4) How is the study of literature motivated?

¹ For the purposes of this article, we distinguish between "foreign language learning and second language acquisition. The former is used to refer to language learning in contexts in which the language is not normally spoken outside the classroom [...]. SLA [Second Language Acquisition] is used [...] to refer to those contexts in which the language is used outside the classroom" (Benati & VanPatten 2010, p. 1).

2 Material and method

The scholarly work presented in this overview has been found through systematic database searches in Umeå University Library (UMUB) Discovery Service Primo. A Discovery Service includes the content, paid and free databases, repositories, etc., being activated by the library. In the case of UMUB important paid databases like Web of Science, Scopus, Academic Search Elite and free databases like Swedish repository search engine SwePub, medical database Pubmed are activated in Primo.² Three main search strings have been used, in French, Swedish, and English, respectively:

(didactique OR enseignement OR pédagogie) AND (literature OR littérature) AND fran*
(didaktik OR undervisning OR pedagogik) AND litteratur AND fran*
(didactics OR teaching OR pedagogy) AND literature AND french

Additionally, we perused the list of didactic research established by the Swedish network for teaching and learning of literature (LDN), to find books, book chapters, and articles of relevance to our study. The LDN list is based on the data base SwePub and the truncated key word “litteraturdidakt*” which will return publications tagged with the Swedish key word “litteraturdidaktik” [literature didactics] in some form, which likely means publications in or from Sweden. Furthermore, we consulted the bibliographies of the selected articles to find further works of relevance, which might be described as a non-systematic yet pertinent search. No specific time frame restricted the searches. The oldest publication to appear in our search results is from 1990 and the most recent is forthcoming in 2026. The use of other keywords related to research discourses before 1990 might have resulted in a wider scope of studies. As our aim was to paint a picture of the current state of affairs, we opted for the searches described above.

From the rather large number of hits in the mentioned databases, we selected publications corresponding to the following criteria: firstly, the topic of the studies is teaching literature in French as a foreign language in a Nordic country. This includes one article discussing the teaching of Romance languages including French, and excludes studies on French as a second language, i.e. on second-language acquisition in a mainly French-speaking context. In early and preliminary searches, the keyword ‘FLE’ (Français Langue Étrangère) returned a vast number of works on the study of literature in the French subject in precisely such French-speaking contexts, and we chose to narrow down the search. Secondly, we selected scholarly works written in French, English or Swedish, the languages in which we read academic texts. Thirdly, the list of works contains scholarly publications including conference proceedings (not necessarily peer reviewed), doctoral dissertations, and reports from a national evaluation of language studies in higher education in Sweden.³ One master’s thesis (Lislerud 2015) was also selected for our investigation, as it is one of few practice-based studies of literature teaching in a secondary school setting (13–15-year-old students). No studies from Finland, Iceland or the Faroe Islands were found, which precluded our initial intention of a survey of works from the Nordic countries. Most of the material found addresses Swedish educational contexts, and some the Norwegian and Danish settings. Finally, a couple of comparative studies of literature

2 The authors wish to express their heartfelt thanks to librarian Lars Iselid at Umeå University Library for valuable help with databases and search strings.

3 Reports are not scholarly works, it can be argued. However, the higher education evaluations conducted by professor Enkvist (1991) are all based on research methods such as observations, interviews, questionnaires, and provide a valuable background to language and literature teaching of today.

teaching in France and in Sweden appeared to be tightly linked to methodological discussions in the research material collected and have therefore been included in the overview (Englund, 1997; Johansson, 2015). A total of 28 articles, anthology chapters, monographs and official (government) reports have thus been collected – a not so large number of publications in a 36-year period. These works are listed in the table below and under the separate heading “primary sources” in the works cited section.

This corpus of academic work has been analysed thematically and divided into the following three categories: 1) the frameworks of foreign language teaching, 2) the contents of literature teaching, and 3) the methods and motives of literature teaching within the French subject. Studies addressing the frameworks of teaching analyse educational structures, curricula, or course literature lists. There are of course overlapping areas between these studies and those regrouped in the subsequent section on the contents of teaching, in which we discuss articles on literature selection, the question of a literary canon, and literature studies linked to motivation. Further, the thematic analysis showed a keen interest among scholars for questions of methods and motives of teaching literature in French as a foreign language; the “how?” and the “why?” of this particular brand of teaching, in other words. As those two didactic questions are tightly linked in the studied works, we choose to regroup them under one heading.

The following table lists the works analysed for this article, in alphabetical order of their authors. In order to clearly show which educational forms and countries are studied in the mentioned works, these are given separate columns. The publication years sketch an outline of the increase of didactic studies in the field of French literature over time. The term ‘category’ of the last column refers to the three thematical categories presented above which in turn refer to the headings of this article (in the form of key words).

Table 1

The academic works studied in this article

Primary source (full references in works cited)	Year	Country of study	Secondary or Higher Education	Category
Aronsson. La fanfiction et le FLE: une manière d'enrichir l'enseignement de la littérature à l'Université?	2019	Sweden	University	Frameworks
Aronsson. La littérature francophone dans les manuels suédois de FLE.	2019	Sweden	Secondary	Frameworks
Aronsson. Dags att tänka på refrängen? Franskspråkig sånglyrik inom nätbaserad litteraturundervisning i franska.	2020	Sweden	University	Contents
Aronsson. Musiklyrik i läroböcker i franska för den svenska skolan.	2021	Sweden	Secondary	Frameworks
Cedergren. Littérature française, littérature francophone ?	2015	Sweden	University	Contents
Cedergren & Lindberg. Vers un renouvellement du canon de la littérature francophone.	2015	Sweden	University	Contents
Christensen & Lindschouw. Motivation et enseignement de la littérature en français langue étrangère dans les lycées danois.	2019	Denmark	Secondary	Contents
Eckart & Leblanc. Fransk litteratur på distans.	2018	Sweden	University	Frameworks
Englund. Tecken, struktur – och skolkunskap?	1990	Sweden	Secondary	Contents
Englund. Skolans tal om litteratur	1997	Sweden, France	Secondary	Methods and motives
Enkvist. Vad är kvalitet i språkundervisning på universitetet?	1991	Sweden	University	Frameworks

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Enkvist. Sambandet mellan gymnasieskolan och högskolan när det gäller språkstudier.	1991	Sweden	University	Frameworks
Enkvist. Kvalitet i språkutbildning vid universitet.	1991	Sweden	University	Frameworks
Enkvist. Experimentkurs i franska 20 poäng med videokonferens.	1995	Sweden	University	Frameworks
Husung & Jeannin. La littérature au carrefour des compétences culturelles.	2016	Sweden France	Secondary	Methods and motives
Johansson. Läsa, förstå, analysera: En komparativ studie om svenska och franska gymnasieelevers reception av en narrativ text.	2015	Sweden France	Secondary	Methods and motives
Lindberg, <i>et al.</i> Vilken litteratur (o)synliggörs inom romanska språk i svensk högre utbildning och forskning?	2020	Sweden	University	Frameworks
Lislerud. La littérature en didactique du français langue étrangère.	2015	Norway	Secondary	Contents
Lutas. Teori i litteraturundervisning på gymnasiet – tre klassrumsexempel.	2014	Sweden	Secondary	Methods and motives
Lutas. Teaching French Literature Online	2023	Sweden	University	Frameworks
Lutas. Adaptation in Teaching Literature	2024	Sweden	University	Methods and motives
Lutas. Teaching Francophonie in Classes of French as Foreign Language in Sweden.	2025	Sweden	University	Contents
Möller. Litteraturstudiet inom språkämnen på universitetet.	2002	Sweden	University	Methods and motives
Mörte Alling. Känslors plats i undervisningen om skönlitteratur: exempel från textkurser inom ämnet franska.	2016	Sweden	University	Methods and motives
Mörte Alling. Why are there no tears in the university corridors? The role of emotion and personal response in literature classes.	Forth - coming 2026	Sweden	University	Methods and motives
Olsbu. The future of literary texts in the L3 classroom.	2014	Norway	Secondary	Contents
Schultz Ravneberg & Verstraete-Hansen. Rencontrer la littérature de langue française en première année à l'université danoise.	2019	Denmark	University	Frameworks
Sundberg, A.-K. Le poids de la tradition.	2009	Sweden	Secondary	Methods and motives

Before addressing the three categories of studies, it is useful to highlight an overarching divide in the research on teaching practices that can be observed in the table above, namely the choice of educational setting to study. There is a slightly larger number of studies of teaching practices within higher education than in secondary school, and studies on the first years of modern languages in secondary school (12–14-year-olds) are few. Regarding methodology, there is a preference for shared practice and text analyses of curricula or textbooks which is why such frameworks of teaching will be addressed first.

3 Frameworks of foreign language teaching

A topic that returns in the following articles on French in higher education is the knowledge gap between secondary school and university courses, and possible ways to bridge that gap through teaching methods or course content.

Nils Schultz Ravneberg and Lisbeth Verstraete-Hansen (2019) conduct a mixed-methods analysis of the Danish baccalaureate requirements in French and the learning outcomes expected in courses at university, combined with a written proficiency test of first-year French

students at the University of Copenhagen. They conclude that their students' language proficiency is not at a level that permits them to fully comprehend literary texts in French. The official documents analysed by the two scholars reveal that there is a considerable gap between the requirements in French at school level and the learning goals at university. Already at a formal level it is thus clear that students will need support to attain the goals of university courses. One type of scaffolding proposed by the authors is for university courses to form more of a program with a clear progression both regarding language competence goals and literature reading and analysis, rather than proposing parallel yet separate courses (grammar, language proficiency, literature, etc.). Within such an integrated program, the study of literature in French should keep its focus on literary analysis and interpretation.

A predecessor to the Danish study was conducted in Sweden nearly 30 years earlier, in a slightly different educational setting. The Swedish Higher Education Authority [Universitets- och högskoleämbetet] launched a three-year evaluation (1989-1991) of higher education in foreign languages; mainly English, but also French. The results are presented in three reports authored by Inger Enkvist who notes (1991:2) a knowledge gap between secondary school and university, pertaining to the content and quality of the language education in school as well as to organisational issues in language studies and teacher training. Interestingly, the interviewed students wish for more challenges, such as reading an entire book in French, while Enkvist writes that first-term students lack the language comprehension skills to read literary texts. Enkvist's findings on the enthusiasm for literary texts contrast with the results of PISA 2022 in Scandinavia, which indicate that reading skills and reading frequency have decreased.

As the knowledge gap continues to be an issue for higher education of French, the results and suggestions provided by both the Swedish and the Danish studies may prove useful for future French teaching in the Scandinavian countries. Relatable texts, and a more consistent, integrated use of literature in French studies are recommended by Enkvist as well as by Schultz Ravneberg and Verstraete-Hansen. Both studies stress the importance of a clear and carefully considered progression of literature (and language) teaching, adding new layers of literature reading and analysis.

3.1 Online teaching

Digitalization and online courses will, most likely, continue to be highly relevant teaching methods and formats. Four studies in our material explore the form and the medium of online teaching: Inger Enkvist (1995), Marten Eckart and André Leblanc (2018), Mattias Aronsson (2019a) and Liviu Lutas (2023). While Enkvist discusses an experimental French course using videoconferencing pre-internet, Eckart and Leblanc examine what is by now an established course format: online courses using internet-based learning platforms and videoconference tools. Their findings suggest that student activity is a requisite for motivation, and thus that fostering group dynamics and establishing connections between teachers and students are productive strategies for online teaching. Moreover, they argue, students must take greater responsibility and be more disciplined and organized than in campus-based studies.

In "Fan Fiction and FFL" [La fanfiction et le FLE], Aronsson (2019a) not only investigates the affordances of a text type not commonly used in literature courses, fan fiction,⁴ but also the forms of teaching and learning. Aronsson's shared practice study explains a teaching experiment in an online course of French where the teacher implemented a system of peer-

⁴ Fan fictions are texts written by amateurs about a preexisting fictional universe (e.g. Twilight, Harry Potter, Pride and Prejudice) and published on internet archives for general or specific fanfic.

based, rather informal learning resembling that which characterizes fanfiction communities where writers and readers collaborate. Among the challenges with this method, Aronsson notes that not all university students of today are digital natives, and that the informal, group-based method somewhat collides with the grading practice of individual performances. Scaffolding is thus necessary, even regarding the medium itself.

Similar insights arise from the 1995 French course given in collaboration between Mid Sweden University and Université d'Orléans, described by Enkvist (1995). The course was based on student-driven teaching and learning and involved professors in Orléans whose first language was French. An important aspect of the course was its egalitarian approach: both teachers and students were to have equally sized images on the screen, etc. The student-driven teaching and the communicative approach are two aspects that remain in focus when it comes to online teaching while the egalitarian aspects of Enkvist's experimental course seem to have faded into the background. At the other end of the timeline, Lutas (2023) addresses the didactic issues of the online courses that became the norm in higher education during the Covid-19 pandemic. The vastly increased number of students created a need for adapted instruction and poses a challenge to the idea of student-driven teaching.

Student activity as a motor for motivation seems relevant in online teaching, as the studies above suggest. Other methods to spark engagement with the studied literature are presented by studies examining motivation and literature selection.

3.2 Paratexts of teaching

Paratexts are usually understood as the textual thresholds leading into a literary work. In a teaching and learning context, such paratexts surrounding or leading into the actual teaching in classrooms or online platforms are for example the curricula, textbooks, and the indicated course literature. While textbooks and course literature constitute parts of the actual teaching, they are at the same time artefacts detached from it, and can be studied separately, without considering the teaching and learning processes of which they can be part. As such studies are quite common, we choose to categorize both textbooks and literature lists as paratexts of teaching. In this section, we discuss studies that examine the selection of literary texts, possible text forms, and the concept of 'text' itself.

Literature teaching is firmly anchored within the language subjects due to its long-standing tradition, Enkvist (1991:3) writes in her final report charting foreign language teaching in higher education in Sweden. Three decades later, the role of literature within modern language studies is less self-evident, according to Schultz Ravneberg and Verstraete-Hansen (2019). Their study was initiated by similar issues as the national evaluation in Sweden: a drop in student numbers in language and culture courses, and a knowledge gap seen in students of modern languages. Against this backdrop, they explain, teaching literature is particularly challenging. Not only do the students lack the necessary language comprehension to read literary texts, but "in a more global manner, the social role of literature has changed with the democratization of access to universities, a strengthened utilitarian view of teaching, and the digitalization of cultural practices" (p. 110).⁵ Referring to the influential scholar Antoine Compagnon, they further highlight how literary texts in school teaching have been overshadowed by non-fiction texts and what Compagnon terms the "digital acceleration" [l'accélération numérique] (*ibid.*) which splits up people's spare time and diminishes the role of literature in their lives.

⁵ All translations are made by the authors of this article.

Through an analysis of three types of data, Schultz Ravneberg and Verstraete-Hansen (2019) suggest appropriate ways of teaching literature to first semester students of the French Language and Culture program at the University of Copenhagen: the curricula for French studies from secondary school and university, data from student surveys, and finally from essays written in French by the same students (topic: What do I read?). The two scholars conclude that the university program is characterized by a “compartmentalization of disciplines” [un cloisonnement disciplinaire] (p. 119) and would benefit from an integration of different epistemologies, most notably of literary studies and language didactics. Such integrated methods are in line with what the student essays suggest would be a motivating approach. The two researchers emphasize that students are likely to be motivated by reading texts they can relate to in some way. They argue that higher education courses should follow a progression where students gradually encounter new *strata* of literary analysis. Using a combination of methods to analyse the paratexts of teaching alongside the qualitative analysis of student essays, Schultz Ravneberg and Verstraete-Hansen thus address both the content and the structure of the program in question.

Analyses of curricula and course literature lists address the issue of inclusion and exclusion of texts from the contents of teaching. Mickaëlle Cedergren (2015) demonstrates how authors from France dominate the reading lists of first-term French at Stockholm University between 1995 and 2010; very few authors from outside of hexagonal France make the list. Further, there is a clear preference for contemporary texts representing a rather eclectic mix of genres and literary movements. Cedergren and Ylva Lindberg (2015) discuss whether a literary canon can be discerned within French courses at Swedish universities. The question is further developed in an analysis of reading lists within Romance languages in Swedish higher education and research, “What literature is (in)visible in Romance languages in Swedish higher education and research?” [Vilken litteratur (o)synliggörs inom romanska språk i svensk högre utbildning och forskning?] (Lindberg *et al.*, 2020). In this study, the authors map out the topics chosen by students of literature for their bachelor’s thesis in French, Italian, Spanish, and Portuguese between 2000 and 2016, and discuss in what way the topics represent a confirmation of tradition or rather a free choice made by the students. Results show that dead, white, European, male writers are at the top of the list for French and Italian, whereas Spanish and Portuguese students to a larger extent tend to choose writers, regardless of gender, from Latin America and Africa, and that twentieth century prose dominates. An implicit presupposition in the study by Lindberg *et al.* (2020) is that students’ choice of topic is influenced by the choice of texts taught in the respective courses, a point that is however not explicitly addressed or problematized. The main result of the study, besides examples of data collection methods, is a description of certain patterns uncovered in the analysed material, which can form a basis for change in higher education Romance language courses.

Textbooks are the object of study in other works, focusing on the literary texts that are included or omitted. Aronsson analyses French textbooks for Swedish schools in two studies: one (2019b) studying which types of authentic texts in French are included, the other (2021) focusing on song lyrics. Aronsson (2019b) finds that so-called low-brow texts are included in textbooks, in line with a Swedish teaching tradition, and that the texts originate from metropolitan France rather than from other French-speaking countries, which Aronsson describes as a reflection of the asymmetrical power dynamics between metropolitan France and the former colonies. In “Song lyrics in French textbooks for Swedish schools” [Musiklyrik i läroböcker i franska för den svenska skolan] (2021), Aronsson discusses the selection of song lyrics intended for the French classroom. The Swedish curriculum specifically mentions songs as an object of study for students of French as a foreign language, which helps explain their

presence in many textbooks. Analysing the presence or absence of certain kinds of song lyrics as markers of a process of canonization of literature, Aronsson finds that the choices of song lyrics seem to be made in accordance with the *status quo*, i.e. that the selection respects male gender dominance, geographical concentration on metropolitan France and a preference for already canonized texts from earlier times. In line with previous investigations into the representation of France and other French-speaking regions in Swedish textbooks of French, Aronsson finds that these images reflect the power relations between the global North and the global South. Aronsson further notes that most scholars insist on music as a support to help students improve their language skills or their cultural knowledge while the aesthetic dimension of songs is largely overlooked.

4 The contents of literature teaching

The question of which literary texts should be used in the French as a Foreign Language classroom has proven to be central to the research available for this survey, especially in connection to student motivation.

The first hurdle to tackle might be the definition of what constitutes a text in relation to curricula and how that influences teachers' choices of material as well as methods. Gry Lislerud (2015) examines "Literature in the didactics of French as a foreign language - A study of the use of literary texts in secondary education in Norway" [La littérature en didactique du français langue étrangère - Une étude sur l'usage des textes littéraires dans l'enseignement secondaire en Norvège] for her master's thesis in French. Lislerud shows that teachers' choice of texts as well as their teaching approaches influences language teaching more than the curricula. Her surveys among secondary school French teachers illustrate how teaching practices vary significantly among the interviewed teachers. Notably, teachers have different interpretations of the concept 'text' as it is used in the curriculum documents, and they use textbooks to varying degrees. Lislerud suggests a discussion and a common definition of the term 'text' for teaching purposes in a Norwegian context, proposing 'literary text', a term that would need to be defined more closely. Lislerud's practice-oriented study, based on French teachers' statements, thus reveals a need for both discussions and definitions of pivotal concepts for literature teaching.

As a point of comparison, the 2025 Swedish curricula for upper secondary school (Lgy25), while consistently based on a communicative language-learning method, explicitly includes literary texts and fiction – written, spoken or visual – in the programs for modern languages. However, studies of textbooks for Swedish students point to a lack of authentic literary texts in French. There seems to be a need for common definitions of key concepts like 'text' and 'literature', and a harmonisation between curriculum documents and textbooks.

4.1 The reading of literature and motivation

Within language studies, the role of literature can be linked to student motivation. According to Mikkel Gleerup Christensen and Jan Juhl Lindschouw, there are two different "dispositions" that have a considerable impact on students' motivation for language learning, "the integrative and instrumental orientations" ["les motivations intégrative et instrumentale"] (2019, p.123). Instrumental motivation implies that the student can link every learning outcome to a particular skill needed in order to accomplish a specific task. Integrative motivation deals with the student's wish to be integrated in the language and culture studied and given that there are several ways of being integrated and that it can be a gradual process, the scope of the learning

is less dependent on a specific skill. Their survey among Danish university students of French shows that students with an integrative motivation are more positive towards the study of literature compared to students whose motivation is more instrumental. This was especially true if the literary texts studied were written by what French studies scholars commonly refer to as ‘francophone’ writers, i.e. authors from outside of France. The instrumentally motivated students had a mono-cultural preference, favouring French culture from France. This tendency was less pronounced in students with an integrative motivation. In addition, the analysis revealed that students who were strongly motivated to study literature also had a high level of intercultural and linguistic reflection and that they saw the teaching of cultural aspects as a resource in developing communicative competence.

The results of Christensen and Lindschouw (2019) can be tied to an attitude among instrumentally motivated students for whom ‘typically French’ literature functions as a motivating factor, as French literature from France is considered as an expression of French culture unlike francophone literature from outside of the country. Literature is thus seen as an important cultural artefact: by reading literary texts you gain valuable knowledge about the target culture. These students thus participate in a movement towards homogenizing the selection of texts to represent what is perceived as typically French.

This aspect is accentuated also in Enkvist’s (1995) report of the experimental French course online: the teachers being native speakers is put forward as a crucial element of the course’s quality. Thus, Enkvist adheres to a similar discourse as that of the instrumentally motivated students in Christensen and Lindschouw’s study, stating that first-language speakers are better equipped for teaching their first language, thereby strengthening the idea that everything French is valued. Similar discussions are seen in research on literature selection, as presented below.

4.2 The literary canon and different text types

As previously mentioned, the selection of literary texts in higher education in Sweden seems to stem from a fairly fixed list, dominated by French, white, male authors (Cedergren 2015, Lindberg *et al.* 2020). However, some research shows a tendency towards more inclusive choices (e.g. Husung & Jeannin 2016). The discussion regards both French texts from France versus francophone texts from outside of France (Aronsson 2019b), and literary classics versus popular culture texts. Boel Englund (1990) highlights processes of exclusion and inclusion that rely on categorisations underpinning ways of thinking as well as teaching and learning in schools. She distinguishes hierarchies of cultural or pedagogical value such as the divide between high-brow literature and low-brow fiction and argues that popular culture texts may be worthy of study.

In her article “The future of literary texts in the L3 classroom” (2014), Inger Olsbu brings both philosophical and pedagogical aspects to the discussion. She explains that a major didactic and epistemic reason for the use of literary texts in the intercultural teaching approach is the belief that literature enables us to see the world from a perspective different from our own. Following that line of reasoning, “postcolonial and minority literature” holds a particular value as it “often depicts intercultural encounters” (p. 382). Lutas (2025) puts such ideas to the test in a classroom setting in which Swedish learners are confronted with French literature from outside of France: Québec, the French West Indies and French-speaking Africa. Such texts are perceived as difficult and therefore rarely used in the classroom, according to Lutas. He suggests an intermedial approach to these texts in order to teach cultural diversity through examples from Francophone cultures outside Europe. Lutas’ choice of literary texts aligns with Olsbu who argues that “it is time to adopt a late-modernist view of culture that inserts FL

teaching and learning in the contemporary globalized world of cultural and linguistic heterogeneity and multiple identities” (Olsbu 2014, p. 6), thus abandoning the idea of “a homogeneous target culture and language” as well as “the ideal of the native speaker” (*ibid.* p. 7).

Some research specifically explores the uses of new *types* of texts in French literature teaching. Aronsson (2019a, 2020, 2021) offers studies on the use of songs and of fan fiction in the French classroom. The students’ response to “chanson, poésie, slam” (Aronsson 2020) was appreciative of the combination of ‘informal learning’ (popular culture as object of study) and academic studies. The inclusion of the popular culture text type fan fiction is explored by Aronsson (2019a) in a teaching experiment. The study poses the question whether fan fiction can enrich literature teaching in French at the university. Among the positive outcomes is what Aronsson, drawing on Gee & Hayes (2011), calls a “passionate affinity-based learning” (2019a, p. 3), denoting the need to familiarize oneself with a fictional world, and of making it one’s own, in order to write fan fiction stories about it. These findings on affinity-based learning point towards affective motivation as a complement to the instrumental and integrative variants discussed above.

5 Methods and motives for the teaching of literature

The two didactic questions of why and how to approach a given subject are closely linked, and in the studied material they are frequently addressed jointly. Traditionally, the study of literary texts within foreign language courses has been linked to both enhancing language skills and providing students with valuable insights in the cultural contexts of the target language. Karin Möller (2002) paints a picture of separate courses for language and literature at Swedish universities, a distinction upheld by teachers specialized in either field. She argues for a more holistic view of language learning which would entail a method of integrating the study of literature into the study of language. Similarly, Enkvist (1991:2) suggests student active and project-based learning proceeding by themes in which several subjects are integrated, two methods that seem to enhance motivation. Regarding the selection of literary texts, she recommends choosing works that can contribute to a personal development in the student, including provocative books, rather than classics thus aligning her recommendations with a more affect-based approach.

Focusing on the cultural aspect in the study of literature, Husung and Jeannin (2016) investigate how literary texts can be employed to improve students’ intercultural competence, while underlining the literary aspects of novels and the importance of students’ personal interaction in the reading practice. They explore the concept of *transsubjectivity* in second and foreign language contexts, which is a mode of reading that activates the students in the characters and their choices and actions within the fiction. Husung and Jeannin claim that the study of literature is particularly efficient in presenting “transcultural identity models” [“des modèles d’identités transculturelles”] (p. 73) which the learner/reader can relate to from the position of the reading subject. The authors present a possible method to use in the FSL or FFL classrooms. Using two novels in French as their examples, they suggest specific questions that teachers can ask to encourage a transsubjective perspective in the students, for instance by imagining the physical traits of characters or how they would react if exposed to situations described in the novel. This model would favour cultural diversity, in both target and source culture, and thus avoid reciting essentialized knowledge about a fixed culture. Working on cultural aspects related to identity, in and through literature, is thus advocated by Husung and

Jeannin in this study that combines a solid theoretical framework with ideas to be implemented in teaching practice.

The warning against a traditional approach where the target culture is considered as something stable and where stereotypical ideas of Frenchness are confirmed rather than challenged (Husung & Jeannin 2016) relates to the overall aim in Ann-Kari Sundberg's 2009 dissertation "The weight of tradition: Teacher management of linguistic and cultural otherness in the FLE classroom" [*Le poids de la tradition: La gestion professorale de l'altérité linguistique et culturelle en classe de FLE*]. In this study, Sundberg uses recorded and transcribed classroom observations to investigate how teachers of French in Swedish secondary schools mediate linguistic and cultural otherness to their students. Of particular interest for this study is the chapter dealing with the teaching of an excerpt from a French-Canadian literary text. Sundberg shows how the image of the French people (from France) constructed by a French-Canadian character in the novel is treated as an undisputable fact by the teacher and that the personal experiences the teacher shares with the students risk being interpreted as truths rather than opinions. Thus, Sundberg concludes, there is a confirmation of stereotypical representations of the French as a homogenous group, of the otherness of the other.

5.1 Narratological/theoretical versus affective approaches and reading styles

Another major theme our overview uncovered is related to the orientation the teaching of literature in the French classroom might have. Two models are suggested: one favouring analytical skills, the other giving value to the affective affordances that literature embodies and concentrates on the emotional and experiential reception of literary texts. These different reading styles are put forward, and regularly set up as opposites, similar to the distinction that Rosenblatt (1986) makes between aesthetic and efferent reading. Similarly, there are clear differences between French and Swedish educational contexts when it comes to the status and the methods of literature teaching. Although this is somewhat tangential to our study object, it provides valuable points of comparison.

Englund (1997) shows how French schools consider literature studies as a self-evident topic, and an essential part of a long-cherished tradition of educating minds. Swedish schools, according to Englund, focus more on literary history, or texts about literary texts, than on the actual study and analysis of them. Englund advocates for more text study, as does Enkvist (1991:2), who considers French methods of reading possible to incorporate in the Swedish educational system after being adapted accordingly. One suggested method is the *explication de texte* (close reading) with a narratological focus which, according to Enkvist, would enhance Swedish students' understanding of literary texts and simultaneously encourage integrative motivation.

These questions are discussed in depth in Maritha Johansson's 2015 dissertation, "Read, understand, analyse: a comparative study of Swedish and French upper secondary school students' reception of a narrative text" [*Läsa, förstå, analysera : En komparativ studie om svenska och franska gymnasieelevers reception av en narrativ text*]. Johansson compares student reception of literary texts in the first-language classroom in France and Sweden (i.e. French and Swedish courses, respectively). Although the focus is not on French as a foreign language, Johansson's study is relevant in that it interrogates the link between the kind of skills the students expose in their interpretation of literary texts and their socialization into a certain interpretive community, which relates to teaching methods. It also picks up on the opposition

between reading styles mentioned above. Johansson studies how students create understanding of a literary text, how they construct their analysis, and what interpretations they offer of the text. The differences between French and Swedish students' reception and comprehension of literary texts are, roughly, the following: French students are more apt at literary analyses using rhetorical and narratological terms while Swedish students are more skilled at interpreting literary texts in relation to personal experiences, their own and others'. The results of Johansson's study indicate that a combination of the French and the Swedish educational methods concerning literature teaching would foster readers capable of identifying narratological and stylistic phenomena in texts and offer interpretations of them related to experiential and emotional aspects in their own life, making the aesthetic experience of literature an important aspect.

Lutas's 2014 study of the use of literary theory in the teaching of literature in a Swedish secondary school contributes to the discussion in which Johansson is engaged, and which questions the rigidity and insistence on form and theory in the French model and the lack thereof in the Swedish context. Setting out to prove the well-known critic Tzvetan Todorov wrong in his claim that theory should not be introduced prematurely because it risks drawing the attention away from the literary text and from the students' engagement with it, Lutas introduces narratological concepts to secondary school students. He uses an inductive method, so that the need for proper terminology arises from the students' reading. Lutas' teaching experiment takes place within his own teaching in secondary school, and centres on two narratological concepts: focalisation and ellipsis. Both concepts are utilised in the analysis of films and literary texts to make students comprehend the practical applications of these concepts. (Similarly, Lutas' 2023 study of literature teaching through film adaptations to university students shows the potential of introducing theoretical concepts such as narrative voice or *ekphrasis* using an intermedial approach.) For our purposes, the example of teaching students inductively about ellipses is highly relevant. Lutas shows how students discover, while reading excerpts from a novel by Martinican writer Patrick Chamoiseau, that some information about the time passing is left out. Lutas relates how the students, through discussions, realize that the use of ellipsis is tied to the impossibility to talk about the traumatic experiences of slavery. The experimental teaching of theoretical concepts inductively has a positive outcome, according to Lutas, visible in the classroom discussions as well as in student evaluations. The results might not translate well into all contexts, however, Lutas adds, because the students in this example were at a high level of French ("Steg 6"), and highly motivated. In other student groups, where discussions do not come naturally or where motivation is low, this method of selecting excerpts from novels and through student discussions teasing out sophisticated issues, both structurally and thematically, may be utopian.

Another way of approaching student engagement is by emphasising emotional rather than theoretical knowledge. Annika Möрте Alling (2016) focuses affective-based learning, linking it to the affective turn in the early 2000's and how it might impact the reading of literature with students, leading to a heightening of their interest or strengthening the emotional investment in literary texts. Contrary to Lutas, she finds support in Todorov and paints a picture of how students, under the influence of theory, grow increasingly disinterested in the reading of novels, and how their attention should be drawn less to the structure of texts and more to their meaning and function in the lives of readers (Mörте Alling, 2016). Allowing students to discuss personal and emotional experiences of reading would enforce their engagement with literary texts, she stipulates. Another method would be to work with suspense to spark student interest. Möрте Alling further suggests, with support from Jean-Louis Dufays, the use of two separate phases in the reading: one more exploratory, inviting discussions on readers' emotional response, and

one more critical where students learn to connect literary techniques to texts' impact on our perception. Eventually, Mörte Alling seems to be advocating for a combination of the two orientations previously mentioned. Although her article presents examples from her own teaching experience, Mörte Alling's investigation is of a more exploratory nature, where she discusses different passages in 19th century novels and how they could be used to prompt emotional responses from students, mainly in relation to narratological aspects such as focalisation. In a forthcoming article, she discusses students' responses to two contemporary novels as expressed in written assignments and shows how emotional reactions and critical analyses of the novels can co-exist (Mörte Alling, forthcoming 2026).

The 'how' and the 'why' of literature studies in the foreign language classroom are addressed by Olsbu (2014) in a methodological and philosophical analysis of literature didactics, with the Norwegian educational context as a concrete example (the LK06 curriculum in particular). A too strong focus on utility and measurability of education tends to exclude literature from the foreign language courses, Olsbu writes, as "the use of literary texts is not so easily translated into testable skills or 'can do'-statements" (p. 13). She calls for "efforts to integrate literature in the competence and skills approach" (p. 14) and, more importantly, for more research on the use of literature in the teaching of foreign languages, in order to specify what kinds of skills and competencies students can reach through the study of literature.

6 Concluding remarks and suggestions for further research

The above presented inventory of research on literature teaching within the French subject in Scandinavia points to several areas of interest which are summed up in the following.

The studies of the corpus identify several frameworks of teaching. They focus on the knowledge gap between students in secondary school and higher education (Enkvist 1991), online teaching (Eckart & Leblanc 2018; Aronsson 2019a), paratexts such as curricula (Schultz Ravneberg & Verstraete-Hansen 2019), course-literature lists (Cedergren & Lindberg 2015) or textbooks (Aronsson 2019b; Aronsson 2021) as well as the role and function of literary texts in foreign language teaching. The studies show the importance of the choice of literary texts and beg the question of which criteria should govern the selections. The answers cover a wide range of attitudes, going from a traditional selection of texts representing the literary canon, transmitting a certain idea of the target culture, to a selection of texts that students can relate to or that represent authors who tend to be excluded from the canon, because they are women or represent the French-speaking world outside of France (Cedergren 2015; Lindberg *et al.* 2020).

According to Christensen & Lindschouw (2019), the study of literature is linked to motivation and, more specifically, the choice of literary texts might enhance student's integrative (rather than instrumental) motivation. As Olsbu (2014) writes, studying literature can contribute to a nuanced intercultural competence rather than easily measurable skills. Furthermore, Olsbu stresses that if the teaching is to reflect the surrounding world, it is time to abandon the idea of a homogenous or (stereo)typical target culture. On a more technical level, Lislérud (2015) demonstrates the importance of a common definition of key concepts of the discipline and, more importantly, a harmonisation between curriculum documents and textbooks when it comes to literature studies in French and other foreign languages.

The studies in the corpus put forward a variety of methods and motives for the teaching of literature in the French as a foreign language classroom. One aspect that seems to occupy researchers is the question of theory and whether it should be introduced early or not. Certain studies advocate working inductively with concepts from narratology (Lutas 2014), others recommend a more affective reading, bringing in student emotions and engagement in order to

increase student involvement (Mörte Alling 2016). Yet other studies promote transsubjectivity as a possible mode of reading, activating the students in the characters and their choices and actions within the fiction (Husung & Jeannin 2016). Another methodological aspect brought to the forefront is teacher positioning, where the issue is the transmission or the questioning of cultural stereotypes (Sundberg 2009). While literature reading is still seen as a valuable method for language learning, it is simultaneously considered as an aesthetic form worthy of study.

In Scandinavian curricula for secondary school, literary texts are explicitly mentioned as one type of material to study in language classes. However, studies on literary texts in French subject textbooks suggest that the pedagogical material framing literary texts like songs, fictions and poems in textbooks is rather limited and focuses for example on vocabulary or text comprehension (Aronsson 2019b; Aronsson 2020; Aronsson 2021). Studies like Aronsson's (see also Lislerud, 2015) point to the urgency of exploring literature teaching in the French classroom, and of presenting research-based methods to reduce the discrepancy between rather ambitious policy documents, on the one hand and, on the other, the treatment of literary texts in textbooks.

On the basis of the studies discussed in this article, we want to suggest three directions of research aimed at developing the teaching of literature within the subject of French.

Firstly, there is a lack of practice-based studies of teaching in secondary school which leads to a knowledge gap within literature didactics regarding the first few years of foreign language studies in school. Such studies may provide clues to better understanding student motivation or lack thereof, or to ways of dealing with how schools prepare students for French studies in higher education.

Secondly, some of the proposed teaching methods (Lutas 2014; Mörte Alling 2016) would be interesting to explore further, especially possible combinations of narratological-analytical approaches (often used in France) and of methods focusing on aesthetic and emotional experiences or reading to relate. According to this line of thought, teachers should not shy away from students' emotional connections to the studied texts but rather use them to enhance motivation and interpretational skills (Mörte Alling forthcoming 2026). Another fruitful avenue to explore would be the intermedial approach in literature teaching (Lutas 2024). Further, it would be useful to develop studies on 'informal' learning where students work in community-like peer groups, which means taking the flipped classroom a bit further within the framework of student-based learning (Aronsson 2019a). New issues to address, perhaps especially in relation to online teaching, are the widespread text-generating AI software and their impact on literature teaching in a foreign language. While student-driven teaching is promoted (e.g. Aronsson 2019a; Eckart & Leblanc 2018), literature teachers of today need to consider that LLMs, or 'generative AIs', may be used to create questions or discussion points; thus, the student-driven courses are not necessarily driven by topics originating from the students.

Thirdly, text selection for the classroom seems to need more scholarly attention, not least because it is linked to student motivation. Rather than prescribing one option over another, we suggest that the choice of literary texts be didactically motivated and, if possible, discussed with colleagues.

Finally, as all literature teachers know, literature has a unique capacity to not only open doors to new worlds and open the reader's eyes to other people's perspectives. Literary texts also provide rich material for developing language skills, not least through writing, be it analytical or creative. Furthermore, literature analyses and interpretations easily connect to the democratic and humanist core values that schools and universities are tasked to teach. And – at the risk of committing a cliché – literature stirs your soul.

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