Academically reading

University students’ reading habits and reported attitudes towards Academic English

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Abstract
The use of English has increased greatly in the higher education system with universities across the world including English as part of their education programs. One of many consequences of this is that many students have to read and study in a second or foreign language, which has shown to be of difficulty for many students according to previous research. The purpose of this present study is to investigate the academic reading habits of students and explore their perceptions and attitudes towards reading academic English, and what experiences they have in relation to that. A total of 68 participants took part in this study, all recruited at Stockholm University. All participants responded to a questionnaire and interviews were conducted with four of the students. A relatively high degree of commitment was reported towards the assigned reading and a majority of the students did not perceive reading academic English as difficult and reported mostly positive attitudes about it. The results suggest that the personal interest and perception of the assigned reading is crucial and matter more for students than the target language.

Keywords
L2 reading, academic English, university students, attitudes, reading habits.
1. Introduction

The use of English is increasingly expanding across a range of domains, and higher education is not an exception. Universities in Europe and beyond are including English as part of education programs to a greater extent (Wächter & Maiworm, 2014), a trend particularly noticeable in Scandinavian countries such as Sweden (Bolton & Kuteeva, 2012). Courses taught through English as the medium of instruction and parallel-language courses are prevalent nowadays (Mežek, 2013). Consequently, university students are supposed to master literacy in different languages, including English, to cope with their studies (Solensten, 2010). This means that regardless of their proficiency and attitudes towards reading in a foreign language, the majority of the students are likely to be assigned reading material in English throughout their education. Despite the assumption of students mastering that kind of biliteracy, research has shown that many students in reality lack the type of academic proficiency that is needed (Hellekjaer, 2009; Mežek, 2013). The relationship between language proficiency and academic literacy skills is not always as straightforward and unproblematic as one might initially think. This suggests that other factors than the level of proficiency must be considered when investigating second language reading.

Previous research has investigated the use of English in Swedish universities (e.g. Björkman, 2013). Mežek (2013) examined reading proficiency among students in a parallel-language environment and found the reading difficulties between the first (L1) and second language (L2) to be minimal, but support for learning terminology in English was found to be important. However, not much is known about students’ attitudes towards reading in English. A Swedish study (Pecorari, Shaw, Irvine, Malmström & Mežek, 2012) examined undergraduate students’ practices and attitudes towards reading in English and a similar study (Solensten, 2010) targeted the attitudes of five students to reading in English in two courses. While many students expressed non-compliance with reading assignments in the study of Pecorari et al. (2012), the findings in Solensten (2010) suggest positive attitudes towards parallel language use and to reading in English for academic purposes.

With this in mind, further research on students’ reading habits and attitudes towards reading academic English can be useful. The purpose of the present study is to investigate university students’ academic reading habits and their perceptions and attitudes towards reading in English for academic purposes. The research questions that will be answered are as follows:

1. What academic reading habits do students report?
2. What perceptions of and attitudes towards reading academic English do students report?
3. What experiences do students report in connection to reading English for academic purposes?
2. Background

2.1 Second language reading
Second language reading has been of great interest to linguists as it is part of second language learning. Even though there surely was interest in L2 reading among the world population before foreign language learning was widespread, an important turning point has materialized with the advent of Internet (Bernhardt, 2011). As unlimited, free and easily accessible material became available for readers around the globe, the number of L2 readers greatly increased (ibid.). Globalization is also part of the reason as to why there is such a large interest in L2 reading. In order to avoid possible misunderstandings through translations and intermediaries, having access to primary sources and original material is usually more desirable (ibid.). Reading in a second/foreign language has become widely popular in today’s global society, with a significant amount of the L2 reading occurring in English (Bernhardt, 2011). As a result, the use of material written in English in higher education has become omnipresent (Mežek, 2013).

2.2 Second language reading in higher education
The increased use of pedagogic material written in English in higher education could be explained by the much wider range of literature to choose from, especially in a country as Sweden where the availability of research disseminated in Swedish is more limited (Solensten, 2010). However, reading in a second language in tertiary education has its own consequences, both positive and negative. Besides access to the latest research, students are more likely to become bilingual and more fluent in English, which can have benefits beyond education purposes (EF EPI, 2016). The English Proficiency Index (EF EPI), the world’s largest ranking of countries by English skills, ranks Sweden among the top countries with English language proficiency. However, the question of whether Swedish students actually are fully capable of studying in English does not have a straightforward answer. Students’ academic proficiency levels in similar L2 contexts have been questioned with studies revealing negative effects in learning (Mežek, 2013). For instance, Hellekjaer’s study (2009) revealed that every third Norwegian student reported having serious difficulty reading academic English. Although Swedes, similar to Norwegians, are well-known for being highly proficient English speakers, Swedish students have previously expressed difficulties towards reading in English, showing non-compliance with reading assignments (Pecorari, et al., 2012); indeed, Pecorari et al. (2012) report that the majority of the participants in their study did not complete all of their assigned reading. An explanation for this complex correlation could lie in the students’ inexperience in the academic field where the conventions differ from the kind of English they are used to. This is supported by Bernhardt (2011) who claims that L2 reading difficulties might very well be a product of unfamiliarity in the academic discourse rather than deficiencies in English. Klaassen (2001, cited in Salö 2010) claims that the adaptation process for students usually lasts one year. Various other factors can also influence the experiences with second language reading, some of which are presented below.
2.3 Factors affecting second language reading

Despite the fact that L1 and L2 reading differ fundamentally (Koda, 2005), they must be discussed in relation to one another, as they are interconnected. Being a good reader requires the need of decoding and comprehending a text (Koda, 2005). These components are often harder to develop in a second language as L2 reading involves two languages, which makes it more complex than L1 reading (Grabe, 2009). Due to contrasting phonology, orthography, morphology, syntax, lexical semantics, and discourse features between languages, the reading processes consequently differ as well (Grabe, 2009). Some of the widely accepted factors that influence L2 reading besides the L1 include: word recognition, vocabulary, orthography, language knowledge, age, experience, reading speed and motivation (e.g. Bernhardt, 2011; Grabe 2009). Dörnyei (1998) especially considers motivation to be key in L2 reading and learning. Motivation can be seen “as a fairly static mental or emotional state” and “a reflection of certain inner forces such as instincts, volition, will, and psychical energy” (Dörnyei, 1998, p. 118). What makes it such a key variable is that all factors concerning L2 learning necessitate motivation to some extent (Dörnyei, 1998), i.e. they necessitate the person to want to undertake certain actions in order to achieve goals. Dörnyei (1998) also notes that lack of motivation can prevent the most gifted individual from reaching objectives, whereas high motivation can compensate for substantial deficiencies. Studies have also found correlation between motivation and reading amount (Takase 2007, cited in Komiyama 2013).

2.4 Attitudes

Attitudes are not easy to define due to contrasting definitions that tend to differ in orientation and features of attitudes. Garrett (2010) presents three of the most common interpretations of attitudes, and cites Oppenheim’s (1982, p. 39) as the most comprehensive of them; therefore, this definition will also be the one adopted for the purposes of the present essay. Oppenheim (ibid.) defines attitudes as

a construct, an abstraction which cannot be directly apprehended. It is an inner component of mental life which expresses itself, directly or indirectly, through much more obvious processes as stereotypes, beliefs, verbal statements or reactions, ideas and opinions, selective recall, anger or satisfaction or some other emotion and in various other aspects of behavior.

This definition highlights that attitudes not only consider affect, but thought and behavior too. This is in line with the aims of the present study as affect alone would not suffice since it will be interesting to find out if the participants’ feelings are reflected in their reading habits. Garrett (2010) explicitly explains how these three components are linked to attitudes. Firstly, attitudes are cognitive in the sense that they are based on beliefs about the world such as the notion of the standard language and its association with high-status occupations. Secondly, attitudes are affective because of the feelings and emotions involved and that they tend to be positive or negative towards an object. This positivity or negativity is usually measured through intensity; for instance, slightly opposing something or completely detesting it. Lastly, the aspect of behavior is present through people acting in certain ways, possibly in line with the two other aspects. However, it should be noted that the interconnectedness of the three aspects and whether or not they are in constant agreement has been questioned (Garret, 2010). Furthermore, Garrett (2010) discusses Oppenheim’s (1982) notion of attitudes being psychological constructs that cannot be observed directly unless there are emotional reactions
or statements that reveal them. This complexity concerning attitudes has created difficulty for previous researchers. Garrett (2010) notes that interviews and asking people to complete attitude rating scales are among the methods that should provide accurate responses. Allport (1935, cited in Garrett 2010) suggests that attitudes are learned and can be influenced by personal experiences and the social environment. To further clarify the concept of attitude, Garrett (2010) makes an effort of distinguishing it from the closely related terms habits and opinions. The greatest difference lies in habits being restricted to the aspect of behavior, while this is not the case with attitudes. On the other hand, opinions are cognitive but may lack the affective component.

Attitudes towards language are very common in today’s global society even though they are not always publicly stated. There are attitudes towards language on all its levels; the words, spelling, grammar and pronunciation to name a few. This study will investigate what kind of attitudes there are towards reading academic English at Stockholm University, Sweden.

2.5. The experiential side of language

The linguistic repertoire could be described as the variety of languages and registers that speakers use in different contexts to convey messages (Gumperz, 1964). This means that all people have linguistic repertoires, although they tend to vary and look quite different from person to person. Busch (2015) views the repertoire as something that is established and formed throughout life between the self and the other, which is why the lived experience of language is targeted. This subject perspective is what provides the personal insight on how the repertoire evolves throughout life. It also enables Busch to look at how emotional experiences and interactions become part of the repertoire in forms of linguistic attitudes and patterns. In fact, she notes that questions about attitudes towards language only can be formulated when the social nature along with bodily and emotional sides of the language are taken into account. Bush (2015) further states that personal attitudes to language are closely connected to the value ascribed to a language in a particular social space. It becomes especially apparent in situations where the linguistic practices and spaces are unfamiliar to people or when there are sudden changes to it. As the majority of the participants in this study do not have English as their L1, the process of incorporating it as part of their language repertoire contained unfamiliarity and change. The process is possibly under development for some, while others have adapted to it. Besides the connection to attitudes, the experiential side of the language could also be linked to the motivation aspect that has been accounted for in a previous subsection. There are individual differences in motivation and various influencing factors behind the motivational states of a person (O’Neil & Dillings, 1994). One of these factors could be Bush’s (2015) concept of the lived experience of language that includes the biographical dimension of the linguistic repertoire. In brief, to gain a fuller picture of what it means to engage in academic reading for students, we need to look at their experiences with this activity, how they relate to it, and what kind of lived past experiences that have gone through when reading in English for academic purposes.
3. Methodology

3.1 Choice of method

Given that the purpose of the study was to investigate students’ academic reading habits, and their perception and attitudes towards reading academic English, the method of a written survey was considered the most adequate for a number of reasons. Since attitudes cannot be observed directly unless they are revealed or admitted (Garrett, 2010), the choice of method became rather self-evident. Besides this incentive, questionnaires also allow the researcher to collect and process the data relatively quickly (Holmes & Hazen, 2013); responses to the questionnaire would allow to answer RQ1 and RQ2 of the present study. However, questionnaires are limited in the sense that they are not particularly suited to delve deeply into an issue (Holmes & Hazen, 2013), which is why in-depth interviews with four of the participants who responded to the questionnaire were integrated to complement the data, particularly with the goal of answering RQ3.

3.2 Sample

A total of 68 participants took part of this study, all students at Stockholm University. The recruitment occurred within a one-week span in four different courses taught at the university. Access to the groups was gained after contacting the relevant teachers and getting permission from them to distribute the questionnaire in their courses during one of their seminars. Hatch and Lazaraton (1991, cited in Holms & Hazen, 2013) note that the size of the sample should be normal, which is achieved by including more than 30 participants. However, some studies require a larger sample than that; for instance, if there are several distinct subgroups within the sample that are to be investigated (ibid.). With this in mind, and considering the time and resources available, the number of students in this study is considered to be fully sufficient to provide justified answers to the research questions.

The sample included students at both Bachelor (BA) and Masters (MA) level (38 BA students, 30 MA students) and a comparison between their responses was made to see if any differences between the two were apparent. As mentioned previously, Klassen (cited in Salö, 2010) claims that it usually takes one year for students to adapt to the academic style of reading. 60% of the BA students had studied for between 1-2 years, while all of the MA students had at least 3-4 years of university experience. The results will hopefully indicate the impact of study experience in the reported attitudes. The languages the students considered to be their L1 varied greatly, presumably because of the courses being entirely in English. 63% were Swedish native speakers, 7.5% had English as their L1 with the remaining 29.5% having languages other than Swedish or English as their first language.

3.3 The questionnaire

Surveys and questionnaires are often used to gather information about behavior, beliefs, knowledge, attitudes, and attributes (Dillman 1978, cited in Holmes & Hazen, 2013) and this study is no exception. Following Pecorari et al.’s (2012) model, the questionnaire was divided into three different parts; background information, general reading habits, and motivations.
and habits in academic reading. With very few exceptions, all questions were closed, meaning that the possible answers were limited to the options provided. These types of questions enable relatively efficient analysis of the data as the possible responses are limited and easily can be generalized in statistics (Holmes & Hazen, 2013). However, various kinds of closed questions exist and it is crucial to choose the most suitable ones. Likert scales, a particular type of rating scales, were almost exclusively used in the questionnaire of this study. They are used to measure agreement or disagreement with a specific statement, usually regarding attitudes and opinions (Holms & Hazen, 2013). The responses are in words (e.g. strongly agree, agree, don’t know, strongly disagree, disagree) rather than numbers, which can make the statistical process more demanding. The questionnaire (see Appendix B) along with an information sheet (see Appendix A) were distributed in person at seminars of the four different courses, which enabled quick collection of the results in addition to providing participants an opportunity to ask questions if any uncertainties emerged. In order to reduce the chances of this to a minimum, the questionnaire had been piloted with a small sample of respondents that consisted of current and former university students in order to check the comprehensibility of all questions; minor revisions were made accordingly from the feedback received after the piloting of the questionnaire.

3.4 The interviews

Four people (two BA students and two MA students) were invited to interviews within the span of two weeks after completing the questionnaire. Participants with contrasting reading habits and attitudes were chosen in order to create diversity and enable comparison of their experiences. Although the questions were slightly adapted to each interviewee, the majority of the questions were almost identical for each person (see Appendix C). Given that these were semi-structured interviews, additional questions were added and improvised on the spot depending on answers and reactions, allowing for the discussion to flow more organically and into directions that the interviewee made relevant (Hoffman, 2013). As ethical issues are involved in interviews, all participants were handed a consent form (see Appendix D) that had to be read, agreed upon and signed before the start of the interview. In order to ensure anonymity and confidentiality, the participants were not labeled in any way that could connect them to their personal identities. Instead, pseudonyms are used in this study to refer to the participants. The interviews were recorded and lasted between 11 to 16 minutes. Transcriptions were subsequently done to facilitate and justify the upcoming analysis of the recordings.

3.5 Processing and analyzing the data

In order to process the results, the questionnaire was duplicated in Google Forms, meaning that an identical questionnaire as the one distributed to the participants was subsequently created in Google Forms, where each participant’s responses to the questionnaire were manually registered. This allowed all responses to be captured digitally for further easier use and analysis. In order to ensure correctness and avoid inaccuracy, this process was checked more than once as the initial data processing might contain mistakes (Holms & Hazen, 2013). Each interview was recorded and transcribed in full. A line-by-line reading of the transcripts
was conducted (McCarty, 2015) in order to detect the emerging themes from each interview, which enabled the analysis of the reported experiences.

4. Results

This section is divided into three parts that correspond to each research question: students’ academic reading habits, perceptions of and attitudes towards the assigned reading and students’ experiences in connection to reading English for academic purposes. The first two parts are answered through the data from the questionnaires, while the third section involves the interviews. Questions 12-16 on the questionnaire will be used as support for the first subsection, while questions 17-25 cover the following subsection. All of the mentioned questions belong to the third part of the questionnaire that specifically targeted perceptions and attitudes towards reading academic English, unlike the first two parts that had the function of providing information about the sample of this essay.

4.1 Students’ academic reading habits

The results show that the assigned reading is an integral part of the courses, and for the most part, it is also reflected in the students’ reading habits. Except for three students who reported being assigned readings in preparation for seminars and lectures sometimes, all claimed that it happened very often. With a sole exception that indicated “sometimes”, all students claimed to be given assigned readings in English very often. While 68% of the students reported doing all or almost all of their assigned readings, 31% did some of it, with one sole participant expressing complete resistance.

As the assigned reading can be of different character, the students were asked if they prioritize certain components (for instance, articles over textbooks, or specific parts of a text) and if so, what they prioritize and how they decide on that. More than half (54%) did indeed prioritize certain components over others, 32% did not and 13% were not sure.

The students’ reported priorities.
Some students prioritized more than one component and the diagram above illustrates articles and textbooks as the most popular components. Not all students motivated their decisions, but based on those that did, articles were preferred because they were more specific, shorter and included more discussions than textbooks. On the other hand, those who prioritized textbooks did so since they felt that articles, in addition to being hard to read and understand, also tend to include uninteresting data. Six students reported that they choose what seems most important and relevant, while four indicated that it depends on the course and its assignments. The column that is labeled as *others* in the diagram includes several different and unique responses. For instance, prioritizing books (not further specified), lectures, linguistic-related readings, readings that will be discussed in class and that they have to write summaries or reflections about, and priorities based on what time allows.

In sum, students are assigned readings in English in preparation for seminars and lectures very often. The majority of the students do all or almost all of these assigned readings, while every third student only does some of them. The results also show that prioritizing certain components is a common habit among students.

### 4.2 Perceptions of and attitudes towards the assigned readings

Virtually all students acknowledge the importance of doing the assigned reading as all except three were of the opinion that doing it improved their chances of passing courses. 95% strongly agreed or agreed with the statement, meaning that only two people disagreed and one who did not know. In a related and similar question, students were also asked to individually grade the helpfulness of four different resources: the required reading, classroom attendance, lecture/seminar notes and extra reading.

**What resources do you think are most useful to pass courses?**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Resource</th>
<th>Very helpful</th>
<th>Helpful</th>
<th>Not helpful</th>
<th>Don't know</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The required reading</td>
<td>49%</td>
<td>51%</td>
<td>31%</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Classroom attendance</td>
<td>45%</td>
<td>55%</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lecture/seminar notes</td>
<td>63%</td>
<td>35%</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Extra reading</td>
<td>56%</td>
<td>49%</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As the diagram above indicates, the positive attitudes towards the assigned readings were confirmed as it was the only resource that did not attract any negative attitudes. However, the resource that attracted the highest percentage of most positive (very helpful) attitudes was classroom attendance with 63% compared to the 49% of the required reading. In general, there were almost exclusively positive attitudes towards the resources except for the extra reading that attracted some skepticism and uncertainty.
The students were also asked about the incentives that were more likely to make them read the assigned material, and liking the course was by far the most ticked option with 76.5% as the diagram below show.

I am more likely to do the assigned reading if (check all that apply)

Other options were I find the course difficult (19%), I find the reading not so difficult (40%) and It makes no difference (19%). Therefore, the personal feeling and interest along with an adequate difficulty level is seen as the most appealing incentives to do the assigned readings.

The questionnaire also included questions about students’ level of understanding and the perceived level of difficulty of academic English in relation to reading in their L1. Although the majority did not consider reading academic English to be hard or challenging, it was still considered to be more demanding in terms of effort and time in relation to the L1 by more than half of the students. Furthermore, merely 30% felt that they understood academic texts more in their L1 than English with approximately half of the students (48.5%) indicating that there was not any difference. As much as 17% reported understanding more in English than their L1, although it should be noted that 7.5% of the participants reported English to be their first language.

Reading academic English… Strongly agree Agree Strongly disagree Disagree Don’t know

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Strongly agree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Strongly disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Don’t know</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>is hard/challenging</td>
<td>1.5%</td>
<td>23.5%</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>requires more effort (than L1)</td>
<td>14.7%</td>
<td>42.6%</td>
<td>20.6%</td>
<td>20.6%</td>
<td>1.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>requires more time (than L1)</td>
<td>23.5%</td>
<td>32.5%</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Despite that reading academic material in English was considered to be more demanding by more than half of the students, only 17% preferred reading academic material in their L1 instead of English if they had the option to choose. The rest of the answers were allocated quite evenly between No (32%), It makes no difference (23.5%) and Depends on the course (26.5%). Furthermore, very few students (9%) were more likely to do the assigned reading if it was in their L1 rather than English. It did not make a difference for the majority (63%), while 25% responded No and the remaining 3% were not sure.
4.2.1 Comparison between BA and MA students

Since the sample contained both BA and MA students, it was thought that a comparison between the reported reading habits and attitudes could provide interesting findings. Naturally, the study experience of the MA students was much greater than the one of the BA students. All of the MA students had at least 3-4 years of experience with 67% having studied for more than 4 years. In contrast, the majority (60%) of the BA students were in their first or second year of studies with only 10% having more than 4 years of experience. The results show a higher degree of commitment towards the assigned reading in favor of the MA students of whom 77% did all or almost all of their readings, whereas 60.5% did on the corresponding side. However, despite the MA students’ longer study experience and higher level of commitment, they reported it to be more challenging and demanding than the BA students.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reading academic English…</th>
<th>MA – (strongly)/agreeing (%)</th>
<th>BA – (strongly)/agreeing (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>is hard/challenging</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>requires more time (than L1)</td>
<td>67%</td>
<td>49%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>requires more effort (than L1)</td>
<td>63%</td>
<td>49%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Further confirmation of the greater difficulties for the MA students can be found in the 34.5% reporting to understand reading material more in the L1 compared to 26% of the BA student. Although the MA students found reading academic English more difficult and demanding, they wore more positive about in the sense that there were more BA students that preferred reading academic material in their L1 over English (18% to 16%) although it was not common in either group. Moreover, 13% of the BA students were more likely to do the assigned reading if it was in their L1 compared to 1.5% of the MA students.

In general, the assigned reading as a resource attracted positive attitudes from the students. Reading academic English was mostly not perceived as difficult, but more demanding than reading in the first language. A comparison between MA and BA students demonstrated that the former group was more committed towards the assigned reading although considering it harder and more demanding. Overall, the target language does not affect the students’ reading habits significantly.

4.3 Students’ experiences in connection to reading English for academic purposes

This section presents the most relevant content from the interviews, which were designed to deeper investigate the students’ reading habits, perceptions and attitudes, and make them explain some of their answers from the questionnaire. These reported experiences could also indicate possible factors behind the findings in RQ1 and RQ2 in the subsections above and partly explain these. Since the students’ responses in the questionnaires differed and the interviews were semi-structured, each interview was not shaped identically but a collection of
the most common and prominent topics of conversation from each student was compiled and is presented individually further below. The topics include:

- The impact of the students’ previous experience and knowledge of English
- Perceived difficulty level of the assigned reading
- Commitment and the perceived importance of doing the assigned reading
- Attitudes towards extra reading as a resource

Each of the students’ experiences is included in all of the topics above, with some exemplification through short extracts from the interviews.

4.3.1 Presentation of the interviewees based on responses from questionnaire

Peter is a BA student aged between 22-25 with Finnish as his L1. Currently in his fourth term of Global Management studies, Peter claimed to do all of the assigned readings and reported having no problems whatsoever with reading and understanding the material.

Jennifer, the second BA student, is a native Swede aged between 22-25. Also in her fourth term of university studies, Jennifer is part of the Professional Language Programme. Jennifer did some of the assigned readings and indicated that reading academic material in English was not hard or challenging, although it still required more time and effort than reading in Swedish.

Lisa, a native Swede is aged between 36-40 and currently in her second term of a master’s degree in Archeology studies. Claiming to do all or almost all of the assigned readings, Lisa agreed that reading academic English was hard, and strongly agreed that it required more time and effort than reading in her L1.

Nicole is between 22-25 years old with 3-4 years of experience at university level. Nicole is in the second term of the Master Programme of Cinema Studies. Nicole reported doing some of her readings in English; she strongly disagreed that it was hard or challenging, or that it required more time and effort than reading in her L1, which is Romanian.

4.3.2 The interviews

The impact of the students’ previous experience and knowledge of English

Three of four students felt that their previous experience and knowledge of English was sufficient to fully understand the course literature. Lisa was the exception as a result of having very limited experience with the English language in general prior to her university studies. Although Jennifer also claimed not to either read or use English much prior to her university studies, she still considered her previous knowledge and experience sufficient as she felt that English for the most part has always been easy to her. Judging by the students’ descriptions, Peter and Nicole had most previous experience with English and were utterly confident that it was enough to cope with the assigned reading. They described the focus on English in Finnish and Romanian schools respectively to be similar to the ones in Sweden with their first experiences with English coming at a very early age. In fact, Nicole even recalls being taught English songs as “Twinkle Twinkle Little Star” as early as in kindergarten. This, along with studying at a bilingual high school, where the focus on English was even more explicit,
helped Nicole acquire English skills to a level she felt was more than sufficient going into her university studies. Peter reported not experiencing any difficulties reading English course literature either. He ascribes his ease with the assigned reading to his superior overall language skills in English, which he mostly attributes to his year as an exchange student in the USA in high school, where he “basically acquired English almost to a native level”. All students agreed that reading academic material was easier now compared to the start of their studies when the academic style and many of the terms were unknown to them.

**Perceived difficulty level of the assigned reading**

The responses differed when the students were asked whether they considered reading academic English to be hard or challenging and to explain why. Despite Lisa being a Master student with several years of university experience with academic English, which she feels has improved her reading skills, the reading still causes her difficulties as many words continue to be incomprehensible and hard to pronounce. In addition, she adds that having a diagnosis as ADHD makes it even harder to cope with an already challenging task. Despite severe difficulties, Lisa ticked the option that it depends on the course when it comes to which language she preferred her course literature to be in, in the questionnaire. When asked during the interview, the response was partly deviating from that:

01  L: Well(.) Swedish obviously, it’s harder and it takes longer
02  time to read in English, that’s the main thing (.) the time I
03  think, mm (.). But sometimes I think English ones is, it’s
04  I:  |Yes|
05  L: better, uh, better to read the original text than
06  translations, uhm so that depends I think.

Early on in the interview, Jennifer did not express any difficulties with reading the academic material in English. For instance, she claimed that as few as two or three words are unfamiliar to her in a full article of 20 pages. However, when asked to put it in relation to reading academic material in her L1, she admitted to it being harder in English. After some initial problems explaining why, Jennifer concluded that her reading is less fluent in English for some reason, which in turn also affects the reading speed negatively. She was also asked to expound on why the preferred language for reading the course literature depended on the course despite the comments above. After some discussion, it was concluded that she preferably wanted the course literature to be in the same language as the discussions in class and assignments are, as that was most beneficial to her. Another reason she mentioned was that translation-related issues could arise in parallel-language courses.

As previously mentioned, Peter did not think reading academic English was difficult in any sense. In fact, he even thought that reading academic material in his L1 would be more of a challenge:

01  P: Uhm, I would say it it would be more difficult to read in
02  Finnish, just cause I haven’t read any texts in academic
04  Finnish, and I’m used to, uh, reading academic texts in
05  English, so then I would say that Finnish would be more
06  I:  |mm|
In the extract above, Peter refers to the fact that all of his university studies have occurred in Sweden with English as medium of instruction and reading. Because of the same reason, and because of this particular lived experience, Peter prefers reading academic material in English and feels that it would probably require more time to read it in his L1 as well. His general reading habits might also contribute to his perception of the difficulty level between the two languages. In the questionnaire, he claimed to read more in English than in his L1 outside of school as well. Asked to explain why, he responded:

P: Uhm, I just(.) I don’t see a future in Finnish for myself, I don’t see myself working in Finland, so I mean, for me it’s enough to, uh, to be able to speak Finnish, I mean obviously I will be able to speak it in the future, but I just feel like(.) getting better at speaking English is what is most beneficial for me.

Similar to Peter, Nicole also did not find academic English to be of any difficulty, to which she credited her long experience with studying and reading in English. However, she noted that it was possibly easier to read academic material in her L1 when asked if it was more challenging in English:

N: Uhm, yeah, like, not necessarily. Maybe a bit cause sometimes I find that Romanian terms, um, are more diverse ((laughs)) and can explain better some concepts, and then yeah, I: |yes|
N: I find English somehow limited from that point of view.

Commitment and the perceived importance of doing the assigned reading

Although the degree of commitment and reading habits varied between the students, all agreed that some of the assigned readings were irrelevant and unimportant. The personal interest for a course or assigned reading was of central importance for the students. Claiming to do all of his assigned readings, a normal study week for Peter includes 25-30 hours a week on reading, an amount he considers to be very sufficient. He also explicitly mentioned that he always keeps up with the reading as the course progresses to avoid being “swamped” when exams are approaching. Regarding the importance of the various assigned readings, Peter definitely considered some to be more important than others:

P: Definitely yes, sometimes the readings might not even be close to, uh, the seminar topic, or even the course, and I: |ok|
P: sometimes they are very relevant(.) There’s a lot of variation in that.
However, regardless of their importance and relevance, Peter does not skip some of the readings:

```
01  P: Uhm, I usually don’t do that, I just read everything that
02  we’re supposed to read, and then might even read some extras
03  |mm|
04  P: in areas I find interesting, but mostly I just read
05  everything that we’re supposed to, so I wouldn’t say that I do
06  |ok|
07  P: that
```

Lisa also estimated to put in around 25 hours a week on the course literature, an amount that tends to increase when exams are nearing and decrease when the reading occurs in Swedish. Similar to Peter, she tries to do all of the assigned readings even though she too felt that some of them were more important than others. Lisa then added that the main incentive for reading course literature in English and what simplifies what is a demanding process is if the course attracts her personal interest:

```
01  L: Well, I think if if it’s a course that is much more
02  interesting than any other, that makes it easier to read in
03  |yeah|
04  L: English, and I wa(.)I want to read it because I want to
05  understand more than if it is a course that is like, naah, not
06  so funny.
```

Jennifer also mentioned the personal interest when explaining how she decides what to read or skip from the assigned reading:

```
01  J: I don’t know, if they’re interesting, uh and I don’t(.)
02  |mm|
03  J: sometimes you can just, like from looking at an article,
04  you can(.) you can see if it’s, if it will help you.
```

This led to a deeper conversation on the topic in which Jennifer confessed to sometimes feel unprepared because of her reading habits, but since she claimed to still manage her studies, she indicated that she did not see a reason to alter. In a normal study week, she would put in approximately 4-5 hours on readings, but admitted to do more when an exam was nearing. Nicole was by far the most outspoken regarding this topic and did not repress her criticism and negative attitude towards the assigned reading, which explains her skipping some of the assigned readings. She claimed to decide the importance of the readings based on her own interests and time rather than what the teacher considers important:

```
01  N: Uhm, I think it’s mostly based on my interests. Uhm, and
02  whether I have time for them or not, cause I also have a life
03  ((laughs)), so yeah, mostly I just pick like whatever looks
04  looks interesting to me.
05  |ok|
```

I: Oh, ok so not what seems most important, or do you
most important for what? Most important for the course or for myself? Right now, I’d rather choose something that interests me and that’s important for me as an academician((laughs)) and then what the teacher wants.

In the questionnaire, Nicole answered that she prioritizes by length and the extract above sparked a dialogue where Nicole went deeper into how she decides what to read and skip, where she noted that it is not always worth reading the longer ones:

Well, if it is super long and I don’t have time for reading, I’ll just say blaah ((laughs)).

Even if it’s important, if it is a must read according to your teacher?

Yeah, yeah, yeah. I’m a rebel((laughs)). If it is too long, I have a life, I don’t have time, no.

But do you feel, do you feel enough prepared then when you come to seminars or lectures if you haven’t done these long readings?

Here in Sweden, yeah, cause they will talk about it anyways. Sometimes you find that you read the text and then the teacher will say the exact same thing(.)on the seminar,

and you’re like why did I bother to read like 70 pages,

When asked if this was not the case in Romania as well, Nicole quickly shrugged it off by claiming that it was considerably more engaging and there was more communication between teacher and student, which in turn necessitated full and proper preparation. Nicole expressed the same reasoning to her ticking that classroom attendance was not a helpful resource in her studies in the questionnaire.

Attitudes towards extra reading as a resource

Although extra reading was the least appreciated resource from the results of the questionnaire, much more positive attitudes were ascribed to extra readings in the interviews. Three of four students turned to extra readings as a well needed complement. On the questionnaire, Nicole even ticked extra reading as a more helpful resource than the assigned ones and when asked if she felt that way because they were more interesting to her, she said:

Uh, yeah, and because I many times find, uh, the required readings quite basic, and if you’re on Masters level, cause we’re on Masters level, then you want to go more in depth, so why do you give me the basic stuff, or why do you keep...
Lisa also considered extra reading, mostly in forms of journals and articles, to be very helpful as they help broaden her experience and knowledge. Furthermore, Peter explained that since most of the assigned readings are textbooks or specific parts from it, he turns to academic papers and articles to diversify the readings. He also added that the reason he considers extra reading so important is because:

P: Usually, they’re more specific and also up to date, so I mean I find those interesting as well and important for the course cause then you get a different perspective on it and you find sort of what’s going on in the field right now and

I: |yeah|

P: not maybe 15 years back when the, uh, textbook was originally published.

To summarize, three of four students felt that they had sufficient knowledge and experience in English, which also reflected their current perceptions of the difficulty level of the assigned reading. The personal interest towards the course or assigned reading is crucial and affects the reading habits of the students, who consider some of the assigned readings to be unimportant and irrelevant. Lastly, positive attitudes towards extra reading were reported by three students, partially as a consequence of the assigned readings lacking or not being of desired quality.

5. Discussion

The aim of this essay was to answer the research questions that included finding out what students’ academic reading habits look like and what kind of attitudes students report towards reading academic English. Additionally, students’ experiences in connection to reading academic English were also in focus. In this section, each of the three research questions is discussed in view of the results presented.

The first research question targeted students’ academic reading habits and the dominant presence of English in Swedish universities was evident as all but one student claimed to be given assigned readings in English very often. This is in agreement with Bolton & Kuteeva’s (2012) claims that most of the assigned course literature in Swedish universities are in English. As virtually all students were of the opinion that doing the assigned reading would increase their chances of passing courses, it would be logical to expect a high reported degree of commitment towards the assigned reading (i.e. that they do all/almost all of their assigned readings.). However, this should not be taken for granted as the study of Pecorari et al. (2012) reported that the majority of the participants did not complete all of their assigned readings and a considerable amount expressed complete resistance despite considering it valuable.
With this in mind, the finding that the majority of the students (68%) in this study did all or almost all of their readings and the close to non-existent percentage of participants that expressed complete resistance towards the assigned reading can be considered as relatively high degree of commitment. However, it should not be overlooked that every third student did only some of their readings and it is interesting to speculate on the factors that influence whether or not a student decides to do all or some of the readings. It can for instance be individual preferences towards certain components, which was common among the students, and that not all assigned readings are considered important, which the findings from the interviews clearly demonstrated. It should also not be forgotten that the assigned reading is just one of many valuable resources, which is supported by the individual grade for each resource where classroom attendance was regarded at least as valuable a resource as the assigned reading.

The second research question that involved students’ reported perceptions and attitudes towards reading academic English provided some interesting findings. One of them that implies positive attitudes towards academic English was that as little as 17% of the students preferred reading academic material in their L1 over English, despite higher percentage of reported attitudes on reading in English being hard and especially more demanding. This suggests that the experienced level of difficulty was not particularly significant, which in turn is further supported by only one student strongly agreeing that it was hard or challenging. This was a bit unexpected as the Norwegian students in the study of Hellekjaer (2011) reported much greater difficulties reading academic English. However, given that Swedes and Norwegians share a similar level of proficiency in English, this distinction only supports what was concluded previously in this essay: that there are other factors than language proficiency that influence the experience of L2 reading. The reported responses also indicate that students are not opposed to put in more time and effort and that they very well could be of the opinion that the advantages of doing assigned readings in English outweigh the disadvantages. For instance, the two interviewees that thought reading in their L1 was easier were not sure they preferred it over reading in English and mentioned translation-issues as an influencing factor for that. This is in agreement with Bernhardt (2011) who explicitly noted that a big reason for the desirability of primary sources and original material is to avoid possible misunderstandings through translations and intermediaries. Nevertheless, the majority of the students do not seem to be too negatively affected by reading in a second language as it was less than 30% that claimed to understand academic material more in their L1. Further confirmation that the target language is not necessarily decisive in the students reported commitment in the reading habits derives from the fact that very few students (9%) were more likely to do the assigned reading if it was in their L1 rather than English. Instead, liking a course seems to be a more decisive incentive, which suggests that the personal feeling is a far more crucial factor.

Another unexpected finding was that the MA students to a greater extent than the BA students found reading academic English harder and more demanding. Given that previous research (e.g. Bernhardt, 2011; Grabe, 2009) mentioned experience as a factor that would simplify second language reading, it was expected that the MA students with their greater experience of reading academic English would be the ones to report less difficulty. This suggests that the reading proficiency of reading academic English does not necessarily increase and develop that much after the adaptation process that usually lasts one year according to Klaasen (2010, cited in Salö, 2001). Since most BA students had begun their fourth term at the time the
questionnaire was distributed, they have likely already undergone that process just like the MA students and then other factors come to play when discussing difficulties, including, for instance, insufficient previous knowledge of English, as the interview with Lisa demonstrates. Additionally, MA level reading material might by definition be more difficult and demanding on the student’s part, and while this was not reported or discussed during the interviews, it might be proposed as an explanation behind the reason why MA students reported reading academic English to be more difficult than BA students.

The third research question was answered through interviews with four students, who shared their experiences with reading academic English. The interviews were very useful and provided clarification regarding perceived difficulties among many other things. All students agreed that their academic reading skills have improved since the start of their studies; this agrees with Klaasen’s (2001, cited in Salö, 2010) claims on students’ needing an adaption process to get used to this specific kind of reading. However, Lisa’s case implies that neither high level of motivation nor study experience might be able to compensate for significant flaws and insufficient previous knowledge as suggested by previous research (e.g. Dörnyei, 1998; Bernhardt, 2011; Grabe, 2009). On the other hand, the examples of Peter and Nicole show that strong language foundations, which were also acknowledged by the mentioned researchers as an important factor for L2 reading, will likely lessen difficulties and shorten the adaptation process. By now, Peter even claimed to understand academic material more in English than his first language. This may seem illogical at first glance, but becomes fully understandable when adding all factors behind it. For a year in USA, he was constantly exposed to the language, which greatly improved his language skills. Besides the exposure factor, his strong motivation and determination towards becoming fully proficient in the language has surely contributed to his development in English. Peter even explicitly stated that he prioritized becoming more proficient in English generally over maintaining his Finnish skills. This incentive might also explain his high commitment towards the assigned reading. This shows that motivation on its own might not be enough, but that it indeed is a contributing and significant factor.

One variable that was particularly prominent and common for all interviewed students regarding their commitment was the personal interest, which also can be connected to the influence of motivation and commitment to the readings. Nicole’s revelations on this matter were especially intriguing. Her priorities were based on length and her own perception of what is important to read rather than the teacher’s, indicating disagreement on that regard. The other students also questioned the relevance of some of their assigned readings, which indicate that the course literature is not always chosen appropriately according to students. This seems like a valid explanation for why not all students do all of their assigned readings. Further confirmation of the perceived irrelevance among the assigned readings is visible as three of the students felt the need to turn to extra reading to complement the assigned ones, which they thought were lacking in various aspects. However, since extra reading was the least appreciated resource in the questionnaire, the positive attitudes towards it during the interviews were not expected. The interviews also showed that level of motivation and commitment of students cannot solely be based on how much of the assigned reading they do. Doing extra reading on your own should be considered at least as strong of an indicator on commitment and high motivation as doing the assigned reading. The ways in which the assigned readings are followed up was also object of critique during the interviews. In fact, Nicole’s negative attitude and commitment towards the assigned reading was mostly based on
that. Knowing that the same content would be thoroughly reviewed on the following seminar is a strong disincentive as it reduces the necessity to be well prepared. Jennifer confirmed this by claiming to manage her studies despite skipping assigned readings and sometimes feeling unprepared for seminars and lectures. This suggests that increasing the amount of participation and communication in relation to the readings on seminars will likely increase the chances of students doing all of their assigned readings as well as gaining more positive attitudes towards the required reading.

6. Conclusion

As English was described to be omnipresent in Swedish universities (e.g. Bolton & Kuteeva, 2012), the present study looked to investigate students’ reading habits and attitudes towards reading academic English, as well as exploring what kind of experiences students have in relation to their course literature. In comparison to previous research (Pecorari et al. 2012), a higher degree of commitment towards the assigned reading was reported, and even though there consequently was a lower percentage of students that only did some of their readings, skipping parts of the assigned reading is evidently a common habit among students. The present study was also able to provide some explanation for it. For instance, assigned readings tend to be disregarded by students if they are considered to be uninteresting and irrelevant, which often is the case according to the interviewees. Since previous research (Hellekjaer, 2009; Mežek, 2013) warned for difficulties among students to read academic English, it was expected that more students would report greater difficulties than what the results showed. Additionally, the fact that only a small margin preferred reading academic material in their L1 despite that more than half found it less demanding suggests positive attitudes and not too significant difficulties in relation to reading academic English. The students’ shared experiences in the interviews further suggest that the focus should necessarily not be on the target language of the readings, but instead on their relevancy and how they are followed up in the connected seminars and lectures. Judging by the students’ revelations, the current setup needs to be evaluated as its perceived flaws can be discouraging. This becomes even more crucial considering that the personal interest for a course or subject was reported to be an important incentive that was likely to increase the degree of commitment from students. Research that more explicitly target students’ perceptions of the course literature and its deficiencies could therefore be useful. Conclusively, it should be said that this study contained far less participants in comparison to previous research on the same topic, which could have affected the results and for the same reason, stronger conclusions should not be drawn. Moreover, as the reported results mostly were based on students’ self-perceptions, this study could be developed and expanded by for instance complementing it with comprehension tests to truly see if the reported perceptions reflect reality. Although it was not within the scope of this study to investigate which factors specifically influenced the reported reading habits and attitudes, it would certainly be a great addition for future researchers as it would provide more clarity and explanation behind the results.
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Appendix A: Information sheet

BA Linguistic Degree Project VT 17
Researcher: David Özkan
Supervisor: Josep Soler
david.ozkan@hotmail.com
josep.soler@english.su.se
______________________________________________________________________

Information sheet

The study
This anonymous questionnaire is part of a research study that investigates university students’ habits and motivations towards reading in English for academic purposes. The purpose of the study is to examine what kind of attitudes there are towards reading academic English.

You are invited to take part of this study as a student at Stockholm University who has experience in reading English for academic purposes.

Implications
Participation is completely anonymous and will not impact your studies in any way or form. Participation is entirely voluntary.

You have the right to withdraw your participation at any time and/or refuse to let the results be used in this study.

OPTIONAL

☐ please send me a summary of the results of this study.
☐ you may contact me to invite me to an interview.

Name:______________________________________
Email:______________________________________

If you have questions about this project, please contact
David Özkan (david.ozkan@hotmail.com) or
Josep Soler (josep.soler@english.su.se)
Appendix B: Questionnaire

Part 1: Background information Please put a tick where appropriate

1. Age group:
   - <21
   - 22-25
   - 26-30
   - 31-35
   - 36-40
   - 41-45
   - 46-50
   - 51 and older

2. Gender:
   - Male
   - Female
   - Other
   - Prefer not to say

3. What language do you consider your L1?
   - Swedish
   - English
   - Other (please specify): __________________

4. How long have you studied at university?
   - Between 1-2 years
   - Between 3-4 years
   - More than 4 years

5. What is the name of the Program that you are studying (indicate also if BA or MA):
   _______________________________________

6. In which term of your studies are you?
   - First term
   - Second term
   - Third term
   - Fourth term
   - Other (please specify): ________________

Part 2: General reading habits Please, tick the option that applies to you in connection to the following statements

7. I generally like to read during my leisure time.
   - Strongly agree
   - Agree
   - Disagree
   - Strongly disagree
   - Don’t know

8. I read more in English than in Swedish/L1 during my leisure time.
   - Strongly agree
   - Agree
   - Disagree
   - Strongly disagree
   - Don’t know

9. In choosing a book/material to read for leisure, the language in which it is written is NOT the most important factor for me (to the extent that I can read in that language).
   - Strongly agree
   - Agree
   - Disagree
   - Strongly disagree
   - Don’t know

10. How many books do you read per year during your leisure time?
    - 1-2
    - 3-4
    - 5 or more

11. I consider myself a dedicated reader
    - Strongly agree
    - Agree
    - Disagree
    - Strongly disagree
    - Don’t know

Part 3: Motivations and habits in academic reading Please, tick the option that applies to you in connection to the following statements

12. My teachers usually assign readings in preparation for seminars/lectures
    - Very often
    - Rarely
    - Sometimes
    - Never
    - Don’t know
13. When I am assigned reading in my courses, I generally read
   o All or almost all of it  o None  o Don’t know/doesn’t apply
   o Some of it

14. Do you prioritize certain components of your reading material (e.g. articles more than textbooks, or specific parts of a textbook, etc.)?
   o Yes  o No  o Not sure

15. If yes to question 14, what do you prioritize and how do you decide on that?
___________________________________________________________________________

16. How often do your courses include assigned reading in English?
   o Very often  o Rarely  o Don’t know
   o Sometimes  o Never

17. I am more likely to do the assigned reading if it is in Swedish/L1 than if it is in English
   o Yes  o Makes no difference  o Not sure
   o No

18. I am more likely to do the assigned reading if (check all that apply)
   o I like the course  o I find the reading not difficult
   o I find the course so difficult  o It makes no difference

19. I find it hard/challenging to read academic material in English.
   o Strongly agree  o Disagree  o Don’t know
   o Agree  o Strongly disagree

20. Reading academic texts in English requires more effort (compared to Swedish/L1)
   o Strongly agree  o Disagree  o Don’t know
   o Agree  o Strongly disagree

21. Reading academic texts in English requires more time (compared to Swedish/L1)
   o Strongly agree  o Disagree  o Don’t know
   o Agree  o Strongly disagree

22. I understand academic texts more or less depending on the language they are written in (English vs. Swedish/L1):
   o More in English  o More in Swedish/L1  o Don’t know
   o It makes no difference

23. If I have the option, I prefer to choose reading material that is in Swedish/L1 rather than English
   o Yes  o It makes no difference  o Don’t know
   o No  o Depends on the course

24. Doing the assigned reading improves my chances of passing courses
   o Strongly agree
   o Agree
   o Disagree
   o Strongly disagree
   o Don’t know
### 25. What resources do you think are most useful to pass courses?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Resource</th>
<th>Very helpful</th>
<th>Helpful</th>
<th>Not helpful</th>
<th>Don’t know</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The required reading</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Classroom attendance</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Lecture/Seminar notes</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Extra reading</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### 26. Please, add any comments, if you wish to:

_________________________________________________________________________________
_________________________________________________________________________________
_________________________________________________________________________________
_________________________________________________________________________________

Thank you!
Appendix C: The general outline of the interview questions

1. What were your experiences with reading material in English like prior to your University studies?

2. Would you consider your previous knowledge/experience sufficient to fully understand the English course literature at the University?

3. Compare your reading proficiency in academic English at the very start of your university studies to now. What are the greatest differences?

4. Do you read/ study in a different way when the target language is English instead of your L1? If so, how does it differ?

5. Do you use any aid in order to increase your understanding of reading material in English?

6. Do you make use of any specific strategies while you read?

7. Do you often encounter words you do not understand? If so, do you usually look them up?

8. Do you find it more/less challenging to read in English rather than your L1? Why?

9. How much time do you spend on the English course literature?

10. Do you think it takes more/less time to read course literature in English than in your L1? Why?

11. Would you consider some of the assigned readings to be more important than others?

12. How do you decide on what to read and what to skip of the assigned reading?

13. Do you do more of your assigned reading when there is an exam coming up?

Further specific questions were based on each student’s answers on the questionnaire
Appendix D: Consent for Participation in Interview Research

I volunteer to participate in a research project by David Özkan from Stockholm University.

I understand that the research is designed to gather information about attitudes towards reading academic English. I will be one of four persons being interviewed for this study.

1. My participation is entirely voluntary. I don’t expect to receive any benefit or payment for my participation. I may withdraw or decline participation from the study without any consequences.

2. If I feel uncomfortable answering a question during the interview, I have the right to decline answering any question or to end the interview.

3. Participation involves being interviewed by the researcher David Özkan. The interview will last approximately 20 minutes. The interview will be audio recorded and a transcript will be produced. Access to the recording will be limited to the researcher.

4. I understand that the transcribed interview or extracts from it most likely will be used in the study. I have been assured that I will remain anonymous, and that my confidentiality as a participant in this study will remain secure.

5. I have read and understood all statements of this form. All my questions have been answered to my satisfaction, and I voluntarily agree to participate in this study.

6. I have been given a copy of this consent form.

__________________________________                       _________________________
Printed name of the participant                                                  Date

_____________________________________                          ___________________________
Signature of the participant                                                        Signature of the researcher

Contact information:
If you have any further questions or concerns about the study, please contact the researcher or his supervisor:
Researcher: David Özkan (david.ozkan@hotmail.com)
Supervisor: Josep Soler (josep.soler@english.su.se)
Appendix E: Conventions for transcription of interviews


((text))   Descriptions of actions that are not talk
??        Speech or speaker identify that was not comprehensible in to transcribe
(text)    Speech that was uncertain to the transcribe
wor-      Dash indicates a word that was stopped short before being completed
word:     Colon indicates the preceding segment is lengthened
[word]    The actual word has been replaced for anonymity reasons
(0.2)     Time in seconds in which the participants do not speak
[text]    Lines spoken simultaneously are denoted by vertical lines at the point of overlap
TEXT      Words spoken with much greater intensity than surrounding speech
text      Bold typeface indicates an important section for analysis
Appendix F: Full length transcription of interview with Nicole

01 I: What were your experiences with reading material in English like prior to your University studies?
02 N: To my university studies?
03 I: Yes, prior to that.
04 N: prior to that(.) um, well, I started studying English
somewhere in the third grade, so at some point I just
started reading in English like also novels for
instance. So I started somewhere in high school, cause I
also did a bilingual high school, so I did a lot of
English literature and translations and, yeah.
06 I: |ok|
07 I: So you’ve worked with English from like a young age?
08 N: Yeah, yeah, pretty much. I mean, from the ninth grade
09 I: |ok|
10 N: especially, I did a lot of that.
11 I: Ok. That also brings us to, uh, my next question, cause
I saw that Romanian was your L1 so I’m wondering what
kind of status does English have in Romania and how is
the focus on English in schools there? Cause here in
Sweden there is a strong focus, it’s like a core subject
and they begin already from the 1\textsuperscript{st} grade I think. So how
15 |mhm|
16 N: is it like in Romania?
17 I: Uh, it’s the same thing more or less. I remember having
some kind of English classes in kindergarten already, we
learned like Twinkle Twinkle Little Star or whatever,
19 I: |yeah, yeah|
21 N: so yeah, the focus is pretty much the same.
22 I: Yes, ok. Would you consider your previous knowledge,
23 eh, and experience sufficient to fully understand the
24 English course literature at university?
25 N: My previous experience? To what, like before university
if I could understand the(.).texts?
27 I: Yes, like the previous knowledge you had, was it enough
to understand the course literature?
29 N: Yeah, I did my my proficiency Cambridge exam, I said
that when in, umm(.) in my 11\textsuperscript{th} grade, so when I got
into university, that’s back home at Romania, so my
first years, we already had to read a lot in English,
33 only in English, so yeah, it was sufficient.
I: Since you brought that up, have you noted any differences between the university in Romania compared to Sweden regarding the course literature, is it as much reading assigned in English here as there?

N: Yeah, yeah. Cause everything is in English either way.

I: Yes, uhm, so if you compare your reading proficiency in academic English from when you started your university studies, like the first period of time compared to now, would you say that it has improved and, uh, what are the biggest differences do you think?

N: Uhmm (.). Yeah it has truly improved cause I’ve been exposed to a lot of material in English and to a lot of, I don’t know (.). complicated speech I’d say. Yeeah, I think I even changed my ways of writing right now, which is not necessarily something good ((laughs)) cause now I tend to like write and formulate much longer and much more complicated sentences, cause I read so much theory in English. And now I’m like “no, make them shorter, cut them!” ((laughs))

I: Ok, so that, that kind of reading has influenced your writing as well?

N: Yeah.

I: Ok, interesting. Uhm, would you say that you read or study in a different way when the target language is English instead of your L1, are there any differences in how you study or read?

N: I think my mind just goes in another sphere. Yeah, I just start thinking in English and that’s it. I’m taking my notes in English, I’m making my arguments in English, so, I just (.), like, yeah.

I: So when you study Romanian, it’s the same, it’s just Romanian then?

N: Yeah, yeah, I switch, I can switch.

I: Do you think this is good, or do you see it as (.). is it something positive or negative?

N: I think it’s positive mostly, cause it means you fully understand the language and the culture, when you can, (yeah)

I: uh, be there completely, but in the same time, I, if I do it in Romanian for instance, I can wrong English things or concepts really easily, especially film
regarded cause you have all those terms, science fiction
or whatever, so you just bring English all the time into
I:  
|yeah, yeah|
N:  the, the discussion.
I:  Yeah, ok. Uhm, you indicated that you read more in
English than in Romanian in your leisure time on the
questionnaire, uh, could you explain why?
I:  In my leisure time?
N:  Well, my leisure time right now implies a lot of reading
for school((laughs)), which is in English, um, and since
I:             |((laughs))|
N:  I’m here, I mostly buy books which are in English cause
I can’t find any in Romanian of course, or in my E
books, so that’s why I mostly read in English nowadays.
But otherwise if I’m, if I’m back home or on holiday, I
would, yeah, I can read novels in Romanian just as.
I:  Yes, umm(.) would you say that you use any aid in order
to increase your understanding of the reading material
in English?
N:  Uhmmm.
I:  Like do you use anything that helps you understand more?
N:  Yeeah, I should((laughs)) but I don’t necessarily. But I
I:             |((laughs))|
N:  should do that. I mean, sometimes if it’s theory
related, I would like search on McMillion or whatever
I:                   |mm|         |mm|
N:  for a term or two but usually I don’t do that.
I:  And why is that do you think?
N:  Uhm, because I disrupt my reading and sometimes I just
prefer continuing(.) cause you understand from the
I:                   |ok|
N:  context what things mean anyway.
I:  Yes, you can guess like
N:                   |Yeah.|
I:  Yes, and uhm, do you make use of any specific strategies
while you read, like during your reading, do you have
any specific strategies?
N:  No ((laughs))
I:  No?
N:  No, I just read ((laughs)).
I:  Maybe like taking notes or underlining words or
something like that?
N:  Eh, again it depends if I’m, if I’m doing that for
school, maybe I will underline or usually I’m reading on
my laptop, essays, so I’m copy-pasting in a notepad paragraphs that I find interesting or relevant to my studies. Uumm, or like taking notes separately. But

I: |yes|

N: otherwise, if I just read for myself, naah.

I: No, I meant like for school.

N: For school? Yeah, yeah I do that.

I: Yes. Uhm, do you find it more or less challenging to read in English rather than your L1? And why is that? I think we’ve been into this question a bit.

N: Uhm, yeah, like, not necessarily. Maybe a bit cause sometimes I find that Romanian terms, um, are more diverse ((laughs)) and can explain better some concepts,

I: |yes|

N: and then yes, I find English somehow limited from that point of view.

I: Ok. Um, you indicated that you do some of your assigned readings on the questionnaire and not necessarily all of them, so my question is would you consider some of the assigned readings to be more important than others, and why so?

N: Uhm, I think it’s mostly based on my interests. Uhm, and whether I have time for them or not, cause I also have a life [laughs], so yeah, mostly I just pick like whatever looks interesting to me.

I: Oh, ok so not what seems most important, or do you

N: |Yeah|, but most important for what? Most important for the course or for myself? Right now, I’d rather choose something that interests me and that’s important for me as an (academician)((laughs)) and then what the teacher wants.

I: Yes, uhm so this question is related but how do you decide on what to read and skip of the assigned reading? So that is maybe your answer?

N: Well, if it is super long and I don’t have time for reading, I’ll just say blaah ((laughs)).

I: Even if it’s important, if it is a must read according to your teacher?

N: Yeah, yeah, yeah. I’m a rebel ((laughs)). If it is too long, I have a life, I don’t have time, no.

I: But do you feel, do you feel enough prepared then when you come to seminars or lectures if you haven’t done these long readings?
Here in Sweden, yeah, cause they will talk about it anyways. Sometimes you find that you read the text and then the teacher will say the exact same thing on the seminar, and you’re like why did I bother to read like 70 pages, when they are saying the exact same thing?

So that’s why maybe you decide to skip some of it? Cause they will repeat it anyways?

Yeah, yeah, and if what they say is super interesting and I’m interested in that, I’ll say okey maybe I look at more in depth, whatever, analysis by reading it afterwards you know, but that is, if it’s completely boring, then no, I won’t bother.

Mm. You said that it’s so here in Sweden, wasn’t it like that in Romania as well, if you remember?

Uhm, no it was much more engaging actually cause you’d have to come prepared and then, you wouldn’t have a lecture, it would be like directly, "ok what have you understood from this text, tell me". And that was it, I mean you had to talk and then it was, uhm, a lot of dialogue and communication between teachers and students.

Ok, so it’s less of that here in Sweden?

Yeah, yeah, here it’s a lot of blabber, blabbering the same thing you’ve read and then I don’t know, maybe you’re waiting for some questions but if you ask questions, you’re like, they will tell you "oh, but this will be maybe discussed, this is not a topic for the seminar", so yeah. Now I’m criticizing the Swedish system.

Uhm, ok so do you more of your assigned readings when you have an exam coming up?

Mmmm [...] Yeah, maybe.

Maybe? (laughs)

The things is that we have to write assignments. and we have to reference some of the readings in the courses. So maybe I’ll like just pick the two readings,
that’s, I don’t know, seem the most interesting to me
and I’ll read those and use those so I’ll somehow pick
them. It’s in the quality, not the quantity.
I: Yeah, ok so I see here that you indicated that you
prioritize your readings by length, but we’ve already
((laughs))
I: discussed this, so we don’t have to take it again, so we
go over to the next one. There was a question on the on
the questionnaire where you should thick, tick which
resources you found very helpful, helpful or not
helpful. And you ticked extra reading as very helpful,
even more so than the required reading. Could you

|Yeah|
I: explain why and also what kinds of extra reading and how
do you find them?
N: Umm, I find them based on my own interests and sometimes
based on recommended readings in class but not
necessarily. Many times I like subjects that are not
discussed in class but I find the given texts or the
required texts, I don’t know, unnecessary or boring, so
I’ll rather find my own sources, maybe I don’t know,

|mm|
N: from some references from that that text or from the
teacher or just stuff I know from the subject. Cause I

|mm|
N: don’t know, If we’re studying about a director, then
I’ll probably know some things about the
director as well and find my own books and my own
material and I will use that.

|ok|
I: And why, why do you think they are more, eh like more
important than the assigned readings, is it because you
find them more interesting cause you pick them yourself?
N: Uh, yeah, and because I many times find, uh, the
required readings quite basic, and if you’re on Masters

|yeah|
I: we’re on Masters level, then you want to go more in
depth, so why do you give me the basic stuff, or why do
you keep keep talking about the same thing all over
again? I wanna get get over to something new, so I’ll
research for myself into that.

|Yeah|
I: Ok. Do you think they help you in your studies as well
in, like uhm, for example if you have an exam coming up,
do you think they can help you as much as the obligatory
reading?
N: I think they help more ((laughs)).  
I: More?  
N: I mean, yeah that’s what happens because basically you gain more knowledge, details and nuances into that field, so yeah I mean, for me they help me more(laughs).  
I: Yes, and uh, then the last question. Uhm, you indicated that, maybe it’s related to the other ones, but you indicated that classroom attendance and lectures or seminar notes, eh, were not helpful, so why is that?  
N: ((laughs))  
I: It’s based on the same principle.  
N: Yes, uh, so |Yeah|, they’re repeating the same things as in the texts and then are presenting things that are quite basic, and naahh ((laughs)).  
I: But if you((giggles)) if you have something that you wonder and want to ask your teacher something, don’t you think that can be helpful? Like you can have dialogues with teachers, with classmates, maybe share, ex-exchange views. Don’t you think that is helpful?  
N: Uhm, yeah, sure it is, it and it happens. It is sometimes helpful I suppose, but you can also like, I don’t know (.) send an e-mail if that’s the case, I don’t know (.) I think I just find my answers in-in, I just read stuff and make my own arguments and then I just write them and usually people like it ((laughs))  
I: Ok ((laughs)). I think we’re done there.