

## Article

# Initial Assessment of First Language Literacy Resources for Adult Instruction in Swedish

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**Abstract:** This study is part of a project on initial assessment of first language (L1) literacy in adult newcomers prior to the commencement of L2 studies in Swedish. Here, we explore the assessment summaries of newcomers' L1 literacy, performed by L2-teachers, with assistance from an interpreter. According to the syllabus, instruction in Swedish for Immigrants (SFI) should be adapted to the individual's needs and goals; however, SFI often fails to do so. L1 literacy—i.e., using texts in different domains (school, work, society, and everyday life)—serves as a foundation for L2 learning and teachers' access to and utilization of students' L1 literacy can significantly enhance instruction. From a sociocultural approach to literacy and based on Luke and Freebody's 'Four Resource Model', a qualitative document analysis of L1 literacy assessment summaries (N = 50) demonstrated literacy practices from different domains of student life, beyond school literacy. Literacy practices from all four learner roles, i.e., *Code-Breaker*, *Text Participant*, *Text User* and *Text Analyst* were identified in the assessments to various degrees dependent on the students' background, which is illustrated by a close analysis of 5 summaries. This information is both important for teachers' planning of second language teaching and in the long term for the development of second language teacher education.

**Keywords:** second language teaching and learning; newcomers; assessment of first language literacy; literacy practices; language teacher education development



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## 1. Introduction

Sweden has a long tradition of receiving immigrants. In recent decades, an increasing number have migrated to Sweden from countries outside of Europe [1] leading to a more pluralistic and multilingual society. All adult newcomers who lack basic proficiency in Swedish are entitled to receive free education via the language program Swedish for Immigrants (SFI). In some cases, there is an educational obligation if the newcomer is assessed to have insufficient education or work experience to obtain employment [2] which often includes participating in SFI. Learning the language spoken in the new country is widely recognized as a central function in terms of social inclusion and integration into the workplace and society, especially by migrants themselves [3,4]. At the same time, many researchers emphasize that too much responsibility is placed on the migrant, whose motivation to learn new languages and literacy practices can be seen as an investment arising from their interaction with their social environment [5]. Research on adult learning is generally limited [6], and this is particularly true concerning second language (L2) acquisition among adults in various contexts. There is, therefore, a significant need for knowledge on how to support language development in learners with different backgrounds and needs [7]. Since experiences of literacy in the first language (L1) play a crucial part in language learning [8–10], an initial assessment of the students' experiences of literacy is important, in order to adapt the instruction to the students.

In this paper, we explore the initial assessment of adult newcomers' literacy practices, in their L1, i.e., their prior experiences of doing things with texts. The initial literacy assessment, which is considered the most important measure for improving the learning and

knowledge development of newcomers, aims to collect this type of information. Moreover, the increasing number of adult newcomers in Sweden has given adult education a more prominent role in the integration and establishment of migrants in Swedish society [11]. Although the prognosis at the moment is a somewhat decreased number of immigrants due to stricter migration policies [12], there is still a significant need for improved educational programming in Swedish for newcomers.

The aim of this paper is to explore the initial assessment of adult newcomers' first language literacy, conducted in students L1 with assistance from an interpreter and translated decoding and reading comprehension tasks, by L2-teachers. Written summaries from assessment interviews regarding student literacy resources in different domains, such as school, work, society, and everyday life, performed by L2 teachers, are analyzed and discussed. The assessing teachers used a L1 literacy assessment material for newly arrived adult learners of Swedish. The literacy assessment material was commissioned by the Department of Education for newly arrived adult learners of Swedish and published by the Swedish National Agency for Education in 2019. This study addresses the following questions:

1. Which literacy practices are revealed in the L1 assessment summaries and from which domains do they come?
2. How do the L1 literacy practices assessed differ between students with shorter versus longer educational backgrounds?

## 2. Background

In this section we will describe the educational context where the study is conducted. We will also outline the theoretical framework and previous research pertaining to a sociocultural view on literacy, literacy and language learning as well as literacies in different domains, such as school, everyday and workplace contexts.

### 2.1. Educational Context

An important part of the educational context for newcomers in Sweden consists of the language program Swedish for Immigrants (SFI). This program constitutes a crucial means of integration [13,14], and according to the national curriculum it is intended to be an "advanced language instruction" that provides "the language tools for communication and enable active participation in everyday life, in society, at work [. . .]" [15] (p. 1). SFI is available for all migrants with a residence permit (including newcomers, refugees, and work migrants). The student base is therefore heterogeneous in terms of educational, linguistic, and cultural background, and the instruction should accordingly be "adapted to the student's interests, experiences, all-round knowledge and long-term goals" [15] (p. 1). To meet the needs of the heterogeneous student group, SFI is organized into three study paths [15] based on students' previous schooling. Study path 1 is aimed at students with little or no formal education, while study path 3 is intended for students who are already accustomed to studying (i.e., students with secondary school level education or above). Study path 2 is aimed at students with previous schooling but not at secondary level. However, criticism has been directed toward SFI regarding its lack of adaptation to the target group [16,17], its low quality, and its outdated pedagogy [14,18,19]. According to Wedin and Norlund Shaswar [20], many teachers lack knowledge about their students' previous literacy experiences, leading to a lack of adaptation in their instruction. An official government report also stresses that high-quality SFI is an important instrument aiding migrants' integration into society and working-life, and adaptation based on initial assessment is essential for its utility [21].

An important part of the knowledge that should be assessed consists of the student's prior literacy experiences—i.e., their contact with written language in different contexts [22]—as literacy plays a crucial role in learning. Since 2019, there has existed L1 literacy assessment material for adult learners of Swedish in their strongest language [23]. This language often corresponds to the student's L1, but the assessment can also be con-

ducted in a language acquired later in life due to migration or schooling or in a language other than the student's L1. Similar compulsory material for newly arrived students in primary school has been available since 2016 [24]. While initial literacy assessment of newcomers in primary school is mandatory, it remains optional in adult education. The literacy assessment in primary school has been examined concerning assessing practices [25,26], interpretation [27], and assessment of newly arrived students in language introduction programs [28]. However, there is still very limited research on L1 literacy assessment of adults in both Swedish and international contexts [29].

Research on adult education in general is scarce within the Swedish context [6]. From the limited research available though, results have shown a discrepancy between how teachers and students perceive student performance. While students see themselves as responsible and motivated, teachers express an opposite view [30]. Gathering information about the student's prior knowledge, needs, and interests can help address this disparity. A review of individualized adult education stresses that teachers can connect with students by demonstrating knowledge of and interest in their prior experiences [31]. However, a study by Norlund Shaswar on how teachers utilize SFI students' prior writing experiences in instruction, shows that teachers restrict students' opportunities to use their everyday writing during SFI education [32]. Positive examples exist, nonetheless, as evidenced by a recent study conducted by Wedin [33] about the use of multilingual literacies in classroom activities for critical literacy development in adult newcomers with limited or no schooling. Her study demonstrated that students were explicitly stimulated to bring their own experiences and express their own views. Wedin concluded that all points of Hornberger's continua of biliteracy, encompassing aspects of power in relation to literacy and multilingualism, are crucial—even in basic literacy education for adults [33]. These findings partially coincide with results from Norlund Shaswar's study on how teachers work with multilingual reading of a short novel in Swedish for immigrants [34]. The teachers identified benefits in allowing students to use their multilingual repertoire and negotiate meaning based on their experiences. In this manner, the teachers moved towards a multilingual practice, despite adult education in Sweden still being characterized by a monolingual norm. In a previous study based on interviews and questionnaires with SFI teachers regarding their perceptions of the initial L1 literacy assessment, Eklund Heinonen and Lindström [29] found that teachers' perspectives on the assessment and the value of the information obtained, varied. Formal literacy and literacy within school-based contexts were considered the most relevant and therefore prioritized in the assessing process.

## 2.2. Literacies in Different Contexts

The present study applies a sociocultural view of literacy, based on the framework of New Literacy Studies (NLS), according to which literacy is understood not as an issue of measurement or of skills but as *social practices* that vary between contexts [35–37], or *domains* [38]. Subsequently, literacy involves reading and writing in a broader sense including all activities linked to written text. Furthermore, text includes visual elements such as symbols, logos, tables and figures and other graphic elements, which in combination with written text, create a multimodal message [39]. The term *literacy practice* is often used by researchers to refer to any concrete social practice that is textually mediated, i.e., “regularly occurring ways of doing things with texts” [40] (p. 21). Literacy practices are embedded in and given meaning through different ideologies, power structures and cultures that vary between different contexts [36,37]. These practices do not imply that the person who encounters written text necessarily needs to be able to decode or produce written text themselves.

Furthermore, different types of literacy practices are valued differently by society. Formal literacies which correspond to standardized practices, often defined by formal purposes of institutions such as school, are more influential and visible. These *dominant* literacies are more institutionally valued [35,40], while literacies associated with peoples' private everyday lives—so-called *vernacular literacies*—which are used outside domains of

power and influence, are often invisible and less valued [35]. Uncovering students' literacy practices from their everyday lives thus have the potential to enhance their learning in more formal contexts [40], assuming educators make the students' vernacular literacies visible and build a link between them and the formal, more institutionally valued literacies of the educational context. The literacies used in different domains should therefore not be seen as separated, but as overlapping (so-called *border literacy practices*) and linking them and making them visible and finding similarities will enhance students' learning [40]. Furthermore, literacy is regarded as a resource for learning in all school subjects [41], including language learning, which underscores the importance of assessing literacy practices beyond school-based contexts.

Given that Swedish for Immigrants (SFI) serves as an integration tool and is deemed to significantly facilitate an individual's swift entry into the labor market [7] (p. 383), it is imperative to ascertain students' literacy experiences specifically within the working life domain. According to Barton, the range of literacy practices in workplaces has often been considered formulaic, limited, and constrained, where sharing, copying, and collaborating is typical [35] (p. 66) [42]. However, research in this field, indicates changing demands on workers as societies are moving into so-called 'knowledge economies'. While workers are deemed deficient in the new literacy skills needed for changing demands, research has indicated that management has low expectations regarding workers literacy experiences. Studies have nonetheless shown that when it comes to workers' literacy practices outside the workplace, workers engage with text very well in several contexts [43,44]. In contrast to workplace literacies, in education there is a broader range of activities where copying and collaborating are tightly controlled, monitored, and often punished as plagiarism [35,42]. However, in the same way that vernacular literacies can overlap school literacies, workplace literacies may also overlap and serve as border literacies that enhance language learning.

School literacies are sometimes referred to as *academic literacies*, which also is a particular branch of New Literacy Studies (NLS) called *Academic Literacies* (AL) which focuses on student writing in higher education [45–47]. Hence, the assumption is that the literacy practices vary between contexts in higher education as well, between disciplines and subjects but also culturally and geographically between different educational systems worldwide. This means that one cannot expect that a highly educated newcomer has encountered all the social practices that typically characterize writing in a higher education context in Sweden. For instance, critical literacy such as source critique and literature discussions (i.e., literacy practices corresponding to the role as a *Text Analyst*, see below), where texts and claims may be contested, questioned, and challenged are often highly valued in Swedish educational settings, but this is not the case in all educational systems, especially not in more authoritarian systems. A newcomer may not recognize this practice and may feel unfamiliar or uncomfortable with critical discussions about texts written by well-established scientists. Moreover, practices vary regarding aspects such as genres, conventions of formal language, rhetorical structure, and plagiarism etc. [48].

Furthermore, there may not be a clear progressive link between the literacy practices of an academic professional education and writing in professional practice [49,50], i.e., writing deemed appropriate in an educational context may not be the same as what is expected in the workplace. This means that upon completing their education, a student needs to acquire new literacy practices in their professional practices of the workplace. Therefore, it is important to also explore whether the newcomer has had the opportunity to practice their profession and what literacy practices they may have acquired to that end.

### 2.3. Literacies and Language Learning

In accordance with the sociocultural view on literacy described above, the initial assessment is based on the view of multilingualism as a resource, reflected in the syllabus and curriculum of SFI. This points to a translanguaging pedagogy, which is a theoretical and instructional approach allowing learners to use their entire linguistic repertoire as a resource for learning [51]. This represents a dynamic view of multilingualism as a series of

social linguistic practices [52], which means that literacy practices are not seen as a set of skills connected to a specific language but rather to different activities. However, despite this multilingual norm reflected in the Swedish policy documents, a monolingual norm still prevails in many educational settings [53,54].

As mentioned above, literacy practices vary between different *domains* regarding how text is used, valued, and discussed. Participation in domains such as everyday life, workplace and educational settings, and society in general, requires acquisition of the particular literacy practices used in those domains [38]. Adult newcomers can have divergent experiences of various literacy practices which involve writing, different approaches to writing and different ideas about what it means to read and write in different domains. Already acquired literacy practices from one context that resembles the ones used in a new context, facilitates the acquisition of new literacy practices; a process which resembles L2 acquisition in general [38]. This view bears a resemblance to Ivanič et al.'s notions of border literacies [40], and, in turn, corroborates Cummins' *interdependence hypothesis* [8], a theory of L2 acquisition in which literacy experiences in any prior languages promote literacy development in an L2, since they are assumed to be transferred during the process. However, for a multilingual newcomer it is not always obvious which language should be considered L1 due to migration and/or different language use in different domains. We therefore use L1 in the sense of it being the 'strongest language', although it may not be the first language a student acquired, but rather the language in which the student has most of their literacy experiences. As mentioned above, literacy experiences do not have to be linked to a single language and/or writing system, nor to a specific geographical area [55]. Many students are multilingual in spoken language and/or in writing. Globalization, migration and technological developments in areas such as mobile telephones and the internet also influence how teachers need to relate to literacy and to student resources and assess these from a broad perspective, incorporating not only context, time, and place but also languages, writing systems, mediums, and modalities [56].

#### 2.4. Adult Newcomers Preconditions

Adult L2 learners have several advantages when acquiring a new language. In addition to having already acquired one or more languages, they have reached a higher level of cognitive maturity, and have already developed a conceptual system in another language, which can naturally be of great benefit when learning new languages [7]. However, this group of language learners also frequently encounter higher expectations for rapid progress in their language learning compared to young children acquiring their L1 [7].

In Sweden, as in most Western countries, literacy is often taken for granted, and numerous expectations associated with the ability to read and write permeate societal structures [7,57]. About one in four SFI students lack or have had a very limited prior formal education in their home country (0–6 years of education) and/or, for various reasons, have been unable to acquire fundamental literacy and numeracy skills during their upbringing. While the acquisition of a new language can pose challenges for these language learners, it is particularly important for educators to avoid a deficit thinking [58], and acknowledge that they, like all adult newcomers, possess diverse forms of knowledge and have the benefit of numerous experiences, even though they have had limited opportunities to learn reading and writing. Despite this, in literacy education, adult newcomers with limited or no prior educational background are often labeled 'illiterate', which invalidates their own experiences and context-specific literacy knowledge and can evoke feelings of inadequacy among the participants [59]. Hence, it is particularly imperative that educators recognize and capitalize on these students' prior experiences at the commencement of their L2 studies, through the initial assessment of students' L1 literacy resources.

As mentioned above, the primary basis for categorizing students into study paths in SFI is by school and educational background. However, the number of years in school does not always reflect the level of an individual's reading and writing skills, as one can acquire literacy outside a formal educational system (at home, in the workplace, in religious schools,



etc.) [7]. On the other hand, individuals might also have had limited use for the reading and writing skills acquired in school due to insufficient access to written materials or other reasons, causing these skills to fade into oblivion. As revealed previously, even students with upper secondary education or higher may have varied literacy experiences, such as more experience reading than writing, or a lack of familiarity discussing and critically reading texts. This means that an initial literacy assessment is important also regarding students with longer educational backgrounds.

### 2.5. Literacy Instruction

When students' L1 literacy resources have been assessed, it is crucial for the teacher to leverage them during instruction by further developing the student's various literacy practices. With the premise that literacy consists of several different resources, the 'Four Resource Model' provides four key skills in reading and writing needed for training students to become literate in order to handle a text-based world [60,61]. Four language learner roles or families of practices are suggested: *Code-Breaker*, *Text Participant*, *Text User* and *Text Analyst*, each of which requires handling of corresponding literacy practices [60]. The first family of practices encompasses the technical aspects of literacy that enable the language user to decode a text, to understand the correlation between sounds and symbols, adapting to writing direction, and use appropriate sound-inscription conventions [62,63]. The second, meaning making practice, involves interpreting text by building on prior knowledge, making inferences when reading, and utilizing available multimodal resources to construct understanding within the text and give it significance [63,64]. The third family of practices emphasizes the text's communicative and social purposes, revolving around the ability to adapt reading and writing to different social situations and functions, such as understanding and producing texts across various genres as well as being able to engage in discussions about texts in a manner that is highly valued in an academic setting [63–65]. Finally, analytical, and critical practices involve analyzing the underlying messages within texts which may include cultural, ethical, aesthetic, moral, or ideological assumptions. This family of practices also encompasses an understanding of the relationship of the text to other texts as well as an awareness that a text is influenced by its producer, sometimes with concealed intentions [62–64].

All four of these families of practices are necessary but none in and of itself is sufficient for literate citizens or subjects in a text-based culture. Thus, functional decoding—a prerequisite for critical reading and codebreaking—can be facilitated if the student understands the function of written language in practical contexts (*Text User*) [61,66], or the link between meaning-making and power (*Text Analyst*) [67]. Thus, the model focuses on the reader's use of texts in various social contexts and the ability to engage critically with text. Therefore, Luke and Freebody advocate that even in early reading and writing instruction, teachers should work on all four families of practices simultaneously [61].

### 2.6. L1 literacy Assessment Material

The assessing teachers, from whom we have collected data for this study, have assessed their students using an L1 literacy assessment material for adult learners of Swedish. This material is broad in its approach and can therefore provide teachers with information about a student's prior literacy practices in that student's strongest language, in turn creating possibilities to adapt teaching practices accordingly. It is designed to explore what kind of literacy practices the student has experienced in different domains, such as in everyday life, workplaces, educational settings, and society. Assessment of literacy practices beyond school-based contexts is crucial, particularly for students with no or limited formal education, who nevertheless may have had many literacy experiences [68,69]. The assessment focuses on literacy experiences in language(s) with which the student has the most experience in terms of reading and writing before their arrival in Sweden which could be their L1 or other language(s), learned or acquired as an L2 in the student's home country (e.g., in an educational context). The assessment is carried out in a language

that the student masters well enough to describe and reflect on their literacy experiences together with the teacher and an interpreter. The assessment interview takes the form of an individual exploratory conversation, during which students are given the opportunity to speak in their L1 about their previous experiences in reading and writing. The format of the conversation makes it possible to adapt the content based on the individual student's terms. The literacy assessment focuses not only on contexts where reading and writing usually play a very substantial role (e.g., in educational contexts) where literacy practices are more institutionally valued, but also in situations that occur in working, social, and everyday life (i.e., situations where it is less obvious that we are using writing, or vernacular literacies [40]). This less visible use of writing is just as important to assess since educators can identify border literacies and build a link between everyday writing and more formal writing [40].

The main part of the material consists of a conversation guide that provides a structure for the conversation based on different domains [38], with suggestions for questions and examples that the assessing teacher can use to bring a student's literacy experiences to the fore. In addition, the material consists of teacher guidance, decoding and reading comprehension tasks, as well as a standardized assessment summary, the latter of which constitutes the focus of the present study. There are two entry points to the assessment material, and entry points are chosen based on information given by the student about their prior reading and writing skills. The first entry point is used to assess the literacy experiences of students who have indicated that they cannot read or write or have very little experiences in these areas while the second entry point is purposed for all other students. In both entry points, the students perform level-adjusted reading comprehension tasks based on what they themselves have stated regarding their reading and writing ability. During the conversation, the assessing teacher is supposed to follow up the results from the reading comprehension tasks by discussing the purpose and content of the texts with the student.

After the conversation, the assessment summary is filled out by the teacher. This summary is intended to follow the students and inform the instructing teachers, so that they can adapt their instruction based on the students' experiences of literacy practices. It is therefore important to investigate the different literacy practices that emerge from the assessment which are noted in the summaries, as this reflects the literacy practices that are considered important to mention in the summary and build upon during instruction.

### 3. Methodology

This study is a part of a larger research project that explores initial L1 assessment of newly arrived adult learners [29]. The present study is based on assessment summaries of student L1 literacy resources, performed by teachers working with literacy assessment, and uses a qualitative approach. The assessment summaries have been analyzed using *document analysis*, which entails a meticulous examination and interpretation of document content to identify patterns, themes, trends, and other relevant information [70]. Document analysis serves as a valuable methodological approach within qualitative research, that allowed us to obtain a rich contextual data, as a complement to other data sources (in this case interviews and questionnaires [29]). In this study, we have focused on the various literacy practices noted by teachers in the summaries. The rationale for studying the assessment summaries in detail entails recognizing them as products of how the assessment interview was conducted, which, in turn, is influenced by the way questions are posed, what domains are explored etc. Furthermore, the teachers' cognitions regarding literacy and multilingualism [29] is likely to affect the assessment practice and its' outcome, as well as the student's expectations based on the situation, among other factors. Additionally, considerations of power dynamics, such as those between teacher and student, may also affect the outcome of the assessment. Moreover, the selection of what the teacher chooses to document in the assessment summary exerts an influence. It is therefore important to

examine which literacy practices are actually documented in the assessment summaries, in light of our previous findings regarding teachers' cognitions [29].

### 3.1. Data Collection

Data were collected from written summaries of assessment interviews conducted by L2 teachers with adult newcomers. These initial assessments of student literacy were authentic and collected following assessment interviews with students conducted by teachers across various municipalities and schools in Sweden. The ethical guidelines provided by the Swedish Research Council were applied [71], i.e., all participants were informed about the research project, how the data would be used, and that their participation was voluntary and could be withdrawn whenever they choose. A written consent for participation was filled out and all personal data were anonymized.

The assessment interviews were semi-structured and conducted in the student's strongest language with the help of an interpreter. They were conducted in ten different languages using interpreters who were either employed at each school or recruited from a translation company. Themes and questions concerned student literacy experience in different domains; for example, they were asked to talk about their home, schooling, free time, and previous work life in the context of experience with text (Appendix B). Students began the assessment interview by completing some level-adjusted reading tasks based on what they themselves have stated about their reading and writing ability. The students who had indicated that they cannot read or write in their strongest language carried out tasks such as writing their name, filling out a short form, recognizing alphabetic letters and decoding a short message (SMS) in their strongest language. If they had some previous experience with reading and writing, they were tasked with longer reading assignments of varying levels of difficulty, including a variety of text types such as a news article, an informational text, and a debate article, all with multiple-choice questions related to various aspects, including the content, purpose, underlying meaning, and intended recipient of the texts. After completing the assessment interviews with students, teachers completed the written summaries which are the subject of our analysis (Appendix A).

### 3.2. Data Analysis

To analyze the L1 literacy assessments, we went through summaries collected from 50 teachers from different schools and different parts of Sweden, using document analysis [70] as described above. The summaries were analyzed using the 'Four Resource Model' to identify student resources as either *Code-Breaker*, *Text Participant*, *Text User* or *Text Analyst* [61]. Analysis was therefore conducted of students' prior experience in decoding, meaning-making, detection of communicative purpose, and critical analysis (critical reading) in different domains. During the process, we noted the different literacy practices that had been documented, the domains to which the literacy practice could be attributed and the learner role(s) in the 'Four Resource Model' that the practice entailed. Through this iterative procedure we identified that the teachers had documented a wide range of literacy practices from different domains of the students' life, also beyond school-based contexts (i.e., everyday and workplace contexts). In order to illustrate this variation, we selected 3 summaries to represent students with very little or no previous experience of formal education (1–4 years) and two summaries to represent students with a more extensive educational background (11–14 years). This selection was motivated by the fact that these assessment summaries were representative and exemplified the variation in prior experiences of literacy practices in different domains among learners with diverse educational background. The primary basis for categorizing students into study paths in SFI is their school and educational background. However, the analyses provide a broader perspective on these students' resources, which teachers can build upon in the educational process.



## 4. Results

In the following section, the results of the analysis of the summaries of the L1 literacy assessments will be presented in terms of five examples of summaries that illustrate the students' multilingual literacy practices in different domains. Each analysis begins with a description of literacy practices in various domains and concludes with a summary of the learner roles based on the 'Four Resource Model' that the student has experience with. Altogether, an analysis of the assessment summaries from five students with different backgrounds is presented in the following section which concludes with an overview table of the students' literacy practices and learner roles (Table 1).

### 4.1. Example (1): A Student Named Sima

The first example involves a student named Sima who has one year of Quran schooling and the assessment summary reveals that he speaks, reads, and writes in Dari. Sima's literacy experiences have been assessed using the first entry point of the L1 literacy assessment material, via a Dari-speaking interpreter. The student learned the Roman alphabet in school but has learned to read on his own by reading easy literature in Dari. He also writes and reads the Roman alphabet. A strategy that Sima employed when he encountered difficult words that he couldn't read was to seek assistance from more experienced readers. Today, he reads and writes independently but explains that he struggles to spell challenging words, for which he seeks assistance. His everyday experiences of written texts in Dari mainly involved news and SMS, as well as forms and information from his child's school. The summary of the assessment also indicates that the purpose of his reading and writing is to send and receive information and to learn. He was working in the gold mining industry and at work he needed to read easy instructions and take short notes related to his work tasks. He mostly reads digitally, both longer and shorter texts, but rarely reads books. He learned to write by mimicking text messages from friends in his teens. His writing experiences mostly relate to his cellphone, but he can also write by hand, although he describes his handwriting as very slow. In Quran school he read the Quran but according to him, there were no discussions about the text.

This summary reveals that despite Sima's limited schooling, he has experience of reading and writing in different contexts and therefore has previous experience as *Code Breaker*, *Text Participant* and *Text User* in different domains, such as in everyday contexts and in the workplace. He has learned to read on his own, partly by mimicking text messages from friends and seeks assistance when encountering challenges, indicating learning strategies when it comes to decoding (*Code-Breaker*). His vernacular literacy involves the regular use of digital tools to obtain and convey information, suggesting that he can fulfill the communicative purposes he needs to navigate in a text-based world. In educational contexts, experiences emerge as a *Code-Breaker* while little information is provided about his experience as *Text Participant* in this context, apart from reading the Quran, as where the only documentation available indicates that texts were never discussed. The summary further demonstrates that the student seems to focus on his deficiencies, using expressions like 'slowly' and 'problems with spelling'. This could be indicative of the student's view on formal literacies as standardized practices that should be used in a specific (correct) manner.

### 4.2. Example (2): A Student Named Fatma

Fatma is another student, whose strongest language is Turmen, but who also speaks Turkish and Kurdish, as well as Arabic. In the latter language, Fatma states that she also reads and writes, as Arabic is the language that was used during her two years of schooling. Therefore, the assessment is performed using an Arabic-speaking interpreter. She states that in school she wrote and read in Arabic but the types of text that were read and how they were read are not evident from the summary, nor is further information regarding the kinds of text that she wrote in the school context. However, what emerges in the summary is that the student copied the teacher's writing from the blackboard,

that she had homework at school and that the teacher read aloud in the classroom. The summary also reveals that Fatma uses her cellphone and computer at home. No information is provided, however, about how and the purpose for which she uses these digital devices other than merely sending SMS and that she requires assistance writing them. Thus, she has experiences as *Code-Breaker* and certain vernacular literacies that the teacher can draw from during SFI instruction. The assessment also reveals that the student employs strategies to meet her communicative needs. Results from the reading comprehension tasks show that she recognizes, reads and writes individual words, and Roman letters and numbers (*Code-Breaker*). To some extent, she could also read an everyday message in the form of a text message and was able to discuss the meaning (*Text Participant*). With some help from the interpreter, she could also read and discuss the meaning of a bus timetable.

The summary above shows the reading and writing experiences for this student in both educational and everyday contexts in her strongest written language, Arabic. She also possesses literacy experiences in several additional languages, which, if utilized as a resource in future language acquisition, could be of great assistance to her learning [8,51]. However, no information is given about her literacy in the workplace domain. This could be due to the fact that the teacher did not ask any questions about her experiences from previous work or occupation and her potential engagement with texts in those contexts. It may also be attributed to the student not perceiving literacy outside the school domain as valuable [35,40]. Still, the completed summary offers an indication of her literacy resources as a *Code-Breaker* and as a *Text Participant* but as the purpose of her reading and writing is not documented, the student's resources as a *Text User* are not clear, nor are her previous experiences as a *Text Analyst*.

#### 4.3. Example (3): A Student Named Farzad

Another student, Farzad, has Dari as his strongest language, and he also speaks, reads, and writes in both Persian and in English. The assessment is performed using a Dari-speaking interpreter. Farzad attended Quran school in Afghanistan for four years where he read the Quran. Later, when his family moved to Iran, Farzad encountered other books. He became interested in books in Iran while playing school with his cousin who went to school. This interest led Farzad to meet the written language and his interest in books and learning, in general, deepened. At a young age he worked selling vegetables in markets, where he did not need to read or write anything. However, he studied driver license theory in Persian and today he regularly reads and writes email and SMS messages for social communication (amusement) and for learning purposes, both in Swedish and in Dari. For the latter, he regularly reads both textbooks and other easy-to-read literature in Swedish. In the educational context, he writes mostly short texts in response to questions about text and verbally recounts what he has read.

The summary above shows reading and writing experiences for this student in his strongest language Dari, as well as in his other languages, Swedish and Persian, in everyday life, his working life, and in educational contexts both in Quran school and when he studied driver's license theory. Some information was acquired about how texts were used, i.e., what the student did with texts, particularly in the educational context. Hence, experiences of literacy practices were documented for this student in these domains as *Text Participant*. In the assessment, the student demonstrates multilingual resources and educational experiences despite his relatively brief period of formal education. The student has independently cultivated an interest in both literature and learning, indicating a motivational drive that constitutes an asset in his upcoming L2 acquisition. The purpose of his reading and writing was discovered during the assessment, which give an indication of the student as a *Text User*. However, information about the student's experiences as *Text Analyst*—i.e., of analytical, and critical practices—was left out.

#### 4.4. Example (4): A Student Named Angham

Another student is a man that has Armenian as his strongest language but also speaks, reads, and writes in Arabic as well as in English. He has a total ten years of educational background and was therefore assessed using the second entry point of the L1 literacy assessment material, with the assistance of an Arabic speaking interpreter. In school, Angham read books and memorized their contents. He transcribed the material presented by the teacher on the blackboard and completed exercises in workbooks. However, the summary does not provide any information regarding the approach to textual analysis or other methodologies employed in his school's instructional practices. At work, the student handled a lot of invoices, orders, e-mails, and messages (WhatsApp), thus managing various types of texts for different purposes. Besides work, the purposes of the messages he sent in his everyday life were most often social contacts (amusements) and learning for his own interest. This student reads independently and very often. He had books at home in his home country and today he reads books on a daily basis, especially in his mother tongue (Armenian). Furthermore, he often borrows books from the library, and he prefers to read stories and fantasy as well as books about philosophy and history. He also has experience writing plans, messages, lists, and emails. The purpose of his writing is to perform his working tasks, but according to the student, writing was not a common feature of his working life. Moreover, the summary indicates that he has successfully completed reading comprehension tasks in Arabic, encompassing the interpretation of everyday messages, bus schedules, two distinct news articles, a multimodal text featuring a diagram, and a factual text. This suggests a literacy proficiency demonstrated through engagement with diverse text genres.

The above summary demonstrates broad reading and writing experiences for this student in everyday and workplace domains. However, no information is given about his literacy practices in educational contexts. This may potentially be attributed to the assessing teacher deeming that the number of years of education alone provides sufficient information regarding the student's experiences within this context. The student's literacy practices in the other domains are more extensively documented in the assessment summary. In every-day and workplace domains, Angham has a lot of experience as a *Text User* and a *Text Participant*, as the purpose of his reading and writing was assessed in these domains which indicates a knowledge of the function and utility of texts. As mentioned above, no further information was acquired about his experiences as a *Text User*; i.e., what exactly the student used to do with texts in educational contexts nor about his potential experiences in critical reading. From the summary of the assessment, it is evident that the assessing teacher did not follow up the reading tasks that the student had performed prior to the assessment interview. This could be a missed opportunity to learn more about the student's experiences with reading comprehension tasks, his recognition of text types, and potentially even his analytical and critical reading (*Text Analyst*).

#### 4.5. Example (5): A Student Named Althea

The summary of the assessment reveals that Althea hails from the Philippines and is proficient in speaking, reading, and writing in Tagalog, and also has proficiency in reading and writing in English, which is a prevalent language in the Philippines. Additionally, she is conversant in Chinese. With a total of 14 years of educational background, she has diverse work experience, including roles as a cashier, call center operator, and nanny. Althea frequently engages in reading novels in her native language, primarily focusing on love stories. In her profession as a call center operator, she has been exposed to instructional materials. The summary also reveals that Althea's reading purposes predominantly serve professional contexts, yet she also reads for leisure, communicative purposes, and relaxation, especially during air travel. During her tenure as a nanny, she often read aloud to children, assisting them with homework in mathematics and in the natural sciences. Althea has also engaged in personal writing endeavors, such as letter-writing and composing poems during emotional moments. Additionally, she possesses proficiency in drafting

job applications and reasserts that her primary reason for writing is for enjoyment. While her written communication was limited as a nanny and call center operator, she has been actively involved in extensive writing while filling out job applications since her arrival in Sweden. Furthermore, she exhibits considerable experience in digital writing through social media platforms (Facebook) and SMS. In summary, she engages in different literacy practices daily, primarily in a digital format.

During her school years, both Tagalog and English were employed as languages of instruction which indicates experiences of literacy practices in multiple languages, which is a resource when learning a new language [8,38]. Reading was emphasized, encompassing both textbooks and whiteboards. Teachers frequently read aloud, prompting students to provide summaries. In later years, some reflective exercises were conducted, though analyses were infrequent. Additionally, there were occasional calls to write on the whiteboard for classmates. Regarding conscious strategies, Althea views reading as an integral aspect of life, engaging in it for both pleasure and information retrieval. However, she expresses a disinterest in reading news. This is also reflected in the reading comprehension tasks she has completed, where she has obtained low scores specifically pertaining to reading newspaper articles. The results from the tasks also indicate that she has faced certain challenges in identifying the purpose and intended recipient of some texts, evaluating the content of a text, and drawing conclusions based on the textual content.

This assessment summary demonstrates experiences of literacy primarily in workplace and educational domains, but also in everyday life domain. The purpose of her reading and writing is predominantly professional or for leisure and the functionality of texts is evident in all domains (*Text Participant* and *Text User*) except in the educational domain, where both information from critical reading and discussions about texts are lacking (*Text Analyst* and *Text User*). The absence of experiences in critical reading is confirmed by the completed reading comprehension tasks, where the student struggled to discern, for instance, the underlying message of a text. This suggests that she has not had the opportunity to encounter typical literacy practices of academic literacies [48].

The literacy practices of the five students in different domains are summarized in Table 1:

**Table 1.** Summary of experiences of literacy practices in different domains based on the ‘Four Resource Model’ [60,61].

Student/Domain	Everyday Life	Work Place	Education
Sima (1 year of schooling)	Code Breaker Text Participant Text User	Text Participant Text User	Code Breaker Text Participant
Fatma (2 years of schooling)	Code Breaker Text Participant	No information provided	Code Breaker Text Participant
Farzad (4 years of schooling)	Text Participant Text User	Text Participant Text User	Text Participant Text User
Angham (10 years of schooling)	Text Participant Text User	Text Participant Text User	Text Participant
Althea (14 years of schooling)	Text Participant Text User	Text Participant Text User	Text Participant

In conclusion, the analysis of the summaries of literacy assessments above has shown that even students with limited schooling often have literacy experiences in several different domains, primarily in the everyday life and in workplace contexts. As these literacy practices in different domains sometimes overlap, the teacher can help students to find the similarities and use them to enhance students’ learning [40]. The analyses of the summaries also reveal that students can have a deficiency perspective regarding their own ability when talking about literacy by focusing on things such as lack of spelling ability or reading

speed. This could be attributed to the high value placed on formal literacy, which is the focus in educational contexts, where practices are standardized. This in turn can evoke a deficit perspective for students who are unable to meet the expected standard. Even assessing teachers can hold such a view of literacy beyond the educational domain, i.e., valuing dominant literacy over vernacular literacies [35,40].

The analyses of the assessments also show that when it comes to students with a shorter educational background, literacy practices such as *Code-Breaker* and *Text Participant* are most often explored by the assessing teachers while students' prior experiences as *Text User* is highly documented among all categories of students, particularly within the domains of everyday life and workplace contexts (Table 1). Within the educational domain, however, students' experiences as *Text User* are less extensively assessed, while their experiences as *Text Analyst* is scarcely explored, not even among students with a longer educational background. This goes against what Luke and Freebody advocate [61]; namely that all four families of text practices are important, and therefore, in this case, important to assess. The fact that experiences as *Text Analyst* are less frequently assessed may also be due to a lack of a deeper follow-up during the assessment interview regarding the reading tasks that are a part of the literacy assessment. This may indicate that these literacy practices are taken for granted. The examples in this study also suggest that students may lack experiences in discussing texts and analyzing them critically. Finally, the summaries of the assessments indicate that most students, regardless of their educational backgrounds, have experienced literacy practices in multiple languages [55]. This multilingual proficiency is particularly crucial for educators to harness in future instructional endeavors [8,38].

## 5. Discussion

The analyses of the L1 literacy assessment summaries revealed both broad and profound experiences of literacy practices in various domains, such as everyday life, workplace and educational settings which constitute important resources that teachers should take into consideration in their teaching in order to enhance students' literacy development in their second language [35,38,39]. All students also had diverse language backgrounds, with several being proficient in both spoken and written forms of multiple languages, which is representative of the heterogeneous SFI student group. This multilingualism can be highly beneficial for these students' L2 development allowing them to use their entire linguistic repertoire as a resource for learning [51,52].

The information regarding experiences of vernacular literacy, among students with limited previous schooling (1–4 years), is particularly crucial for teachers to consider when planning and individualizing instruction as it have the potential to enhance their learning in more formal contexts [40]. This in turn would significantly improve the quality of the adult education within Swedish for Immigrants (SFI), as it has been found, in both inspections and research, to maintain deficient quality, partly due to insufficient adaptation and failure to capitalize on students' prior literacy experiences [16,17,20]. Further, the students' extensive experiences of literacy practices in workplace contexts, as emerged in the assessments, can serve as border literacies that enhance language learning and, with the assistance of the teacher, can be transferred to other similar contexts [40]. Another aspect that emerged in the results was the tendency among students with limited previous schooling to relate to school literacy, when devaluing their own literacy skills. This also emphasizes the importance of including a broader conception of literacy both in the L1 assessment procedure and in SFI classroom practice. However, according to Eklund Heinonen's and Lindström's previous study on teachers' perspectives regarding initial L1 assessment, and the importance of assessing literacy beyond the educational domain, this is not always the case [29].

When it comes to students with a longer educational background, the fact that the academic literacy was only partially assessed may be due to the assessing teacher assuming that texts have been used in a manner similar to what is customary within higher education in the Swedish context, not taking into account that practices vary culturally and geographically between different educational systems worldwide even in higher education [48].



This also accentuates the importance of teachers' knowledge of which prior literacy skills and experiences should be explored during the initial assessment procedure and how the assessed literacy practices can be utilized as resources in future classroom practice. This, in turn, stresses the importance of the teachers' awareness of sociocultural differences between educational contexts [45,46]. The omitted information in the summaries also highlights the importance of teachers being trained in both the sociocultural perspective of literacy and its' significance for second language acquisition [9,10,22,35–37,51,52].

Basic education in the Swedish language for adult newcomers (SFI) is organized within three differently paced study paths that are mainly based on the length of time students had spent in school. Consequently, students with no or very little previous schooling are placed on path 1, which has a very slow pace and includes basic literacy teaching (alphabetization) [15]. However, the results in this study indicate that schooling in terms of number of years (which is often used as a criterion for the choice of study path) does not necessarily say much about students' real starting points when they start L2 education.

The results from our study underline the importance of gathering wide-ranging information about students' literacy practices in their L1 to adapt teaching within the confines of the syllabus. Following the valuable information revealed in the L1 literacy assessments, we claim that such assessments should be a standard part of student intake in SFI and will thus improve the teachers' ability to adapt their instruction to the students' needs and preconditions. This means that the teachers need to be prepared to conduct such an assessment, and in order to do so, they need to be familiar with the theoretical assumptions underlying the assessment material, such as a sociocultural view on literacy [22,35–37], and that newcomers' experiences of literacy may stem from various domains outside of the school context [38,40], as well as from different languages [9,10,51,52]. However, Eklund Heinonen's and Lindström's previous study suggests that not all teachers are aware of, or may resist, the sociocultural view on literacy [29]. Together with the results of the present study, this indicates that teacher education needs to focus more on initial assessment of L1 literacy assessment in order to prepare the teacher students for this task. As there is no specific teacher education program for adult education, it is important to address adults' prior experiences in general, and literacy experiences in particular, in other teacher training programs, which requires a strengthened knowledge base [72]. Thus, besides enhancing the competence of practicing teachers, the results also provide important knowledge contributions to teacher education and decision-makers for increased goal attainment, pedagogical integration, as well as language instruction and adult education in general, where research needs are substantial [6].

An important issue that remains to investigate is that we do not know what happens to the assessment summaries after the assessments are conducted. Given research indicating that teachers may be unable to integrate their students' previous experiences of literacy practice into their instruction [16,17,20,32], it is conceivable that the information in the summaries will not always be used as intended. A task for future research could therefore be to investigate what happens with the information in the summaries and how (or whether) the teachers use this information in their instruction.

From a methodological perspective, the results above demonstrate the advantages of allowing adult newcomers with diverse educational, linguistic, and professional backgrounds to engage in structured conversations about their prior experiences of literacy practices. It is important not only to explore these experiences using reading comprehension tests, which can be misleading as they require background information about the cultural context, among other factors [35]. These results thus confirm what Barton [35] asserts, namely that an assessment of literacy, largely based on what the adult learner themselves report about their textual experiences and how they have acquired them, provides a more accurate depiction of the learner's literacy than standardized reading and writing tests. He also argues that adult's assessment of their own literacy is defined by their needs and aspirations in varying roles and context, not by independent measures and objective tests. The assessed information about the student can also alter the teachers' perception of the

students, which, according to previous research, has been shown to be more negative (deficient) than how the students perceive themselves [30].

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**Institutional Review Board Statement:** Not applicable, since the ethical guidelines provided by the Swedish Research Council were applied [71] (see Section 3.1). Ethical review and approval were waived for this study after consideration of the Swedish Act (2003:460) [73] concerning the Ethical Review of Research Involving Humans. The Act applies to research that includes the processing of personal data referred to in Article 9.1 of the EU General Data Protection Regulation (sensitive personal data). The data collected as part of this study is not considered sensitive as it does not concern an individual's racial or ethnic origin, political opinion, religious or philosophical beliefs, trade union membership status, health or sex life, or sexual orientation. Additionally, informed consent has been obtained from the participants, and the materials have been anonymized.

**Informed Consent Statement:** Informed consent was obtained from all subjects involved in the study.

**Data Availability Statement:** Data is not available due to privacy, since the research was conducted on authentic assessment documentation, with the consent from all participants with the guarantee that all personal information was anonymized. Furthermore, the summaries are in Swedish, and it is not possible to translate all the summaries to English. Instead, we provide examples of summaries in Appendix A.

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## Appendix A. L1 Literacy Assessment Summary Template

The summary consists of several different parts which are summarized under the headings below.

### *Background Information on the Student Prior to Assessment*

- Student's name and age:
- Assessment language (the language in which the assessment is done):
- Year of arrival in Sweden:
- Strongest language according to the student:
- Other languages stated by the student (speaks/reads/writes):
- Education (and total number of years of education):
- Work/occupation/employment:

### *Basis for planning of instruction*

- Concise comments on the student's strengths
- The student's goals, needs, and interests.
- Other relevant aspects for instruction

### *Literacy experiences in the student's strongest language*

#### Work/Occupation

Engagement in written language (what, in which contexts, extent)

- Reading
- Writing

#### Every day and societal life

Interaction with written language (what, in which contexts, extent)

- Reading
- Writing

#### Education

Interaction with written language (what, in which contexts, extent, and how the student has engaged in [worked with] reading and writing)

- Reading
- Writing

Beyond the aforementioned areas that are being mapped, inquiries are also directed towards aspects of literacy, specifically: Formal Spoken Language/Different Types of Oral Presentations; Use of Digital Tools, Use of Other Languages besides the Strongest Language; Use of Conscious reading and learning strategies.

### **Appendix B. Example of Questions in Assessment Interview**

Here are examples of questions posed by the assessor to the student during the assessment interview. The assessment interviews are structured according to domains related to occupation/employment, every day and societal life, as well as education. The questions regarding reading and writing should be tailored based on the respective domain.

#### Work/Occupation

- Can you tell us briefly what a typical day looked like at your work? employment in your home country?
- Did you read something?—What did you read then? (e.g., notes, forms, invoices, signs, letters, e-mails, instructions, manuals, reports, articles, books)—How often? (every day, quite often, rarely)
- Did you listen when others read?—What did they read then? (e.g., notes, forms, signs, letters, e-mails, instructions)
- Did you write something?—What did you write then? (e.g., forms, orders, receipts, notes, SMS, letters, e-mails, notes, reports, articles)—Did you write by hand or on a computer?—Who read what you wrote? (only yourself, others)—How often did you write? (every day, quite often, rarely)

#### Every day and societal life

Can you tell us briefly about what you did when you were not working/employed or studied in your home country? What did a typical day look like?

- Did you read something?—What did you read then? (e.g., SMS, chat, advertising, ads, books, magazines)—What kind of books/magazines etc.? (e.g., fiction, poems, non-fiction, religious texts, daily newspapers, weeklies)—How did you get access to books, magazines, etc.? (e.g., at home, at library, in a café or other place where you could read/borrow books etc.)
- Did you listen when others read aloud/performed something orally? (e.g., reading aloud, lecture, speech, sermon, theater)
- Did you read aloud yourself or perform something orally for others? (e.g., reading aloud, lecture, speech, sermon, theater)
- Did you watch or listen to different programs in your home country? (e.g., TV, radio, computer, mobile)—What kind of program? (e.g., news, weather forecast, documentaries, factual programs, debates, series, entertainment programs)—Did the TV programs have subtitles? In what language? Did you read them?
- Did you write something?—What did you write then? (e.g., notes, lists, letters, e-mails, notes, stories, diary, poems)

#### Education

You have told us that you went to school/college/university for X years. Can you briefly describe what a typical day looked like?—How did you like going to school/

studying?—How was the teaching at school/college/university? (e.g., lessons, lectures, laboratories, seminars, self-studies)

- What did you read (school/higher education/other education)? (e.g., writing on the board, textbooks, non-fiction books, fiction, poems, articles, reports, scientific texts of various kinds)—What did the textbooks look like? (e.g., text only, text and images, tables, charts)
- When you read—what did you usually do then? (e.g., read silently/aloud, listen when the teacher read aloud)
- How did you work with the texts? (e.g., discuss the reading in class/in groups, answer questions about the text orally/in writing, write about what has been read, report orally, learn the text by heart)
- Did the teacher give oral briefings/lectures?
- What did you write (school/higher education/other education)? (e.g., copy from the board/book/what the teacher said, write your own texts)—What kind of texts did you use to write? (e.g., stories, poems, texts where you invented the content yourself, texts where you have written facts: e.g., described something or explained something, or argued for something, papers, exams, reports, essays, articles)—Did you use to write by hand or on a computer?—What kind of comments/response did you usually get on what you had written? (e.g., content, structure, grammar, spelling)—Did you get to rewrite the text after receiving feedback/comments from the teacher?

You have told us that you have not been to school. Have you participated in any other teaching? (e.g., home schooling, private tuition, religious education society, driver's license training, nursing training, military training)—How did the teaching go?—How did it happen when you learned to read and write?

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