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Digital tools through a K-3 teacher’s perspective

Digitala verktyg ur ett F-3 Lärarperspektiv

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Table of content

Foreword .......................................................................................................................... 3
Abstract ............................................................................................................................ 4
1. Introduction ................................................................................................................ 5
2. Aim and research question ......................................................................................... 7
3. Theoretical background and previous research ....................................................... 8
   3.1. Definition of the term “digital tools” ................................................................. 8
   3.2. English language teaching ............................................................................... 8
   3.3. Digital tools ..................................................................................................... 10
   3.3.1. Digital tool a positive and good aid for language development ................ 11
   3.4. Disadvantages and obstacles regarding the usages of digital tools ............... 12
   3.5. Teacher knowledge about digital tools ............................................................ 13
4. Method ....................................................................................................................... 15
   4.1. Semi-structured interviews ............................................................................ 15
   4.2. Participants ...................................................................................................... 16
   4.3. The procedure ................................................................................................. 17
   4.4. Ethical considerations .................................................................................... 17
   4.5. Analysis of the data ........................................................................................ 18
5. Results ....................................................................................................................... 19
   5.1. Five teachers’ view on English as a subject in K-3 classroom .......................... 19
   5.2. The five teacher view on digital tool and their usage of it in the English language classroom for young learners ................................................... 20
   5.2.1. Five teacher’s usage of digital tools during English lessons ...................... 22
   5.3. Benefits and Challenges with the use of digital tools .................................... 23
   5.3.1. Benefits .................................................................................................... 24
   5.3.2. Challenges ............................................................................................... 24
6. Discussion ................................................................................................................ 26
   6.1. English language learning in younger school grades ..................................... 26
   6.2. Digital tools as a supporting aid for English development ............................. 27
   6.3. Challenges and positive aspects of digital tools ............................................. 28
   6.4. Digital tools difficult to learn and more difficult to master? ......................... 30
   6.5. Gender and Age ............................................................................................ 31
7. Conclusion ................................................................................................................ 32
   7.1. Limitations of the study ................................................................................ 33
   7.2. Further research ............................................................................................. 33
   7.3. Ending comment ............................................................................................ 34
Reference list .................................................................................................................. 35
Appendix 1: Interview questions ................................................................................. 37
Foreword

As the authors of this study, we declare that we have participated equally throughout the process of this paper. This project has been planned, prepared and constructed by both of us. Parts of the study was divided between us during the writing process. The final paper has been handled and revised by both participants, who also have agreed on the final text.

We want to thank all our friends and family members that have spent their time and effort to read our paper and support us throughout our work. Furthermore, we want to thank the teachers that have participated in our study and made it possible for us to create this study.

______________________  ____________________  
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Abstract

Technology is advancing at a rapid pace and more digital tools find their way into the classrooms as a means for educational purposes. The English language has also taken more space in our everyday life and is almost a necessity in today's global society. However, can the teachers in the Swedish educational society keep up with the rapid growth of both these subjects? The aim with this study is to get a better understanding about teachers’ perspective and knowledge about digital tools as an aid for English language development for young learners, as well as what challenges and benefits they find with using digital tools as a means for English language development.

This study will present a summary of theoretical and literature background regarding the topic at hand. The data for this study was collected through interviews with five K-3 teachers in four different schools located in south of Sweden. The result showed that a majority of the five interviewed teachers, saw digital tools to be beneficial in the English classroom environment, and they had a positive view on English as a subject and its importance for young learners. However, the data collected exposed that the absence of guidelines, inadequate knowledge about how to use the tools within an educational approach, malfunctioning equipment and the lack of time to teach and plan the lessons was a substantial dilemma.

Keywords: Digital tools, English as a second language, teacher knowledge, technology, English language development, benefits
1. Introduction

Technology is the foundation of the modern society; it has crossed the border from being seen as a luxury item to a necessity for our everyday life. With the progress of technology comes the prospect and the possibility to interact with people, and consume media and information from all over the world. To be able to consume this information and to be an active part of the global society, it has become necessary to have a grasp of digital tools and the English. With this development, children come in contact with digital tools and English much earlier than before and it serves a more natural part in their life than for their predecessors (Israelson 2015; Stevenson, Hedberg, Highfield & Diao 2015).

According to the Swedish curriculum (Skolverket, 2016) student’s interests, everyday life and their pre-existing knowledge should accompany them into the classroom, and be a part of their learning process. This suggests that technology needs to play a greater role in the classroom environment, not only as a tool for educational development, but also as a means for further advancement in using technology outside of school. It is also an indicator that English should have a greater role in today's classroom (Chen, Quadir, Benazir & Teng 2011; Król-Gierat 2014; Berns, Palomo-Duarte, Dodero, Ruiz-Ladrón & Márquez, 2015).

Including and using digital tools for educational purposes has proven to be challenging for some teachers in the field. Technology is evolving fast, and with it comes new methods and techniques regarding the usage of digital tools in the classroom environment. This, for some teachers, can be a daunting process as their knowledge and understanding of the digital tools and their possibilities is not up to date. This issue was something that was present during our internship practice in K-3 classes (VFU); many teachers used digital tools in their English language teaching, but not always to its full potential. The digital tools often served as a temporary solution and were often used “just because”. They were mainly used in a passive way, either the pupils watched a movie/clip or they were working separately with an app, mostly alone. Digital tools, outside watching clips, were rarely used in the English language classroom. The teachers used the traditional method of teaching for the majority of time. During our observation, we could sense a form of anxiety and lack of knowledge among the teachers regarding using digital tools in the English classroom as well as teaching the English subject itself.
The English subject does not get as much time and attention as the other school subjects, the time and effort devoted to it in years K-3 vary a lot from class to class and school to school, which we noticed during our internship practice (VFU). Some schools spend all their English hours in the end of year three, while others try to spread them out throughout K-3. The different hours can be a result of the fact that there is no specific time stated when to start teaching English (Skolverket, 2016). In the curriculum (Skolverket, 2016) K-3 do not have any knowledge requirements at the end of grade three, which means that the teachers need to work towards the English knowledge requirement for grade six. This may make it difficult for the teacher to see where they are heading and what they are aiming for. Especially as some teachers do not have the competence regarding English as a subject as they were not given the opportunity to study it during their teacher education.

Research claims that digital tools are a fun and motivating way for the students to develop their English language, as motivation it is the key element for language development (Chen et al, 2011; Wooten & Mccuistion, 2015 and Nisbet & Austin, 2013; Król-Gierat 2014). This paper aims to convey K-3 teachers’ perspectives, knowledge and use of digital tools during English language development. As this is a very broad topic and we understood the difficulty of doing such a huge investigation with the time restriction we had; five K-3 teachers from four different schools in Sweden worked as our base for this paper.
2. Aim and research question

The main focus of this study is to investigate how teachers perceive and work with digital tools as a means for young learner’s language development in English. We focus on teachers’ perspectives regarding benefits and challenges they find with their use of digital tools. The data presented in this paper was collected during interviews with five teachers from four different schools.

The following questions served as guidelines throughout this study:

- How do K-3 teachers perceive and work with digital tools in order to promote young learners’ language development in English?
- How do teachers view positive aspects as well as challenges related to using digital tools for language development in K-3 classrooms?
3. Theoretical background and previous research

This section will provide background and insight to previous research regarding digital tools, how to integrate and use digital tools in an English classroom for English language development. The first part will give a definition of digital tools and describe English language teaching. Secondly, we will discuss digital tools, their benefits and challenges. Finally, it will bring up teachers’ knowledge regarding digital tools. The subheadings chosen for this sections are conducted after the founding’s as well as our research questions.

3.1. Definition of the term “digital tools”

The term digital tools describes different kind of devices that can receive, use and produce digital media, but also the media that is produced through the devices. For example; computers, TV, tablets, Smartboards, apps and movies. Digital tools open up new possibilities for interaction. With these devices, you can access the internet, watch movies, check your emails, and use the camera to take photos and record movies. With tools such as the computer, tablet or phone you can get access to apps and sites that can be used in educational purposes (Çelik & Aytin 2014; Hunt-Barron, Tracy, Howell & Kaminski 2015; Samah, Putih & Hussin 2016).

3.2. English language teaching

The English language is the most used language outside its native core, and has become the global language of our world, which makes it possible to share culture, entertainment, research and science between different countries and people. English is also used in higher education, economics and in politics. Because of this, the English language is a mandatory subject in many schools around the globe (Arikana & Ozenb 2015).

Sweden is one of the countries where English is a mandatory school subject. The English language shall, according to the Swedish curriculum, be taught as early as in primary school grade 1-3 (Skolverket, 2016). According to Skolverket (2011), the English language is a part of the Swedish students’ everyday life. The language opens up opportunities to study, work
and travel abroad, and in order to take part in this the students need to rely on a good English language foundation. Therefore, it is important and only natural to give the students tools and education as early as possible to expand their language learning. This so that they can be a part of and expand the global society (Skolverket, 2011).

Through teaching, pupils should be given the opportunity to develop all-round communicative skills. These skills involve understanding spoken and written English, being able to formulate one’s thinking and interact with others in the spoken and written language, and the ability to adapt use of language to different situations, purposes and recipients. (Skolverket, 2016, p. 32)

Król-Gierat (2014) states that English language teaching in the younger ages should be concrete and proper. To achieve a good language-learning environment, McKenney and Voogt (2011) argues that teaching should be social, meaningful and intentional. Language development should be integrated in such a way that it helps to practice the thinking processes and develop the English language. Sinatra, Zygouris-Coe & Dasinger (2012) emphasize the importance that students encounter new words on a regular basis and use the words continuously. Bakhsh (2016) points out the importance of a communicative atmosphere for student’s vocabulary learning and language development.

Language learning should be taught in “chunks” according to Read (2007), so that the students get a better understanding of the words and context that they are used in. Sun and Dong (2004) however, proceed to proclaim that studies have shown that learning words in pairs is more effective than learning words in contexts and chunks. Sun and Dong (2004) talks about the method known as decontextualized learning (also known as traditional learning) this method has been used essentially and is still present in many classrooms today. This type of teaching relies on memorization of new words, often in form of examinations where the student recites the words by spelling and translate them to their native language, often using pen and paper (Çelik & Aytın 2014, Lau & Rao 2013). The contrast to the decontextualized way of teaching is the contextualized method that Read (2007) argues is the best method, and it has gained popularity in the last years. This method emphasize learning the words in context, not giving the children the answers. Instead, the students need to make sense and figure out the words presented to them with the help of
visual clues, the context that the word is represented in and their already existing knowledge. The students use their previous knowledge and combine it with the new knowledge to develop further (Çelik & Aytın 2014, Lau & Rao 2013). This method rely on learning by doing, which means that the students are active and a part of the lesson according to Çelik and Aytın (2014). Both Çelik and Aytın, (2014) and Lau and Rao (2013) states however, that there is little research done on which of these methods that have the best effect on students’ language development.

Bakhsh (2016) states that L1 (first language) should not be used during the English lessons and the L1 should not be used for translation of the English words, phrases or sentences during the lessons. Król-Gierat (2014) argues though that students develop their L2 (second language) with the translation help of their L1. Vocabulary learning is closely connected with student’s early language learning in both L1 and L2 (Read, 2007). Chen et al, (2011) states that during the English lessons the L1 often exceeds the English language; the L1 is often used more. This creates a so-called “non-English” speaking context, which makes it difficult for the students to learn English. Using the L1 too much in the English classroom can have a negative effect on the students’ vocabulary and English language development, Chen et al, (2011) continues. It can lead to a problem understanding when and how to use the language; this also has a negative effect on the confidence and motivation to use the language in and outside the classroom environment (Chen et al, 2011).

3.3. Digital tools

Technology has expanded rapidly over the years, and even though digital tools were used in classroom settings as early as the 1960s, there is no denying that digital tools have expanded beyond our imagination in the last five decades (Chen et al, 2011). This expansion of technology has according to Berns et al, (2015) an impact on not only the population but especially the children that are growing up with it. Chen et al, (2011) states in their study that since digital tools such as smartphones, tablets and computers are more accessible today, it shapes our way of living and thinking as it gives way to access anything everywhere at any time. This makes digital tools a big part of students’ free time as well as their everyday life (Israelson 2015; Stevenson et al, 2015).
Skolverket (2011) pinpoints that it is important for students are motivated and have confidence in their abilities, to help them develop their language skills further. Incorporating digital tools to the same degree as the student’s interest and experience into the classroom, is one of the core aspect for good English language learning according to Salinas-Gonzalez, Arreguin-Anderson and Alanís (2013). Salinas-Gonzalez et al, (2013) continues stating that it will help students get a better understanding of what is expected of them as well as getting a perception of the task itself, which makes the learning more meaningful and interesting. Skolverket (2011) points out that the use of different digital tools as an aid during the English lessons gives the students the opportunity for a vibrant language development that they can process and assimilate. Skolverket (2016) request that different tools and devices should be used as a support for the students’ development. With the different digital tools, the students are able to assimilate the language in an immediate context, which deepens their understanding.

In order to deal with spoken language and texts, pupils should be given the opportunity to develop their skills in relating content to their own experiences, living conditions and interests. (Skolverket, 2016, p. 32)

Digital tools have become popular to use in the classroom environment for educational purpose. Berns et al, (2015) states that this kind of technology opens up the opportunities for people to access information anywhere and from different sources. This technical learning environment has become a popular teaching and learning tool and it can also be highly interactive and effective in collaborative learning situations.

3.3.1. Digital tool a positive and good aid for language development

Nisbet and Austin (2013) and Król-Gierat (2014) argues that motivation is the key aspect for English language development; they continue arguing that digital tools provide this motivation. The tools help to capture the student’s attention, the lesson becomes more fun and meaningful. The tasks done by digital tools often stimulate the students to remain interested, engaged and focused on the task that they are given. McKenney and Voogt (2011) agrees and build upon this notion and add that digital tools also strengthen the students’ engagement in their own learning. Wooten and Mccuiston, (2015) continues to state that digital tools support
students in their understanding of the context as the tools often provide both sound and pictures. This in turn helps to stimulate more of the senses. According to Liu, Navarrete, Maradiegue and Wivagg (2014) digital tools will improve the student's ability to listen, speak, read and write, as there are endless learning possibilities when using digital tools.

Van Deursen, Ben Allouch and Ruijter (2016) continue stating that because digital tools can provide unlimited material there is no limitation to the possibilities of teaching and educational purpose, which makes the use of them highly efficient/beneficial in the English language classroom. As Keengwe and Bhargava (2015) points out, digital tools open up the possibility for teaching anytime anywhere. Sung, Y. T., Chang, K. E., & Liu, T. C. (2015) also point out that digital tools can be customized for individual use, which gives the possibility to adjust to different learning styles and needs. Students that have social and emotional difficulties can use different kinds of digital tools to produce contents at the same level as their peers. According to Van Deursen et al (2016) digital tools save time for both students and teachers, as the teachers both get more time to help the students as well as time to prepare the lessons.

Digital tools give the students a sort of familiarity, which helps them to stay more focused than if they would use pen and paper. Additionally, pen and paper are not as common in their everyday surroundings as they used to be (Van Deursen et al, 2016). Van Durden et al, (2016) goes so far as to say that the pen and paper exercise is overdue. Traditional exercise and textbooks are according to Van Deursen et al (2016) inefficient for students that are growing up in this technological society. Digital tools will help the students focus on the task instead of being distracted by, for them, unusual tools of communication. Read (2007) claims that students need good hand to eye coordination and substantial motor skills when it comes to writing with pen and paper. This can be troubling as the student must focus both on the context as well as on forming the letters, and the process of writing the letters correctly and neatly takes energy and effort. All that energy could instead be focused on the content and the structure of the text.

3.4. Disadvantages and obstacles regarding the usages of digital tools
Bakhsh, (2016) points out that even though digital tools are popular among young learners and has presented itself as a good language learning practice; it has a tendency to be used in the wrong way. Often the tools are used to enhance the “fun” factor of the lesson but lack substance, which does not provide good learning environments, as lessons are constructed without real meaning or depth.

Batters dying, long recharging time, limited storage and lack of internet access were the main disadvantages according to a study made by Van Deursen et al. (2016). Some other distress when using digital tools according to Van Deursen et al. (2016) was physical discomfort as students complained of back and neck pain. A study done by Norris (2016) state that one other huge disadvantage was mainly the time. In this study, it took the students 15 minutes out of the 40-minute lesson to log in to the school’s network, which they proclaim in the study is unacceptable.

3.5. Teacher knowledge about digital tools

The students often have better understanding and knowledge about digital tools than the surrounding adults have. The students will grow up and be exposed to the tools in many different ways in contrast to the adults. Since children use the digital tools more frequently, they get more experience in how the devices work and how to use them. This knowledge often mirror the lack of understanding from the older generation regarding digital tools according to Wooten and Mccuiston (2015). Chen et al, (2011), Pim (2013), Çelik and Aytın, (2014), Wooten and Mccuiston (2015) and Young (2016) all argue that teachers have an understanding that digital tools are in many aspects a good educational tool for language learning. That the tools should, if possible, be incorporated into their classroom to accessibility of technology outside the classroom. This has according to Pim (2013) made the teacher rethink their way of teaching.

Çelik and Aytın, (2014) continues saying that research has pointed out that teachers feel that digital tools are a good, interesting and motivating way to teach English. Although, there seems to be an underlying fear from many teachers when it comes to using the theology in the English classroom as well as in the school environment. Çelik and Aytın, (2014) proclaim that this is rooted in that the teachers feeling that they do not comprehend the technology.
McKenney and Voogt (2011) argues that many of the teachers do indeed lack the knowledge and understanding that is necessary to use the tools sufficiently. The teachers’ attitude towards technology also plays a crucial role for the integration of technology in the classroom as well as their knowledge and understanding of the device. The teachers’ lack of knowledge and skills is the most common barrier of the usage of digital tools in the classroom according to Young (2016). In addition, the teacher’s self-confidence that comes with knowledge and skills can be the main reason not to incorporate digital tools in the teaching. Young’s (2016) study showed that age might have something to do with the use of digital tools in the classroom. Teachers over 36 showed less excitement over the use of digital tools. In Young’s (2016) study, the participant had to answer questions with statements such as “using technology is enjoyable” and “technology makes me more productive” and many of the teachers over 36 generally answered that they disagreed with the statement. Nevertheless, as Young (2016) points out, writing about how a person over 36 thinks is just a generalisation that should not be made. Young’s (2016) study also showed that, in contrary to male teachers, female teachers preferred doing things by hand rather than using digital tools.

According to research done by Harrington (2014), teachers and tutors are concerned that practices such as handwriting and reading a book in physical form will disappear in the new world of technology. Furthermore, Harrington (2014) claims that digital tools are just another step into the evolution and he states that digital tools are here to stay and therefore needs to be accepted by the teachers.

Berns et al (2015) states that another problem when it comes to using digital tools in the English classroom is the time limitation. Furthermore, they claim that teachers are not given enough teaching hours in the English subject, which lead to flaws in the student’s language skill because they are not given enough time to learn what they need in order to develop the basic language skills. Young (2016) also declares that the lack of time is a barrier. The teachers need to invest time to get to know the digital tools, time they do not have to spend. Time also need to be applied to look for new and good educational material that can be used. Teachers in Young’s (2016) study stated that if they were given more time to research and to get a better foundation for the use of digital tools, they would be used more.
4. Method

For this degree project five K-3 teachers from four different schools in Sweden were interviewed. The interviews were done in autumn of 2016. Alvehus (2013) states that the use of interviews is a valued method to use, as there is a possibility to interact with the person that is interviewed (the respondent). Interviews give the opportunity to access the respondents’ feelings, opinions and experience regarding the topic, which in this study digital tools and English language is learning.

4.1. Semi-structured interviews

To collect the data for our study we used semi-structured interviews. This form of interview consists of open-ended questions that are generally formulated for a more engaging conversation regarding the topic (Alvehus, 2013). During a semi-structured interview flexibility is important and the interviewer should be encouraged to be responsive and follow up on interesting subjects that appear (Bryman, 2011). The interaction makes it possible to perceive, in this case, the teachers’ thoughts and actions in different situations. Moreover, this type of interview gives the teachers the opportunity to explain their thoughts and the different reasons that may appear (Alvehus, 2013).

The interviews were conducted in Swedish. The interview questions were divided into three parts: 1) Background questions about the teacher and her/his work; 2) Questions about the teachers thought about the English subject; 3) and questions about digital media and English vocabulary (see appendix (1)). The teacher decided the time and place for the interview. As Bryman (2011) points out, the interviews should take place where the respondent feels comfortable and should be conducted in a calm environment. The interviews in this study took place in different environments that the respondents chose. It ranged from the teacher’s classroom to the staffroom. There was some disturbance during some of the interviews with people coming and going into the room and some background noise, but nothing that ruined the recordings or the interviews.
4.2. Participants

Certain candidates were chosen out of convenience and availability reasons and most of the schools and teachers chosen for the research are known to us individually. Some of the teachers that were contacted for these interviews are teachers from our internship, VFU. The schools chosen are from four different cities in the south of Sweden.

One reason for our selections is that this study focus on the teacher’s perspectives in the classroom as well as their knowledge of the digital devices. The other reason is the time limit of this study. The participants in this study are all women. All the teachers involved in this study are anonymous and have been given fictional names.

The first participants (given the name Johanna and Marie), both work in a small Montessori school in Halland. Johanna is a 60-year old woman that has been working as a teacher for 28 years. Nonetheless, it is her first school year at this particular school. She is qualified to teach all the core subjects for primary school F-3, and she also has math, music and English up to sixth grade. Now she is working in the second and third grade teaching Swedish and English.

Marie is a 58-year old woman who has worked as a teacher for 35 years. She has worked at this particular school for 17 years. She has preschool degree within Montessori and qualification to work with K-3 students, and is currently working in class K-1.

The third participant Amanda works at a small school in a small community in Skåne. She is 44-years old and she is qualified in all the primary subjects. Furthermore, she teach PE (Physical education) from first to seventh grade, and math and science up to ninth grade. Amanda has worked in both preschool and the preschool class, but she is not qualified for it. In the subject of English, Amanda lacks qualification, in spite of this, the headmaster has given her permission to teach English as she is qualified in all other subjects and has worked for over 18 years in the field. She has worked in this particular school for seven years, and at the moment she is working in the second grade.

Irene, the fourth participants, works in a large school in an urban area in Skåne. With only 26 years of age, Irene is the youngest of the participants. Irene has worked as an F-3 teacher for...
one and a half year and during this time, she has been working in the same school. At the moment, she works in the second grade and she teaches in all the primary subjects.

The fifth candidate is called Bonnie. Bonnie is a 52-year-old woman who has been a teacher for 13 years. After her teacher degree she was certificated in math, Swedish, English, Science and music from first to seventh grade. In addition, in 2012 she also studied to become qualified in English from K-6 grade. She has been working at her current school for eleven years and at the moment of the interview she works in the fourth grade and has followed her pupils since year one in all subjects.

4.3. The procedure

The interviews took place at four different schools with five different teachers. All the interviews were recorded with permission from the participants. The interviews took around 20-30 minutes with each participant. All the interviews were done in Swedish as the interviews took place at Swedish schools. The interviews were all transcribed and recorded in Swedish, and will be translated to English in the result section. During two out of the five interviews, we were both present, and one of us asked the question while the other took notes. During the other three interviews, only one of us was present and thus note taking was not possible as it took too much focus from the conversation with the respondent. This corresponds with Alvehus (2013) as he proclaims that when taking notes, the interviewer may not have time to write down everything and at the same time being a good listener. What has been written then might not be accurate to what the respondent actually said. Voice recording, on the other hand, gives the interviewer a chance to go back to the interview and listen and discuss what was said one more time, which is why that was used in addition to taking notes.

4.4. Ethical considerations

All participant was contacted through email. The email consisted of a brief introduction of what the degree project was about, what was needed from them and if they would like to be a part of the study. All the emails were written in different ways, depending on the person and which one of us sent it (as some of the participants were more or less known to us). However, the content of the email was the same. When we were at the schools with the teachers, we
informed the teachers that they would be anonymous and asked if it was okay to record them. Asking them on the spot if it was okay to be recorded may have been a mistake on our part as it may have put the participant in a tight spot. However, none of the participants did show any sign of discomfort or concern. None of the participants seemed to be too concerned about anonymity either.

4.5. Analysis of the data

The data analysed in this study are the answers we collected from the interviews compared with the theoretical background. The data was categorized into different sections in relation to the aim and research questions. The result section has five subheadings, which the last one is separated into two sections for the reader's understanding. The discussion section is divided in five subheadings that are connected to the results of the data.
5. Results

This section presents the results collected during our interviews with five teachers in four different schools located in Sweden. The section will contain the five teachers’ view on the English subject in K-3 classroom, their view on digital tools and the use of it in the English language classroom. Furthermore, the teachers’ view on digital tools in the English classroom for younger learners, and the benefits and challenges with the use of digital tools, which are separated into two categories for better clarification. This categories/subheadings are chosen in regards of the results that the interviews gave. They are also in correspondents and connected to the research questions.

5.1. Five teachers’ view on English as a subject in K-3 classroom

The majority of the five teachers had 40-60 minutes of English per week; the only exception was Irene that only had 20 minutes of English per week. In both Amanda’s and Irene’s school they started to teach English in second grade. In Bonnie’s, Maria’s and Johanna’s case they already started in pre-school.

Bonnie commented that the focus during the English lesson should be “on the English as an international language” and that the students should be given tools so that they can communicate with others around the world. During Amanda’s interview, she mentioned that the English language has increased significantly throughout the years and that the language is more present in today’s society. Amanda stated that she had seen this increase in the students’ knowledge about the English language whenever a new generation walks into her classroom. Amanda and Irene argues that students’ knowledge regarding the English language is greater today because the language has become a part of the children’s everyday life. Today, the children have access to the language through, television programs, games and different social media. This makes them see the meaning of the language and develop an understanding of why they should know and learn the English language. Amanda stated in the quote:

[…] the children understand the point, the purpose of learning the language.
They understand it much easier now… because they see it in their games all
the time, [...] so they have more use for it and it gives them more motivation to learn it as well. (Amanda, 2016)

That the English language is important for society is something Johanna agreed upon. She argued that the success of the children's knowledge regarding the English language derives from not dubbing the films in Sweden.

I think it is still very important to learn English and that you start early, as we do here in Sweden. And we continue not dubbing our films … that helps us a lot and the children are very good at it as well ...so I think it is very important, and that the children have the courage to speak English. (Johanna, 2016)

All the five teachers acknowledge the importance and usefulness of learning and using English. However, all the teachers both used and taught the language differently. When we asked the teachers about which language they use during their English class, they all had different opinions and are using Swedish and English differently. Irene understands the importance of using the English language and has during her education learned that teachers should only use the English language from the very beginning. Marie declared that she uses a mix of Swedish and English during her lessons, she translates the words and sentences directly to Swedish. Bonnie uses the English language throughout her lessons and also body language, pictures and sound to help the students to understand the context. Bonnie only uses the Swedish language when they talk about the goals and the matrix. Amanda and Johanna said that the students have mentioned that they think it is difficult to understand when the teachers only speak English, and that some students’ panic when they do not understand. They both felt that it is necessary to use the Swedish language sometimes, so that the students understand the content of the lesson. Although, Johanna pointed out that she allows one of the students to translate what she has said, so that everyone understands what has been said.

5.2. The five teacher view on digital tool and their usage of it in the English language classroom for young learners
All the five teachers had a positive view on digital tools and the usage of it in the English classroom. Two out of the five teachers used digital tools frequently and more integrated, three out of the five teachers used digital tools more modestly and more as complement to their teaching. Almost all of the teachers expressed that the students already had a lot of knowledge about both the English language and digital tools when they enter the classroom.

Out of the five teachers, it was only Irene and Amanda that implemented and frequently used digital tools in the teaching. Together with her students, Amanda worked with iPads and other digital tools as a mean for English development. Amanda pointed out the importance not to forget to complement the digital tools with other teaching materials and methods.

    [...] but at the same time I think that you must combine it with other things, with books and texts so that you do not get the sense that everything is done digitally. (Amanda, 2016)

Amanda stated that she used digital tools because it has a positive impact on the students. She also pointed out that in contrast to books the technology is being updated constantly to fit the time we are living in:

    [...] it attracts the children and we have seen that their schooling becomes…good, better when we use them [...] plus that it is constantly updated. Books and stuff like that does not get updated frequently so after a while, they are history and the pictures are boring. While the digital tools are often up to date. (Amanda, 2016)

Irene shared the same approach and thoughts as Amanda regarding digital tools. At the time of the interview, Irene's pupils were all in the possession of a Chromebook that they used in various ways during her English lesson. Irene stated that digital tools are a good way to teach English, because the children get different perspectives and it becomes more playful and the students will learn more. In her quote, she stated:

    Well I think it is really good to be able to use the digital tools in that way. [...] So, it is a good way, a good way to learn, better than if we would just
have had a book that we worked with. You see it in another way, it becomes more playful and in the process, they learn something. (Irene, 2016)

Marie and Johanna were the two out of the five teachers, that used digital tools the least. Marie clearly stated that she used it as a complement in her teaching, she also mentioned that you need other form of methods as well because the children need to work with their body, to enhance their fine motor abilities and skills.

[...], considering that the younger children cannot read it is hard to only have one sort of teaching material, so you need to have other methods as well. [...], the hand is the instrument of the brain. (Marie, 2016)

Two out of the five teachers mentioned that they would like to have some kind of combined resource where they could search for ideas and digital tools to be used in the English language classroom. It seemed that some of the teachers had a hard time finding useful things to use. They claimed that there is a vast majority of sites and forums to pick materials from, but it is not always easy to sort the good from the bad. Amanda stated that there seem to be a lack of knowledge, or in some cases interest, to spend time looking up good digital tools to use in the English classroom. She based this on that technology is expanding faster than the teacher can keep up with. Amanda mentioned that there needs to be some sort of education for the teachers in the subject of digital tools in an English environment so that the teachers can keep up with the children's expanding knowledge of technology.

5.2.1. Five teacher’s usage of digital tools during English lessons

All five teachers used some form of digital tools during their lessons and all the teachers used different approaches, different methods and materials. The main digital tool, which all the five teachers used, was a computer to connect to either a smartboard, television or projector to watch movies, clips or listening to songs. For two out of the five teachers, this was almost the only digital tool used in the English classroom. All the five teachers had a different view on the digital tools as an aid for English language development and used it differently during the lessons.
Irene pointed out that she often used some kind of digital media or device during her English lesson, because it gives the students the opportunity to hear, see and feel the language.

Well, we always use some form of digital tools [...] they watch movies and television shows but also with this (site) they can dance and sing. We do that through the projector, but they also get opportunity to write because they have their chrome computers. (Irene, 2016).

During the time of the interview Marie only used the computer to watch movies/clips on the projector in her classroom. Further into the interview she stated that it was a long time ago since she used other digital tools. Johanna stated that she is very enthusiastic to use digital tools although she claimed that knowledge and time was missing on her behalf to actually use it. This was the reason to why Johanna only used the computer to watch movies or clips during her lessons. Bonnie worked with repetition of phrases including digital tools in numerous ways, it could be anything from games, reading, songs and movies. Amanda was planning her English activities around digital tools so that they could work around a specific program or topic with different materials.

One good thing is that everyone can watch the movie together, but for some children it fits much better to sit with an iPad with headphones and sit and watch it in their own little bubble, [...] so you can watch, play, record and write on them, so we use digital tools a lot [...] we also write a lot on iPads and computers, so then you can check the spelling if you want to look at the English spelling. (Amanda, 2016).

5.3. Benefits and Challenges with the use of digital tools

All five teachers mentioned many positive aspects with the usage of digital tools as a mean for English language learning. Although, they also listed many challenges.
5.3.1. Benefits

The five teachers in our study had a positive approach for the usage of digital tools as an educational aid for young learners. Irene considered digital tools to be a playful approach for English development. Amanda stated that digital tools are easy to use because they are appealing for the students. This captures the student’s interest and makes it more fun and interesting in their learning process. Amanda stated that she uses digital tools because it has a positive impact on the students.

Amanda also mentioned that the digital tools can be adjusted, to every student’s needs and abilities.

 [...] they can use the iPads to film themselves saying words, because the children may be more secure going into a room alone and say cat, dog and record themselves saying it and then show me. Because they may not have the courage to talk when all the other children are present or to me when I’m there. (Amanda, 2016).

Amanda commented that with the digital tools the students can repeatedly watch and hear the same episodes, songs or clips several times. All of the teachers agreed that repetition is important for young students and young learners need repetition for their understanding and further development.

Well I think it is really good to be able to use the digital tools. [...] It is a good way, a good way to learn, better than if we would just have had a book that we worked with. You see it in another way, it becomes more playful and in the process they learn something. (Irene, 2016).

5.3.2. Challenges

There was some disagreement among the teachers on the importance and usage of digital tools in the English classroom. All of the five teachers listed different aspects of challenges with the usage of digital tools in the classroom. The main problem, according to the majority
of the interviewed teachers, was not the pedagogical aspect of the usage rather problems with the digital tools themselves such as malfunction or problem with the network.

 [...] above all, it frequently malfunction. It's the classical, it often do not work. Old iPads not working properly, someone has tinkered with them, they have no battery left or they are not charging properly [...] the network is not working, therefore it becomes very frustrating sometimes. (Marie, 2016)

All the teachers agreed; that the network was the main issue when it came to teaching with digital tools. Johanna spoke of malfunction in the network as well and expressed an annoyance over it. “The connection is bad sometimes, (laughter) sometimes it just disconnect in the middle of everything, and it drives me crazy.”

 [...] the only thing then is when the network is not functioning when you are planning on it to work [...] it is hopeless, but it has become much, much better, a couple of years back it was awful. (Bonnie, 2016).

The second issue was the knowledge and the interest of digital tools. Two out of the five teachers stated that they felt like they did not know where to look and what to look for when it came to good education materials. One of the teachers pointed out that not all of her colleagues share the same enthusiasm about digital tools as herself. All the teacher agreed that digital tools is a good aid. However, there needs to be a balance between the classroom and different media, and tools should be used for the students benefits. Bonnie mentioned that the digital media and devices is not the only way to work with the students and their English development.

Lastly, a problem almost all of the teachers pinpointed during the interviews was; that the students already had a lot of knowledge about the digital tools when they enter the class. Considering the knowledge, it is difficult for the teachers to make it interesting and “new” for the students. Amanda commented that this is both good and bad because the teacher has a problem to keep up with the development and the students’ knowledge.
6. Discussion

This section present the analysis and discussion of the collected data from the semi structured interviews with 5 K-3 teacher in Sweden: Amanda, Marie, Bonnie, Irene and Joanna. Throughout this part previous research will be connected to the study by discussing and analysing the result found. This categories are chosen as a mix from the result section and the theoretical background.

6.1. English language learning in younger school grades

Language learning is a lifelong process and it takes time to develop according to Sinatra et al, (2012). According to the Swedish curriculum it is important to support the students in their language development and use different methods to give them a strong foundation (Skolverket, 2011a). All the five teachers in our study are working hard to create an English environment for the students where they can feel confident and positive to learn and develop their English language. Skolverket (2016) state that the students need to manufacture a positive confidence in their English language so that they are able to use the language outside the classroom.

The hours spent on the English subject throughout the school years varies among the schools and the municipality, which can influence the student's language development. Some schools start teaching English in preschool and some save up all the English hours for grade three. During the interviews the teachers stated clearly that it was regretful that they did not have more English hours throughout the younger grades. Berns et al, (2015) backs up our findings, stating that the teachers do not get enough time or hours to teach English. They also state that absence of teaching hours and time spent on the English lessons leads to many flaws in student’s language development. One of the participants differ from the other four and has only 20 minutes a week of English, because at her school they “save” the hours for the third grade. While the other teachers in this study has at least 40-60 minutes of English per week even if they start in pre-school. The teachers from the interview mention several times that it is important with repetitions for younger learners and that the students need repetition to remember and understand the language. Lightbown & Spada (2013) states that you need to
hear or see a word several times to remember it and to create an understanding for the word. With less hours to teach English, the teachers face difficulties to give the students the support they need for their language development. This can also lead to a non-English environment, because the teacher rushes through the lesson and use the L1 to make sure that the students understand.

Researchers state that the English subject should be taught in English so the students can enhance their language skills (Chen et al, 2011; Bakhsh, 2016). Although, some of the teachers in our study use the Swedish language during the English lessons to make sure that the students understand and to explain what has been said. Which according to Chen et al, (2011) creates a “non-English” speaking environment and can lead to complications and negative effects on the student's development. Three teachers state that they have learned throughout their education that it is important to teach English mainly in the English language. However, the teachers mention that they sometimes use the Swedish language as a support for the students understanding. This correspond to Król-Gierat (2014) argument that students learn and develop their L2 with translation and support from their L1. However, Chen et al, (2011) states that the L1 often over shines the English language during the lesson and that it is difficult for the students to learn English if it is not used in a meaningful context.

### 6.2. Digital tools as a supporting aid for English development

The entire group of teachers look at the digital tools as an aid for English development in a positive and fun way. How can the digital tools support and help the younger students in their English language development? Thanks to the pictures, sounds and movements digital tools give the support the students need to understand the context of circumstances, it also stimulates more senses (Wooten & Mccuiston, 2015). How can the teacher use and work with digital tools as an aid for young learners’ English development? The interviewed teachers use digital tools in numerous ways during the English lessons and for different purposes. According to Berns et al, (2015) technology and digital tools opens the opportunities to access information from different sources. This also creates an environment of interaction and collaborative learning. Which means that the students can be a part of different cultures and hear different English accents. Because digital tools are a part of the students everyday live it
is familiar to them and fun to use; it makes the learning process more motivating. All the teachers mention that motivation is important for the language development. Two of the teachers argues that the digital tools make the learning more fun and that the students are more active during the learning process.

Skolverket (2016) pinpoint that it is important for students to have motivation and confidence in their abilities to help them develop their language skills further. According to Salinas-Gonzalez, Arreguin-Anderson & Alanís (2013) one of the core aspect for good English language learning is to combine digital tools with the student's interest and experience. Salinas-Gonzalez et al, (2013) continues to state that digital tools will help students in their understanding of what is expected of them. According to Skolverket (2016 and 2011), motivation is important for students and builds up their confidence. Digital tools give students support in their language development as well as it helps them to adjust their language, which deepens their understanding.

6.3. Challenges and positive aspects of digital tools

There is no segregation among the teachers regarding the usefulness of digital tools in the classroom and they all agree upon that it is good, fun and motivating for the students to learn. That digital tools are fun, that it captures the students interest and attention, that it gives meaning and motivation to complete tasks and participate in the lesson is well researched (McKenney & Voogt, 2011; Nisbet & Austin, 2013; Król-Gierat, 2014; Wooten & Mccuiston, 2015). Therefore, our findings did correspond to earlier findings around the topic.

Three out of the five teachers, however, cannot give any in depth explanation to why they thought it was a good and fun way to learn English. Bakhsh (2016) points out that incorporating a digital tool solely based on “fun” can have severe consequences. As a lesson based upon this principle often lack real learning substance, and real knowledge regarding the practice is missing. On the contrary, two teachers from our study did provide feedback on why they thought digital tools are a good way to teach English. One of the teachers stated that, with the help of digital tools the students get a more in depth learning experience as the tools can provide learning material for all the senses. The other teacher states that the digital tools are always updated while books do not have the same possibility.
One good thing, according to one teacher, was the possibility to adjust the digital tools to suit the students’ needs and wants. As digital tools come in many forms and abilities, it is easy to customize the task for individual use (Sung et al, 2015). The same teacher points out that the tools can be used in such a way that the children who are shy or have problems concentrating can use the tools to record themselves or take pictures and achieve the same goal as their peers. This correspond with Sung et al, (2015) that states that digital tools support students with social or emotional difficulties to reach the same level as their peers. According to Van Deursen, et al, (2016) the digital tools give teachers more time to interact and support the students during the lessons and the digital tools give the students direct feedback. The use of digital tools save teachers and students time and gives the teacher the possibility to support and help the students in the moment. Digital tools also create the possibility to unlimited material for educational purpose, which makes it a great aspect for use in the English language classroom (Van Durden et al, 2016). However, the teachers in our study express concern about the unlimited possibilities as they find that this is both intimidating and time consuming. Since there is so much to choose from it is hard to know what to use. Three out of the five teachers points out that they would like some sort of bank, where the government or Skolverket has gathered information about digital tools that are good for educational use.

Even though all of our teachers have a good outlook on digital tools as a teaching aid, even if not all of them could go deeper into why, they all had the same problem. The problem was not rooted in the pedagogical aspect of the tools rather in the tools themselves; non-functional, lack of internet access, internet not working, storage on the device is full, it takes time to recharge, batteries dying and that the problems would eat up a lot of the teaching hours. This correspond with Van Deursen et al. (2016) as they stated that teachers in their study complained about the same things. Norris (2016) points out in correspondence with Van Deursen et al, (2016) and our interviewed teachers, that digital tools are a disadvantage because they can consume a lot of time. As in Norris (2016) study, it took 15 min out of a 40 min lesson just to connect to the internet, which is unacceptable. Furthermore, Van Deursen et al. (2016) talks about physical discomfort as the students in their study complained about back and neck pain. This is not something the teachers in our study mentioned as their frustration was more aimed towards the devices themselves being the biggest problem.
6.4. Digital tools difficult to learn and more difficult to master?

Three teachers in our study either try or shows little to no interest in adding digital tools into their teaching, even though they clearly state that they understand that it is a fun, good and a motivated way to teach English. One of the teachers show very little interest and states frequently that she does not have the knowledge for using the tools. The attitude, knowledge and understanding regarding digital tools in the classroom is crucial for the integration and usage. Having knowledge and understanding about the tool used in the classroom is necessary for a sufficient use (McKenney & Voogt, 2011). During the interview, three out of five teachers show unease and in some cases state that they lack the knowledge regarding using and incorporating digital tools in their teaching. One of the teacher’s state that she feels that her colleagues do not have the knowledge, and reflects that many shows no interest at all, which she thinks is dangerous, as the children will not get the same schooling. Çelik and Aytın, (2014) explains that the lack of interest and engagement in the usage of digital tools is rooted in unease and lack of knowledge. Çelik and Aytın (2014) agrees with McKenney and Voogt’s (2011) statement, that knowledge about digital tools has an impact on the usage of it as an educational aid. A recent study made by Young (2016) also provided information that the lack of knowledge is one of the common barrier for the usage of digital tools. Young (2016) proceed to make the statement that self-confidence that comes with knowledge is one of the pillars that are holding back the teachers from using it.

Young (2016) also proclaims that the lack of time is a barrier. The teachers need to invest time and get to know the digital tools, which is limited due to lack of time. Time is also needed to look for new and good educational material. Teachers in Young’s (2016) study state that if they were given more time to learn and get a better foundation for the usage of digital tools they would be used more. Many of the teachers in our study wish for a “bank” were tools and materials regarding digital tools could be selected and collected for easy access so that time could be spent on other things.
6.5. Gender and Age

The teachers that participated in this study were all female, and four out of the five teachers were over 40 years of age. Young (2016) argues that age may have something to do with the acceptance and knowledge regarding the usage of digital tools. In Young’s (2016) study the teachers over 36 showed less excitement when it came to incorporating digital tools in their teaching. The five teachers in our study correspond to this, as it is only one of the four teachers over 40 that showed a valid interest and tried to incorporate the tools frequently in their teaching. The only one that is truly interested in digital tools is the youngest participant, she was 26 years old at the time this study was conducted. According to Young's (2016) study female teachers prefer lessons during which tasks are done by hand compared to male teachers. This is something that our study cannot compare and investigate as only female teachers participated. However, the majority of the teachers over 40 in our study points out the importance of using the hands when it comes to learning, and in some cases, holds it above digital tools. This knowledge often mirror the lack of understanding from the older generation regarding digital tools according to Wooten and Mccuiston (2015).
7. Conclusion

The aim with this study was to see the teachers’ perspective on digital tools used during the English subject as an aid for students’ language development. We also wanted to find out what difficulties and benefits the teachers see with using digital tools. With the teachers’ participations and the theoretical background, we were able to find answers to our research questions.

In this study, all of the five teachers agreed that the English language plays a great part in today's society and international availability. They also mention that the English language is part of the student’s everyday lives thanks to social media, network, games and the digital tools, which Skolverket (2011) also states. Many researchers claim that digital tools are a good approach for students’ motivation and English development (Berns et al, 2015; Chen et al, 2011; Wooten & Mccuiston, 2015; Nisbet & Austin, 2013). All teachers have a positive view on digital tools as an aid for language development for younger learners. However, they mix the activities during the lessons with traditional learning methods and contextualized method, and they use some kind of digital tools during the lessons. Berns et al, (2015) suggest that digital tools should be used to increase students’ exposure to the English language as it gives the students opportunities to obtain and produce meaningful language knowledge. The theoretical background for this study pinpoints the positive effects with the use of digital tools, although, how does the digital tools affect the student's English language development in the long haul? As the usage of digital tools in educational purpose is a fairly new element, it is hard to tell the consequences of it.

It seems that some of the teachers are having difficulties to find useful tools to use, and it is not always easy to sort the good from the bad. One of the teachers also state that there seem to be a lack of knowledge, or in some cases interest, to spend time looking up good digital tools for the English classroom. Çelik and Aytın, (2014) and Graham (2008) points out that teachers understand and think that digital tools are a great way to introduce the English language for the students. All of the five teachers however; do want to expand their knowledge about digital tools as a meaningful aid for English language and vocabulary development. Çelik and Aytın, (2014) and Graham (2008) continue to point out that the teachers are not at the same level as the students in the use of digital tools in their spare time.
Israelson, (2015) claims that the teachers find it difficult to choose appropriate tools to use, because they do not have the knowledge around the area that is required. In the interviews, three out of five teachers mention that they do not have the knowledge they wished they had around the use of digital tools. Furthermore, some teachers mentioned that there need to be some sort of information and further education in the subject of digital tools in an English classroom so the teacher can keep up with the children's expanding knowledge of technology.

There seems to be an overall theme among the teachers that the main problem with digital tools as an aid for English language development, is not the pedagogical aspect, but rather problems with the technology or the devices themselves.

### 7.1. Limitations of the study

We want to point out some of the limitations that may affect the reliability of the findings for this study. Firstly, only five teachers participated in this study, a larger amount of participants could have increased the reliability of the results and the conclusion. Secondly, we should have tested our questions before the interviews; we noticed that some of the questions could be misunderstood. Some of the questions were conducted in a way that gave a specific answer that we already expected the teachers to answer.

Thirdly, in this study we only looked at the teacher's perspective, this can be seen as a limitation as well. It would be interesting to see the student’s perspective and point of view around digital tools as a learning material. Lastly, the time limitation on this study could have an effect on the reliability of the results and conclusion. More time could have initialized further generalizations and deeper analyses and more participants.

### 7.2. Further research

What we have noticed during our research is that there are three main areas that need to be further researched:

- More research needs to be done around digital tools in a larger scale and more teachers need to be included.
• There needs to be more research about the effects the digital tools have on the students as well as the difficulties that can appear when using digital tools. (Not problems as internet connection or cables missing).

• More research should also be done on the use of digital tools during the English subject in a longer time scale and the effects it has on the student's English development over time.

Another point that needs to be further investigated is how good the digital tools really are for the students and what disadvantages there might be. When we did the study, the teachers mentioned the complication they had with the technical support. However, throughout this study we have found that there is a lack of knowledge from the teacher's point of view around the usage of digital tools. What consequences can this have on the student’s English development, and what support will the digital tools give the students in their learning process if the teacher does not understand it? Another detail to investigate is the students themselves and how they use the digital tools, if they use it as a relaxation tool or if they see it as an educational tool. Are the students distracted by the digital tools and forget about the learning outcomes?

7.3. Ending comment

As an ending comment: this study concludes that teachers like the idea of using digital tools as a means for younger students’ English language development. All five teachers in our study like the idea of using digital tools during the English subject. However, only two of the teachers actually use the digital tools in varied ways. This study also shows that the teachers do not notice any complications with the digital tools for the students. Although, they notice some difficulties with the technical support. We have also discovered that the teachers feel that they do not have the knowledge around the use of digital tools that they think is necessary.
Reference list


Appendix 1: Interview questions

Background questions (about the teacher)

- Hur gammal är du?
- När tog ni lärarexamen? och var?
- Vilka ämnen har ni behörighet i?
- Hade ni behörighet i alla dessa ämne efter examen?
- Har ni läst till några ämnen efter examen? vilka då?
- Hur länge har ni arbetat som lärare?
- Hur länge har ni arbetat på denna skolan?
- I vilken årskurs arbetar ni i?
- Vilka ämnen undervisar ni i?

Questions about the English subject

- Hur ser ni på engelskämnets och engelska språkets roll i världen idag?
- Hur många engelska timmar har ni överlag att arbeta med?
- När börjar man undervisa engelska på denna skolan?
- Hur kan en engelska lektion se ut, i grova drag vilket upplägg har ni?
- Under engelskundervisningen vilket språk använder ni er av; engelska; svenska; båda?

Topic area (new media and vocabulary)

- Hur ser ni på digital medier och digital verktyg som ett hjälpmedel/ läromedel för ordförrådsutveckling i engelskämnet?
- Använder ni er av någon form av digital media eller under era lektioner för att främja engelska ordförrådet?
- Ja (Vilka)?
- Ja (Hur använder ni er av dessa)?
- Ja (Varför har ni valt att använda er av dessa)?
- Nej (Hur kommer det sig att ni inte använder dessa former av media i detta syfte)?
- Nej (Har ni funderat på att använda er av digital media och verktyg )?
- Nej (Hur arbetar ni med ordförrådsutveckling?)
- Ser ni några svårigheter med att använda digital media i klassrummet som ett
läromedel/ hjälpmedel för ordförrådsutveckling i engelska språket?

- Vilken metod använder ni er av för att se elevernas ordförrådsutveckling?