Teachers’ perceptions on the use of digital tools in English teaching and learning

Lärarens uppfattningar om användningen av digitala verktyg i engelska undervisning och lärande

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Abstract

It is recognizable that the use of technology in the Swedish school context has increased greatly these years, and it has made impact on the ways how teachers teach and how students learn. The primary focus of this degree project is to investigate what teachers’ perceptions on integrating digital tools in English teaching and learning and then to establish the factors that promote or inhibit teachers’ use of digital tools in English language classrooms. This empirical research focuses on English teachers at one Swedish secondary school and their use of digital tools in the school context. Information-gathering methods: participant observations and semi-structured interviews are conducted for this qualitative research. The findings of this study reveal that the use of digital tools in English classrooms can increase students’ attention on lessons and improve learning as well as individualization. However, the results also show that integrating digital tools in English teaching is seen as time consuming and disruption to classroom order, teaching and learning. Furthermore, this research reveals that teachers’ attitudes and confidence towards the use of digital tools in teaching can be influenced positively by appropriate technology training and support from the school. It also demonstrates that teachers’ confidence regarding the use of digital tools is significantly related to their digital literacy. The implications of the results may be considered as suggestions for the local school and English teacher education program for reference.

Keywords: digital tools, English teaching and learning, English language classrooms.
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1. Introduction

In 2016, when I was assigned the first time to do my internship as an English teacher-student in a local school in Sweden, I was amazed that the school provided every teacher with a laptop computer and all students in grades 7-9 with their own tablet devices, which is almost impossible for local schools to obtain such technology resources in Taiwan where I am originally from. It was fascinating to see how digital tools were applied and integrated into teachers’ teaching and students’ learning. I was an English teacher in Taiwan, but I had not yet combined the use of such technology in teaching. Therefore, during the first-week lesson observations, I felt confused and frustrated because I was unable to fully comprehend the use of ‘Unikum’, ‘Google Classroom’ which were fully frequently used in this partner school in the context of learning and teaching. According to the report of Skolverket (2016), Swedish schools have greatly increased investment on technology instruments to prepare students for the digital modern society. Additionally, the syllabus for the subject English (Skolverket, 2011) clearly indicates that teachers should provide spoken English and texts from various media, develop students’ abilities to use different tools for learning, understanding, being creative and communicating as well as give them opportunities to search for, choose and access different texts and spoken language in English from the Internet and other media. In this sense, the significance of digital tools’ implementation in English teaching and learning cannot be neglected. Therefore, the goal of this empirical research is to conduct classroom observations and interviews with English teachers in grades 7-9 to obtain a better understanding from teachers’ perspectives on the use of digital tools in English teaching in schools.

1.1 Purpose and research questions

The aim of this thesis is to investigate what teachers’ underlying attitudes and motivations are regarding the use of digital tools in English teaching and learning in classrooms. Furthermore, we may gain better understanding of the factors that affect their use of digital tools in teaching. In this study, the digital tools include classroom-based technologies, laptops/tablets, mobiles, Internet, computer software, applications, online videos/audios/text
resources and digital books. Hereby, the following research questions are focused in the current study:

1. How do teachers of English language perceive the use of digital tools in English language teaching and learning?
2. In what ways are the digital tools implemented in English language classroom?
3. What do English teachers think of their own level of digital literacy?
4. How do they view the availability and support in respect to technology training and the use of digital tools/resources in school?
2. Literature review

This chapter firstly presents advantages of the use of digital tools on language teaching and learning from various research. Then, the current usage of digital tools apart from the traditional methods or materials in English language classrooms is explored. Finally, challenges and barriers of integrating digital tools into teaching are discussed.

2.1 Advantages of the use of digital tools on English teaching and learning

Digital tools in English language classrooms have made teaching and learning more variant and diverse. Social media such as blogs can be served as platforms for students to post or demonstrate their work while telecommunications application software products e.g. skype can be used to communicate with students from other countries. Dahlkwist (2012) emphasizes that different forms of teaching can raise students’ interest and motivation on learning. Students nowadays are exposed to different types of social media and applications. Implementing the tools that they are familiar with in learning and teaching can raise their curiosity and draw their attention to lessons. Furthermore, digital tools offer potential opportunities for effective communication between teachers and students in a way that has never existed before (Dawes, 2001). Students are able to receive instant feedback such as through email from teachers regarding their learning progress. Additionally, a mutual digitalized platform enables students or parents to obtain the newest information in regard to lesson-related matters or class events. Park and Son (2009) argue that the integration of digital tools can make lessons become more appealing to students. In other words, the use of digital tools may direct students’ focus to lessons and attract their interest in learning. Hafner’s study (2014) indicates that the integration of digital videos into an English learning activity is considered to be valid and productive for learners. He claims that digital videos which act as a medium have exposed learners of English with multiple expressive resources and provided a source of real language. The embedment of collaborative digital video project in English learning may increase students’ interaction with authentic online audience as well as enhanced their autonomy, creativity and learning motivation (Hafner & Miller, 2011).
During the process of collaborating in the project, students firstly need to express and share their ideas. They are required to discuss and negotiate with each other to reach agreement. Finally, they need to take responsibility for their own part of work in order to complete the project. Additionally, Craig and Patten’s research (2007) has found that the students’ overall writing skills as well as vocabulary development improved by the usage of Apple iPods.

Although technology use can facilitate English teaching, it is significant to have attentive planning to achieve effective learning. Brandl (2002) argues that to make the integration of Internet-based readings a successful learning experience in classrooms, the information relating to the activity should be presented and organized accordingly. He further points out that the use of World Wide Web-based activities is required to have a clear pedagogical rationale as a base; and moreover, technological and developmental issues should be taken into account when adopting internet resources. He stresses that an Internet-based activity should not implemented as the purpose for learning without being carefully evaluated and planned beforehand.

Despite the benefits from technology on teaching, its appropriateness in school contexts is still under debate, especially the concerns of putting teachers’ and students’ physical and mental health at risk. A research (Epstein, et al., 2008) reveals that the obesity has a strong relevant to the time of learners’ use of TV and computer screen. Furthermore, a study by Seo, et al (2011) carried out in Korea has shown that long exposure of computer use in both home and educational settings contributed to young learner’s addiction to computers. As the concern for teachers, Grönlund, Andersson & Wiklund (2014) underline about 50 percent of the teachers suffer from the use of digital tools in different degrees, such as stress, headache and physical discomfort. When teachers encounter technical problems during lessons which they could not solve, they become stressful since they need to alter the lessons immediately. Furthermore, long hours of looking at screens or using computers with certain position are reported to contribute their headache and sore shoulders/back.
2.2 Current innovative use of digital tools in teaching and learning English

The assistance of technology tools has brought new aspects to language teaching and learning. Al-Mutairi and Al-Qallaf (2015) have pointed out that online sources and digital devices combining with other types of pedagogical practices can become powerful tools that influence English teaching and learning positively. Although digital tools/resources are commonly utilized to assist the traditional teaching, they have evolved over time in a way that promote students’ learning connecting to their real life. For example, the use of social media, such as: blogs, youtube as platforms for students to write and publish their work has motivated them on the process of learning (Warschauer, 2008). Since the writing piece can be read not only by the teacher but also by other students, learners invested more time to check their writing carefully. In the sense, students’ reading comprehension is promoted by reading others’ work and by working through their own written texts (Warschauer, 2008). Furthermore, Al-Mutairi and Al-Qallaf (2015) argue that the use of blogs on teaching English has made positive impact on the students as well as the teachers. The results show that the students could produce longer sentences on writing with fewer grammatical and spelling errors. Additionally, they claim that the students were more independent, positive and motivated towards English learning while the teachers expressed positive attitudes towards the use of web technologies in their teaching. The purpose of using digital tools in the process of teaching is to motivate students to be interested and take initiative on participating and involving themselves in the learning process.

Another innovative use of technology on English learning is to utilize digital games. Playing digital games is a common spare-time activity for many teenagers; moreover, a large amount of digital games are instructed in English. Integrating digital games as part of teaching in English language classrooms, the students are required to acquire vocabulary regarding rules, goals, narrative construction related to the characters in the games in order to operate digital games (Rusu Bodea, 2016). Additionally, the learners need to use English to explain the tasks or problems and communicate with other gamers abroad. In this way, English was used as a tool to solve problems in an informal learning atmosphere that reduces learning anxiety (Rusu Bodea, 2016). This approach may enhance students’ understanding
of the function of using the language in the real situation. The language use acts as mediation for language learning, and, while engaging speaking, students’ attention is actually drawn to both form and meaning (Lightbrown & Spada, 2013).

The last example for the current use of digital tools for English teaching and learning in classrooms is cross-countries collaboration which allows students from two different countries to work on a collaborative project through technology, such as discussion board, skype or email to exchange and share their views about their own life. Craig and Patten (2007) contend that the access to the Internet and social media enables to facilitate students’ development of intercultural skills. As students are offered the opportunity to obtain authentic information provided by people from other countries; furthermore, this allows them to gain better understanding towards other cultural perspectives. It requires much time and effort to plan lessons and make arrangements between collaborating schools, cross-countries collaborative projects benefit on improvement in the use of English as well as development of students’ cross-cultural awareness (Angelova & Zhao, 2016). Lundahl (2012) states that intercultural skills involve learners to be able to empathize with people from different cultures, to relate to other cultural perceptions, and to use these understandings and then to evaluate and reflect over things that are often taken for granted in one’s own culture. As Skolverket (2011) indicates, students are encouraged to develop an interest in culture and an ability to relate to other cultural perceptions, and to reflect over things regarding living conditions, social and cultural phenomena in different contexts and parts of the world as part of the aims of English learning. Many learners may not have opportunities to visit other countries, and they therefore gain their cultural understanding through foreign movies which are proved to promote students’ culture awareness but they may also create cultural stereotypes (Angelova & Zhao, 2016). Cross-cultural collaborative projects create exposures to foreign cultures and students are in direct and indirect contact with people from other countries which help them gain more understanding and correct their prejudices or misconceptions of other cultures (Angelova & Zhao, 2016).
2.3 Challenges and barriers of integrating digital tools on teaching

Integrating digital tools into teaching and learning is a complex process, and many aspects from teachers’ perspectives need to be taken into consideration. In order to take fully advantages of digital tools in teaching, the barriers and challenges that teachers encounter should be examined carefully. According to Bingimlas (2009), factors that impede teachers’ use of digital tools in teaching can be respectively categorized into two main parts (1) intrinsic barriers: such as teacher confidence, their technology-related knowledge and skills, attitudes and beliefs towards applying technology tools; and (2) extrinsic barriers: such as lack of access to technology resources, training, time, and support from institutions.

Al-Mutairi & Al-Qallaf (2016) underline that digital literacy involves the ability to adopt technology to search, understand, evaluate, create, manage and communicate information to meet the needs in a knowledge-based and technology-driven society. Digital literacy skills and knowledge are substantial for both teachers and students to be productive in the digital societies (Al-Mutairi & Al-Qallaf, 2016). Additionally, Al-Maini (2013) indicates that teacher resistance towards the usage of technology is related to their lack of technical proficiency and limited understanding of how technology can be employed effectively in the contexts of English learning and teaching. However, it seems unnecessary for the teachers to develop other technology skills in the teaching context since their main technology use is to search materials relating to the needs of syllabus on databases such as Wikipedia and Google (Al-Mutairi & Al-Qallaf, 2016). In other words, this way of operating technology tools to collect materials for teaching has limited teachers’ ability to develop their technology skills. Furthermore, personal views towards the value of technology use in language teaching are related to teachers’ willingness to implement digital tools (Lam, 2000). Without recognizing the usefulness of technology on teaching and learning, teachers will have difficulty to integrate digital tools in classrooms. Furthermore, Lam (2000) claims that teachers’ confidence is crucial to determine whether they will use computers or not. Without confidence, teachers tend to give up trying if they encounter any complication or difficulties on technology. Redmond, Albion and Maroulis (2005) also reveal that lack of confidence,
technology knowledge and skills and experience can cause nervousness which affects the success of integrating technology in teaching.

Teachers may have a positive attitude and be willing to use technology, however, it does not mean that they will be able to implement it in the classrooms. Extrinsic factors such as lacking an access to sufficient internet connection and computer devices are obstacles for many Indonesia teachers to prevent them from adopting technology in their teaching at schools (Mali, 2015). Furthermore, inaccessibility of digital resources or teachers’ unawareness of the existence of resources hinders teachers from the use of technology in classroom contexts (Al-Mutairi & Al-Qallaf, 2016). This clearly indicates that school has great responsibility for teachers’ use of technology in regard with extrinsic factors.
3. Methodology

This current study aims to find out teachers’ perceptions on the use of digital tools in language teaching by conducting qualitative research method. Participant observation and semi-structured interviews are particularly chosen as information-gathering methods for this qualitative research. As Denscombe (2000) claims, the main feature of qualitative research is to have an interest to know the meanings and the ways that people understand things. Therefore, qualitative research method seems to be appropriate for this current study.

3.1 Participant observation and semi-structured interview

The starting point for the choices of information collecting methods is that the interviews help me to understand how and what the teachers think while the class observations reflect accurately the actual situation (Patel & Davidson, 2011) of how teachers use digital tools in English classrooms. Kumar (2011) claims that the combination of multiple methods not only complements each other, but also enhances the richness of information collection.

During participant observations, I situated myself as an observer as well as a learner in the classrooms. An observation form (Appendix 1) was filled in regarding to what digital tools were applied and what activities were conducted in the lessons. I participated in activities and asked questions to teachers in classrooms. I requested the students and teachers to show or instruct me the digital resources/programs they were using for classroom activities. In this way, I could not only have better understanding about the interaction between teachers and students, but also examine how the digital resources/tools were actually operated and implemented in English teaching in classrooms. Kumar (2011) points out that developing a close interaction with members of a group or ‘living’ in the situation which is being observed benefits information collecting of a social interaction or a phenomenon (p. 128).

Denscombe (2000) states that a research interview usually contains a series of assumptions and knowledge surrounding a certain topic. It may appeal as an open discussion though it is generally organized and controlled. During semi-structured interviews, a series of designed questions (Appendix 2) were asked to elicit specific information from the
interviewees. The interaction with the teachers was not restricted in certain order in terms of how and when the questions were delivered and responded. As the interviewer, I had flexibility to decide how the interviews were conducted. May (2001) points out that semi-structured interview allows the interviewer to have more freedom to discover beyond the answers, and; therefore, the teachers were asked to clarify or elaborate their responses during the interviews when necessary. Through using the same questions, the comparisons across the interviewees were made. During the interviews, I tried to avoid making any comment that could affect the outcomes. It is significant that an interviewer maintains his/her role in a neutral position even though he/she disagrees with the answers made by interviewees (Esaiasson, 2012).

3.2 Procedure and participants

In the beginning, I contacted two secondary schools for this research as I assumed it was common that each student was provided a personal digital tool by schools. However, not all the students in secondary schools in Sweden were offered laptop/tablet devices for learning in classrooms. Therefore, this research was only conducted in one local secondary school where every teacher was equipped with a laptop (Macbook) device while all the students in grades 7-9 were provided tablet (Ipad) devices. To carry out the study, I firstly made contact with the teacher coordinator at school to get the permission. English language teachers of grades 7-9 were the main interview subjects. Therefore, I contacted every English teacher of 7-9 graders via e-mail about the purpose of the research, and four teachers, both male and females, were willing to participate in the study. In total, there were eight lesson-observations and four face-to-face individual interviews. Each teacher was observed for two lessons following with an individual interview. Each lesson-observation lasted between 40-60 minutes depending on which grade I observed, and each teacher was interviewed for 30-45 minutes. The teachers were purposely interviewed soon after I observed their two lessons. In this way, the teachers were able to retrieve memories quickly from previous lessons in order to explain or clarify my questions or concerns regarding the lesson-observations. To retain the anonymity of the teachers, interviewees are referred as Informant 1, Informant 2, and so on in the analysis. Participating teachers’ basic profiles are presented as following,
- Informant 1: Teacher of English (grade 9) and French, 17 years of teaching English. cannot remember when she started to use digital tools in teaching

- Informant 2: Teacher of English (grade 8) and Spanish, 5 years of teaching English. Started to use digital tools in teaching in 2012.

- Informant 3: Teacher of English (grade 7) and Swedish, 11 years of teaching English. Started to use digital tools in teaching in 2007.

- Informant 4: Teacher of English (grade 9) and Swedish as a second language, 25 years of teaching English. Started to use digital tools in teaching in 2014.

3.3 Ethical considerations

Teachers were informed briefly regarding the purpose of my research in the beginning of e-mail correspondence. However, to obtain their approval and confirmation about class observations and interviews, I visited them in person and explained in more details about the content and procedure of the research. Ethical issues regarding collecting information, seeking consent, and maintaining confidentiality are required to consider in a research activity (Kumar, 2002). Information, such as the adoption of recording device and notetaking during lesson observations and interviews, was given in advance. Moreover, all information that had been collected or provided by the teachers was used anonymously and accessed only by me for this current research. The teachers were also informed about their right to refuse answering any question, to ask any question, or to withdraw themselves from the interviews as they request. Furthermore, teachers were encouraged to use their preference language, either Swedish or English, during the interviews.
3.4 Data analysis

An observation form was used during lesson observations. Besides following the form, I also took notes on things that I found interesting or incomprehensible relating classroom activities. Moreover, the questions that were written down during observations were consulted with the teachers in class/ after lessons or during the interviews. The interviews were recorded in a Dictaphone accompanying with notetaking. To assure the results were reliable, the interview recordings were transcribed in details along with the notes taken during interviews and observations. Through comparing and contrasting my observation notes and interview transcriptions, differences and similarities among the teachers’ comments were derived. Moreover, themes and factors relating to my research questions were identified to obtain a better perspective for my data analysis.
4. Results

This study is to examine teachers’ perceptions on the use of digital tools in English classrooms. With the respect to technology resources, the selected school provided free, high-speed Wifi connection and offered all teachers and the students in grades 7-9 with personal laptops (Macbooks) and tablets (Ipads) for educational use. General and current information relating to school activities and events was posted on the school website. Regarding administration matters, the common corresponding way among the teachers, school staff, students, and parents was through emails. Google Classroom was used as platform to share, post and upload information relating to class events, homework and lessons. It was also noticed during the observations that each classroom was well-equipped with the technology equipment such as projector, screen, speakers and CD-player, to support teachers’ use of digital tools/resources.

During the lesson observations, it was noticed that the teachers adopted varied digital resources/tools differently in the lessons according to the classroom activities. Informant 1 and 4 used online audio files to conduct listening exercises. To respond to the content they heard, the students answered and filled in the paper question sheets. In the Informant 2’s lessons, the students were doing group oral presentation. The tablets were used to make power points slides and to assist the students to present their work. In the Informant 3’s lessons, the students used the tablets to do a writing assignment on google documents. Once they finished the writing, they uploaded their work to the Google Classroom.

Several themes were identified after comparing and contrasting the information collected from the lesson observations and teachers’ interviews: (1) teachers’ initiatives on the use of digital tools in English teaching, (2) advantages of the use of digital tools, (3) disadvantages of the use of digital tools in classrooms, (4) perception of own digital literacy, (5) access to training opportunities, (6) administrative support for the use of technology tools, and (7) availability and adequacy of digital teaching resources.
4.1 Teachers’ initiatives on the use of digital tools in English teaching

All the teachers agree the necessity of integrating of digital tools in classrooms since most of school-matters was digitalized; however, their reasons of initiating the usage are quite different. Informant 2 and Informant 3 argue that the adoption of digital tools benefits on students’ learning and advocate its use in English teaching. Informant 3 states, “…students are able to listen to the sounds while reading the texts which helps improve their pronunciation as well as reading comprehension, especially for students with reading difficulties”. Furthermore, they both express that the use of digital affects them and they become more creative. As Informant 2 explains, “…when using digital tools, it requires some creativity in which I need to think how I can use in a way that raises students’ interest.” Lam (2000) claims that teachers’ perception of the usefulness of digital tools for teaching and learning is seen as a facilitator for teachers’ use of technology tools. On the contrary, Informant 1 and Informant 4 state that the need of using digital tools in schools is because of trend of the modern technology society, the school’s vision of the future education, and the requirement from Skolverket (National Agency for Education). As Informant 1 expresses,

I initiate the use of digital tools [in classrooms] because the books have been digitalized and the use of digital tools is also requested by the curriculum that students need to be able to use different media.

In addition, Informant 4 explains,

…the need of using digital tools, the implementation [of digital tools] in the class and in school has become a culture now. Everyone has to do it now and has to keep up the modern technology. The profile of the school is to keep up the pace with technology.
As Lam (2000) notes, teachers’ resentment and avoidance towards the implementation of digital tools can be derived from authorities’ emphasis which may make impact on teacher’s adoption of digital tools.

4.2 Advantages of the use of digital tools

4.2.1 Increasing attention on lessons and improving learning

Technical resources are highly effective in increasing learner’s attention (Brown, 2001) as they provide various forms for teaching as well as for learning. For instance, Informant 1 states, “I give oral assignment that students record their speaking and I can check their pronunciation. Students think it is interesting to record their sound”. Additionally, Informant 2 expresses, “Students can use Ipad to take pictures or make films to do some projects which make learning more interesting.” She further claims that lessons implemented with digital tools can catch students’ attention and creates a close bond with learners because technology is their domain. During Informant 3’s lesson observations, it is noticed that the tablets are used for a writing assignment while in Informant 2’s lessons tablets are adopted to make the power point slides and to assist students’ individual oral presentation. Those different ways of applying digital tools make the lessons and learning more diversity, which may attract students to learn.

All the teachers acknowledge the value of a great range of online resources that enriches teaching and students’ learning materials. For example, Informant 1 mentions, “Students can search facts [online]…there are good [English] exercise on Internet.” As Informant 3 states, “Students use online dictionary to look up words and search relative information for their writing work”. Löfgren (2012) argues that students’ learning development can be affected positively by using the computer as a writing tool and aid. Furthermore, he claims that students’ self-confidence grows when they notice their work gets better through handling the computer in a knowledgeable way. In Warschauer (2008) study, the teachers directed the students to the online supplementary material which helped the students to gain better understanding of the increasingly difficult texts. He further points out that the online textual and multimedia materials were used to help students to get more
background knowledge related to the reading texts that were difficult for them to comprehend. He also adds that the online dictionaries allowed the students to look up unfamiliar words easily. Online resources can provide different forms of scaffolding to improve students’ reading comprehension (Warschauer, 2008).

Furthermore, Informant 4 expresses, “Students’ pronunciation has improved comparing few years back because of the influence of youtube clips and un-dubbed English movies.” The technology has offered the opportunity for students to access a great range of online resources and to immerse themselves in English learning environment without noticing it. Additionally, Informant 1, 2 and 3 claim that sound applications or audio files can be utilized as an assisting device for students with learning difficulties such as dyslexia. Furthermore, Informant 2 states, “…some applications in Ipad can help children dyslexia…when students need to train vocabulary, they can hear how the words are pronounced and then write…” Informant 3 further expressed that listening to texts while reading them can help students with reading difficulties to understand the content of the reading texts better. Similarly, Löfgren (2012) concurs this opinion and points out that students with writing and reading impaired can benefit from the aid of the computer which enables students to listen to a voice that reads the text or describes the picture that appears on the screens. She further stresses that once students have better comprehension on reading, they are more willing and motivated to learn.

4.2.2 Individualization of teaching and learning

The guidelines in the curriculum (Skolverket, 2011) indicates that teachers should take consideration on each students’ needs, circumstances and thinking. Indeed, Informant 1 points out that online resources provide different interesting vocabulary/reading exercises in which students can choose the ones they like to practice according to their levels. Additionally, Informant 2 remark, “It [the use of digital tools] helps me to easily individualize my teaching depending on the kids’ and the groups’ level”. As students are varied individuals, they have different learning styles and learning paces. Lee (2000) points out that appropriately implemented technology can greatly enhance individualized instruction for learners’ different learning needs according to their abilities and characteristics.
4.3 Disadvantages of the use of digital tools in classrooms

Though the implementation of digital tools in English classrooms has its merits, the negative impacts on teaching and learning cannot be neglected. The results collected from observations and interviews regarding disadvantages of using digital tools in classrooms can be divided into two parts respectively: disruption to classroom order and teaching and learning; and technical problems and time-consuming.

4.3.1. Disruption to classroom order as well as teaching and learning

All the four informants unanimously claim that students’ inappropriate use of digital tools (i.e. playing games, using social media) during the lessons were the drawbacks of technology implement in classroom, which not only disrupted themselves from their own learning but also disturbed other students in class. For instance, Informant 2 mentions, “Students download and play games, use social media which disturb them from what they have to do”. Furthermore, this point is even carried out by Informant 3 who states, “Technology could be disruptive…students watch youtube, take photos, download and play games [in class]”. During the class observations of Informant 1, 3 and 4, it is noticed that the teachers consistently remind the students’ to concentrate on the classroom activities. Few students are even asked firmly by the teachers to put away their cell phones or to stop playing online games/social media. As Informant 1 says to a student, “Please put your cell phone away and do the exercise… you don’t need it in class now”. Obviously, the teachers’ focus on teaching and students’ learning was distributed to managing and supervising students’ use of digital tools instead. It is unlikely that the teachers’ attention can fully devote to students’ learning needs in classrooms. As Al-Kahtani and Al-Haider (2010) claim, lack of the ability to supervise students’ use of interactive media could impede teachers from implementing technology tools. Skolverket’s study (2016) reveals that twenty-eight percent of the students reported that they were disturbed by their own or other’s use of text and social media while two-third of teachers stated their lessons were disrupted by students’ everyday use of text, chat, games or social media. Moreover, Informant 2 underlines, “Students need to know how to use Ipad properly instead of seeing it as a toy”.

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4.3.2 Technology problems and time-consuming on the use of digital tools

Common technical problems in classrooms include internet broken down, Ipad/laptop/projector out of function or run out of battery on Ipad. Informant 1 comments, “I get stressed when it (Internet) doesn’t work as it is supposed to be”. Similarly, Informant 4 has the same concern about this technical problem. Both Informant 1 and 3 mention that students are not able to do school work once their Ipad/s are out of function or run out of battery. Without functional Ipad/s, students have difficulty to finish assignment on time and may end up piling up too much work. Technical problems not only cause stress on teachers and students but also make work consume more time (Söderund, 2000). As Informant 2 and 4 state, it is time-consuming to use computer software (Google document) to correct students’ writing documents than doing by hand. Some functions in the application cannot be operated in the way they want; therefore, they end up spending much more time than it requires. Furthermore, Informant 4 contends, “…the use of technology does not save time in regard to workload, but instead it demands more time from teachers”. The study (Skolverket, 2015) reveals that there is a need for teachers to frequently reflect on how their teaching is designed and organized associated to the use of technology. Furthermore, Informant 3 expresses his willingness and interest to try some new application/online program. However, his concern on taking much time and effort to learn has prevented him from trying.

4.4 Perceptions of own digital literacy

Teachers with digital competent can utilize online tools to plan technology-related activities effectively and efficiently (Son, 2011). Informant 4 argues, “I was not comfortable of implementing digital tools because I was not used to it...but I am more confident now with help from colleagues and school staff”. Furthermore, Informant 1 elaborates her discomfort and uncertainty towards the use of digital tools in teaching due to her lack of technology knowledge. She further adds if she knows more, she would be more comfortable on using and exploring it. Familiar problem has been discussed by Al-Qallaf & Al-Mutairi (2016) who claim that teachers’ ability to effectively engage with technology information is hindered by the lack of digital literacy competencies and which can easily result in disinformation and
mispresentation. However, while Informant 1 and 4 describe their lack of confidence, Informant 2 and 3 have expressed their confidence in digital skills and knowledge to integrate technology in classrooms. They further express their great interest and active involvement in improving and developing their technology-related skills through personal contact or school context. Not surprisingly, it is indicated that technology-experienced teachers are more willing to implement technology in the teaching contexts. (Egbert, Paulus and Nakamichi, 2001).

4.5 Access to training opportunities

All the teachers express that technology training/seminars relating to main programs/software the school is using are provided; however, they have never received any technology-related courses when studying in teacher-education programs. Informant 3 points out training courses are significant especially for the teachers who are not familiar with technology. Egbert, Paulus & Nakamichi (2002) claim that even one technology course can make impact on teachers’ attitudes towards technology tools, which can increase their confidence and convince them of the value of technology tools. In fact, Informant 2 shares that she was skeptical in the beginning about the integration of tablets in classroom contexts until she attended an introduction course. She further expresses that the course broadened her view of the use of digital tools and made her realize the usefulness of tablets on improving teaching as well as facilitating learning.

However, Informant 1 states, “Technology training/seminars are not sufficient for my personal need because I need my time to try and use them [digital tools]. I don’t feel it [instruction] is enough for me.” Similarly, Informant 2 also expresses her discontent and insufficiency on training seminars. She stresses that technology training in school should be more specific on respective subject, not only on the general training. All informants state that they update and acquire new technology information and knowledge mainly through colleagues, friends or on their own. For example, Informant 2 states, “I have colleagues and friends who are also teachers. I get information about new applications through them”. In addition, Informant 1 express, “I hear from colleagues about the use of digital resources like Kahool for teaching or I google resources myself.” Egbert, Paulus & Nakamichi (2002) state
that many of teachers’ technology skills are self-taught. The report by Skolverket (2016) shows that half of secondary school teachers express the needs for updating their IT-related skills. Furthermore, Egbert, Paulus and Nakamichi (2002) claim that the significance of teacher technology learning is to meet their specific needs. Therefore, the customized technology training according to teachers’ individual needs seems to be the key to promote the use of technology. Lam (2000) also emphasizes that matching teachers’ goals with the digital tools they wish to integrate should be on the focus of language teacher training for the institutions and programs.

4.6 Administrative support for the use of technology tools

In terms of administrative support for digital educational tools, all the informants are positive about the institution’s great intention and technical support for their needs. They further express that the technician was helpful and effective to solve technical problems regarding their technology concerns, school’s technical equipment, their laptops and students’ tablets. For example, Informant 4 demonstrates, “…have an IT guy in school…can always go to him… principle is very encouraging and promotes the use of digital tools in the school”. Moreover, Informant 2 pointed out the school provided Wifi with great speed.

4.7 Availability and adequacy of digital teaching resources

The school no longer provides English textbooks in paper form but in digitalized form as teaching resources. However, all the teachers are not satisfied with the English digital books. Informant 1 explains her dissatisfaction about the exercises in the digital book, “The answers [to the exercises] that students write sometimes don’t work because they are not the way the computer want.” Moreover, Informant 3 expresses, “Even though we have Happy [the digital book], I made my own texts. Those texts in the book are so boring. I want to spice them up a little bit…created new exercises.” In addition, Informant 4 states that the use of digital books is not as flexible as paper books since the students cannot underline or scroll back and forward the ways they wanted. Backman- Löfgren (2012) points out that standard textbooks
are structured in a way that is convenient for students to orientate, but a web text lacks this kind of structure. She further claims that a digital text environment is unlikely to present an overview of the content structure; moreover, students easily lose the original source when they are directed to other web pages continuously and they do not open new websites in parallel (Backman-Löfgren, 2012). Moreover, Informant 2 suggests that school should offer good applications/digital resources specifically related to English teaching combining with good instruction courses as it consumes time to figure out or orientate a new application. She also mentions Interactive Smart board which may allow her to conduct teaching more effectively since she cannot write on the white board while using the projector. Meanwhile, Informant 3 recommends to replace Ipad with Chromebook which can prevent students from downloading games and accessing social media.
5. Conclusion and discussion

The aim of this study is to obtain better understanding of English teachers’ perceptions on the use of digital tools in the school context. The findings of this study reflected what some research indicated that teachers’ attitude towards the use of digital tools was influenced by technology training, their digital knowledge and skills as well as experience and confidence with technology. The following summary is presented in responding to my research questions: how do teachers of English language perceive the use of digital tools in English language teaching and learning; in what ways are the digital tools implemented in classrooms; what do English teachers think of their own level of digital literacy; and how do they view the availability and support regarding technology training and the use of digitals/resources in school.

Half of the teachers perceived the value of digital tools on teaching and learning as significant and vital while the other half expressed that their use of digital tools was the consequence of the digital society and the authority. All the teachers appreciated that the great range of online English resources enriched teaching and learning. Additionally, three teachers stressed that students’ with learning difficulties such as dyslexia benefitted from the technology. One teacher further stated that students’ pronunciation had improved over years due to the immersion of different types of English media such as online video clips and undubbed movies. Furthermore, one teacher claimed that the use of digital tools enhanced individualization of teaching and learning to meet the students’ individual needs. However, all the teachers pointed out that the students’ inappropriate use of digital tools such as playing games and using social media which disrupted classroom order, teaching as well as the students’ own learning and others’ learning. Furthermore, one of the teachers claimed that the use of technology demanded more time from teachers and, therefore, it led to more workload. Two of the teachers underlined that it was time-consuming to use digital tools to correct students’ writing assignment. Two of the teachers claimed that technical problems such as Internet problems impeded lesson progress and caused stress. Two teachers mentioned that students were not able to deliver their school work on time with non-functional tablets since it took time to repair broken tablets.
The tablets were used to conduct respectively oral presentation and writing assignment by the students during the lessons of two teachers. On the other hand, two of the teachers used digital tools to deliver listening activities. The teachers’ use of technology tools in English classrooms coincided with the findings of Enrique et al’s study (2015) that technology is integrated as a supporting tool in classroom management, presenting information, and providing instructions. As Russell et al (2003) already point out, digital tools are mainly used to instruct classroom activities, deliver content, and support students with special needs. Although there is a 12-year gap between the two mentioned studies, the use of digital tools is still incorporated in the classroom context as a tool to support teaching which indicates that teachers have not fully taken advantages of the potential of technology. Egbert, Paulus & Nakamichi (2002) claim that teachers have tendency to apply technology to fit their current practice, rather than transforming their teaching through the use of digital tools. According to the finding of this research, digital tools are primarily implemented in a way that assists teachers’ teaching instead of being a part of teaching. The innovative use of digital tools seems not to be recognized in English teaching; therefore, there is a need to introduce teachers and raise their awareness regarding the innovative usage on benefitting students’ learning such as development of intercultural skills.

Two teachers mentioned their unfamiliarity with technology and lack of technology-related knowledge and skills caused discomfort to implement digital tools in classrooms; however, one of them pointed out that confidence grew over years with help and support from co-workers and school. Two of the teachers expressed their interest in technology as well as developing technology-related skills and knowledge.

Regarding technology training/seminar in school, two teachers claimed that it was insufficient: one required more time to process the technology information during training while the other stressed that the training should be more specific for the subject use and required more useful training to become better. All the teachers expressed positively towards administrative effective support for technical problems they encountered and their technology request. However, all teachers had negative comments about the use of the English digital textbooks which were provided by the school. To maximize English teaching and learning, two teachers respectively recommended a digital tool.
To conclude, the teachers’ statements regarding the insufficient technology training in school implied that there is a need to customize technology training to meet teachers’ individual needs to improve their confidence and technology competence as well as their knowledge of innovative use on digital tools in English teaching and learning. Moreover, even though one of the teachers graduated 5 years ago, none of them received any technology-related training/courses while they were studying in teacher-education programs. As technology is used widely in schools nowadays, teachers are expected to be knowledgeable about technology. Therefore, to prepare future English teachers working in schools equipped with digital tools, technology training should be considered as part of teacher-education program. As students’ unsuitable use of digital tools in classrooms is problematic, imposition of certain regulations under agreements with all involved parties, including students, teachers, school staff, and parents may possibly reduce the problem. However, it is also important to find out what the real causes are behind students’ inappropriate usage. It is found that the implementation of digital tools is mainly functioned as support for teaching which indicates that current innovative usage of digital tools is not widely adopted. In order to raise teachers’ awareness of this issue, there is a need to introduce and promote how other ways that digital tools such as blog, skype can be integrated in English teaching classrooms to develop students’ intercultural skills. Furthermore, teachers’ comments and suggestions toward the English digital books and the useful digital tools/resources should be examined and taken into consideration regarding the improvement of English teaching and learning in school. At the end, I hope that the findings of this study can offer the school some useful insights about the English teachers’ concerns in regard to technology use in the teaching context.
6. Limitations and further research

The size of this research was limited by the time pressure. It goes without saying that the number of participants in this study was small; moreover, the interviews and class observations were only conducted in a local school in Sweden. Therefore, the findings of this research cannot be generalized to represent and reflect most of English teachers’ perceptions on the use of digital tools in school context. However, as technology has gradually become a necessity in teaching contexts, it would be interesting to investigate through the quantitative method such as questionnaire combining with qualitative method to find out how most of the English teachers in Swedish schools perceive and implement digital tools in the school context.
References


Appendix 1

Observation form

1. What the digital tools are used during the lesson?
   - Hardware (tools)
   - Software (programs)

2. How does the teacher implement these digital tools (presentation, film, internet, etc.) in teaching?

3. What type(s) of classroom activities is conducted regarding the use of technology tools?
   _____ Individual work that digital tools are allowed to use when needed.
   _____ Individual work that is not required to use digital tools.
   _____ Individual work that requires to use digital tools.
   _____ Group work that is not required to use digital tools.
   _____ Group work that is required to use digital tools.
   _____ Teacher-led reviews and lectures.

4. Notes:
Appendix 2

Interview questions

Background:
1. How long have you been teaching English?
2. When did you start to implement digital tools in classrooms?
3. Who initiated the use of digital tools in the teaching?
4. What IT education or IT skills training have you received in teacher-education program?
5. How has your teaching been changing since you started to teach regarding the use of digital tools?

Part I: educational consideration concerning technology use in English language teaching

1. The current English language curriculum focuses on the communicative purpose. What is your general opinion regarding the place of digital tools (e.g. personal laptop/tablet, computer software/application, PowerPoint, videos/audios, the Internet, etc.) in English language classroom?
2. What do you see as barriers or challenges on the implementation of digital tools in teaching?
3. Do you feel a need to include digital resources and implementation in your teaching? Why or why not? If so, which tools do you consider to be the most effective?
4. What are the advantages of using digital tools in teaching English?
5. What do you consider to be the disadvantages of using digital tools in English language instruction?
6. What do you see as the more useful applications in English language teaching/learning?
7. How do digital tools benefit students’ learning and development? In what way?
8. How does the use of technology hinder students’ learning? In what way?
9. How does the use of digital tools affect you as an English teacher? In what way?
10. If you take full advantage of the use of digital tools, what would you like to do for prompting English learning and teaching?
11. In your opinion, what is the optimal condition for using the digital tools to maximize English teaching and learning?

Part II- Beliefs concerning your own skills and knowledge concerning integration of digital tools in English language teaching.

1. How comfortable do you feel about using laptops/tablets and other digital equipment, either in your teaching or for your personal needs? Please elaborate.
2. What kind of training have you undergone regarding the use of digital tools in the classroom (e.g. teacher preparation, professional development programs, training seminars, etc.)? Do you feel that sufficient training opportunities are available and accessible?

3. Do you think you obtain the necessary technology-related skills to support language learners in the use of digital learning tools?

4. How do you update technology-related knowledge and skills?

Part III- Perceptions of institutional/administrative support concerning the use of digital tools and resources for English language teaching.

1. What types of English learning programs or materials are available in your school (e.g. interactive learning software, audio/visual materials, social networking, etc.)? If you could, what would you change about the current situation in your school regarding available digital resources?

2. What are your opinions in regard to the availability of technical support staff in terms of digital tools in your school?

3. Does your school encourage/support the use of technology in language teaching? Please elaborate.

4. If you could, what would you change about your institutional environment regarding the use of technology in education?

(adapted from Çelik & Aytin, 2014)