

A CROSS-CULTURAL STUDY OF ATTITUDES TO DIGITAL TOOLS AMONG STUDENTS AND TEACHERS IN THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE CLASSROOM

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Abstract

In 2006 the European Commission stated eight common key competences for life-long learning (European Commission, 2010). Five of these key competences are Communication in a foreign language; Digital competence; Learning to learn; Sense of initiative and entrepreneurship, and Cultural awareness and creativity, all important for the digitalization in education. But what role do information technology and digital media play in the language classroom of today?

In a pilot study, we focused on the use of digital tools in the teaching and learning of English in Sweden and Germany. Even if Sweden and Germany are closely related, the situation concerning digitalization and the status of English differ (cf. Burchard et al. 2016). The reasons for comparing Sweden and Germany are the following: (i) English is the first compulsory foreign language in both countries. Even so, the input of English outside school is more limited in Germany. (ii) In both countries there is a new national strategy with proposals for actions to better exploit the potential of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) in education (Skolverket 2016, Burchard et al. 2016). These proposals aim at supporting all students and teachers to develop the digital skills they need to improve results and to prepare students for an increasingly digitalized society. (iii) In other words, there is increasing importance given to the use of digital tools in Swedish and German schools. Due to recent efforts to provide equal access to technology, every student in Sweden receives a laptop from their school. The Germans are more restrictive concerning the use of digital tools in school: The German Minister of Culture states that 'replacing a book by a laptop or a tablet is no pedagogy. We still need scientific knowledge', 'Technique must follow the pedagogy and not vice versa' (our translation) (Czimmer-Gauss, 2017).

The hypothesis of this study is that there will be differences in the treatment of and attitudes to digital tools between the students and teachers and between the two countries. Our research questions are: (i) how does the use of digital tools in language teaching differ between the two countries, (ii) how do the attitudes to digital tools between students and teachers differ between the two countries?

Interviews were initially conducted with 9 Swedish and 7 German teachers of English and questionnaires answered by 15 Swedish and 40 German students in grade 6. During autumn 2017, new interviews are being conducted with German and Swedish teachers of English, and questionnaires answered by 16-year-olds. The questionnaires were produced in a digital tool called Survey & Report, and have been approved by the German authorities, as the rules for the use of digital tools in German schools are very strict. Our goal is to get answers from about 300 students and 50 teachers in each country to receive reliable results.

Results from the pilot study as well as results from ongoing research will be presented. In the pilot students were also asked to evaluate an English language learning tool, in the form of a game. The teachers were asked to rank four parameters on a Likert scale (Affect, Perceived usefulness, Perceived control, and Behavioral intention when using digital tools for English language teaching (Buabeng-Andoh, 2012, Teo 2008)).

Our results so far show that the situation concerning digitalization in education differs. Whereas the Swedish teachers use a variety of tools, there is a lack of access to computers as well as digital learning tools in Germany. Even though Sweden has the technical devices they are not optimally used due to lack of in-service training (cf. Gagnestam et al. 2010, Fredholm, 2016). We believe that a collaborative approach and co-creation between teachers, students

and entrepreneurs will help to design more efficient, user-friendly digital learning tools, which, in turn, will contribute to better learning results.

Keywords: Digital Tools, English, Co-creation, Language Acquisition, Sweden & Germany.



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