

# **A Cross-Cultural Study of Attitudes to Digital Tools Among Students and Teachers in the European Language Classroom**

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## **BACKGROUND**

What role does information technology and digital media play in the language classroom? In Sweden, a survey of adults' and young people's computer usage showed that 69% of the 9 to 14-year olds used the computer for computer games an average week (Svensson 2008, pp.21). However, the use of digital media in language teaching is still underutilized (Kuang-wu Lee, 2000). In a study conducted by Sundqvist & Wikström (2015, pp.74) their findings "indicate a positive relation between gameplay and L2 English, at least for boys". Their explanation for boys being better was that much fewer girls were gamers. Al-Jarf (2004) elaborated on the use of web based lessons and when used as a supplement to class room teaching this was found to be more effective than the traditional pedagogical style, dependent only on the text book. 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 digitization in education.

In recent times, the Swedish school authorities (Skolverket, 2016) have suggested a new national strategy to better exploit the potential of IT in schools. The strategy contains proposals for actions aimed 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. In Sweden every student gets a laptop from their school. Nevertheless, digital media are underused in the classroom. Fredriksson (2011) showed in her pilot study of Swedish upper secondary students' use of computers in the classroom that computers were used to a very small degree in German teaching, although the majority was in favor of this. She also found a need for targeted educational efforts to change students' computer use and that both teachers and students should be involved in this process.

In this study we focus on the use of digital tools in the teaching and learning of English in Sweden and Germany. English is the first compulsory foreign language in both countries. Sweden and Germany are closely related, even so the situation concerning digitalization and the status of English differs (cf. Burchard et al. 2016). German students do not get a computer from their school and the input of English outside school is more limited than in Sweden, where English is considered to be a 'second' and not a foreign language. In a recently conducted interview with teachers in Germany (Weller 2016), 48% said, that they would like to use digital tools in the classroom. Although Sweden is far ahead in the use of computers in education, teachers' lack of training in the use of digital media has been reported in Sweden as well (cf. Fredriksson 2011, Fredholm, 2016). Rosenberg (2010) emphasizes the use of the learner as a creativity resource to provide teachers with an unending source of ideas and study material. Therefore, it is essential to 'create more situations in which the learners can contribute, initiate, control and create what happens in the classroom' (Deller, 1990).

In accordance with Rosenberg and the key competences, stated by the European Commission, this pilot study will present first results from interviews with teachers and questionnaires among students in the two countries. The next step will be to involve local entrepreneurs in the creation and management of digital tools for language learning. It is believed that a collaborative approach and Co-creation between teachers, students and entrepreneurs can prove to be a fitting solution to enhance the effectiveness and applicability of digital media for language learning.

## **RESEARCH OBJECTIVE**

In Sweden and in Germany English is a compulsory part of the curricula, but there are differences in the intensity of input outside school. In both countries there is increasing importance given to the use of digital tools in schools, but Sweden is far ahead, as stated above. The purpose of our pilot study is to compare how the use of

digital tools in language teaching differs between the two countries and to compare the attitudes to digital tools between students and teachers. The hypothesis is that there will be differences in the overall attitude to digital tools between the students and teachers and also between the two countries. It is of interest to know the nature of the existing gaps between the two clusters.

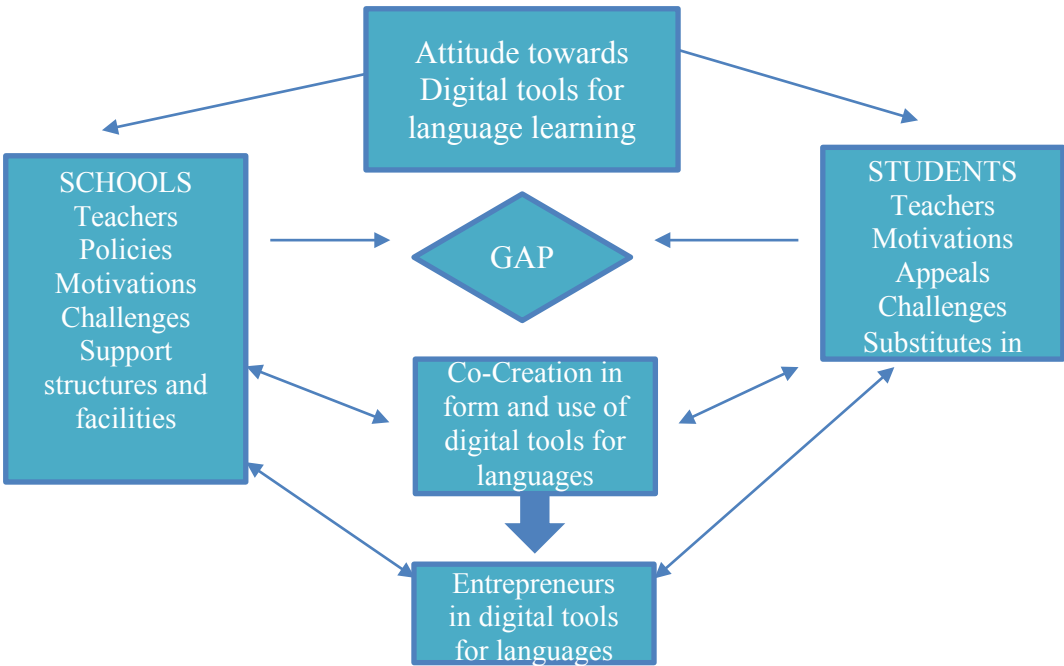
**METHODOLOGY**

The teachers’ use of digital tools, their motivations, challenges and associated support systems for digital pedagogy is examined through interviews with 10 teachers of English in Sweden and 10 in Germany (ongoing). The parameters used to interview the teachers included 1. affect (liking), 2. perceived usefulness, 3. perceived control, and 4. behavioral intention (Buabeng-Andoh,2012) to use the digital tools for English language teaching. The students’ use of and attitudes to digital media for learning English are examined through questionnaires, answered by 15 Swedish and 30 German students. The questionnaire was based on the following parameters: (i) The use of computers at home, (ii) The use of computers in school, (iii) The use of digital tools for learning English. All informants also evaluated an online program to have one controlled variable. Identification of existing gaps will be used as a premise to motivate a collaborative and co-creative process wherein a better environment for digital learning of languages can be built. We assume that students from different cultures will come up with different emotions, motivation and experiences that can also add immense value in the teaching and learning process. As stated above we will present first results of work in progress.

Extension of the pilot project: In a follow up of the results from the pilot, local entrepreneurs in the business of digital tools for language learning will be involved. The following holistic research framework will be used to connect the various elements of the study into one larger frame (See figure 1). It is expected that these stakeholders will benefit from the co-creative and collaborative activities between teachers and students.

Digital technology in languages is one of the most developing areas in recent times. A great deal of research is still needed in this area, though. Hence it is believed that this study will help to fill the gaps and work towards knowledge creation that can be used both academically and commercially.

Figure 1  
Research framework



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