Access to and Accounts of Using Digital Tools in Swedish Secondary Grades. An Exploratory Study.

# Details

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## Implications For Educators About

* School innovation
* Professional development
* Other

## Implications For Policy Makers About

## Other PolicyMaker Implication

How to improve digitalization and implementation processes in schools.

## Implications For Stakeholders About

Researchers

# Abstract

Aim/Purpose: The aim of the study is to explore students’ encounters with digital tools and how they account for their experiences of using digital tools within formal education.

Background: While computers have a long history in educational settings, research indicates that digital tools function both as affordances and constraints, and that the role of digital tools in schools continues to be debated. Taking into consideration student perspectives can broaden the understanding of knowledge formation practices.

Methodology: The study is part of a larger ethnographic project, focusing on agency at all levels with respect to digitalization in schools. The present exploratory study is built primarily on interviews with 31 secondary school students at five different schools (15 girls and 16 boys). The analytical framework was a Nexus Analysis, focusing on discourses in place.

Contribution: The paper shows how digital tools are conceptualized as being formed by and fitted into the traditions and habits of the institution, rather than acting as a transformative force to change knowledge formation practices in schools.

Findings: From the students’ narrative accounts, the following key themes emerge: (1) Action in contexts, (2) Agency in contexts, and (3) Equality in contexts. The first deals with the use of digital tools in school and the interaction order as it is accounted for in the use of digital tools in schools. The second frames human agency with regards to usage of digital tools and how agency fluctuates in interaction. The third deals with the compensating role digital tools are supposed to play for students who are identified with special needs and for students with divergent backgrounds, especially socioeconomic standards.

Recommendations for Practitioners: For teachers, the recommendation is to engage in dialogue with the stu-dents on how and when to use digital tools and the affordances and con-straints involved from a student’s point of view.
For school leaders, the recommendation is to review how organizational structures, culture, and processes hinder or support the development of new practices in digitalization processes.

Recommendation for Researchers: The three key themes that emerged in this study emphasize the need to reflect upon how a panopticon view of contemporary classrooms can be challenged. Involving students in this work is recommended as a means to anchor ideas and results.

Impact on Society: This study is part of a larger project at Jönköping University, focusing on agency at all levels with respect to digitalization in schools. The overall goal is to increase our understanding of how to improve digitalization and implementation processes in schools.

Future Research: Future studies that address digital technologies in schools need to pay special attention to the interaction between students, teachers, and various kinds of tools to map the nature of the education process, with the aim of challenging the panopticon view of the classroom. Future studies need to focus upon processes themselves, rather than accounts of processes.

# Outcome

“[T]he usage of digital tools in the classroom was characterized by a mere substitution of traditional classroom technology, domi- nated by paper, pens, and textbooks. Although the students appreciated working with digital tools, they had difficulties identifying the added value of using them. In addition to this, the teacher con- trolled how, when, and where digital tools were used. For students with special needs digital tools were reported to have a compensatory effect, supporting their studies. Their advantage, however, seemed to be related to whether their classmates had access to the same digital tools or not." (Authors, 310)