

## **Degree Thesis II**

### **Master's level**

## **Swedish Primary Teachers' Attitudes towards Integrating Gaming in the EFL Classroom**

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**Abstract:**

A current topic in Swedish schools is the use of computer games and gaming. One reason is because computers are becoming more and more integrated into the schools, and the technology plays a large role in the everyday lives of the pupils. Since teachers should integrate pupils' interests in the formal teaching, it is of interest to know what attitudes teachers have towards gaming. Therefore the aim of this empirical study is to gain an insight into the attitudes Swedish primary teachers have towards online and offline computer games in the EFL classroom. An additional aim is to investigate to what extent teachers use games. Five interviews were conducted with teachers in different Swedish schools in a small to medium-sized municipality. After the interviews were transcribed, the results were analyzed and discussed in relation to relevant research and the sociocultural theory.

The results show that teachers are positive towards games and gaming, mostly because gaming often contains interaction with others and learning from peers is a main component in sociocultural theory. However, only one out of the five participants had at some point used games. The conclusion is that teachers are unsure about how to use games in their teaching and that training and courses in this area would be valuable. More research is needed within this area, and it would be of value to investigate what suggested courses would contain and also to investigate exactly how games can be used in teaching.

**Keywords:** Computer games, Online and offline games, Primary EFL teaching, Teachers' attitudes

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# 1. Introduction

In recent years, computer games and gaming have been a current topic among educators and school administrators for several reasons. One of these reasons is because computers and other technology are becoming more integrated into the schools and because this sort of technology plays a role in the everyday life for the pupils. Ekman and Fogelberg (2011) claim that “[c]hildren and adolescents sometimes are called *digital natives*, since they have grown up with digital media and those media are a natural part of their everyday life” (author’s own translation, p. 98). Even though many young people use this technology in everyday life, it might not be that easy to integrate into the Swedish schools, especially regarding online and offline games.

This degree thesis is a continuation of a literature review conducted in spring 2015. In the literature review, previous research about online and offline computer and video gaming as support for English reading comprehension was analyzed and discussed with relevant background. The previous research showed that teachers are not very comfortable working with games in their English classrooms. The main reason was because they considered themselves lacking knowledge of games, and the teachers in the studies suggested for example courses in the area to receive more information (Apperley & Walsh, 2012; Sandberg & Karlsudd, 2014; Sylvén & Sundqvist, 2012). Since these teachers had this opinion, it is interesting to investigate this area more. Therefore, I have decided to investigate this matter more in this second thesis but with the focus on teachers’ attitudes towards integrating online and offline computer games in the Swedish EFL classroom.

The Swedish National Agency for Education does not mention anything about online and offline gaming in the curriculum, but since teachers are supposed to connect pupils’ previous knowledge to new knowledge it is important that the new knowledge is related to their interests (Skolverket, 2011, pp. 8, 30, 34). Therefore it is interesting to find out what teachers think about working with computers and games, and whether or not they do work with games in their teaching, since it is the teachers who must take the initiative to work in this way.

## 1.1 Aim of thesis

The aim of this empirical study is to receive an insight into the attitudes and practice of a sample of primary English teachers in Sweden regarding online and offline games in the EFL classroom. The research questions are:

- What are teachers’ attitudes towards integrating online and offline computer games into the English language classroom in a sample of Swedish schools?
- To what extent do teachers in these schools use online and offline computer games in their English language classrooms?

# 2. Background

## 2.1 The Swedish National Agency for Education

There is nothing stated in the Swedish curriculum about computer games; however, teachers are supposed to give the pupils a chance to develop their English in areas where they normally use the language. According to the Swedish curriculum, education should be varied and connect to the pupils’ interests (Skolverket, 2011, pp. 8, 30, 34). One such interest can be online and offline computer games.

Most pupils are exposed to English to a large extent outside of school in different ways, according to a report made by the Swedish National Agency of Education. The report was about IT usage

and IT skills at Swedish schools, and it also shows that the English they hear could be both formal and informal (Skolverket, 2013, p. 2).

## 2.2 Games and gaming

In order to understand what gaming is, it is of great value to know what games are and a little about how they can be played. There are several types of games, for example online and offline games. Online games are normally played on computers or a television-console and are often played with other people. These types of games can be called MMORPG<sup>1</sup> (Åkerlund, 2011, p. 32) and one of the main purposes of those games is interaction with other players. Offline games, on the other hand, are normally not played with others and lack the social element which the online games possess. Examples of popular games are the online games *World of Warcraft*, *X-Men Legends II: Rise of Apocalypse*, *Halo* and the offline game *The Sims* (Gee, 2007, p. 179-181; Åkerlund, 2011, pp. 32-34).

Gaming is the actual playing, or what the person does with the game. Gaming, as previously stated, is a current topic for several reasons. One of those reasons is because gaming often receives criticism because it can have a negative influence on the pupils. However, Gruber (2011, p. 45) claims that it is only excessive gaming that can cause problems for a person. Apart from that, Gruber claims that there is nothing in games that can jeopardize the pupils' health. However, Sandberg and Karlsudd (2014) interviewed teachers about, among other things, their thoughts on computers games. One teacher they interviewed said:

Computer games in themselves can't be wrong as long as they aren't violent. People say that games make young people aggressive. But I've also heard that you can use games to talk with people all round the world! This is quite fantastic, isn't it! (Sandberg & Karlsudd, 2014, p. 374)

In this thesis the focus is on online and offline games which often are played at home by the pupils, for example "spare time games" such as *World of Warcraft*, *Minecraft* and *Halo*. However, there are also "educational games"<sup>2</sup> in which the player learns a certain skill, for example vocabulary or spelling. Even though "educational games" is not the focus, it is mentioned at some point in this thesis.

## 2.3 Teachers and gaming

### 2.3.1. Gaming in schools

Gaming can lead to benefits in education, and Estling Vannestål (2009) argues that it provides variation in the classroom and it can lead to better conditions for English learning. Computers are also a good source of authentic and current material (p. 17). According to Sandberg and Karlsudd (2014, pp. 374-375) teachers do want to use games and computers in their English teaching. However, it is not quite that easy. For example, teachers need to have knowledge not just about computers, but also have an understanding of computers and be able to use games and know how to work with them. Åkerlund (2011, pp. 32-34) writes about the difficulties that may arise when integrating and working with games in formal education. Åkerlund argues that it is hard for teachers to create challenges in the game that the pupils can benefit from. In addition, Mills (2010, p. 35) states that "[t]eachers are being urged to include new literacies using digital media to make connections between the learning spaces of home and school". Using games in the classroom might be seen as taking time from the "real" and formal learning as Åkerlund (2011) describes it, since

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<sup>1</sup> Massively Multiplayer Online Role-Playing Game (Åkerlund, 2011, p. 32)

<sup>2</sup> Pedagogical games are for example games from elevspel.se and crickweb.co.uk

gaming would be a kind of informal learning. Formal learning is learning that is considered as “real” and takes place in an ordinary classroom in an ordinary lesson. Informal learning, on the other hand, is learning that occurs outside of the formal classroom and is sometimes seen as less valuable (Åkerlund, 2011, p. 38). Åkerlund also argues that informal learning, such as playing games, can be a support for the formal learning in schools (p. 38). Furthermore, Gee (2007, p. 23) argues that a person always learns something, in all contexts. However, if what we learn is of any value or a waste of time is a question Gee asks himself.

As described above, computers can be seen as a beneficial tool in English teaching. However, gaming and games are often criticized because they can be seen as a waste of time (Gee, 2007; Gruber, 2011). Gee and Gruber agree that if people knew more about games and the benefits, then perhaps the criticism would end (Gee, 2007, p. 37-39; Gruber, 2011, p. 44). Furthermore Ekman and Fogelberg (2011) argue that *modern media*<sup>3</sup> need to be integrated to a greater extent in English teaching. The authors point out the importance of building bridges between the pupils’ media knowledge and the school world in order to support the pupils’ development in school subjects. In addition, they also point out the big gap that now exists between the pupils’ spare time and their school activities (Ekman & Fogelberg, 2011, p. 101). In addition to this Säljö (2000) claims that with the help of computers, education and knowledge can be spread to all people without accessing teachers or fellow pupils. Furthermore, Säljö argues that in the last century movies, television and computers have changed the school and because of that some people claim that formal teaching could be unnecessary (Säljö, 2000, pp. 247-249).

Sylvén and Sundqvist (2012, p. 317) claim that working with games is not just playing them, but the pupils can also work with them in other ways, including writing about them or working with them as a theme. Sylvén and Sundqvist suggest that pupils can write a diary about their gaming habits so that teachers can benefit from the pupils’ knowledge about modern media.

To use games and gaming elements in areas where gaming is not common is a fairly new concept according to Deterding, Dixon, Khaled and Nacke (2011). Deterding et. al. argue that games are created to be fun and engaging and using gaming elements or games in, for example, schools may motivate pupils to learn. Deterding et. al. call this “gamification” and the exact definition of what it is may differ some since it is a new concept. However, according to Deterding et. al., “gamification” is “the use of game design elements in non-game contexts” such as in schools or businesses.

### **2.3.2. What do teachers need to know about games?**

Gaming has its own literacy and Gee (2007) claims that the language the player uses is different than that he or she uses otherwise. If that is the case, both teachers and pupils need to learn this new literacy in order to be able to use it and benefit from it (Gee, 2007, p. 18-19). Chase (2011) also mentions this literacy. However, he argues that it is not a *new* literacy if it only contains “reading and writing in a digital environment” (Chase, 2011, p. 535). Chase points out that using computers and other digital tools is a bit frightening for teachers (p. 536). Sandberg and Karlsudd (2014, pp. 374-375) agree with Chase and they claim that teachers can feel a bit anxious about using games in their teaching. According to Sandberg and Karlsudd teachers can still see benefits with games, even though they are a bit nervous about using them.

According to a report made by the National Agency for Education in Sweden, 73 percent of surveyed teachers felt that they did not have access to any IT-support (Skolverket, 2013, p. 55), but at the same time teachers have a better understanding of computers and IT than in 2008. Actually,

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<sup>3</sup> Modern media in this context refers to computers, games, DVD and TV (Ekman & Fogelberg, 2011, p. 98).

“almost eight out of ten teachers say that they are very good or fairly good at it” (author’s own translation, p. 62). Despite this, the report shows that three out of ten teachers have a need for training in using computers and IT, since they feel that they have a lack of knowledge (Skolverket, 2013, pp. 63-64, 77) and only four out of ten teachers feel that computers in the Swedish school create benefits and that computers are a good tool for teaching.

It can be difficult for teachers to use games in their English teaching for several reasons; one reason is teachers’ lack of knowledge about games and how to use them, in other words - gaming. Apperley and Walsh (2012, pp. 120-122) suggest courses for teachers where they can receive information and training in the gaming area.

### **2.3.3. What do teachers think about games and IT in school?**

Some teachers have a negative attitude towards IT and computers and Hellström (2011, p. 90) claims that a reason is the lack of computers in schools, which makes it difficult to learn how to use them. Hellström argues that computers play a different role in schools now than previously, when computers only were a subject that was separate from all other school activity. Hellström believes that fear of computers can be due to lack of knowledge and fear of the things the teachers do not know. She states that it would be necessary to learn about what she refers to as *young network environments* through practice and supervising (Hellström, 2011, p. 88). There is an idea that pupils can learn English by themselves through media, such as computers, movies and computer games. However, that is not always the case. Lundberg (2010, p. 23) suggests that teachers should learn how to use computers and the media as a tool but not rely on them completely. Sandberg and Karlsudd (2014, pp. 374-375) argue that teachers are often positive towards gaming but that they also are a bit anxious about using games in their teaching. However, they can see the benefits of gaming and the interaction with others that often occur while playing online games.

## **3. Theoretical perspective**

The sociocultural theory is suitable for games and learning, because this theory represents learning that occurs while we interact with others in a social context (Säljö, 2011) This is something pupils can do while interacting with other players. Vygotsky, who is a founder of this theory, argues that learning can never happen alone but only while interacting with others in social contexts, for example at home or in school (Säljö, 2011, p. 191; Westlund, 2012, p. 20). Säljö (2000) claims that:

[p]eople are born into and developed within the framework of interaction with other people. From the beginning, we make our experiences with others. These collaborators will help us - often unintentionally - to understand how the world works and is understood. We can thus say that knowledge is understood based on the world around us - or, to use the term as basis for a sociocultural perspective: mediated (Säljö, 2000, p. 66, author’s own translation).

Säljö (2000, p. 67) argues that in the sociocultural perspective communication and language use is the link between the child and the world around it. Vygotsky explains that a person is always developing and learning and this occurs in the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD; Säljö, 2000, p. 120; Säljö, 2015, p. 180). The ZPD contains what we can learn on our own and what we can learn with help from someone more competent within a certain area. When a high competence within the area is reached the student no longer needs to have someone else to assist them, as they did in the beginning (Säljö, 2000, p. 120; Säljö, 2015, p. 180).

It is important that pupils have a chance to develop from their own level in all areas and to do so a person can interact with others and receive help. Vygotsky explains that when people help each

other they can learn from their own knowledge. This is called scaffolding and is a part of the sociocultural theory (Säljö, 2015, p. 180).

## **4. Materials and method**

In this section the choice of method will be presented along with the selection criteria, ethical aspects and how the analysis was performed.

### **4.1 Chosen method**

The aim of this thesis is to receive an insight into a sample of primary English teachers' attitudes towards, and practice of, online and offline games in the EFL classroom. A qualitative method was used to collect the data. A qualitative method can provide data that are "verbal statements", for example recordings of interviews and observations (Fejes & Thornberg, 2012, pp. 17-19) but in this case only interviews were conducted. In empirical studies the researcher needs to go deeper into the chosen area in order to be able to receive the right information and then the qualitative method is the most suitable option (Fejes & Thornberg, 2012, p. 30).

### **4.2 Selection of informants**

For this thesis certain criteria for selection were made. Since the aim of this study is to investigate what teachers' attitudes are and to what extent they work with games, it was of importance to contact teachers. The criteria for selection were that the teachers are active English teachers who teach the grades 4-6 in Swedish schools and the participants needed to work within the same municipality since the time frame did not allow for travel. Due to the time frame and the large number of English teachers in grades 4-6, only a small sample was asked to participate. This sample was asked and chosen because they fit the selection criteria. These participants work in a small to medium-sized municipality in Sweden and represent a range of different ages, gender and different schools. Since it is only a sample of teachers in this study it is not possible to generalize these results.

Five principals with grades 4-6 in their schools in the municipality were sent an email which asked for contact information to English teachers at their schools. When information was received, an email with information and a letter of consent (see Appendix 1) was sent to the teachers who were relevant for this study. The consent form informed about the study, why they were asked to participate, their rights and my obligations towards them. In total, eleven teachers were asked to participate in these interviews. A total of nine teachers said yes to an interview but only five had the time to participate in an interview. The interview contained 24 questions about the teachers and their thoughts on their English teaching and gaming (see Appendix 2).

### **4.3 Implementation**

In this thesis an *interview guide approach* was used, which means that the interview questions may differ in phrasing but the content is the same (see Appendix 2). The reason for choosing this approach is because it can make the interviews more personal since the questions can be rephrased while asked, and at the same time obtain the relevant information (McKay, 2006, p. 52). However, it is important to not change the questions too much since it must be possible to compare the answers between the first and last interviews (McKay, 2006, p. 52; Wray & Bloomer, 2006, p. 173).

The interviews were conducted over two weeks and at the different teachers' schools. It was possible to sit undisturbed in smaller rooms, and the interviews were recorded in order to be able to later go back and listen to what was said again. All interviews were conducted in Swedish because all participants had Swedish as their first language. After the interviews were conducted larger excerpts from them were transcribed and analyzed. Afterwards chosen quotes were translated into

English. The reason for just transcribing parts of the interviews was because it was not of importance to transcribe the first questions that were about the teacher's age, which grade they were teaching and such. Kvale and Brinkmann (2009, p. 197) point out a number of difficulties researchers face while transcribing an interview. They claim that it is hard since there is a difference between oral language and written language and the transcriber needs to decide how to transcribe the recordings. However, since this thesis is a content analysis it is not as important to transcribe word for word as it would have been if it was a language analysis.

#### **4.4 Method of analysis**

Thornberg and Forslund Frykedal (2012, pp. 38-40) discuss *grounded theory* which is a research approach with focus on social areas and provides systematic guidance to collect and analyze data. In *grounded theory* collection of data is analyzed at the same time as the collection. That can in turn lead to more ideas and questions. Cohen, Manion & Morrison (2007, p. 473) also mention this; they claim that a researcher should compare the data while conducting the interviews. This means that the answers from the interviews became compared between the interviews to see if something should change to receive relevant information before the next interview. However, the interview questions did not have to change. McKay (2006, p. 56) also claims that the analysis should be conducted during the collection of the data.

Interviews can be analyzed in different ways; in this thesis five stages were used, which LeCompte (2010) describes. These five steps are helpful while analyzing the data. In the first step the recordings and transcriptions were copied to ensure that they would not be erased. Step two contains three parts: frequency, omission and declaration. Frequency stands for things that can be counted and omission refers to things that the researcher never thought would come up before the interviews were conducted. Declaration stands for things that are presented by the interviewee to be important for him or her, but something that the interviewer had not thought about. On the third step categories of the data were created, and on the fourth step these categories were used to see patterns which on the fifth stage should give a proper result (LeCompte, 2010, pp. 148-152). An Excel document was created and afterwards printed in order to more easily see results that are different or similar.

Fejes and Thornberg (2012, p. 32) argue that it can be challenging to analyze data collected using a qualitative method since it is necessary to pick out the essential parts. When listening to the recordings of the interviews sections which connected to the research questions were picked out and those sections were more carefully transcribed. Here it was important to be sure to show exactly what the interviewee said.

#### **4.5 Reliability**

It is of importance that the study is conducted in a way which makes it possible to re-conduct and obtain a similar result to be reliable (Cohen et al., 2007, p. 134). One way to achieve that is to make sure that each interview is conducted in the same way. However, since the participants might not answer the same thing when receiving a question again the result may differ. Also, interviewing other teachers might also have changed the outcome of the results.

The reliability was also taken into consideration when interview questions were created and interviews were conducted; the same questions were used in all interviews, even though they were rephrased to some extent. In the interview no leading questions were asked since that would affect the result (Cohen et al., 2007, p. 151). Cohen et al. argue that even though the interviewer tries to be objective while interviewing and processing the result it is difficult to not have any influence on

the result since we “are part of the world that we are researching” (2007, pp. 134, 150). In addition, the results only show a sample of Swedish teachers’ attitudes.

#### 4.6 Ethical considerations

The ethical aspects were under consideration before the interviews were conducted, during the interviews, and in the presentation of results. Before the interviews were conducted the participants received a consent form in which they were informed about what the interview focused on, why they were asked to participate, about their rights and that they could cancel the interview at any time. This is the first step before conducting an interview (Cohen et al., 2007, p. 55). A consent form gives the participants the democratic freedom to decide for themselves if they want to participate or not (Cohen et al., 2007, p. 52).

In this study the interviews were recorded, then transcribed and after the study has been conducted they will be destroyed since it is important to give the participants a right to have the recording erased (Wray & Bloomer, 2006, p. 154). Wray and Bloomer also emphasize the importance of not letting anything give clues about who the participants are (Wray & Bloomer, 2006, p. 185) since they should be anonymous. According to Cohen et al. (2007, p. 64) anonymity means that the information showed in the thesis in no way should be able to reveal who the person is. Therefore they were given fictional names.

## 5. Results

In this section the results of the interviews are presented under headings that connect to the aim of the thesis. First, the teachers who participated in the interviews are presented (see Table 1) and after that the results are presented in three sections. The first two sections connect to the first research question regarding teachers’ attitudes towards gaming. The last section is connected to the second research question regarding the extent to which teachers in Swedish schools use online and offline computer games in their English language classrooms.

**Table 1**

Name	Years taught	Teaches grade	Subjects taught	Age	Gender
Adam	39	6	Swedish, English, Home Economics and Social Studies	60-65	Male
Caroline	4	5	English, Mathematics and Natural Science Subjects	30-35	Female
Denise	16	6	Swedish, English, Social Studies and Natural Science Subjects	50-55	Female
Elisabeth	12	4	Swedish, English, Social Studies and Mathematic	40-45	Female
Fredrik	8	5	Swedish, English and Social Studies	50-55	Male

### 5.1. What are the teachers’ opinions on gaming?

All five teachers in the study have both negative and positive thoughts on gaming. This section will show what all five teachers thought about gaming and computers both in school and in the pupils’ spare time.

Four out of the five participants are more or less positive towards gaming. Adam is one of the most positive, and he has earlier worked with a concept which is called 1-1. That means that the

pupils have one computer to use during all subjects. Even though Adam is positive towards computers and gaming, he claims that the pupils who really benefit from gaming are the pupils who already are on a higher level in their English language learning. He goes on to say that the pupils who are not good at English lose even more when using computers. Adam thinks that there are quite a lot of good games; he gives an example of a former pupil of his who plays quite a lot of games in his spare time:

I had a pupil a couple of years ago, he played a lot. I mean a lot. He played some kind of online game with friends from different places in the world. This boy, he had a much easier time with English than his classmates. I think that was because he talked and wrote so much to his friends when he was playing games.

Elisabeth, Caroline and Denise are quite positive towards computers and games too. Elisabeth, for example, considers computers to be a good aid when everything works, but she points out that computers often malfunction and that takes quite a lot of time from the English lessons. Elisabeth is positive towards gaming and computers and she advocates the use of online games. She believes that online games make the student more open towards the language since they often interact with others and that it is because “[t]hey need to speak and be active, otherwise they will not understand. They will become number two”. When Elisabeth says that they will be number two she means that they will not make it, they will not win, that they will lose something and in this case they will not be able to interact with others and therefore not be able to play the game in the way that they should be able to. Elisabeth’s favorite parts in games are the levels, which make pupils more eager to continue with the game and also learn more.

Caroline is the only teacher among the participants who has played online games herself and she considers gaming to be a good spare time activity, as long as it is not excessive. She believes that gaming is positive for all pupils, both the strong and weaker English language users because it is fun for all. They also learn without thinking too much about the fact that they actually are learning. However, in the beginning she claims that it is of importance that an adult look at what type of game the pupil wants to play to be sure of the fit for the student. She believes that violent games with high age-limits are not good for pupils in the grades 4-6 and that both teachers and/or parents should approve the games before letting the pupils play them. When it comes to learning opportunities, Caroline thinks that games are a good tool and it does not matter if the games are online or offline. However, she says that “I feel that online games have more to offer since the players can interact with others. Offline games are a bit closed in a way”. In addition to this Caroline argues that using games in the English teaching can be good since then the pupils can develop at the level they are and she can more easily help them develop their language instead of using the teaching materials that do not fit all pupils.

Denise is the most positive towards gaming and computers of all teachers who participated in this study. The first thing she said when the subject came up in the interview was that she is not afraid to use computers and new technology in her English teaching; she thinks that it is fun to use it herself. One reason for her positive thoughts is because the pupils can learn the language through interacting with other players and she believes that there are positive affects with using computers and games. Denise believes that it does not matter if the game is online or offline; they do learn the language in both types.

Adam, Denise, Caroline and Fredrik mention the negative perspectives when it comes to gaming. Both Adam and Fredrik point out that all the sitting still pupils already do is quite negative. Fredrik feels that it might encourage pupils to play games more if we brought games into the school and the pupils are already sedentary as it is. Adam also mentions what happens to pupils that are not familiar with computers:

I have, and have had, pupils who are not familiar with computers and have a hard time figuring them out. Since they have to focus that much energy on the computers and how they work they end up not learning anything about what they are supposed to work with. It becomes a bad spiral. But of course there can be exceptions; some pupils learn both how to use the computer and what they are supposed to work with.

Even though Denise is quite positive towards games and computers, she has a few thoughts on the negative aspects of gaming. She points out that excessive gaming can have the opposite effect than desired on the pupils, and by that she means that they can for example learn a strange vocabulary with only abbreviations. She claims that gaming can also affect pupils' social life:

I have had some pupils who were playing games too much. Even though they did talk to others within the game, when in school they lacked friends to be with, since they did not hang out with them outside of school. And children at this age really need friends. Of course they can play with classmates too, but I think that is not as usual.

Denise also thinks that violent games affect the players' language negatively, they do not learn quite as much and the words and phrases they do learn might not be nice. Caroline is positive towards gaming and the only thing she can see as negative is if the gaming becomes over excessive. As mentioned, Fredrik is quite negative towards games and computers. He claims that he lacks the experience to be able to use games and benefit from gaming. He says that "we should not encourage gaming of any kind since there is a risk that the pupils will get addicted to it. They might get stuck in the gaming-world and forget the real life outside". Despite this, he can understand that there can be benefits from gaming in school if you do it right.

## **5.2 What do teachers need to know in order to be able to use games in their English language teaching?**

Adam, Elisabeth, Denise and Fredrik are asking for more training, courses or information in the gaming area if they were to use games in their teaching. Even though Adam is confident in the area of computers, he says that if he were to use games in the classroom then he would like a course or something similar to receive information. He adds that he would like to know more about for example, what to think about when it comes to games and how to use games in the classroom. Adam is used to using computers for searching for information and writing, but not so much more. Therefore he would like to know more about games and how he can use them in his teaching. However, since there is a lack of computers at his school it still might be hard to use games.

Elisabeth points out the importance of being the most proficient in the classroom in English and since some pupils play games and learn quite a lot of English that way it is important to be "up to date".

Many of my pupils play different games, and while playing they learn a lot of English. I know that I need to be better in English than them and therefore it is important that I develop my English. One good way to do that is through further training in English, in not just speaking, writing and listening but also in how to use games.

In comparison to Adam, Elisabeth has good access to computers. Due to her small class, all of her pupils can use one computer each at the same time if she books the computers for her lessons.

Denise and Fredrik claim that they are also in need of information or training within the gaming area. Even though Denise is positive towards gaming and she like games, she says in the interview that she would like more education herself in the gaming area to be able to use it in the classroom:

“It feels like it would be easier if I would receive tips and ideas about how to use games”. Since Fredrik is quite negative towards gaming he feels that if he was to use it someone has to show him what benefits there can be with gaming and in that case, how to use it the right way. Therefore some sort of education in the gaming area would be of benefit for teachers. Neither Denise nor Fredrik can access computers for their whole classes; Denise has access to computers for half of her class, and Fredrik only has five computers that his pupils can use during lessons.

Caroline is the only one of the interviewed teachers who does not ask for education or training in the gaming area. She says that if she wanted to use games in her teaching, she would take the time herself to learn the game and decide how to use it or if to use it. She says:

If I would like to use a game in my teaching, I feel that it is best if I know what I’m doing. I need to know what the game contains, how it works, what can happen and so on. If I don’t know, how will I be able to help my pupils if they don’t know what to do?

This is because she feels that she must know what she brings into the classroom and if the pupils need help she must know what she is talking about, just like any other subject they are working with. Caroline claims that even though it is important for teachers to know how the game works, it is not wrong to discover the games together with the pupils or get help from the pupils if they are better at the game than you are. Caroline does not have access to computers for her whole class, but they can use them in pairs.

### 5.3 Do teachers use games in their teaching?

Table 2 shows which of the five teachers use games in their English teaching. The ones marked yes have used or are using games in their English teaching and the ones marked with no have never used games in their English teaching.

**Table 2. Teachers who use spare time games in their English teaching.**

Name	Yes	No
Adam		x
Denise		x
Elisabeth		x
Fredrik		x
Caroline	x	

Adam, Elisabeth and Fredrik have never used games in their English teaching, for different reasons. Adam has quite a lot of experience within the computer area but not that much experience with games. He does not use games in his English language teaching, but the main reason, according to him, is not the lack of knowledge but instead the lack of computers. He claims that if they had more computers at his school he would perhaps use them also for games. Despite this, Adam claims that he rather uses the teaching materials they have at the school instead of working with, for example, his own custom themes.

Elisabeth does not use games in her English teaching and she says that this is the reason:

I do like computers, they are a great tool, but they always malfunction in some way and it takes up too much time to fix them. I don’t have that time; I’m not at school to fix computers.

Neither Denise nor Fredrik use games in their teaching, but for different reasons. Denise does not use, as she calls it “spare time games” such as *Minecraft* and *World of Warcraft*, but she does use what she calls “educational games”<sup>4</sup> that are available to use free on the Internet. She does that quite often since the pupils learn from it and they think it is fun. However, she would like to use “spare time games” but she claims that it would take too much time which she does not have to spend on it. Fredrik does not use games in his English teaching and he is the only one of the teachers who does not want to either. He feels that the “ordinary” and regular English language teaching is enough for both him and his pupils. “Ordinary” teaching for Fredrik is when he only uses the teaching materials that his school has, textbooks and workbooks. He claims that his pupils can play games when they are at home and not in school:

In school we should use the material we have, both for our sake as teachers and for our pupils’ sake. They need a normal ‘routine’ and to work with books. Talking a lot and working with different themes is enough during the English lessons. I like the ordinary English lessons; there is nothing wrong with them. My pupils can play games at home instead.

Caroline has used games in her English language teaching. She does not use games on a regular basis but it occurs every school year; however, she thinks that it is difficult to use games in larger classes since there is much that needs to be working. For example, all pupils need to understand the game and all computers need to be working. She has also had gaming as a theme in her teaching; the pupils can research a certain game and afterwards present it to the class with other activities that connect to the chosen games.

I’ve worked with games a few times, in different ways. Both played them in the classroom and talked and written about them, we have worked with *Minecraft* a couple of times. Playing it in the classroom has been really popular but it is difficult in large classes, since we need more computers and some pupils need more help with the computers than others. Depending on which game I choose to work with, the more I need to help them. Some games almost everyone plays at home.

## 6. Discussion

The discussion contains two parts, the first section is about the method and the second section discusses the results of the interviews in relation to the background and the theoretical framework.

### 6.1. Discussion of methodology

In this section the chosen method, analysis, implementation, reliability and ethical considerations are discussed. The discussion concerns whether there would be any difference in the results if any changes had been made.

Since the aim of the thesis is to investigate what attitudes teachers have, using interviews is one of the best ways to get that data. This is because then it is possible to go deeper into the subject while interviewing. The selection of informants is probably the main variable to receive this result; if other teachers had been interviewed the result might have differed. There might have been another result if the participants were younger, from another part of the country, or if more teachers were to be interviewed. However, since the time frame only was a few weeks, it was not possible to interview more teachers.

When contacting possible informants, it was made clear in the letter of consent (Appendix 1) that this interview and thesis was about games and computers, and that might have scared off some possible informants since it might be a difficult thing to talk about if you do not have any experience

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<sup>4</sup> For example Denise uses educational games from [elevspel.se](http://elevspel.se), [bbc.co.uk](http://bbc.co.uk) and from [abcya.com](http://abcya.com).

within the area. However, three of the respondents did not use games, so the selection does not seem too biased.

If the interviews had been done in a group or in pairs, it might also have changed the results, since they might have answered differently if they felt insecure with the others and replied what they thought was the right answer (Cohen et al., 2007, p. 373). One participant in a group interview might dominate the whole interview and not let anyone else speak. Even though group interviews might have been quicker and better given the time frame, it might have been difficult to find a time that suited all participants.

## **6.2. Result discussion**

In this section the results of the interviews and the background are discussed and organized under five smaller headings. Since one aim of this thesis is to see what attitudes teachers have towards gaming it is important to see what teachers think about several things that are connected to games in schools.

### **6.2.1. Why use or not use games?**

As the background shows, there is nothing stated in the Swedish curriculum about games and gaming and it might seem odd to use it in formal education. However the teaching should connect to pupils' own interests (Skolverket, 2011, p. 8, 30, 34) and gaming can lead to better conditions to learn English (Estling Vannestål, 2009, p. 17). Ekman and Fogelberg (2011, p. 101) also argue that *modern media* such as computers should be integrated in the Swedish schools and that it is important to "build bridges" between pupils' knowledge about that media and the formal school education. All five teachers in this study were aware of the importance of including activities that connect the pupils' interest with formal teaching. However, they did not all agree to what extent. Denise, Caroline, Elisabeth and Adam mention interaction with others as a positive aspect in the gaming area and that is one of the reasons that they are positive towards gaming. Interaction is a key variable in the sociocultural perspective. Vygotsky points out that social interaction is what helps children learn (Säljö, 2000, p. 67; Säljö, 2011, p. 191; Westlund, 2012, p. 20) and MMORPGs are about interaction with others (Åkerlund, 2011). Denise argues that pupils can learn a great deal of English through interaction with others and also that there can be more positive effects of gaming. Adam and Elisabeth agree with Denise and believe that gaming helps to increase pupils' English level. This is because they interact with other players and also that games make them more open towards the English language which can lead to several positive effects. This is in line with the sociocultural theory and the concept of scaffolding, where pupils learn from their own level in interaction with a peer who is more competent. While playing games a pupil has a chance to learn from their own level, as in comparison with a classroom where it is more difficult for the teacher to individualize the content of the teaching (Säljö, 2015).

Adam and Caroline do not agree on whether or not gaming can be beneficial for all pupils, regardless of the level of their English. Adam argues that pupils who are not so good at English do not benefit from computers and gaming since that is one more thing they need to learn, but Caroline, on the other hand, believes the opposite. She claims that gaming is positive for all pupils because they learn without knowing that they actually are learning and also all pupils will be motivated to learn more English. The use of "gamification" is a good way to motivate pupils (Deterding et al., 2011) and Caroline can be right that pupils will learn more without knowing it. Pupils are always learning, with or without knowing it and with technology, such as computers, knowledge can be accessible for everyone (Gee, 2007; Säljö, 2000). However, pupils still need guidance and with the teacher's help, they can develop even more.

In addition, Caroline believes that gaming can make it easier to meet the student on their level. In comparison, Adam would rather use other teaching materials to be sure to meet all pupils on their

level. Åkerlund (2011) argues that difficulties may arise when integrating games in the English teaching since teachers can have a hard time creating challenges for all pupils. Nevertheless Caroline seems to disagree with Åkerlund about this since she argues that it is easier to meet all pupils on their level when using games and computers. Meeting pupils on their own level is in line with the Zone of Proximal Development in the sociocultural theory, where pupils develop and learn with help from someone more competent (Säljö, 2015).

Even though four of the interviewed teachers have positive thoughts on games and gaming Fredrik does not agree with them. Instead he expresses a concern about games and the disadvantages of playing too much. He thinks that sitting still is a large concern and that pupils already have adapted themselves to a sedentary lifestyle, and that teachers should not encourage that more. Adam's views are in line with Fredrik's on this matter. In addition he points out the pupils who are not used to working with computers can have a hard time learning how to use this new tool. This is his opinion, even though his pupils may be considered *digital natives*, as Ekman and Fogelberg argue that they are. Adam and Fredrik are not alone with those opinions; Gruber (2011) also agrees with them, claiming that exaggerated gaming can cause problems for a person if it takes time from more important activities.

It is not just sitting still that is a negative aspect according to Fredrik; he also claims that addiction to games can occur and that teachers should therefore not work with games in formal teaching. However, addiction can also occur from other things and subjects in school, for example Physical Education and Health which can encourage working out perhaps too much or too hard. Therefore, it can be difficult selecting what to use and what not to use. Denise is quite positive towards gaming, but she agrees with Gruber (2011) that excessive gaming can have a bad effect on pupils. Denise also thinks that they sit still too much and do not meet friends, which can have a negative effect in school where they need friends. Another negative aspect that Sandberg and Karlsudd (2014) and Denise mention is that violent games can have a negative effect on pupils and their learning and well-being. Therefore it is important to know what games the pupils are playing and be certain that the game is not too violent.

### **6.2.2. What types of games do teachers consider most beneficial?**

As shown in the background there are two main types of games: online games where the players interact with others and offline games where the players play by themselves. The participants in this study mostly agree that online games are the most rewarding in regards to school for the pupil since they give the pupil a chance to talk, write and interact with others around the world. Elisabeth is one of the teachers who believe that online games are more beneficial than offline games, since the pupils need to be more active by talking, writing and reading. Caroline and Denise on the other hand argue that it does not matter if the games are online or offline; the pupils learn either way, but they learn different things. While playing offline games the player most often learns new words, but does not learn how to talk and write to others.

### **6.2.3. Access to computers**

One rather large matter that Adam highlights is the lack of technology, which in this context is access to computers. In Adam's school there are only a few computers available for the class to use and that makes it difficult to work with games and computers. This is something Hellström (2011) points out as creating a negative attitude towards computers since teachers are unable to learn how to use them. Adam is not the only teacher in this study who has a harder time accessing computers; Fredrik only has five computers to use for his whole class. Caroline and Denise have enough computers for half their classes, and due to her small class Elisabeth has computers for her whole class. Even though Adam and Fredrik both have fewer computers to access they do not

have the same opinion regarding integrating computers and games in the school activities. But Adam is more positive towards games, just like Caroline, Denise and Elisabeth who have an easier time accessing computers during their English lessons.

#### **6.2.4. What do teachers need to know to be able to use games in their English teaching?**

According to Sandberg and Karlsudd (2014) some teachers can see benefits with computers and games in schools but are at the same time anxious about the use of games in their teaching, since they lack the knowledge about how to use them. In this thesis four out of five teachers mention that it would be rewarding to take a course or receive some sort of training in order to be able to use games in their teaching. This shows that courses in this area might be relevant for several teachers and not just for teachers in this study, as that is also something Apperley and Walsh (2012) suggest. Gee (2007) argues that teachers also need to learn this so called “new” literacy (Mills, 2010) if they want to be able to benefit from it. Chase (2011) and Hellström (2011) mention that computers can be frightening for teachers; however, the teachers in these interviews do not agree with Chase and Hellström, as they are not afraid of using computers. Nonetheless, Adam is rather confident in the computer area but does not possess the same confidence when it comes to games. There he, Elisabeth, Fredrik and Denise would like a course or something similar in the subject of games. According to them it would be valuable to know how to work with games and what problems may occur, just like Hellström (2011) proposes. Even though it might be of benefit for Adam, Elisabeth, Denise and Fredrik to learn about games and computers, Lundberg (2010) argues that it is important to not rely on computers completely and forget to use other things in the teaching.

Caroline, on the other hand, does not ask for any supervision or training in the gaming area, perhaps because she is used to working with games or because she thinks it is easy. She does claim that she would like to use a game in her teaching, and that it is important to learn the game itself. Caroline points out that the pupils might know the game and then they can learn together. This is in line with the idea in sociocultural theory where scaffolding plays a part. Pupils learn from a more experienced peer and this peer could either be a teacher or as in this case, another student or classmate (Säljö, 2015).

#### **6.2.5. Do teachers use games in their English teaching?**

One part of the aim in this thesis was to see to what extent teachers use games in their teaching. Mills (2010) argues that teachers often feel forced to use new literacies such as computers and other digital media to connect activities at home and in school. However, the results of the five interviews show that only one out of five teachers use games (see Table 2). Denise only uses what she calls “educational games” where the purpose is to practice words and writing. However, in this thesis the focus is only on “spare time games”. The other teacher, Caroline, is the only teacher who uses games in this sense in her English language teaching. Caroline uses the games in two ways, either letting pupils play them in the classroom or working *with* them as a theme, which is writing and speaking about the games. The reason why teachers do not use games in their English teaching seems to be because of a lack of equipment, lack of knowledge and lack of time to learn the games.

A lack of computers or lack of knowledge must not put an end to the idea of using games in the classroom. The definition of “gamification” shows that it is possible to use gaming elements, which can be leaderboards, levels or perhaps avatars (Deterding et. al., 2011). It does not have to be the game itself, but rather it can be something related to the gaming world.

## 7. Conclusion

The aim of this study is to obtain an insight into the attitudes and practice of a sample of primary English teachers in Sweden regarding online and offline games in the EFL classroom. The results show that, in a sample of teachers in grades 4-6, attitudes towards online and offline games are overall positive even though the teachers also have some negative perspectives on games too. The participants in this study think that gaming can create benefits and that pupils learn from and with games. However, only one of the five teachers uses spare time games in the classroom. The main reason that the other teachers do not use games in their teaching is because they are unsure how to use them in class or because they lack the technology. Overall the teachers are positive towards gaming since the pupils interact with other players and therefore can learn from and with each other. This connects well with both the ZPD and scaffolding which are essential in the sociocultural theory (Säljö, 2015). It also shows that teachers are positive towards integrating their pupils' interests even though they do not know how to do it, since they can see benefits with online and offline games.

The results of this empirical study contribute information which shows that more research in this area is needed; otherwise it can be difficult for teachers to benefit from games. This thesis also shows that teachers have both negative and positive attitudes to gaming. However, they are overall more positive even though they understand the negative aspects that can occur.

### 7.1. Future research

Future research in this area would be of value. The results of these interviews show that this sample of teachers agrees with earlier research in the same area and that they are in need of more training and education within the gaming area. For example, it would be necessary to create courses or training and therefore it is important to figure out what they would contain. Since there only were five participants in this study it would be of interest to include more teachers to receive results that were possible to generalize. It might also be interesting to let teachers try to use games in their teaching to let them see if they want to use games. However, in order to be able to create courses for teachers about how to use games in their teaching it is important to *know* how to use them; therefore it might be necessary to investigate how gaming can be used in the formal school, and, for example, create a teacher's guide.

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## Appendix 1 Consent form

Hej!

Jag heter Ida Sandin och studerar sista terminen på Grundläraprogrammet med inriktning 4-6 på Högskolan Dalarna. Just nu gör jag ett examensarbete inom engelska och detta brev informerar om en undersökning inom engelskämnet. Undersökningen handlar om engelskalärares åsikter och tankar angående dator- och tv-spel integrerat i den formella skolundervisningen. Undersökningen rör också frågor om användandet av dator- och tv-spel förekommer i engelska undervisningen. Du tillfrågas härmed om deltagande i denna undersökning i form av en enskild intervju.

Syftet med undersökningen är att få kunskaper om vad engelskalärare har för åsikter och tankar om dator- och tv-spel i undervisningen. Undersökningen syftar också till att få reda på om engelskalärare använder sig av dator- och tv-spel som ett hjälpmedel i deras engelska undervisning.

I den här undersökningen är medverkande engelskalärare som arbetar med årskurserna 4-6, från olika skolor. Eftersom du är inom detta spann så är du tillfrågad av delta i en intervju på ca 30-40 minuter. Jag kommer gärna till dig där du är så du slipper resa någonstans. När intervjun och arbetet presenteras är du självklart anonym och inget du säger kommer kunna ledas till dig, det är endast jag som har direkt tillgång till den information du ger mig. Efter att resultatet är sammanställt kommer ljudfiler och annat material som eventuellt kan ledas till dig, att raderas. En kopia av uppsatsen kan skickas till dig om du vill ta del av resultatet.

Ditt deltagande i undersökningen är helt frivilligt. Du kan när som helst avbryta ditt deltagande utan närmare motivering. Undersökningen kommer att presenteras i form av en uppsats vid Högskolan Dalarna.

Ytterligare upplysningar lämnas av nedanstående ansvariga.  
Lycksele 2015-09-14

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Jag har fått muntlig och skriftlig information om deltagande i ovanstående studie i sådan utsträckning att jag känner mig tillräckligt informerad. Jag ger därför mitt informerade samtycke till att delta.

---

Ort

---

Datum

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Namnteckning

## Appendix 2 Interview questions

Om dig och lite om din undervisning.

1. I vilken/vilka årskurser undervisar du?
2. I vilka ämnen?
3. Hur länge har du arbetat som lärare/inom skolan?
4. Vilka årskurser har du behörighet i?
5. Din ålder?
6. I vilka ämnen har du behörighet i?
7. Kan du berätta lite för mig hur du gör när du undervisar i engelska?
8. Utgår du från något (speciellt) läromedel?
9. Vad tycker du är lätt respektive svårare i engelskundervisningen för dig som lärare?
10. Om du fick önska, hur skulle du helst vilja arbeta med engelskundervisningen? Som du gör eller på något annat sätt? Varför gör du som du gör?
11. Hur tänker du gällande att få med elevernas intressen i undervisningen?
  - Brukar du utgå från elevernas intressen när du utför/planerar din undervisning?

Om spelande

12. Vad har du för tankar om datorer i skolan?
13. Vad har du tillgång till i datorväg i skolan?
14. Har du erfarenhet med att arbeta med IKT i skolan? (kan finnas behov av att förklara vad IKT är)
15. Vad tänker du om mobiler i klassrummet?
16. Vad tänker du om användandet av iPads/surfplattor i klassrummet?
  - Har ni datorer/iPads i klassrummet?
17. Vad anser du om att arbeta med en dator alternativt iPad per elev?
18. Vad tycker du om dator- och tv-spels spelande?(Positiv, negativ, mitt emellan)
19. Hur tror du spelande påverkar eleverna?
  - Spelar det någon roll om det är online eller offline spel? Fördelar/nackdelar
  - Är det någon skillnad vilken typ av spel det är? (Ex. spel som Wow, Sims, 1st person shooter)
  - Anser du att det påverkar undervisningen på något vis?
  - Anser du att det påverkar vad eleverna lär sig/inte lär sig?
20. Spelar du något själv?
  - Vad i så fall? (dator, videospel, mobil osv)
21. Anser du det finns någon fördel med att integrera spel i engelskundervisningen?
22. Anser du det finns någon nackdel med att integrera spel i engelskundervisningen?
23. Vet du vad för spel dina elever spelar(/om de spelar)?
24. Använder du dig av spel i din undervisning/på dina engelskalektioner?
  - Har du provat att arbeta med spelande?
  - Varför/varför inte?
  - (Har du någon idé om hur man kan få in spelande i den formella undervisningen?)