ENGLISH TEACHING AND THE USE OF ICT

English teachers’ experiences of the use of ICT during the corona pandemic

Joy Brown
Abstract
Despite teachers already using Information and Communications Technology as a tool in their English teaching, the corona pandemic and the subsequent transition to online teaching presented teachers with the challenge of using ICT for all of their teaching. Teaching a language which is not the students’ mother tongue makes online teaching an even greater challenge. The purpose of this study, therefore, is to increase the knowledge surrounding the use of ICT in online English teaching in an effort to support teachers in the future. The experiences of ten English teachers were obtained through the use of semi-structured interviews. A thematic analysis revealed a mixture of positive and negative experiences from the teachers, in terms of personal feelings, the actual process of online teaching and professional competence. The need for extra support for teachers in various areas of online teaching is discussed. Further research is needed to provide more detailed information in order to learn how teachers can be better supported in their role as an online educator, or in the use of ICT in a physical classroom.

Keywords: information technology, upper secondary school, digital tools, EFL, corona pandemic
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Introduction

On the 17th March 2020, the Swedish Government announced that, as of the following day, all schools at upper secondary level and higher would close and move over to online lessons (Regeringen, 2020). Overnight, teachers went from using Information and Communications Technology (ICT) at those times when it was relevant or appropriate, to having no choice but to use ICT in all aspects of their teaching. ICT refers to the set of tools used to process and communicate information (Kennewell et al., 2000, p. 1) meaning that ICT is the software and hardware used in the production and reception of information.

Whilst many teachers were confident using ICT when they chose to, and had had time to prepare, it was not an easy task to immediately substitute classroom teaching for online teaching and face-to-face communication with digital communication. Lesson plans required changing, methods of communication needed to be organised and both students and teachers had to learn new methods of learning and teaching (Morberg, 2020). Whilst ICT is used widely in both schools and in the home, the changeover to digital teaching made the job increasingly challenging for many teachers.

There is no question that the use of computers has greatly increased since they became available for the general public to purchase at the end of the 1970s. Since then, society has become increasingly digital with people using computers both for work and for pleasure. In 2019, 93% of the Swedish population had a computer at home, 70% had a tablet and 92% had their own smartphone (Internetstiftelsen, 2019, p. 7). In 1993 the Internet first went public which has led to both computers and the internet becoming an important part of life for the vast majority of people. Whether computers and the Internet are being used to send emails, to read the news, to watch films and series or to keep in touch with people on social media, there is no escape from digitalisation. The percentage of Swedish households with access to the Internet increased from 2% in 1995 to 98% in 2019 with the majority of people using it to send emails, as well as to look at social media and to listen to podcasts and digital books (Internetstiftelsen, 2019, p. 9).

Since 2015, every upper secondary school student has had a computer to use for their schoolwork (Swedish National Agency for Education, 2019). In 2017, the Swedish government published a strategy for digitalisation in schools. The goal was for Sweden to become the best in the world at utilising the possibilities of digitalisation (Regeringen, 2017). The Swedish School Curriculum states that it is the school’s responsibility to ensure that each pupil, after completing their education, has digital competence. This means that every student is able to use ICT in the sourcing of information, information processing, problem solving, creation, communication and learning (Swedish National Agency for Education, 2018). This requires teachers to use digital tools in their teaching in order to give students the opportunity to gain such knowledge and to become digitally competent.

During the time that schools had implemented online teaching due to the corona pandemic, I came across a wide variety of views both on social media and in conversation with other upper secondary school English teachers. Many of
these were negative and included comments with regards to an increased workload, lack of support from schools as well as difficulties in the actual teaching process. There were also positive comments about teachers finding new digital tools which actually made their teaching easier or which helped them to meet their students on a different level.

Teaching students in a language which is not their mother tongue only adds to the difficulties of online teaching. English lessons are to be taught in English (Swedish National Agency for Education, 2011) which means that it is important that teachers have access to ICT in order to support their English teaching. It is not only access to ICT which is important, they must know how to use the ICT that is available to help their students in the best way possible. Nobody knows what education will look like, even in the immediate future, just as nobody predicted that schools would close due to the corona pandemic. Therefore, it is important to understand the experiences of teachers, both positive and negative, in order to properly prepare them for the future.

**Purpose and Research Questions**

The purpose of this research is to contribute to the knowledge surrounding the use of digital technology in the online teaching of English as a foreign language.

**Research Questions:**

1. How have challenges within English teaching been supported by ICT during the corona pandemic and what has been found to be lacking?
2. How do Upper Secondary School English teachers describe their experiences of online teaching?
3. How has the experience of online teaching changed Upper Secondary School English teachers’ approach to the use of digital technology in the classroom?
Background
The purpose of this section is to provide information from the Swedish Government and the Swedish National Agency for Education with regards to the use of ICT in schools both generally and during the corona pandemic. It also discusses previous research into the use of ICT in teaching in general as well as in the teaching of English as a Foreign Language (EFL). Furthermore, it looks at previous research carried out with direct reference to the corona pandemic.

Regulatory documents

Upper Secondary School Curriculum
One of the main purposes of education is to prepare young people for the future in terms of work and/or further study (Swedish National Agency for Education, 2018) and, as the majority of jobs and higher education are dependent on the ability to use ICT, it is not only logical, but necessary for schools to instruct students in its use. In 2018, the Swedish National Agency for Education updated the Upper Secondary School Curriculum in order to clarify the schools’ aim to strengthen the digital competence of students. They point out that new demands are placed on people in terms of knowledge and working practices due to new technology and that upper secondary schools have a duty to give every student the possibility to develop their ICT skills (Swedish National Agency for Education, 2018, p. 3). In order for students to be given this opportunity, teachers need to be knowledgeable in the use of ICT themselves; they need to be digitally competent. In their commentary material regarding the digitalisation of teaching in upper secondary schools, the Swedish National Agency for Education make it clear that ICT should be being used in every school and in the teaching of every subject. They go further by saying that ICT should be used in a way that supports the students’ learning and that, without proper planning and a clear purpose and goal, the use of ICT could actually be detrimental to the learning process (Swedish National Agency for Education, 2017, p. 13).

Whilst there were already guidelines in place from the Swedish National Agency for Education regarding online/distance teaching, when the Swedish Government announced recommendations for the closing of upper secondary schools these were updated (Swedish National Agency for Education, 2020). In order to minimize the spread of the corona virus, further legislation was put in place by the government’s education agency which gave power to school leaders to make the decision to close their schools. It also provided guidelines for the manner in which teaching should take place if this decision was made. According to the law concerning education in schools and other teaching activities during the spread of certain infections, if a school does close, its students continue to have the right to the equivalent number of teaching hours as laid out in the school curriculum (SFS 2020:115, 5 §). In order to clarify the way in which teaching is to be carried out, the same law states that “[s]chool leaders may decide that pupils shall be given instruction where the teacher and the pupil are separated in both space but not in time or are separated in both space and time” (SFS 2020:115, 7 §). This means that lessons can take place with the teacher and the whole class through the use of a video conferencing programme, or information regarding the
lesson and assignments can be communicated to the students without actually meeting in real time.

Whichever of these two methods are used, it would be complicated without the support of ICT, and impossible to meet in real time without it. In these situations, the expectation is that every student has access to a computer or tablet in order for them to take part in online schooling. The Swedish National Agency for Education (2020) points out that it is the school’s responsibility to ensure that all students have access to the necessary digital tools that are required to take part in online/distance teaching. However, ensuring that every student has access to a stable internet connection can be an issue. The Swedish National Agency for Education is clear that a “lack of equipment should not limit students’ ability to develop the knowledge and abilities described in the curricula” (Swedish National Agency for Education, 2017, p. 14). Whilst there are alternatives for those students who do not have reliable access, such as going to work at the local library, the Swedish National Agency for Education goes further to say that “the principal is responsible for ensuring that students have access to good quality teaching materials as well as other learning tools for a modern education” (Swedish National Agency for Education, 2017). Therefore, it is not the responsibility of the students to solve the problem themselves but is instead the responsibility of the school to make sure that all of its students have adequate Internet access.

**English Syllabus for Upper Secondary Schools**

English in upper secondary schools is split into three courses: English 5, English 6 and English 7. English 5 is compulsory for all upper secondary school programmes, English 6 is compulsory for all university entry programmes and optional for other programmes and English 7 is optional for everyone.

Whilst there are no direct references to the use of ICT in the English syllabus, there are areas of the syllabus which are suitable for being supported by ICT. One of the aims of English as a subject is that “[s]tudents should be given the opportunity to develop knowledge of living conditions, social issues and cultural features in different contexts and parts of the world where English is used” (Swedish National Agency for Education, 2011). This is an area which would benefit from the use of ICT, specifically the Internet. There is a wealth of up-to-date information available online which would be relevant to this topic.

The syllabus further states that “[t]eaching should make use of the surrounding world as a resource for contacts, information and learning” (Swedish National Agency for Education, 2011) and, whilst it does not mention the Internet directly, the surrounding world can be understood to include the world that is made accessible online. It also mentions that teaching should “help students develop an understanding of how to search for, evaluate, select and assimilate content from multiple sources of information, knowledge and experiences” (Swedish National Agency for Education, 2011). These multiple sources certainly include online sources as that is how the majority of upper secondary school students gather information, both in and out of school.
The syllabi also include the following knowledge requirements:

**English 5:**
- “Students choose texts and spoken language from different media and in a **relevant** / and **effective** / and **critical** way use the selected material in their own production and interaction” (Swedish National Agency for Education, 2011).

**English 6:**
- “Students can choose and **with some certainty** / **with certainty** use strategies to search for relevant information and assess the reliability of different sources.
- Students choose texts and spoken language from different media and in a **relevant** / and **effective** / and **critical** way use the selected material in their own production and interaction” (Swedish National Agency for Education, 2011).

**English 7:**
- “Students can choose and **with some certainty** / **with certainty** use strategies to search for relevant information, structure it and assess the reliability of different sources.
- Students choose texts and spoken language from different media and in a **relevant** / and **effective** / and **critical** way use the selected material in their own production and interaction” (Swedish National Agency for Education, 2011).

The ability to find various sources, to be able to determine how relevant and trustworthy they are, and then to be able to use them in an appropriate way in the student’s own production is also an integral part of the syllabi and knowledge requirements. These skills are described by the Swedish National Agency for Education (2018) as one of the components of digital competence. The only way to learn and to practice these skills is through the use of ICT to access the sources.

Another relevant part of the syllabus is the production of both oral and written work and how the student is required to be able to adapt their work to different situations, recipients and for different purposes. Due to the demands of society today, these productions need to also include producing work using ICT. There is a wide variety of options from creating a written piece of work using a word processing programme, to recording a podcast, to giving a presentation with the help of slide show or presentation software. The production of work should not solely involve the use of ICT, however, in order to enable the student to fulfil the adaptation requirements, it is essential that it is included.

**Previous research**

The use of ICT in teaching has become an important topic of discussion and research across the globe since the corona pandemic. Whilst there was research into the topic previous to this, it has become considerably more relevant since the start of the pandemic in the spring of 2020 when many schools and teaching facilities worldwide implemented online teaching for their students. The main focus of previous research appears to have been to create a general understanding
of the advantages and disadvantages of what forms of ICT are available and how well they work as well as to identify what is lacking or needs improving. The corona pandemic is an on-going situation and it is not possible to see, as yet, exactly what effect it will have on the teaching of EFL. However, it is important to gather as much information as possible in order to be able to support teachers in the future and this study aims to add to this knowledge base.

**Teachers’ Level of Digital Competence**

In their article concerning digital language learning during the corona pandemic, Chik and Benson (2020) state that there is a belief that students have the ability to transition from traditional classroom teaching to online teaching with minimal problems. However, they also point out that this assumption is based on the very simplistic view that “as long as a digital device and Internet connection is available, one can learn” (p. 2) which does not consider the need for a teacher to have the necessary skills to be able to teach online.

A study by Dashtestani (2014) into the online teaching experiences of EFL teachers in Iran discovered that one of the main obstacles to the changeover to online teaching was the low level of digital competence which the language teachers had (p. 10), a view supported by Bergdahl and Nouri (2020) in their study of distance education due to the corona pandemic in Sweden. In their study they discovered that there were a number of teachers who felt that they did not know how to think in terms of online teaching despite having used ICT in their physical classroom teaching (p. 5). The idea that teachers may not have the necessary skills is discussed by Atmojo and Nugroho (2020) in their research about online EFL teaching in Indonesia. Their research showed that “teachers’ knowledge and skill on the use of technology in online learning need to be improved” and that “teachers must be knowledgeable and skilful to teach through online learning” (p. 62). This indicates that further training for teachers is an important factor in the success of online teaching.

**The Transition from Classroom to Online Teaching**

The issue that is considered by a number of researchers to have had a considerable effect on the experiences of online teaching during the pandemic is that the transition from traditional to online teaching occurred very quickly – overnight in the case of many upper secondary schools. A study carried out in Turkey by Hebebci et al. (2020) aimed to discover the experiences of students and teachers forced into online education due to the corona pandemic. They concluded that “as the preparations for distance education were completed in a short time and that teachers and students were not prepared for this situation, problems occurred” (p. 297). This statement is echoed by Atmojo and Nugroho (2020) who state that teachers in Indonesian schools complained about the lack of planning and preparation before starting to teach online due to the need for a rapid implementation of online teaching (p. 67). In response to their own research which resulted in the same conclusions, Bergdahl and Nouri (2020) suggest that “preparedness plans for schools should be developed” (p. 14) and that “teachers’ experience of the transition into temporary distance education are critical to explore when developing an informed preparedness plan for Swedish education”
The purpose behind having a preparedness plan is to avoid the problems associated with the quick transition to online teaching.

Whilst the hasty transition to online teaching was obviously a challenge for teachers, there were also positive results of the experience. Spoel et al. (2020) discovered that teachers who had increased their use of ICT due to having to teach online “have the intention to integrate technology in their teaching significantly more, once teaching is back to normal” (p. 10) which can only be seen as a positive development in teaching as a whole.

Online English teaching

Whilst these points are relevant to the online teaching of all subjects, including English, there is also research which focuses specifically on online English and EFL teaching. In the preface to their book concerning the use of ICT in the teaching of English in secondary schools, Adams and Brindley (2007) point out that “of all subjects, English must be the one which poses simultaneously most problems and most opportunity for using ICT in the classroom” (p. vii), an opinion which is confirmed by the variety of results produced by research, both positive and negative.

One of the main criticisms of online English teaching is the lack of communication and interaction that takes place, even when lessons are carried out in real time via a video conferencing platform. According to Andrews (2007), “a key sociological variable in English is the presence of the teacher” (p. 131), a point which Anderson and Rivera-Vargas (2020) also consider to be important as they say that in order to successfully enable interaction and communication between a teacher and their students, physical proximity is advantageous (p. 209).

In terms of English and EFL teaching, the ability to interact and communicate is essential. It is an important part of the process of being able to use a language. Orellana (2006) carried out research into the correlation between class size and interaction in online classes. All of the participants in the study said that a smaller class size was necessary in order for them to achieve the highest possible level of interactivity. The results of the study indicated that “online courses at the highest interactive levels should have an average class size of 15.9” (p. 242). Both oral production and reception are important parts of the English syllabus within Swedish upper secondary schools. English is a subject in which interaction is imperative and therefore class size needs to be taken into consideration, particularly when teaching takes place online.

Even in situations where teachers have had positive experiences of online teaching, the lack of interaction was mentioned as a drawback with Hebebci et al. (2020) pointing out that the “most important problem that teachers ... draw attention [to] is the lack of interaction” (p. 278). This does not appear to be a problem in all cases however, with Spoel et al. (2020) reporting that “interaction was ... reported as an unexpected positive experience, in the situation where introvert students were more present compared to a regular classroom context” (p. 10). This can only be seen as a positive aspect of online teaching, particularly in EFL education, as speaking is an integral part of learning a language.

There is further literature which discusses the positive aspects of online English teaching, with particular reference to the other core elements of the
English syllabus. Dawes et al. (2007) write that “[i]n relation to the English curriculum, computer-based activities can be used not only to help develop speaking and listening but also to encourage children to jointly make sense of texts and learn to use new registers and genres” (p. 15), making it clear that reading comprehension cannot only be carried out successfully using ICT but can actually encourage students to work together in order to understand what they have read.

Adams, Brindley and Sida-Nichols (2007) believe that writing is the activity which involves the most use of ICT in the English classroom and that it is of equal importance for students to learn to write texts on screen as it is for them to write on paper (p. 19). With the increase in the use of ICT during the corona pandemic, this has become even more important as assignments are primarily written on the computer. Davies (2007) sees one of the main advantages of using a word processing programme as being that “an individual child can sit in front of a computer screen and focus on the act of writing” and that this is “particularly helpful to those who cannot write much” due to the fact that “computer screens are responsive, they make the writing look good, and they normalize writing in ways that are not even viewed as writing” (pp. 63-64). Encouraging students to produce written work can be a problem for English teachers, however, this research shows that it may be possible for students to produce more, or better writing when using ICT.

Summary

Previous research has shown a variety of experiences in the use of ICT, both generally and, more specifically, in English teaching. There is, however, a shortage of research specific to English teaching during the pandemic in Sweden and it is important to know how ICT functioned within the various parts of the syllabus. Nobody could foresee the impact of the corona pandemic on education around the world and there is no guarantee that schools will not be forced to close again in the future. Whether this happens or not, ICT is a permanent fixture in teaching, and knowledge about ICT gained before, during and after enforced online schooling should be shared within the teaching profession in order to improve education for the world’s students. The experiences of teachers in the use of ICT in English teaching, both before and during the pandemic, can lead to professional development for all teachers regardless of whether they are teaching online or in the classroom and further, more specific, research, such as this study, is therefore important.
Method
For the purpose of this study, a qualitative research method was used in the form of recorded semi-structured interviews. These interviews were carried out with ten upper secondary school English teachers in order to contribute to the knowledge surrounding the use of digital technology in the online teaching of English as a foreign language. The recorded interviews were then transcribed and analysed by theme. This section includes further information regarding the method used as well as the reliability and validity of the aforementioned results. Furthermore, it includes a discussion about the ethical considerations involved in the implementation of the study.

Sample
Ten individual semi-structured interviews were carried out with teachers from ten upper secondary schools in Sweden. It was decided to interview teachers from different schools in order to obtain as wide-ranging results as possible with a relatively small sample. Where two or more participants from the same municipality agreed to take part in the study, the first person to respond was accepted and the other(s) retained as potential reserves.

Convenience sampling, “where advantage is taken of ... informants that are close at hand” (Punch & Oancea, 2014, p. 211), was considered to be the most appropriate method of sampling for this study. This was due to the fact that informants were easily contactable on social media. A request was sent out to upper secondary school English teachers via two Facebook groups: Engelska för gymnasielärare and Nätverk för lärare i engelska, asking for volunteers who would be willing to be interviewed. In both cases, a covering letter with information detailing the purpose of the study was included alongside a request for willing participants to make contact via email (see Appendix 1). On receipt of a positive response, contact was made in order to arrange a time for the interview. One week before the arranged interview time, the participants were sent an interview guide (see Appendix 2). This was to enable them to prepare for the interview by giving them time to think about the questions that would be asked.

Data collection method
The method of data collection employed in this study was semi-structured interviews which were carried out on a one-to-one basis via the Google Meet online platform and took between 30 and 60 minutes. Jamshed (2014) describes semi-structured interviews as “those in-depth interviews where the respondents have to answer preset open-ended questions” (p. 87) whilst Gubrium and Holstein (2002) state that, in qualitative interviews, “participants are more likely to be viewed as meaning makers” and that “[t]he purpose of most qualitative interviewing is to derive interpretations” (p. 83). The use of this type of interview is therefore relevant to this study as the purpose is to increase the knowledge surrounding the use of ICT in online English teaching and the best way to do that is to consider the views and experiences of those who are being expected to utilise the various forms of ICT available.
Semi-structured interviews are interviews which are intended to take place only once and are expected to take from thirty minutes up to more than an hour (Jamshed, 2014, p. 87). This makes them ideal for this study as teachers have a high workload and a strict timetable that they work to so requesting an hour on just one occasion is more suitable than requiring shorter periods over a longer period of time.

Once the initial interview questions were decided upon, a pilot interview was carried out in order to ascertain whether the answers received actually answered the research questions. Small adjustments were made in order to encourage participants to give more detail in their answers. The interviews were then performed individually via the online meeting platform Google Meet which enabled the meetings to be recorded. Cohen and Crabtree (2006) state that the recording of semi-structured interviews is highly recommended due to them including open-ended questions which could lead to discussions about more in-depth areas not included in the interview guide (para. 3). This information may be highly relevant to the study but could be missed if the interviewer does not record the interview and takes written notes based only on the questions mentioned in the interview guide instead.

Data analysis method

The results from the interviews were analysed using a thematic analysis method which Braun and Clarke (2006) describe as being “a method for identifying, analysing and reporting patterns (themes) within data” and which “organizes and describes your data set in (rich) detail” (p. 79). This is a flexible method which allows the data to be analysed in an objective way as it is not apparent before the interviews what the teachers’ experiences are. With this method the themes will become apparent when the data is analysed.

The analysing of the data was executed following the phases suggested by Braun and Clarke (2006, p. 87):

Table 1

Phases of thematic analysis

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Phase</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Familiarizing yourself with your data:</td>
<td>Transcribing data (if necessary), reading and re-reading the data, noting down initial ideas.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Generating initial codes:</td>
<td>Coding interesting features of the data in a systematic fashion across the entire data set, collating data relevant to each code.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Searching for themes:</td>
<td>Collating codes into potential themes, gathering all data relevant to each potential theme.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Reviewing themes:</td>
<td>Checking if the themes work in relation to the coded extracts (Level 1) and the entire data set (Level 2), generating a thematic ‘map’ of the analysis.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
5. Defining and naming themes: Ongoing analysis to refine the specifics of each theme, and the overall story the analysis tells, generating clear definitions and names for each theme.

6. Producing the report: The final opportunity for analysis. Selection of vivid, compelling extract examples, final analysis of selected extracts, relating back of the analysis to the research question and literature, producing a scholarly report of the analysis.

The themes which were identified in the relevant responses to each of the three research questions are illustrated in tables 2 – 4 with examples from the transcribed interviews. A description of each of the themes is included in the results section along with a discussion of the results and conclusions drawn.

**Table 2**

*Thematic analysis examples of interview data relevant to research question 1*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Transcript example</th>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Theme</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>“Students worked through tasks in digital study groups (via google meet)”</td>
<td>Success with student participation and motivation</td>
<td>Challenges supported by ICT</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“I instructed the students on the assignment in a google meet with the whole class and then uploaded it to our google classroom so that they could read through them as many times as necessary”</td>
<td>Students’ access to lesson information / teaching</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“It became harder for me to check their understanding.”</td>
<td>Fair assessment of students’ work</td>
<td>Challenges unable to be solved with ICT</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Students did not interact as much with each other as they did in the classroom and less with me”</td>
<td>Interaction</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Table 3**

*Thematic analysis examples of interview data relevant to research question 2*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Transcript</th>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Theme</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>“Horrible, awful in fact”</td>
<td>Negative emotions</td>
<td>Emotional response to the experience</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“I love using ICT”</td>
<td>Positive emotions</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“I learned a lot”</td>
<td>Professional development</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“It was very time consuming in terms of planning and supporting students”</td>
<td>Time/workload</td>
<td>Consequences of the execution of online teaching</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“My teaching was worse as I was continuously trying to find methods of ICT that would replace the methods I used in the physical classroom”</td>
<td>Performance</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 4

*Thematic analysis examples of interview data relevant to research question 3*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Transcript</th>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Theme</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>“I am definitely more confident now having used ICT”</td>
<td>Increased confidence</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“I know how to use [ICT] in my teaching now”</td>
<td>Improved skills</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“It has made me find fun, new ways of using ICT”</td>
<td>Improved knowledge</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Ethical considerations**

According to The Swedish Research Council (2017), there are four areas which must be taken into consideration when carrying out research. These are information, consent, confidentiality and usage.

On receipt of emails from prospective participants, a reply was sent out informing the recipient about the purpose of the study which included details concerning the collection of data. It specified that data would be collected during an interview in the form of a recorded online meeting. It was also explained that written transcripts and notes would be made based on the interview but that these would be destroyed once the study was completed. All interviews were to be carried out in English which was also made clear to the potential participants. In order to keep all obtained information confidential, fictitious names were given to each of the participants and no record was kept linking any of the comments to their real name. Any and all of the information obtained during the interviews was used solely for the purposes of the study. The participants were also advised that they could decide to withdraw from the study at any point. Once the participants had been given all of the above information, written consent in the form of an emailed reply was received from all of the participants. Each participant was then reminded of all the information before commencing the interview, thereby meeting all of the requirements for research.

**Discussion of method**

**Reliability**

Reliability is how credible the results of the study are. Reliability is affected by how well thought-out the study is as well as how well it is carried out (Lagerholm, 2013, p. 30). The questions that were asked during the interviews were neutral and unbiased and therefore the answers were considered to be reliable. The interview guide was followed and each of the interviews was carried out in the same way, that is, on a one-to-one basis via Google Meet. This meant that there was a strong intra-rater reliability as all interviews were carried out by the same person following the same routine.

Another problem with reliability is that of definitional drift in coding. The issue here is that material which is coded towards the end of a study, whilst using codes which were decided upon at the beginning, may not be coded in exactly the
same way as material that was coded at the start (Gibbs, 2018, p. 137). In order to avoid this, recently coded material was regularly checked with earlier coded material and any inconsistencies were rectified.

Validity
Validity has to do with the degree to which you actually examine what you claim to be examining (Lagerholm, 2013, p.29). A pilot interview was carried out before the full interviews were performed in order to check that the questions led to the type of answers that were required in order to fulfil the purpose of the study. This ensured a good level of content validity. All ten of the teachers interviewed taught English in upper secondary schools in Sweden and taught 100 % online during the spring term of 2020. The purpose of the study was to contribute to the knowledge surrounding the use of digital technology in the online teaching of English as a foreign language and therefore all of the respondents were able to give valid responses.

Punch and Oancea (2014) point out that a validity issue with interviews is whether the interviewees give responses which can be considered to be valid. They raise the issues of inaccuracy in respondents’ memories as well as dishonesty and self-deception (p. 192). Whilst this is something which must be taken into account, the fact that the respondents were given the interview guide before taking part in the interview gave them the opportunity to accurately recall their experiences of online teaching. This does not take away the possibility of the respondents being dishonest but as their names were changed and no identifying information was used in the report, they had no reason to say anything other than the truth, thus making the results valid.

Gibbs (2018) describes the transcription process as “a form of translation from one medium to another and inevitably involves some interpretation” (p. 132). In order to avoid misinterpretation, he suggests that the accuracy of the transcription should be checked with the interviewee. However, due to time constraints, this was not carried out. Taking into account that the interviews were carried out in English, a language that is not the respondents’ mother tongue, as well as the fact that the interviews were conducted online, this would have given a higher level of validity to the results.

Generalisability
As there were only ten interviewees it is not possible to generalise the results to say that they apply to all upper secondary school teachers. However, steps were taken to ensure that respondents were from different municipalities within Sweden to obtain as wide-ranging results as possible. Whilst it is not possible to generalise the results obtained, they are still a useful addition to the knowledge already available.
Results
This chapter presents the results of the thematic analysis carried out on the responses given by the teachers during the interviews. The chapter is divided into sub-sections for each of the research questions and examples of the results are given in the form of quotes and paraphrases.

How have challenges within English teaching been supported by ICT during the corona pandemic and what has found to be lacking?
There were two themes identified within the responses to this question. They are:

- **Challenges supported by ICT** – this involves areas of teaching which were successfully carried out using ICT during online teaching.

- **Challenges unable to be solved with ICT** – this involves areas of teaching where it was found that ICT was lacking which made it difficult or impossible for those activities to take place.

**Challenges supported by ICT**
Eight out of ten of the teachers interviewed reported that they experienced challenges with online teaching. Some of them mentioned that motivating students to participate was an issue for them. Caroline said: “My students showed a loss of motivation when they were at home” and she also mentioned that keeping them focused on their lessons proved to be difficult as “[t]hey would log in and go do something else”. Ivy also mentioned having a similar experience when she said that, amongst her students, “[t]here was a lack of commitment and interest. It is hard to motivate students when they are not present”. The ability to keep the students’ attention and to motivate them when not in a traditional classroom situation is something which needs to be addressed if online teaching is to be a success.

Six out of the ten teachers, however, found ways of using the ICT that they had access to in order to help them to motivate their students and encourage them to take part in the lessons’ activities.

Making smaller group rooms within Google Meet was successful for four of them, encouraging students to play a more active role in the lesson whilst enabling the teacher to monitor their participation. Sara found it advantageous to have students working through tasks together in digital study groups via Google Meet whilst David explained that “[t]o help motivate students, I assigned them study groups of about 4 students and gave each group a meet room which I went round to during each lesson and checked how it was going – just as I would have walked round the classroom checking”. Peter and Ivy divided their classes into smaller groups in order to discuss a book or film which they had watched. Peter felt that this was a more successful activity than whole group or individual assignments as “the students had to cooperate” and Ivy’s experience was that “[t]he majority of students joined in” when she split them into groups to discuss pre-prepared questions. Finding ways in which to encourage student participation is a crucial part of successful English online education. Without student participation it is impossible for them to develop their use of the language in order to reach the requirements and to move on to the next stage in their learning.
Working through assignments together, either led by the teacher or a student, appear to encourage student motivation and participation. Esther found that being present in the online classroom with all of the students and supporting them through the lessons’ activities worked best for her class. She said that “[t]he students worked well when [we] worked through the assignments together”. She also mentioned that she has small class sizes in comparison to the usual gymnasium class size of around 32 students, with a maximum of 10 students in each class and suggests that this approach might not be as successful for larger classes. Roger’s explanation of a successful lesson which he found encouraged his students to take part in lessons includes using the screen sharing facility in Google Meet. However, instead of sharing his own screen and giving the lesson or assignment information, he assigned the task to a student. He said: “When students themselves shared their screens and went through the assignments, the other students were more willing to participate and ask questions”. In this way, he encouraged student participation by giving the students more responsibility in the online teaching environment and thereby increasing their English communication skills at the same time.

The other challenge that was deemed by the majority of teachers to have been supported by ICT was the students’ access to lesson, assignment and teaching information. When the students aren’t physically in the same place as the teacher, being able to convey information to the students was considered to be an issue. Google’s Meet and Classroom package was used by four out of the five teachers who regarded this as one of the challenges that had been solved by the use of ICT. Three of those teachers used the recording feature in Google Meet to present a lecture in real time as well as to record it. Simon, Marie and Roger recorded their lectures / presentations and then uploaded them to Google Classroom for students to access again if necessary. Roger explained: “Using Google Meet as a way of recording a presentation made it possible for students who had problems with their internet to go back and watch it if they missed parts - or if they were sick”. The option for students to watch and/or re-watch presentations was viewed as an advantage by the teachers as it gave students access to the teaching information which they may have missed for various reasons.

Marie mentioned that she put all of the assignment information and instructions in Google Classroom which David also did, saying “I instructed the students on the assignment in a Google Meet with the whole class and then uploaded it to our Google Classroom so that they could read through them as many times as necessary”. They both saw it as important that the students had clear and detailed instructions which they could access whenever they considered it to be necessary.

Esther also found a successful way to give students assignment information. Her school used an online English coursebook before the switch to online teaching so she said that the transfer was relatively smooth as “I based the lesson on the digital coursebook we use – each student has their own online copy so they could work through the assignments I had set”. She pointed out that this was not only
easier for her as the teacher but also for the students as they were already familiar with this set-up.

During a pandemic it is especially important that students are able to catch-up on work that they may have missed if they are to successfully gain enough knowledge complete the course. This is considerably harder with online teaching as there is not so much, if any, face to face contact between the student and the teacher so it is vital that the information is accessible to all students. It is seen here how the majority of teachers found that having all of the information available for students to access at any time made it easier for them.

Challenges unable to be solved with ICT
Six of the teachers interviewed also spoke about challenges which were not successfully met by ICT. One of the challenges that they considered to be especially problematic was the ability to fairly assess their students’ work. Four of the teachers identified the issue of cheating or not knowing who wrote the text or answered the questions in an exam situation. David exemplified this when he said that “[i]t was impossible to know whether the students actually did the work themselves” and Caroline went as far as to say: “When we had exams they cheated”.

Not being in the same physical room as the students made carrying out assignments in exam conditions impossible. Whilst Roger mentions using Dugga to carry out exams (a programme which locks the computer so that it can only be used for the exam itself), he admits that it was impossible to know whether or not the student had access to another computer, smart phone, books, etc and therefore could not be said to have been completed in 100% exam conditions. None of the teachers interviewed had found any form of ICT which enabled exams to be carried out successfully in exam conditions in the online classroom situation.

Aside from cheating, the actual practise of assessment was considered to be an issue by four of the teachers. Esther summarised the overall issue when she said that “[i]t was incredibly difficult to check the students’ understanding in online lessons”. They were also concerned with specific areas of English language skills with David being concerned about the difficulty of assessing reading comprehension and Ivy and Esther mentioning listening comprehension. Esther said that “[l]istening exercises had to be done individually as it was impossible to assess their listening skills in an online setting”.

They considered this to be particularly challenging when assessing assignments carried out online. This raises the question of how accurate such results are and whether they can be used in the setting of grades. They were keen to be seen as having been fair but felt that it was a lot of added pressure on them when it came to setting grades.

Lack of interaction was another concern within the online teaching setting. Three of the teachers reported that there was generally less interaction than what was usual in the physical classroom. Esther said that in terms of having contact with her students, Microsoft Teams worked reasonably well, “but there was less interaction, especially between the students”, something which Ivy also mentioned. Caroline expressed the feeling that her students were actually afraid to
speak in Google Meet adding that “[i]t was difficult to have a conversation as it was not natural”.

All of the teachers mentioned interaction at some point in their interview and all considered it to be an important part of the learning experience. Esther said that those of her students who didn’t interact in the physical classroom didn’t interact in the online classroom either and that this was worse as “I could at least talk to them in the physical classroom”. David, however, observed that his quieter, more reserved students actually interacted more in the online classroom setting. The decrease in interaction for whatever reason is something which needs to be addressed as oral communication is an important part of learning English.

Conclusion
The analysis of the interview responses has provided information about ways in which ICT supported teaching as well as areas which were not supported as successfully, if at all.

There was a strong sense of agreement amongst the teachers that student motivation could be a challenge during the online teaching period and that it was something that needed to be addressed. Small groups, or even smaller class sizes as Esther experienced, appeared to encourage students to take a more active role in lessons. It can be concluded that it is important to keep things as similar to being in a physical classroom as possible as Roger explained was his experience with students being more open about discussing and asking questions of other students as they would naturally do in a physical classroom setting. This idea of teaching online in a similar way to in the classroom was echoed in the responses regarding the presentation of information and assignments to the students. Responses included filming themselves doing presentations which were uploaded to an online classroom alongside assignment instructions and relevant resources. This is similar to the way a lesson would work in a physical classroom with the teacher presenting information and then writing the instructions on the whiteboard or handing out printed information.

The two main areas which were not considered successful with ICT were accurate assessment of students’ ability and the lack of interaction. It was generally agreed that there was a lack of ICT which could provide conditions suitable for carrying out examinations. There was not a single teacher who had found a suitable way of removing the risk of cheating by students went taking exams. There was also concern surrounding the ability to accurately grade students’ reading and listening skills in an online situation as the situation was not natural for these situations. Whilst some teachers had managed to find suitable ways to encourage their students to participate, there was concern amongst further interviewees that students did not interact as much with each other, and even less with the teacher. This was considered to be a serious problem in the teaching of English where speaking is an important part of the development of language skills.

How do Upper Secondary School English teachers describe their experiences of online teaching?
There were two themes identified within the responses to this question. They are:
• Emotional response to the experience
• Consequences of the execution of online teaching

Emotional response to the experience
Half of the ten interviewees mentioned personal feelings in response to this question. Three of the teachers interviewed described the experience negatively in terms of their emotional response to the process. Esther said that neither she nor her students found it to be an enjoyable experience and Sara said that it was “depressing and a bit dull”. Caroline went even further and described the experience as “horrible, awful in fact”. That three out of the ten teachers who were interviewed described the experience with such strong negative language is something which needs to be taken into consideration when, or if, it is necessary to go back to online teaching. If the teacher is not enjoying the experience, they will not be performing to the best of their ability which adversely affects the students. If the students feel that the teacher finds the experience to be negative, then they are likely to feel the same, as Esther pointed out.

There were, however, just as many teachers who described it as a positive experience. Both David and Peter used the word ‘fun’ to describe their experiences. David said, “It was great fun – I really enjoyed it” whilst Peter described his experience as being “lots of fun”. Marie went as far as to say, “I love using ICT”. These quotes are in direct contrast to the quotes from the other teachers who also described their experience with an emotional response.

Of those teachers who gave an emotional response to their experiences, the comments were split evenly between positive and negative feelings. The positive responses, however, do not outweigh the negative comments as it is important that all teachers have an enjoyable teaching experience. All of the teachers who described their feelings were clear that they understood the importance of enjoying their work with regards to how their students would react to the experience. However, those who gave negative responses felt that they were not able to even pretend that it was enjoyable and could not give ideas as to what would make it more enjoyable. They were unable to see a way to increase their enjoyment and all three felt that in order for them to be able to enjoy teaching again, they needed to be back in a traditional classroom setting.

Consequences of the execution of online teaching
Six of the teachers interviewed commented on factors concerned with the consequences of online teaching when asked to describe their experience. Three of them commented on the positive effect it had on their professional development. David and Simon both felt that they had developed professionally and that they had learnt a lot through the process. Whilst Peter mentioned that he had found the process to be challenging, he felt that it was rewarding in the long term as he had learnt a lot about using ICT in his teaching.

Whilst they saw it as a positive learning experience, others saw it as negative in terms of how much time was available to them for preparation of lessons and giving the required help to students, in comparison to physical classroom teaching. Roger stated that, “It was very time consuming in terms of planning and supporting students” and Caroline pointed out that the extra workload “created
more stress for us as teachers”. This raises the question of what can be done to support teachers who feel that they do not have enough time to carry out their job to the best of their ability and to help with teachers’ mental well-being during the online teaching process.

Two out of the ten interviewees mentioned their performance as teachers in the online classroom. They both credited their experiences to the fact that online teaching was new to them and that they therefore needed to find alternative ways of teaching as the tools that they had used in the traditional classroom were not appropriate for online teaching. There was a marked difference, however, in how they described the experience. David saw it as having a positive effect on his teaching saying, “I found the experience incredibly exciting and I think I performed better as a teacher during the time as it was new, and I had to think of new ways to teach”. Esther, however, found the opposite to be true for her. She felt that her teaching had deteriorated, explaining that “My teaching was worse as I was continuously trying to find methods of ICT that would replace the methods I used in the physical classroom”. They were the only two teachers to comment on how the online teaching affected their performance however they described completely different experiences of the process, both of which are equally valid and need to be considered.

Conclusion
The responses overall show the online teaching experience to be mostly positive, or at least positive in some areas. It is clear from the responses that all of the teachers who responded with a description of their personal feelings felt that it was important that the teaching and learning process was enjoyable and half of those who answered did actually find it positive whereas the other half found it to be negative. The answers were polar opposites of each other with the negative comments using strong negative emotions such as ‘depressing’ and ‘awful’ whilst those who expressed positive emotions used words such as ‘fun’ and ‘loving it’.

Whilst it is important to know what effect the experience had on teachers emotionally, it was equally as important to hear their comments about the consequences of the process itself. The majority of teachers found there to be certain areas which were positive about the experience, including how much they had learnt as well as how it had improved their performance as a teacher. Whilst it is encouraging to have the positive views, it is also important to bear in mind the views of those who felt the process had issues such as the extra work and stress that was involved. The overall opinion was that whilst there were positives to be found, it took time and energy to learn new methods which was difficult to do whilst working at the same time.

How has the experience of online teaching helped Upper Secondary School English teachers’ in their future use of digital technology in the classroom?
The theme that was identified in response to this question was:

- Improved competence – that is, that teachers felt they were more positive about the use of ICT due to the experience of online teaching.
All ten of the teachers mentioned their competence in terms of their use of ICT. Eight of them made references to their improved competence in terms of how the experience of online teaching had helped them. Two of these focused on how they felt more confident having had the experience. Sara saw an improvement in her ability to teach online, saying that she felt “more prepared for having to teach online again as I have had more practice” and Marie also mentioned that she was more confident having used more ICT in her teaching. They agreed that even though they had been fairly confident in their use of ICT before the transfer to online teaching, the practice that they received whilst teaching online improved their confidence which made them more competent.

Another facet of improved competence that was mentioned by three teachers was how they had acquired more skills throughout the process. Peter felt that he was more prepared for further online teaching as he has learnt more about the use of ICT and has what he calls “ICT know-how”. Ivy and Marie also described an improvement in their ICT skills, attributing it to what Ivy described as “being forced to use ICT” due to the transfer to online teaching. They felt that they had developed their ICT skills which had improved their competence in the use of ICT in their teaching.

Four of the teachers also mentioned an increase in their knowledge. Three of them mentioned an increase in ICT knowledge with John and Marie both saying that they were now aware of a wider variety of types of ICT that could be used in their teaching. Ivy also mentioned that she had found “fun, new ways of using ICT”. Having access to, and the knowledge about how to use, different types of ICT led to these three teachers seeing the online teaching experience as having a positive effect on their professional competence.

Roger noticed his increase in knowledge in a different area. He felt that he had improved his knowledge about how to vary his teaching and “to try to view assignments from the student’s perspective” which led to him having a greater competence in terms of reaching students’ on their level.

However, not everybody saw an improvement in their competence within ICT. Esther said: “There haven’t been any changes for me as I already used relevant ICT, so it made no difference to my teaching”. She did not experience any difference in the way she taught as she was already aware of what was available and felt that she was already using it in an appropriate manner which did not change during online teaching.

She was not the only exception to be noticed in terms of an improvement in competence as there was one teacher who felt that the experience of online teaching had changed her use of ICT in a negative way. Caroline said: “I was already sceptical but now even more so. I try to give my students pen and paper assignments as much as I can. We read on paper and not on the computer”. She felt that her experience of using ICT had confirmed what she already believed about it and that, instead of encouraging her to use it more, it has had the reverse effect and she is using it considerably less than before.

**Conclusion**

The majority of the teachers interviewed concluded that the online teaching experience had helped them in their future use of ICT both in the physical
classroom and the online classroom should the need arise again. They described
the experience as having increased their confidence and having taught them about
the different types of ICT. They also expressed how the experience had taught
them how to use ICT successfully as well as how to improve their teaching when in
an online situation. There was one teacher who felt that she already knew all that
she needed to and was already confident in her use of ICT and another who failed
to find anything positive at all in the whole process and actually took a step
backwards in her use of ICT.
Discussion

The purpose of this research was to contribute to the knowledge surrounding the use of digital technology in the online teaching of English as a foreign language. It has shown that the teachers interviewed had a wide variety of experiences ranging from extremely positive to extremely negative. The findings of the study will now be discussed with reference to both the research questions and previous research.

Successes and deficiencies in ICT

One of the issues with online teaching that many of the teachers interviewed mentioned was the lack of motivation and interaction displayed by their students. This is in line with studies carried out by Hebebci et al. (2020) and Spoel et al. (2020). Their results also showed that the lack of motivation and interaction of students as being of concern to the teachers involved in their research. Conversely, David found that his quieter students actually interacted more during online teaching, an experience mirrored by research by Spoel et al. (2020) who reported incidences of more introverted students taking a more active role in lessons. A weakness of the study is that the teachers were not asked why they thought that it was the case that their students showed an increase or decrease in motivation or were more or less willing to interact. In order to be of help to those teachers whose students were less motivated or who interacted less, it is important to have an understanding of what it could be due to. Whilst Caroline, one of the teachers interviewed, mentioned that she thought that the students were scared to speak whilst taking part in online lessons, this was information that she offered and other teachers were not asked to expand on their answers. With further information the results would be more valuable.

Anderson and Rivera-Vargas (2020), as well as Andrews (2007), believe that interaction and communication can only be successfully achieved if the teacher is physically present with the students. Unfortunately, during a pandemic, such as the corona pandemic of 2020, this is not possible due to schools being closed and all teaching taking place online. To simply say that it cannot be achieved under these circumstances does not help the situation and therefore, solutions need to be found in order to support the teachers in increasing their students’ motivation and interaction.

Some of the teachers interviewed in this study found ways in which to use the ICT that they had in order to encourage their students to interact and to motivate them. For a number of them, this involved dividing their classes up into smaller groups. The teacher was then able to go round to the individual groups to support the students in their learning. In a smaller group, preferably with their friends or other students that they feel comfortable with, the majority of students were more active and took part in discussions and worked together on assignments which is supported by Orellana (2006). A strength of the study is that information was collected concerning how the teachers solved the problems with motivation and interaction and also that many of them considered small groups to be a suitable solution. Esther was the only teacher who gave information about her class sizes and she said that she had between 10 and 16 students in each class. That the other teachers were not asked about the size of their classes, or what size
groups they split their students into, is a weakness with the study. If class and
group sizes were known, the information could be used to study the success of
different class sizes and draw conclusions based on the findings.

It is, however, not as simple as making class sizes smaller. Many classes in
upper secondary schools in Sweden have more than 30 students and it is not
possible to divide each class in half in order to decrease student to teacher ratio,
particularly when timetables and classes are arranged at the beginning of the
school year. To suddenly divide each class in half would involve the need to
employ more teachers to teach the smaller classes which, with the current
shortage of teachers, would not be possible. Timetables, however, could be altered
to allow half of each class to be present in an online lesson at a time, alternate
lessons for example. This would allow the teacher to be able to focus on approx.
15-16 students and encourage them to be more interactive as the aforementioned
research by Orellana (2006) suggests.

Another cause for concern mentioned by the interviewed teachers is the
difficulties of correctly assessing students’ work, either due to the practical issues
of carry out assessments or the inability to be certain that it is the student who has
done the work. This has become an even more important issue with the
announcement from the Swedish National Agency for Education (2020) that there
will be no national examinations in the Spring of 2021. Whilst there are
programmes such as Dugga and Inspera available, which block a computer from
being able to access other programmes, it is impossible to be certain that a student
has not cheated by having access to another computer or smartphone. Whilst
certain teachers used these programmes and required the students to have their
cameras on so that they could be watched in case they did cheat, it is not a suitable
solution for a whole class. It is therefore important to come up with alternative
ways to assess the students’ work.

One possible solution is to take small groups of students into the physical
school building at different times and to carry out tests in a classroom to ensure
that no cheating takes place. This, however, can be time-consuming and increases
the workload for the teacher at a time when teachers are already under a lot of
pressure due to the changes in teaching methods. Another alternative is to adapt
the test questions in a way that the students can analyse, reflect and evaluate,
instead of producing facts and information from memory. In this way the students
are showing that they have learnt the information and that they can apply it as
necessary. The Swedish National Agency for Education needs to decide on
solutions for these problems, in discussion with upper secondary schools, in order
to ensure that all students have access to the same level of education which is a
requirement mentioned in the Upper Secondary School Curriculum (Swedish

Teachers’ perceptions of the success of online English teaching
One of the questions which was asked of the respondents was that of how they
would describe their experience of online teaching. A relatively large number of
them answered with emotional responses, using words such as ‘hate’, ‘enjoy’ or
‘love’. Half of the words used were positive and half were negative and whilst it is
important to know how the teachers felt, they were not asked what it was about
the experience that they hated, enjoyed or loved. Was it that they missed seeing
their students in person? Was it that they didn’t like working from home? Did
their students complain which took away any enjoyment? Or was it due to the lack
of ICT available to them? This is weakness of the study which does not give any
particularly useful information in terms of how to improve the experience, just
that it was positive or negative.

In terms of the actual online teaching process, the results were also equally
split between positive and negative. Adams and Brindley (2007) believe that
English is the subject which leads to the most problems as well as the most
opportunity in the use of ICT. The results of this study have supported this view
with some of the teachers finding the online process to be an opportunity to find
new and different ways of using ICT and others experiencing problems with it.

A concerning result was that of the teachers who described an increase in
workload and that the process was more time-consuming than teaching in a
physical classroom which led to an increase in stress. This supports the conclusion
drawn by Orellana (2006) that online teaching takes more time than teaching in a
physical classroom. The quick transition to online teaching led to a lack of
planning time for teachers as, even those who had been using ICT in their
classrooms previously, had not been teaching online and they therefore needed to
adapt their methods of teaching and assignments to work within the online
teaching situation. This problem has also been addressed in research by Hebebci
et al. (2020) and Atmojo and Nugroho (2020). They also discovered that
problems seemed to occur due to the rapid changeover to online teaching.

In order to prepare for any future situations which could lead to online
teaching, the Swedish National Agency for Education should have a system in
place to support teachers and schools. This is an idea echoed by Bergdahl and
Nouri (2020) who suggest that there should be a ‘preparedness plan’ developed
for this purpose and that teachers’ experiences should be considered during its
development. A strength of this study is that it provides a selection of views from
various English teachers’ which could be used in the preparation of such a plan.

The future of ICT in the English classroom

One of the purposes of this research was to see how teachers’ attitudes to the use
of ICT had changed due to the online teaching situation. Nobody knows what will
happen in the future and it is therefore important to be able to gain information
about how teachers think they will work with ICT in the future, either in the
physical classroom or online.

The majority of the teachers interviewed saw a positive effect on their future
use of ICT. This supports Speol et al. (2020) who also found that the experience
has led to teachers intending to increase their use of ICT in their English teaching.
Those teachers who saw an increase in their ICT competence attribute it to what
they learned through having no choice but to use ICT due to the school closures.
They admitted that, before teaching online, they did not know much about the ICT
that was available or how to use ICT in an online teaching situation. This is
supported by numerous studies, including those by Bergdahl and Nouri (2020)
and Dashtestani (2014) who said that teachers’ lack of computer skills and not knowing how to think in terms of online teaching led to problems. Chik and Benson (2020) argue against the idea that ‘as long as there is a computer available, students can learn’ as it does not take into account the fact that teachers must be able to teach using ICT for it to be successful, something which is supported by the results of this study.

Whilst some of the teachers in this study learned how to use ICT whilst they went through the process of online teaching, this was not the case for everyone. One teacher said that the online teaching experience had had a negative effect on her use of ICT in the future. She went as far as to say that she now gives her students assignments where they write on paper and not on the computer. This is an issue which should be addressed as there are likely to be more teachers who feel the same way. It is part of the Upper Secondary School Curriculum, as well as the English syllabus, that work is produced using ICT. Adams, Brindley and Sida-Nichols (2007) support this view as they believe that it is of equal importance for students to learn to produce text on a screen as it is for them to write with paper and a pen.

If there are teachers who are significantly reducing the number of assignments that their students produce on a computer, then they are putting their students at a disadvantage. Davies (2007) is clear that students who struggle with writing on paper can actually be supported by writing on a computer as they quite often write more when the writing’s appearance is improved as it is on a screen. This is an issue which must be considered by schools and the Swedish National Agency for Education. Students should not be disadvantaged due to teachers who have not been successful in their use of ICT.

The future of ICT in the classroom is important to consider whether that is in a physical or an online classroom. The major issue that confronts teachers within their future in online English teaching appears to be the lack of training in the use of ICT. Whilst many teachers have taught themselves, there appears to be some areas which are lacking. This is supported by Atmojo and Nugroho (2020) who believe that teachers’ knowledge and skills need to be improved in order to be successful.

**Preparation for the future**

One of the issues raised as a result of this study concerns the possibility of a return to online teaching and how teachers can prepare for such a situation. There are a number of factors which can, and need to, be addressed by the Swedish National Agency for Education, whilst taking into account the views and experiences of schools, teachers and students. In order for any future transition to go more smoothly, a preparedness plan needs to be developed. This would need to include recommendations of how the different issues can be dealt with by individual teachers as well as schools as a whole. Ideas as to how the various parts of the syllabus can be carried out as well as how to ensure fair assessments are made would also need to be a part of the plan. There should also be accredited training courses to instruct teachers in how to implement the use of different forms of ICT and schools should be required to allow extra time for teachers to take part in the
courses. In order for teachers to support students in their learning, it is important that these issues are considered.

**Future research**

This study has shown that the use of ICT in English teaching during the corona pandemic has had mixed results in how teachers perceive the experience to be. It has highlighted successes as well as problems which need to be addressed. This raises the question of how teachers and students can be supported in their use of ICT either in the physical classroom or in the event of further online teaching. It would be beneficial to research specific forms of ICT and how they can be used to support the teaching of the various parts of the Upper Secondary School English syllabi. It would also be useful to know the views of students and how they feel that they could be more successful in their use of ICT.
References


https://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/umeaub-ebooks/detail.action?docID=316244#


Appendix 1. Cover letter

30th October 2020

Dear .................

My name is Joy Brown and I am currently in my final term of my teaching degree at Umeå University. As the final part of the course, I am required to carry out a study which will be presented in the form of an essay.

The purpose of my study is to investigate the experiences of EFL teachers’ use of digital technology (ICT) in the online teaching of English as a foreign language (EFL), during the school closures due to the corona pandemic.

If you agree to take part in the study, I will contact you in order to book a convenient time for an interview. The interview will take place via google meet and is expected to take around 30 minutes to an hour. The interview will be carried out in English unless you would prefer it to be carried out in Swedish. No identifying data will be included in the report and all information will be treated confidentially. The completed essay will be published in the DiVA database and when this is done, all information in terms of recordings and transcripts will be destroyed. Once started, you are under no obligation to continue with the study and may withdraw at any time.

If you wish to participate, I would appreciate a reply before the 9th November after which I will contact you in order to book a convenient time for the interview.

Any questions regarding the study can be addressed to myself or to my supervisor, Lars Hall.

Yours sincerely,

Joy Brown (student)
joybrown73@gmail.com

Lars Hall (supervisor)
lars.hall@umu.se
Appendix 2. Interview guide

The general purpose of this research is to contribute to the knowledge surrounding the use of digital technology (ICT) in the online teaching of English as a foreign language (EFL).

More specifically, the purpose is to answer the following research questions:

1. How have challenges within English teaching been supported by ICT during the corona pandemic and what has been found to be lacking?
2. How do Upper Secondary School English teachers describe their experiences of online teaching?
3. How has the experience of online teaching changed Upper Secondary School English teachers’ approach to the use of digital technology in the classroom?

| Background questions | 1. Where is the school that you teach at located?  
2. How long have you been teaching?  
3. Which courses did you teach last term / do you teach this term?  
4. Did your school transfer to online teaching during the school closures due to the corona pandemic? If so, what percentage of your lessons were taught online? |
|----------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| How have challenges within English teaching been supported by ICT during the corona pandemic and what has been found to be lacking? | 5. In what ways did you communicate with your students during online teaching – both during lesson time as well as outside of timetabled lessons? For example, in real time using a video conferencing platform (such as google meet, zoom, etc (as a whole class or individually) email Facebook or WhatsApp messenger (groups or individually) E-learning platform such as google classroom School communication system (vklass, school soft, etc) Other (please specify)  
How do you feel this worked in terms of how well the students interacted both with you and with each other?  
6. Please describe a lesson, lessons, or part of a lesson, that you felt worked well in terms of ICT. What was it that made it work especially well with regards to the ICT that you used?  
7. Please describe a lesson, lessons, or part of a lesson which you felt did not work particularly well in terms of ICT. What could have been done differently in terms of |
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<th>Question</th>
<th>Answer</th>
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<td>ICT in order to make the lesson more successful?</td>
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<td>How do Upper Secondary School English teachers describe their experiences of online teaching?</td>
<td>8. As a whole how would you describe your experience of online teaching? 9. What was your experience of using ICT to support your online EFL teaching in the following areas of the English curriculum? Which forms of ICT did you use for each area? How successful were they? Reading comprehension Listening comprehension Speaking conversation presentations Writing Vocabulary learning Exit tickets / quizzes Group work Exams / tests</td>
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<td>10. Has the experience of online teaching changed the way that you view ICT as a teaching tool?</td>
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<td>11. Has it increased your confidence in teaching using ICT?</td>
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<td>12. In reference to the areas of the curriculum mentioned above, are there any forms of ICT which you did not use before online teaching that you now use/intend to use in a physical classroom setting?</td>
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<td>13. Do you feel more prepared now for a repeat situation if it were necessary for you to teach online again? Why do you think that is?</td>
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