Swedish upper secondary pupils’ reading habits and reading comprehension in English in the digital age
Abstract
The aim of this study is to investigate if the levels of attainment in national reading comprehension tests in English reflect the types of reading texts which pupils encounter inside and outside the classroom. A further aim is to find out if there is a gender distinction between boys’ and girls’ levels of reading comprehension which can be related to existing reading habits. A questionnaire was completed by upper secondary school pupils of English in order to investigate the three research questions. The questionnaire involved 10 questions about the pupils’ reading habits. Furthermore, two reading comprehension tests that were created by The Swedish National Agency for Education were also used and distributed to the pupils to complete. The pupils’ results from the reading comprehension test were used by the author to answer the three research questions that this study is based on.

The results of this study show that the types of texts the pupils encounter inside and outside the classroom affect their results on the reading comprehension tests. Regarding the second question that this study investigates, there is no gender distinction between boys’ and girls’ levels of reading comprehension, which can be related to existing reading habits. Concerning the third research question in this study, the results show that both girls and boys spend more time on social media than reading English fiction. These results might indicate the fact that technology such as the Internet and social media are very popular and important in the pupils’ lives. Moreover, technology and the use of social media might as well affect the pupils’ reading habits and reading comprehension.

Keywords: reading comprehension, reading habits, English as a second language, upper secondary level
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Appendices
1 Introduction

1.1 Background
Reading is one of the most important skills in an increasingly digitalized world. It is certainly the case that pupils spend a significant amount of classroom lesson time on reading and writing activities alongside listening and speaking activities which are equally important (Lundahl 2012:223). Blachowicz and Ogle (2001:13) claim that studies of the range of reading among students and adults have shown that less than 25% of reading time is devoted to narrative and fiction texts. Part of the work of language teachers is to offer their pupils reading material in the form of stories and other works of fiction that present different forms of reading. In this way, students will be able to expand their skills in a range of multiple literacies. In addition, a person’s reading proficiency should involve the ability to read different kinds of texts and textual genres. These reading abilities can be developed over a period of time and involve readers engaging with different types of texts in order for the reader to develop their reading skills (Lundahl ibid:223). This independent project focuses on whether the pupils’ reading habits have an influence on their levels of reading comprehension in English. In addition, another important aspect that this paper examines is if there are any gender distinctions between boys’ and girls’ level of reading comprehension which can be linked to existing reading habits.

One concern among a significant proportion of parents and teachers nowadays is that children are not reading books from ‘cover to cover’ in the same way as previous generations. This leads to parental concerns about their children’s learning and how digital technologies affect their education (Palfrey and Gasser 2008:240). When it comes to children’s reading material, reading can be realized online with the facilitation of various technological devices such as tablets, mobile phones, computers, etc. These technological devices are considered very useful learning tools in schools and yet not all parents and grandparents are aware of these devices as learning tools, a factor which has led to concern among parents (Palfrey and Gasser ibid:240).
1.2 Aim and scope
This paper aims to establish whether there is a connection between pupils’ reading habits in the digital era and their levels of reading comprehension in English. More, specifically, this study seeks to answer the following research questions:

1. In what way do levels of attainment in national reading comprehension tests in English reflect the types of reading texts which pupils encounter inside and outside the classroom?

2. What are the implications of the existing reading habits on the boys’ and girls’ levels of reading comprehension?

3. In what way, if at all, does the pupils’ gender affect the choice of the social media platforms as well as the amount of time pupils spend on social media?

2. Theoretical Background
This section will start by describing the relationship between spoken words and the development of writing. The Theoretical Background section will move forward to describe the connection between sounds and written symbols in a language with respect to the learning of English in the EFL classroom. Furthermore, this section will also describe traditional and modern language reading approaches and their importance in a reader’s reading development along with pre- and ‘during’ reading strategies. The last section will focus on reading in the digital age. In addition, the last sub-section will also explain the concept of digital natives and its significance in the teaching’s world.

2.1 The relationship between written and spoken language
There are substantial differences between writing and spoken language, differences that are mostly based on the several types of communicative situations (Crystal 2010:187). Crystal (ibid:187) defines speech as “time-bound, dynamic, transient” and he also claims that in speech the participants are present and the participant addressing has a specific and clear purpose with what he/she wants to say. On the other hand, Crystal (ibid:187) claims that writing is” space-bound, static, permanent”. In this case, the producer might be absent and he/she might not even know who the receiver is (Crystal ibid:187). Therefore, he states that writing cannot be considered as an “interaction”
between the participants. An exception of this situation that can be considered an
interaction is personal correspondence and computer-based interaction situations which
might be email and text messages (Crystal ibid:187). Neef et al. (2002:11) define oral
language as the first mode of expression whereas writing may be seen as the second
mode of expression. Furthermore, Neef et al. (ibid:11) claim that the written language
is learned in school while the essential core of the oral language is being acquired. Oral
language should be acquired unconsciously especially when the child lives in an
environment where the target language is frequently in use. On the other hand, writing
and reading require strategies and material that covers their language use in order to
develop. (Neef et al ibid:11).

2.2 The relationship between sounds and written symbols in a language
Learning to read and write requires that the reader also gains knowledge about all the
aspects of language structure and use which are subsumed within the concepts of
phonology, graphology, vocabulary, grammar, discourse and variety (Crystal
2003:442). Furthermore, the English writing system involves a phonetic alphabet that is
constructed in order to draw a clear connection between sounds and letters (Wallence
2002:9). In contrast to Spanish, Urdu or Arabic which have a clearer one-to-one
connection between sounds and letters, English does not have a particularly regular
spelling system to represent the sounds of the language. This phenomenon results in a
difficult situation for the learners in their process of learning how to read because they
might not know how to make the essential connection between the language that is
heard and the language that they see in print (Wallence ibid:9). For example, a second
language learner might produce the word danger in their oral speech but they might not
right away recognize the same word in printed form. The situation might be that she/he
might assume the word to be pronounced as /dæŋə/ (Wallence ibid:9).

Moreover, Fromkin et al (2002:245) claim that what speakers use to consider one letter
for example p, might occur phonetically as two sounds [p] and [ph] where the sound “h”
is in the superscript. These symbols are defined in the phonetic alphabet as voiceless
aspirated stops. Regarding pronunciation, Fromkin et al (ibid:245) use the words cot
and caught in order to show the difference between how these two words are
pronounced. People might or might not pronounce cot and caught identically but in
American English for example cot is pronounced with the vowel sound as [a] as in car
whereas *caught* illustrates the vowel [ɔ] as in *core*. There are several differences between how a word is spelt in writing and pronounced in oral speech. These differences are based on the fact that English is a global language and it is spoken in many forms both in the United States and further afield. This is the reason why the learners might learn different variants of the language (Fromkin *et al* ibid:245).

**2.3 Modern reading approaches: cognitive views and metacognitive views**

According to Oxford (1990), cognitive reading strategies facilitate the accomplishment of the reading task. Taking notes, summarizing, inferencing, using prior knowledge, analysing and guessing from the context constitute approaches that define cognitive reading strategies. Metacognitive reading strategies require the learner’s self-reflection and thinking about reading and learning.

*A bottom up model* is defined by the text’s smallest components which are the graphemes and their relationships to the phonological system. These components are supposed to be decoded in order for the text to make sense (British Council [www]). The *British Council* refers to this model as a cognitive view of reading. Furthermore, these features are supposed to be linked and analysed by the readers to build meaningful words and phrases. In addition, the reader might have difficulties with this reading model because words and phrases might be difficult to decode especially when the words are too long or the phrases too complicated. According to Lundahl (ibid:231) second language learners constitute a group of readers that are most exposed to this kind of difficulty because their vocabulary and their decoding capabilities in the second language are not developed enough. Consequently, Lundahl (ibid:231) claims that second language learners should read texts that are somehow defined as being ‘one level’ over their language capacity. The *Common European Framework of References* defines different levels of language proficiency on a scale from A1 to C2 (The Common European Framework of Reference for Languages [www]). More specifically, A1 and A2 define basic users of the English language whereas B1 and B2 define *independent* users of the English language and C1 and C2 refer to *proficient* users of the English language. With these levels in mind, the teacher should provide the pupils with reading material that provides them with a source of motivation while at the same time helping them to improve their reading skills and reach a high level of language ability (British Council[www]).
The metacognitive model which may also be seen as ‘top down’ is facilitated by the readers’ knowledge, comprehension and experience with texts. The process is that readers seek the texts’ meaning and need to exercise their abilities to guess textual content. Moreover, the readers should focus on discovering and understanding the message of the text. The readers will be able to do so when their earlier reading knowledge and experiences with texts are activated. In this way, they will have the capacity to understand the text more easily and more efficiently. Lundahl (ibid:232) explains this process and claims that the full comprehension of a text is possible when the readers can apply and make use of their previous knowledge while learning something new. Learners who spend much of their leisure time reading can understand and decode a new text more easily than pupils who read less. For instance, when children read fairy tales that start with “Once upon a time…”, they are already aware of the story’s content and how this type of text is going to be formed in the future reading. At the same time readers find it easier to read this kind of story because their earlier reading knowledge will help them to adapt to this new story.

2.4 Traditional reading approaches: reading by the ear/eye

It is difficult to describe what perceptive processes are involved as the eye scans a text. However, many children experience difficulties in the process of learning to read. Crystal explains that reading involves reading for meaning. Moreover, the process of reading involves making connections between graphology and semantics whereas phonology is unnecessary, especially when reading is not aloud. The readers’ knowledge of the language will provide them with the opportunity to identify and decode letters and words in a text as well as guessing from the context (Crystal ibid:220). Moreover, Crystal (ibid:220) explains what happens when a person reads either by the ear or by eye. These differences are set out in Table 1.1 below.

Table 1.1 Support for the ear and eye when reading.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reading by the ear</th>
<th>Reading by the eye</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Graphemes and morphemes occur naturally</td>
<td>Fluent readers are not baffled by homophones such as <em>two</em> and <em>too</em>.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A quick letter identification which also can be related to silent reading</td>
<td>In this case phonology, cannot help.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New words will be decoded phonological</td>
<td>A non-phonological route from print to meaning for people with phonological dyslexia.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The eye can take in 500 words per min. The ‘eye’</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
theory states that readers increase their sampling as they speed up.

Different sounds are written identically and different letters might have the same pronunciation. Some orthographic rules are different to the phonology. For example, skr- is acceptable in English speech, but not exist in writing.

Crystal (ibid:221) states that learners benefit from both strategies at different stages of learning and in managing various kinds of reading challenges. Furthermore, the ‘ear approach’ is also referred to as ‘bottom-up’ theory, because of its connection with basic letter units and this approach is very important especially in the course of the initial learning stage. In addition, the “eye approach” is also associated with a ‘top down’ conceptualisation of the reading process because of its connection with whole-word units.

2.5 Pre-reading and ‘during’ reading activities
This sub-section will now focus on the importance of teaching how to read. Furthermore, reading tasks that can be performed before and during reading in order to develop reading skills are also presented in this section.

In the article about Theories of reading, The British Council claims that pre-reading activities before starting to read a text it is important to have a purpose with reading the text, such as reading for pleasure or reading with the purpose of improving language skills. During reading, readers can re-read the text in order to gain a more-in-depth understanding of the text. After reading the text, attempting study questions based on the text for example is a task that can improve reading comprehension (British Council[www]).

2.5.1 Pre-reading activities
Before starting to read a text, the reader should take into consideration some factors that might be crucial for the comprehension of the text. Activities such as teacher-directed pre-reading involve key vocabulary and ideas that the text contains. In this way, the readers will receive the information they need before and the purpose with the text is presented to them through the tasks that the teacher provides them with before reading
(British Council [www]). Furthermore, the interactive approach brings up discussions between teacher-students in which the teacher adds more information to the readers’ knowledge than what they acquired during their text reading (British Council [www]). Moreover, the purpose of reading can be outlined by the teacher in the beginning of the reading activity. During the reading process, the reader becomes more adept at achieving this purpose. Therefore, awareness-raising strategies are outlines for action that the teachers leave to the readers to process at that point. For instance, the readers might ask themselves ‘Why I am reading this text?’ etc.

Intensive reading is according to Harmer (2007:314) often practised by the students in the presence of the teachers. Intensive reading in contrast to other reading methods is a way for the students to read and understand a text in detail. Intensive reading is reflected by supplementary questions that are supposed to be answered while reading a book. Questions such as what, how, why, how often, when, are usually asked to help students to reflect and think about the content and the purpose of the book that they are reading. These types of comprehension questions will give the students the opportunity to learn how to read and what they should look for when they are reading (Harmer ibid:314).

2.5.2 ‘During’ reading activities

To encourage the students to read actively, the teacher should create reading activities which can involve summarizing, reacting to, questioning, arguing, evaluation and placing a text within one’s own experience (British Council [www]). For instance, texts that present conflicts with different scenarios will give the readers the opportunity to react, question and argue in relation to textual contents, action and purpose.

Furthermore, good readers are also active readers following certain strategies such as: making predictions and selections, integrating prior knowledge, skipping insignificant parts, re-reading, making use of context or guessing, etc. (British Council [www]). These tips lead to the readers’ comprehension of a text and give the readers the opportunity to analyse the text. In addition, another important classroom activity is group discussion. This type of strategy will be seen as an aid for the students because it might help them to understand parts of a text that they did not comprehend (British Council [www]).
The way pupils work with reading activities has changed and this is due to the introduction of technology in schools. Digital technology and the Internet are considered by both pupils and teachers as important learning tools. This means that instead of group discussions for example, learners can use sites such as *Wikipedia* which provides the learners with answers to possible questions about the narrative action of the book or text (Palfrey and Gasser 2008:239). This adaption to the technological world is explained in the sub-section titled *Digital natives*.

### 2.6 Reading comprehension tests

According to Bachman and Palmer (1996:18), language tests are used for pedagogical purposes but the principal intention with tests is to measure language performance/proficiency. Reading is an important component of the Swedish national tests in English, and this is a skill that the pupils will be tested on in order to reach a pass grade in the subject. Furthermore, the Swedish syllabus for upper secondary school at English 6 (the second year of the programme) requires pupils to be able to practise: *strategies to search relevant information in larger amounts of text or longer sequences of spoken language and to understand perspectives and implied meaning* (Swedish National Agency for Education [www]). Hughes (1996:116) claims that the best way of measuring the pupils’ reading comprehension is to make them complete different reading tests.

Hughes (ibid:116ff) describe different aspects of performance assessment that should be taken into consideration while testing pupils’ reading comprehension. One aspect that Hughes (ibid:119) refers to is to have an appropriate selection of texts that will cover the reading test. More specifically, choosing different text genres in a reading comprehension tests, an appropriate length of the tests, selected short passages in a test and avoiding to include information that contains pupils’ general knowledge in order to avoid making the tests too easy, are some factors that are considered important by Hughes (ibid:129). In addition, all these factors might contribute to making the reading comprehension test more reliable as a measure of test quality (Hughes ibid:120).

There are a number of different approaches to reading tests that can be constructed in order to measure the pupils’ reading comprehension. Factors that should be taken in
consideration while choosing a reading comprehension test include problems that might occur during this process of measuring the pupils’ reading comprehension. Some pupils might read perfectly but difficulties in writing might stop them from demonstrating their reading comprehension (Hughes ibid:120). Furthermore, Hughes (ibid:121) mentions two examples of reading comprehension test that can be used in order to measure the pupils’ reading comprehension. The first one is *Multiple choice* which involves several alternatives such as A, B, C or D that the pupils should choose in order to answer their questions. According to Hughes (ibid:121) *True/False* questions are also defined as a subset of multiple choice tests. The advantages that come with using this type of tests are that these tests are very reliable and can be administrated efficiently and economically. However, there are also some disadvantages with this kind of tests. Firstly, it is difficult to identify the pupil’s oral production in a grammar test for example. The pupil might choose the right answer but might not be able to produce the correct form in speaking. Secondly, guessing might have a great impact on test scores since on average someone can score 33 on a 100-item test just by guessing, assuming that there is a choice between one right answer and three distractors. Lastly this kind of test might not be the right one for students to help them improve their target language (Hughes ibid:62).

As a further alternative, *Cloze procedure* is highly recommended for measuring reading ability because the result of the test would be a reliable and valid test of candidates’ underlying language ability. This type of test involves erasing a number of words in a sentence for example and leaving blanks that require pupils to fill in the original words (Hughes ibid: 66). Pre-testing and the selection of appropriate texts are important in the process of constructing the tests. Nevertheless, one problem that might occur in this kind of test is the difficulty of predicting the missing words; that is why choosing carefully the words that should be deleted from the text is very important to keep in mind.

2.7 *Digital natives*
This section focuses more specifically on L2 reading in the digital age beginning with the revolution ushered in by the Internet. Prensky (2001:1) states that research has shown that today’s university students are the first generation that grew up with the new technology such as computer games, email, the Internet, cell phones and instant
messaging. Furthermore, studies have shown that students normally spend less than 5,000 hours of their life reading, whereas they may devote 10,000 hours to playing video games. Prensky (ibid:1) also describes these students as ‘digital natives’ because of their extensive use of computers and claims that ‘they are native speakers of the digital language of computers, video games and the Internet’. On the other hand, there are people that were not born in this digital age and are still learning how to use all these devices and services that the Internet and computers for example can offer them. Prensky (ibid :2) refers to these people as ‘digital immigrants’ and claims that these people, like all immigrants, learn to adapt to this digital environment. It is certain that all immigrants learn with an ‘accent’ and this is also the case for digital immigrants.

Moreover, an issue that exists in schools is the role of teachers who Prensky has labelled as digital immigrants. The older generation of teachers are still learning how and why to use all this technology in their teaching. One problem in schools for example is that digital natives are used to processing information rapidly, multi-tasking, always having access to the Internet, reading from the screen instead of book and so on. These are just a few examples of the influence of modern technology education on and everyday life. Teachers may therefore experience a feeling of frustration when it comes to making the students do different activities in the classroom (Prensky ibid:2). Furthermore, digital immigrant teachers believe that they can use the same methods in their teaching that they always relied upon but since today’s learners are different with regards to their use of technology this belief might be misguided. Furthermore, it is hard to believe that digital natives will start to learn old study methods for example which cover just paper and pen. Instead, the digital immigrants should learn how to adapt to this new environment and develop their abilities in technology in order to contribute to their digital native students’ education (Prensky ibid: 5).

2.8 Summary of the Theoretical Background
The Theoretical Background section of this study starts by highlighting the importance of the relationship between written and spoken language and the relationship between sound and written language. These two sections emphasize the fact that English differs from other languages in terms of its spelling system, phonetic alphabet and pronunciation. Furthermore, this section moves forward to Modern reading approaches:
cognitive views and metacognitive views section which describes different approaches that second language learners might use in the processing of learning a second language. This section also presents Traditional reading approaches: reading by the ear/eye and describes the process of these two reading processes which are important to keep in mind because the learners’ reading skills might be influenced depending on which approach learners choose to use. Furthermore, The Theoretical Background section also explains the importance of pre-reading and ‘during’ reading activities in the development of reading. Reading comprehension tests is another section that presents different approaches to reading that could measure the learners’ reading comprehension in English. The last section that is presented in the Theoretical Background of this study is the section called Digital natives which defines today’s learners and their extensive use of computers and Internet as well as the impact of their computer use on their learning processes in this digital age.

3.Material and Method

3.1 Material

The material used in this study is in the form of questionnaires and reading comprehension tests in English. The respondents were covered by 22 upper secondary students whereas 5 girls and 17 boys. The participants studied English 6 at an upper secondary level within the technical programme as defined by the Swedish National Agency for Education [www]. The participants were 16-17 years old and their L1 was Swedish with three exceptions (L1 Arabic). The school that the pupils studied at is one of the municipal schools in the city. According to the class teacher, the technology programme use to cover more male students than female and that is a characteristic that this programme has. The respondents were given the task of answering a questionnaire (Appendix 1). The questionnaire involved direct questions about the respondents’ digital and non-digital reading habits. The questionnaire included three open and seven closed questions (Denscombe ibid: 176). The questions that covered the questionnaire were written in Swedish as well as their answers. This decision was made because the author wanted to make the pupils feel relaxed about the task of answering the questionnaire. Moreover, the questionnaire involved 2 questions about the pupils’ reading habits in Swedish, in addition to the questions about reading habits in English. The questions about pupils’ reading habits in Swedish were included because the author wanted to see if there was a significant difference between their reading habits in
Swedish and English. However, the focus of this study is primarily on English. Furthermore, the questionnaire also involved two questions about the participants’ use of social media because the different platforms on social media are nowadays considered very important in the pupils’ lives. The questions were constructed with the purpose to investigate if the use of social media affect the participants reading comprehension in English and to investigate if boys and girls spend different amount of time on social media. In this essay, the pupils’ use of social media is considered crucial for their reading habits and reading comprehension since social media are so popular and pupils spent many hours per month with it.

The first test component the pupils completed involved mini-texts and the task was to read the text and choose A, B, C or D as the best alternative in line with the meaning of the text (see Appendix 2). In the second test the students were given the task to fill the gaps with one word that was missing from the sentence. The test item below is included as an example of a one-word-gap test item: ‘*We had planned to send our son abroad for a year but now we’re having second____________ about it*’. More specifically, the word the students wrote should fit in with the context/ co-text and be grammatically correct (Appendix 3).

### 3.2 Method

The aim of this paper is to find out if the levels of the pupils’ performance in national reading comprehension tests in English reflect the types of reading text which pupils encounter inside and outside the classroom. Furthermore, this study also investigates if there is a gender distinction between boys’ and girls’ level of reading comprehension and if the pupils’ gender affect their choice of social media platforms as well as the amount of time pupils spend on social media. In order to investigate these three research questions the author of this study used a questionnaire that involved 10 questions about reading habits whereas three of them were open questions and seven were closed questions. Because the questionnaire involved both closed and open-ended questions this study is based on mixed methods approach (Denscombe 2014:146). According to Denscombe (ibid:146) *researchers can improve their confidence in accuracy of finding through the use of different methods to investigate the same subject*. The questionnaire involved both closed and open-ended question which means that both *quantitative* and *qualitative methods* have been used in this study. The qualitative method which
involved the three open-ended questions were used in this study in order for the author to get a more complete picture of the second language phenomena that this study investigates (Denscombe: ibid 148).

3.3 Validity and Reliability
This section discusses the reliability and validity of the methodology that is used in this research. In addition, this study is based on mixed method approach because this type of research can validate findings and improve accuracy (Denscombe ibid:160).

Denscombe (ibid:271) claims that one way of controlling the validity of the data is to ask the question: ‘Are the data right kind of investigating the topic and have they been measured correctly?’ The material that is used in this study is a questionnaire and two reading comprehension tests. The Swedish National Agency for Education authorized the University of Gothenburg to produce and develop the project NAFS (Nationella Prov i Främmande Språk [www]). Moreover, the two reading comprehension tests (Appendix 2) and (Appendix 3) that are used in order to complete this study have been adapted from the NAFS project, which means that the tests were trialled and assessed by experts before they became available on the NAFS website.

With regards to completion of the reading comprehension tests, the group had varying levels of English and this can be concluded from their results from the reading comprehension tests. Denscombe (ibid:177) states that it is important to look for the same kind of answers to similar questions because in this way the internal validity of the data will increase. However, this research is considered small-scale and that is why these answers cannot be generalized from the sample to the wider population. Nevertheless, the results of this research project might serve as a point of departure for further investigations in order to shed further light on reading in digital era.

3.4 Ethical issues
In order to protect the participants’ identity, the author of this study did not require the statement of any personal information about identity (Denscombe ibid:310). The pupils are referred to using fictive names in this essay in order to preserve the anonymity of the participants.
However, the participants were required to state if they were female or male because this information was needed to answer one of the research questions listed above. As Denscombe (ibid:311) ‘the participation should be voluntary and based on informed consent’. The author of this study chose to talk to the teacher and students about the motive with this study before the material was handed out to them. The time that the students spent doing the tests and the questionnaire was approximately 80 minutes.

4. Results
This section presents the answers to the three research questions which are reproduced here from Section 1.2:

1. In what way do levels of attainment in national reading comprehension tests in English reflect the types of reading text which pupils encounter inside and outside the classroom?

2. What are the implications of the existing reading habits on the boys’ and girls’ levels of reading comprehension?

3. In what way, if at all, does the pupils’ gender affect the choice of the social media platforms as well as the amount of time pupils spend on social media?

The answer to the first research question is presented in the Table 1.2 in Section 4.1. Furthermore, a summary of the answer to question 1 will be presented in Section 4.1. This section will continue by presenting the answer to the second question in 4.2. Moreover, the answer to the second question will be presented in the form of histograms. Each closed question from question 1 to 5 from the questionnaire will be presented in Histograms in order to elucidate if there is a difference between boys’ and girls’ level of reading comprehension and if it can be related to their existing habits. The remaining of 2 closed questions will be also presented in Histograms in order to find out if the pupils’ gender affect the choice of the social media platforms as well as the amount of time pupils spend on social media.
4.1 Summary of the results on the reading comprehension tests and the existential reading habits inside and outside the classroom

Concerning the first question about an existing link between the type of texts pupils encounter inside and outside the classroom and their reading comprehensions scores, the results showed that the pupils’ results from the national comprehension tests reflect the type of texts that pupils are reading inside and outside the classroom (see Table 1.2). The lack of reading English fiction for example might contribute to the pupils’ low score on the reading comprehension tests. Compared to the texts that the pupils might read on social media English fiction offer the pupils a formal English which might contribute to the pupils reading comprehension. By reading more English fiction, the pupils have the possibility to improve their reading comprehension skills and in this way, reach a higher score on the tests. Furthermore, it is certain that there is a great difference between the time pupils spend on social media and the time they spend on reading English fiction. The time pupils spend on social media is over 10 hours a month whereas only one student from the group of 22 answered that he reads English fiction 6 hours a month. Moreover, the time pupils are spending on social media such as Instagram or online-magazines/new sites reading is considered time that they spend on reading texts outside the classroom. The results in response to the first question showed that the time spent on reading fiction texts is very limited and this fact might affect the results in the reading comprehension tests because none of the pupils scored maximum points on the tests. The results of this study show that there is just one pupil that scored 9 out of 11 on the one-word-gaps tests.
Table 1.2 The pupils’ reading habits and the results on the reading comprehension tests.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pupil</th>
<th>Preferred genre</th>
<th>Preferred social media</th>
<th>Hours spent reading per month</th>
<th>Reading comprehension</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sci-fi</td>
<td>Comedy</td>
<td>Drama</td>
<td>Horror</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marco</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
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<tr>
<td>Elias</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
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<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ervin</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
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<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>George</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Liam</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Andreas</td>
<td>x</td>
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<tr>
<td>Karl</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
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<tr>
<td>Viggo</td>
<td>x</td>
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<tr>
<td>Bruce</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tony</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Robin</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Krister</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Andy</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alex</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emilio</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Simona</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Erika</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rebecka</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Calle</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
4.2. The pupils’ levels of reading comprehension based on the pupils’ gender and their reading habits

The answer to each closed question from 1-5 from the questionnaire will be presented in the form of Histograms in order to elucidate if there is a difference between boys’ and girls’ reading comprehension score and their existing reading habits.

4.2.1 The difference between girls and boys in terms of time spent reading

Histogram 1

As shown in Histogram 1 above, there are 4 pupils that read fiction more than 10 hours per month. The boys dedicated around an average of 5 hours per month to reading. Girls on the other hand dedicated around 6,7,8 and 10 hours per month.
4.2.2 The difference between boys’ and girls’ in terms of reading habits in English

Histogram 2

2. How many hours do you spend on reading English fiction?

Histogram 2 shows that both boys and girls do not dedicate that many hours per month to the reading fiction in English. Moreover, 15 of the pupils spend 0 hours per month on reading English fiction. The remaining 7 pupils read less than 5 hours per month. The maximum amount of time spent on reading was 6 hours per month (1 male respondent).

4.2.3 The difference between boys and girls and their reading habits in Swedish

Histogram 3

3. How many hours do you spend on reading fiction in Swedish?

Histogram 3 shows a similar result compared to the Histograms 1 and 2. 10 pupils spend basically 0 hours per month on reading material in Swedish. One important aspect to notice here is that 5 pupils answered that they spent 5 hours on reading Swedish books (4 male respondents and 1 female respondent). Whereas 7 pupils read Swedish fiction less than 5 hours per month.
4.2.4 The difference between boys and girls in terms of reading genre

Histogram 4 shows that 8 out of 17 boys enjoy reading books in English that is about Sc-fi, in second place came comedy and in third place came drama and horror.

Furthermore, 5 of the male respondents wrote their own alternative answer which where detective stories/ thrillers as most popular alternative answer. Among the female respondents, 4 girls preferred drama when they read in English and 1 girl preferred horror.
4.2.5 The difference between boys and girls in terms of reading genres in Swedish.

Histogram 5

**5. What type of genre do you read when you read in Swedish?**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Boys</th>
<th>Girls</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>a) Sci-fi</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b) Comedy</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c) Drama</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>d) Horror</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alternative Answers</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Compared to the Histogram 4, Histogram 5 shows some similarities in reading genres. The most popular genre is still science fiction among boys and drama is still the most popular genre among girls.

4.2.6 Summary of the results of the pupils’ gender distinction in their reading comprehension which can be related to their existing reading habits

Regarding the second question which involved the gender distinction between boys’ and girls’ levels of reading comprehension which can be related to existing reading habits, the results show a negative correlation between the hours of reading and scores on the reading tests. The results show that both genders spend less time reading books in English and Swedish and much more time on social media. This factor might contribute to the pupils’ score on the reading comprehension tests because none of the students reached maximum points on the reading tests. Moreover, none of the students showed a higher score on reading comprehension tests; on the contrary both girls and boys seem to have similar levels of reading comprehension. Furthermore, the most preferred genres among boys is Sc-fi whereas drama is read by the girls.
4.3 The pupils’ amount of time spent on social media based on their gender

The answers to the closed questions 5 and 6 from the questionnaire will be presented in the form of Histograms in order to elucidate if the pupils’ gender affects the choice of the social media platforms as well as the amount of time pupils spend on social media.

4.3.1 The difference between boys and girls in terms of time spent on social media

Histogram 6

Histogram 6 shows that 20 of the pupils spend more than 10 hours a month on social media. It is an overwhelming result among both boys and girls. Some of the pupils even answered that they spend 180 hours per month on social media.
4.3.2 The difference between boys and girls in terms on preferred social media platform

Histogram 7 shows that the most popular platform is Facebook among the male pupils and Instagram. The female pupils preferred Instagram and they provided an alternative answer where Snapchat was a popular social media platform.

4.3.3 Summary of the results of the pupils’ use of social media

The Histograms show that both girls and boys spent more than 10 hours a month on social media and the average of hours the pupils spent on reading English is 6 hours per month. The boys preferred both Facebook and Instagram whereas the girls preferred Instagram and Snapchat.

4.4 The difficulties in reading English fiction

The last three questions in the questionnaire required an open response about the pupils’ reading habits, taking up the difficulties that pupils encountered when they read material in English. Moreover, one of these three questions concerned the pupil’s motivation in reading. The most common difficulties that pupils acquired in reading English were grammar and vocabulary. One pupil answered that the difficulty in reading English is: “Att uppfatta det som man läser och inte ha tillräckligt stort ordförråd”. Some of the pupils’ experience in reading in English for example was that they do not understand everything that they read and this factor is considered a barrier when it comes to reading. Another pupil answered that “Ordförståelse” is the factor that is experienced as the most difficult thing when reading in English. Regarding the pupils’ encouragement
in reading in general, time was considered crucial for the pupils’ reading habits. One pupil answered that “Känna att jag har tid för att läsa. Jag tycker det är kul men hinner inte”, Another pupil claimed that “Mer lästid i skolan och mindre läxor skulle bidra till att jag läser mer”. Furthermore, the time that is offered to the pupils to read during school hours is perceived by the pupils as being very limited. Other factors that concerned the pupils’ reading motivation was the lack of variety of books in school as well as the freedom of choosing books. The pupils do not think that they have the freedom to choose the books. One pupil answered that “Urvalet av böcker är inte så stor. Vi får inte välja så mycket”. Another pupil answered that “Om jag fick välja själv vilka böcker jag läser”.

5. Discussion

Besides the fact that pupils spent a very limited time in reading English fiction, out of the 22 pupils that participated in this study, 19 pupils had Swedish as their mother tongue and 3 pupils had Arabic as their mother tongue. This factor for example might influence their results on the reading comprehension tests in English. It is ultimately very difficult to ascertain how much contact the pupils have with English outside the classroom. A fact that is certain is that pupils spent more time on social media than reading fiction texts in English. Neef et al (2002:11) claim that reading requires reading strategies such as understand from the context or knowing how to make predictions, etc. The material that covers the pupils’ language use is also very important in order to develop their language skills. The pupils’ results on the reading comprehension tests might also be caused by the lack of reading material in English in their lives. Furthermore, the pupils’ interaction based on computer which according to Crystal (2010:187) could be email and text messages might not help the pupils in their reading comprehension and development.

Another important aspect that might be taken in consideration while measuring the pupils’ results on the reading comprehension tests is that correlational statistics could have been used to establish if there is a statistical link between hours spent reading and scores on reading comprehension tests. Establishment of statistical correlation might have been possible given more time available of the completion of this study. However, some pupils that participated in this study might face problems on how to make the essential connection between the language that they hear and the language that they see
on print. Wallence (1992:9) claims that English has several differences between how
words are spelled in writing and in oral speech. As Hughes (1989:120) states, some
pupils might read perfectly but deficiencies in literacy might stop them from
demonstrating their reading comprehension and this might be the case for the one-word-
gap tests that are used in this study as well. However, the one-word-gap and the mini
text-tests in Sweden are considered a part of the national reading comprehension tests in
English and that is why this type of tests were chosen in this study. The Mini-texts test
that pupils completed in order to measure their reading comprehension might be
described as Multiple-choice type of tests. The test involved several alternatives such as
A B C or D in order to answer the question. According to Hughes (1989:121), Multiple
choice tests give the learners the opportunity of guessing the right answer and someone
can score 33 on a 100-item test just by guessing. This is a fact that could be taken in
consideration when correcting the pupils’ multiple choice tests.

The results of this study show that there is no difference between the hours boys and
girls spend on social media. Both girls and boys spend more than 10 hours a month on
social media and less than 10 hours on reading English fiction. Prensky (2001:1) claims
that people who overuse computers and Internet in their everyday lives can be
associated with “digital natives”. Pupils that participated in this study can be associated
with ‘digital natives’ because of their extended use of computers and the Internet. The
boys’ and girls’ results on the reading comprehension tests are similar, and there is no
significant distinction between their results on the reading comprehension tests or
between their reading habits. According to Prensky (ibid:1) an issue that might exist
among teachers in schools is that teachers might be ‘digital immigrants’ and that is a
fact that might affect the pupils’ reading habits in English for example. The way this
observation might affect the pupils’ reading habits in English could be because pupils
might prefer technology such as tablets or computers when reading something that
teachers that are “digital immigrants” might not use when teaching and this fact might
discourage the pupils in their reading habits. English books can be found at the schools’
library for example and the process of going to the library and borrow the books and
return them might not be experienced as comfortable as having the book on the tablet or
on the mobile phone. The pupils might find English fiction easier to access on tablets or
mobile phones. One aspect that teachers who are ‘digital immigrants’ might omit is for
example to recommend to the pupils online-novels because this is a source that is very
important and efficient for the digital natives. It is important for the pupils to hear about the importance and efficiency of these online sources that could motivate pupils to read.

The last three open questions gave the pupils the opportunity to complete their answers to the closed questions from the questionnaire regarding their reading habits. The pupils answered that the lack of reading time in school is one of the reasons that contribute to reduced opportunities for reading. Furthermore, the pupils experienced a limited variety of books that the schools offer to them as well as their freedom to choose books to read. Some of the pupils answered that if they had more time in school for reading they would definitely read more than they read right now. On the basis of the answers to the three open questions, the time school offers to the pupils on reading time is crucial for the pupils’ reading habits. Another important aspect to keep in mind when reading is *Pre-reading* and *‘during’ reading* activities which might motivate pupils to read more English material such as short stories, fiction, novels, etc. It is important for the pupils to know and understand how to read a book for example, a book that they are supposed to work within the classroom (BC[www]). An example of a book that involves film material to encourage the pupils’ interest in the book itself could be *The Hunger Games*.

The respondents that participated in this study were covered by 22 pupils whereas 12 of them answered that vocabulary is considered a barrier when they read in English because they do not understand everything that is read. That is why teacher-directed pre-reading activity which involves key vocabulary and ideas that the text contains could be a help for the students to develop their reading habits because this activity requires more work with vocabulary (British Council [www]). Since English fiction for example involves a more formal level of vocabulary than texts which can be read on *Instagram*, the pupils risk not to develop their vocabulary enough. Moreover, both girls and boys spend a considerable amount of time on reading texts on *Instagram* or *Facebook* which can lead to a limited vocabulary and difficulties in completing one-word-gaps tests for example.

Interactive approaches such as discussions in the classroom might enhance reading. Study questions about the material that is read for example is a helpful activity that might contribute to increase the hours pupils spend on reading in English. Study questions with the purpose of having discussions in the classroom might motivate
students to read (BC [www]). Discussions might provide a more stimulating way of working with a book and encouraging reading, through shedding light on different social perspectives relating to popular culture and global development. However, since technology is an important leaning tool for the pupils nowadays the teacher could use different programs that give the opportunity to the pupils to communicate with each other and discuss the material that they work with in the classroom. Information and Communication Technology (ICT) resources and tools such as Google Classroom or Facebook Messenger could be used by the pupils in order to communicate. Encouraging the pupils to use technology and the Internet while working with reading activities could be an efficient strategy to motivate the pupils to read. Searching online about characters that pupils find interesting in a book or group discussions through Facebook messenger could increase the pupils’ interest in reading.

The pupils’ low results on the reading comprehension tests could be explained by the fact that they spend little time on reading fiction in English as seen in Histogram 2. However, there are other factors that might influence the pupils’ results on the reading comprehension tests. With regards to the pupils’ reading comprehension, according to Crystal (ibid:219) and Lundahl (2012:231) there are traditional reading and modern reading approaches that the pupils can use while they are reading. The pupils’ reading habits might depend on the strategies that they use while reading. Taking notes, summarizing and guessing from the context are modern strategies that could be difficult for second language learners. Since 12 pupils answered that vocabulary is a barrier in their reading, Lundahl (ibid:231) explains that second language learners’ vocabulary and their decoding capabilities in the second language might not be developed enough. This observation might be relevant for the pupils who participated in this study. Furthermore, teachers should be aware about the pupils’ needs when it comes to their reading development. The teachers need to see if the pupils are capable of guessing from the context because this is a useful tool when it comes to completing Mini-texts tests with alternative answers, tests that pupils needed to complete for this study.

There are two strategies that define traditional reading approaches. The first one is reading by ear and the second one is reading by eye (Crystal ibid:219). It is certainly the case that pupils learn to read in different ways. Since the pupils who participated in this study answered that they have a limited time to read in school, it might be possible
that they do not have the chance to test different reading approaches. Pupils that have a hard time with pronunciation might need reading time which gives them the opportunity to read aloud and vice versa with other pupils that need to read by eye. Crystal (ibid:221) states that pupils benefit from both strategies at different stages of learning and managing several kinds of reading difficulties.

6. Conclusion
This study has set out to investigate if levels of attainment in national reading comprehension tests in English reflect the types of texts which pupils encounter inside and outside the classroom. Another aspect that this study investigated is if there a gender distinction between boys’ and girls’ levels of reading comprehension which can be related to existing reading habits. One trend that may be the case is that pupils spend a large amount of their time on social media while reading fiction in English is not as popular in their everyday lives. The results of the reading comprehension tests might be affected by their reading habits and their time spent on social media. However, it is obvious that social media are not the only factors that influence the pupils’ reading comprehension. The pupils’ responses regarding their reading habits raise concerns about the time the school and teachers allocate to reading. Furthermore, technology is already very much a part of the pupils’ routines through social media and do not help the pupils to develop their language and reading skills either. On the other hand, reading English novels or short stories are texts that might stimulate the pupils’ memory because these texts incorporate a formal vocabulary for example, which might demand the pupils to think, reflect and search for information. Including various reading activities based on these kinds of texts the pupils might develop their reading and decoding skills such as guessing from the text’s content for example.

Both boys and girls spent almost equal time on social media and on reading English fiction. The results of this study show that there is no gender distinction between both genders’ levels of reading comprehension which can be related to existing reading habits. However, their results on the reading comprehension tests might be influenced by the reduced time they spend on reading fiction in English. The school needs to incorporate more time for reading various kinds of texts in English such as novels, short stories, etc. in the pupils’ school time.
Since social media are such a major part of the pupils’ lives nowadays, it will be interesting for further research to investigate whether and how teachers include more reading time in their teaching and the difference in the pupils’ results in reading comprehension.
References


Neef, Martin, Neijt, Anneke & Sproat, Richard (red.) (2002). *The Relation of Writing to Spoken Language [Elektronisk resurs]*. Berlin: De Gruyter


Online References

The Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR)
http://www.cambridgeenglish.org/exams/cefr/

The National Assessment Project
http://nafs.gu.se/english/information/nafs_eng

The British Council
Appendices
Appendix 1

Questionaire
Kvinna

Man

1. Hur många timmar per månad ungefär spenderar du på att läsa?

2. Hur mange timmar spenderar du med att läsa skönlitterära böcker på engelska?

3. Hur mange timmar spenderar du med att läsa skönlitterära böcker på svenska?

4. Vilket typ av genre läser du när du läser skönlitterära böcker på engelska?
   a. Sc-fi
   b. Comedy
   c. Drama
   d. Skräck

5. Vilket typ av genre läser du när du läser skönlitterära böcker på svenska?
   e. Sc-fi
   f. Comedy
   g. Drama
   h. Skräck

6. Hur mange timmar per månad ungefär spenderar du på sociala medier?

7. Vilken typ av sociala medier spenderar du mest tid på?
   a. Twitter
   b. Instagram
   c. Blog
   d. Online tidningar
   e. Facebook

8. Vad anser du är den svåraste aspekten med att läsa på svenska?

9. Vad anser du är den svåraste aspekten med att läsa på engelska?

10. Vad skulle uppmuntra dig i att läsa mer på svenska och engelska
Appendix 2

Mini-texts

*Read through each text and decide which of the four alternatives agrees best with the meaning of the text. Mark your choice by writing one of the letters A, B, C or D in the boxes below.*

1 Legal Dispute

After ve years, legal bills of £110,000 and a lot of acrimony, a row between millionaire neighbours over ownership of a bramble patch worth a few hundred pounds has been settled in court. Even the judge delivering his decision yesterday confessed that it was difficult to understand why two men with extensive estates should get involved in such a dispute “considering the nature of the land involved”.

We understand from the text that the two millionaires have been arguing about

. A an area of farmland

. B a small piece of land

. C a large house

. D paying court fees

2 Air Safety

The average airline passenger travelling in the United States is nearly 10 kilograms heavier than eight years ago, a survey by the US aviation watchdog has found. The findings prompted the US Federal Aviation Administration to order all US-based airlines to add extra kilograms for each traveller to passenger weight standards, plus an extra kilogram for heavier luggage.

It seems evident that in the US ... 

. A certain weight standards have now been raised
. B air passengers are heavier than in other countries

. C travellers and luggage must now be weighed

. D airports might be more overcrowded

www.nafs.gu.se

Exempel på provuppgifter, Engelska 6 ©Skolverket

Answers


12

3 Old People

When you are old, you can get away with incompetence to an astonishing degree. If you make a mess of things, the only reproach will be one muttered out of your earshot.

It is suggested that old people...

. A often don’t hear very well

. B are less exposed to criticism

. C think youngsters are not clever enough

. D are usually despised by the young

4 Not to be Sniffed at

In spring, most people are lled with joy at the knowledge that the summer months stretch before us, but some face the prospect of endless suffering due to hay fever. A new study offers hope in the form of a herbal extract which seems to be as effective as the drugs containing antihistamines, but does not have any sedative effects.

The study claims that
A most people suffer from allergies in spring

B the extract is an excellent cure for sleeplessness

C a plant substance might solve a medical problem

D the common treatments for allergies have little effect

5 Miró’s Art

Miró approached painting with a bard’s sensibility. His tableaux consisted of simple symbols and shapes on earthy backgrounds. “The Gendarme,” for instance, depicts an abstract policeman with a thin moustache and scarlet mitt on a tea-colored canvas, his white horse rearing up next to him. Miró sought to return painting to prehistoric cave art. The result was a spare graphism that he dubbed “painting-poems.”

We understand that Miró’s paintings

A bear a close resemblance to reality

B have few connections with older art forms

C do not show people in a realistic way

D portray military of cers and their symbols

www.nafs.gu.se

Answers

Points

Exempel på provuppgifter, Engelska 6 ©Skolverket
Appendix 3

One Word Gaps

Instructions

_in the following sentences there are gaps. Each gap is to be filled with ONE word which is grammatically correct and makes sense in the context._

1. I had been working hard and the doctor told me I had to take it for a while.

2. The first act was so boring that I could hardly my eyes open.

3. We had planned to send our son abroad for a year but now we’re having second ___________about it.

4. We tried hard to reach an agreement, but all our efforts were in .

5. The service at the store was bad so we wrote a letter of to the management.

6. Many people avoid saving money in banks because of the low rate of .

7. The manager said he won’t employ me because I experience.

8. The train had gone and there was no bus. So there was nothing for it to take a taxi.

9. The writers of the report stressed that hard core criminal offenders should be severely ___________with.

10-11 The survey found that 75 per cent were in favour of national ID cards

__________________________

__________________________

__________________________

while 17 per cent said they were expressed no .

http://www.ped.gu.se/sol/engbex.htm
them. Eight per cent

Exempel på provuppgifter, Engelska B, Focus: Reading © Skolverket