

Tablet use can benefit bilingual preschoolers

November 10 2015, by Elin Bäckström

Bilingual preschool children can use digital tablets as a special resource. They can listen to books in their language, use pedagogical applications, and communicate with children in other preschools using for example Skype—which is particularly important for children that speak minority languages. This was found in a new thesis from Uppsala University.

'My study shows that active work with [digital tablets](#) in preschool settings is a good way to facilitate children's communication, especially for the youngest children who cannot yet read or write. The digital tablets can become considerably important to children with other first languages, since the [teachers](#) often have no knowledge of their language,' says Petra Petersen, researcher at Uppsala University.

There are five minority languages in Sweden, and in 74 municipalities, children have the right to attend preschool in the minority languages Finnish, Saami and Meankieli. In her thesis Petra Petersen has studied [preschool](#) groups with children aged one to six, including Finnish-Swedish bilingual children.

'Since not all the teachers spoke Finnish, it was difficult for them to come up with activities in the minority language. It is of course possible to borrow Finnish books at the library, but who is going to read them, if the teachers can't? It can be difficult for teachers to create multilingual activities, but using digital tablets they can inspire the children and stimulate their interest in languages in general. One way of doing this is to together find out what different things are called in the minority language,' Petra Petersen says.

Regardless of which language is used, digital tablets have didactical implications for all children since much of the communication is based on for example pictures, and not on the ability to read or write. This, in its turn, can reduce children's dependence on adults and at the same time make it possible for the children to use their own creative abilities.

'It is not about children sitting alone with the digital tablet to save teachers' time. Instead the focus is on children being able to work independently and focus on what they want to do, without having to rely on an adult's explanation of how they should do it. The applications of course have to be chosen with care, to make sure they support the [children](#)'s learning processes.'

Provided by Uppsala University

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