



English Teaching in Swedish Multi-level Classes

How Teachers Meet Different Proficiency Levels

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Abstract

Teaching in classes with numerous students requires the ability to meet students' needs regardless of the subject taught. Teaching English in a multi-level year six class in Sweden, a country where the English language is omnipresent, requires knowledge of the subject and the expertise to meet students with vastly different proficiency levels individually. According to the Swedish Curriculum, the obligation ensuing the profession assigns teachers the responsibility to meet the students at their level, adapt the education, and enable the students to develop their proficiency accordingly. This study sets out to investigate to what extent and how this obligation is carried out and what methods English teachers use in Swedish compulsory year six today. Besides, the study examines possible needs for additional resources to fulfil the teacher's responsibility to meet each student individually. A digital survey was sent out to English teachers, resulting in 29 volunteer respondents. The reported results show that all respondents claim to adapt the education to meet the needs of their students. The reasons for adapting were equally for students with either higher or lower proficiency levels. The most frequent methods reported were to adjust the assignments or the content to be implemented at different levels or to hand out different assignments to students with varying proficiencies. The survey also revealed that the English teacher was most often the sole person responsible for the adaptations made and that very few of the respondents reported cooperating with a colleague or a special education teacher when preparing the lessons. Finally, the respondents were given the possibility to express their wishes for additional resources, which revealed that the most frequent desire was for classes with fewer students or for having an extra teacher or adult present in class to enable the students to develop individually.

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1 Introduction

When teaching English in 6th grade in a Swedish compulsory school, teachers often encounter larger classes of students with different proficiency levels. The English language being omnipresent in Sweden, many students are exposed to English daily, out of school, and in their everyday life. The students are spending more and more time on digital devices, such as computers and mobile phones connected to the Internet. They use social media, streaming services, YouTube, online applications and games or video games, often with English as the language of communication. The globalisation of English has brought about an expectancy that we all understand and use English, at least as soon as we enter the global Internet.

Children who spend time on the Internet often need the ability to understand and use English to communicate on websites or through the games they are playing. Accordingly, students are reaching proficiency levels high above their age expectancy in some areas. However, this is not true for all students; some might not have the abilities, possibilities, or interests or might actively choose not to participate in English-speaking activities outside school. Moreover, students have different learning abilities, interests, and motivations to learn, all of which are essential factors for learning a second language (Lightbown & Spada, 2013; Hattie, 2009). My experience is that there is a substantial gap between higher and lower proficiency levels in many Swedish school classes today, and teachers continuously struggle to meet the various needs of their multi-level classes.

It is challenging to meet all students' needs and, thus, allow them to develop their English proficiency at their levels. It often takes hours of careful planning and adaptation of both content and educational material, and, as teachers, we are often left with a sentiment of not being able to do enough for our students.

How can we reach, teach, educate, and motivate as many students as possible to reach their goals of developing their proficiency in English simultaneously when their proficiency levels widely differ? How are we working, what strategies and methods are we using, and most importantly, are we doing the right thing, or should we work differently? This study aims to identify to what extent and how English teachers in 6th grade in Swedish compulsory schools adapt their teaching to meet individual needs in a multi-level classroom. It also aims to determine if Swedish teachers in grade 6 identify a need for additional resources or educational material to fulfil their task as teachers and enable all students to develop their proficiency at their level.

1.1 Definitions

Below, a few frequently used terms in this study are introduced. Other definitions exist, which might cause confusion and misinterpretations if they are not explained.

1.1.1 Proficiency

I have chosen to use the concept of *proficiency* in this study, as the Council of Europe defines it. The concept of being proficient in English can be understood as having knowledge about the English language itself and knowing how to use it, what someone can do or knows in relation to the application of the subject in the real world, (Council of Europe, 2001).

1.1.2 Knowledge

The word *knowledge* is here used as Oxford Learner's Dictionaries define it as "the information, understanding, and skills you gain through education or experience" (Oxford Learners' Dictionaries, n.d.).

1.1.3 Multi-level Class or Mixed Level Class

In this study, a *multi-level class* refers to a group of students, most often of the same age, who learn and work together as a group, despite having varying levels of abilities, interests, and backgrounds. There is yet an alternative, commonly used definition of *multi-level* and *mixed-level* class, referring to a class consisting of students of various ages taught in the same classroom. The expressions mixed-age class or multi-age class are here used for that concept to differentiate between the two terms.

1.1.4 Adaptation

The term *adaptation* is here used as defined by Oxford Learner's Dictionaries as "the action or process of changing something, or of being changed to suit a new purpose or situation" (Oxford Learners' Dictionaries, n.d.). Most often, I refer to a situation where teachers change, adjust or modify methods, content or educational material to suit the needs of their students.

1.2 Aims and Research Questions

The aim of this study is to determine to what extent and how English teachers in Swedish schools, year 6, adapt their teaching to meet the students' different proficiency levels. I am also investigating if there is a need for other resources, approaches, or methods and if the teachers lack any educational resources to fulfil their tasks.

The research questions are:

- To what extent and how do English teachers in Sweden adapt their teaching to meet the needs of the different proficiency levels in multi-level classes?
- Are there any additional resources that would ease or facilitate the task to meet the students' individual needs to develop their English proficiency?
- Is there a need for additional educational resources?

2 Theoretical Background

In this section, theories supporting the aim of my study are presented and discussed. This study applies a somewhat different definition of the *multi-level* class, which implies the need to clarify the concept and the specific educational challenges that it can convey.

2.1 Teaching English in the Swedish School System

The English language is omnipresent in Sweden and holds an elevated position compared to other foreign languages, other Scandinavian languages included (Hult, 2012). Sweden currently holds place eight out of 112 countries in the English Proficiency Index (EF Education First, 2021). The report is based on standardised, online English proficiency tests, EF SET, designed for second language learners and assigned to the Common European Framework of Reference for Language (CEFRL). The tests assess the receptive skills, such as reading and listening comprehension, of more than 2 million adult test-takers from 112 countries with more than 400 completed tests. The median age of the adult test-takers was 26, and 83% of the test-takers were under the age of 35.

English has been a required subject in the Swedish school system since 1849 (Svartvik, 1999). The Swedish curriculum historically focused on a traditional grammar-translation approach in foreign language teaching, where the activities in a classroom were based upon teaching the formal aspects of the language, e.g., grammatical rules and less on communicative skills and abilities (Hult, 2012). In the 1970s, language education develops, reforms, and changes focus towards a more communication-based learning. Different types of communicative skills, strategies and abilities are enhanced, and the English language, in relation to the real world where it is used, is given more attention (Bardel, 2019). The Common European Framework of Reference of Language Learning was introduced in 1996 to promote linguistic diversity and plurilingualism within European countries, giving further importance to communication in modern language education. The Swedish curriculum is

continuously following in the same direction. English is taught as a first foreign language in Swedish schools and is today a compulsory subject in the Swedish curriculum from grade 1.

Most Swedish students meet spoken and written English outside school through television, commercials, movies, video games and online activities on the Internet. The annual research made by the Swedish Media Council (Statens medieråd, 2021) shows that in 2018, 91% of the 9-12-year-old children in Sweden had access to their own computer, tablet, or mobile phone. Very close to 100% of the Swedish 12-year-olds had mobile phones, mainly used to watch videos, films or series, play games, or interact on social media. (p. 41) Hence, the assumption that most Swedish students hear, read, and use the English language daily.

However, there are multiple proficiency levels amongst the learners in every class for various reasons, including learning abilities, cultural differences, interests, motivation, and the extent of exposure to English in or out of school, through different media Internet.

The Swedish National Agency for Education assigns the responsibility of choosing content, material and methods for teaching as long as it coheres with the curriculum. (Skolverket, 2018). Teachers usually have access to educational material selected by the teachers themselves and then procured by the school, e.g., a textbook, workbook, or such, which are often used as a base for all students, regardless of their level of knowledge. The *Swedish Curriculum for the compulsory school, preschool class and school-age educare* (Skolverket, 2018) emphasises the importance of supporting students in need of adaptations and teachers to "take into account each individual's needs" (p.12). Teachers are expected to "organise and carry out the work so that pupils [...] develop in accordance with their capacity, and at the same time are stimulated into using and developing all of their ability" (p.13).

In an inclusive school system like the Swedish one, where practically all students, regardless of ability, are most often taught together, the teacher must find ways to simultaneously reach all learning abilities and levels of proficiency. Hence, adaptations of existing material are usually made to facilitate and enhance the learning of students with lower proficiency and to challenge and further motivate students with higher proficiency levels. The teacher is left with the responsibility of finding new material, adapting existing material, or creating new material to reach each student at their level.

Ability grouping based on the student's level of proficiency to create more homogenous learning groups is another method of meeting the challenges of a multi-level class. Grouping students based on their knowledge level is temporarily accepted, although viewed as being avoided since research has shown that it might negatively affect the learning process (Skolverket, 2009). The groups are often left alone to work with the adapted material

as the teacher attends to the larger group of students, meaning fewer chances to support the learning process and give feedback directed at the right level. Hattie & Timperley (2007) emphasise the importance of giving students feedback compatible with the student's prior knowledge, which can assist students' abilities to comprehend, engage and process the information provided.

The teacher is responsible for planning the content, finding suitable educational material, adapting it to reach all students, teaching, and giving clear and precise feedback in a multi-level class. Reliant not only on students' actual abilities to learn but also on the students' motivation for learning. A task that can easily be viewed as unachievable and invincible, leaving the teacher with the feeling of not being able to do enough. How can we succeed in meeting the individual needs in a multi-level class?

2.2 Multi-level Classes

It is essential to understand the concept of multi-level classes. This study refers to second language learner classes in compulsory schools where students have different English proficiency levels. The students' proficiency can differ, for instance, in individual learning abilities, motivation, attitude, and willingness to learn (Lightbown & Spada, 2013). Other aspects that impact the students' proficiency are their previous knowledge of the language, cultural differences, and their habit of encountering and using the English language outside school. According to Hess (2001), every class could be described as multi-level since there are always individual differences in a classroom, primarily since the composition of a class is mainly based on the 'students' date of birth and not on their proficiency level.

A multi-level classroom has several positive aspects to take into consideration. Hess (2001) argues that higher-performing students in a multi-level class can offer support and impel the lower-performing students to achieve higher motivation, as Vygotsky (cited in Strandberg, 2006) implies in his theory of learning via the *Zone of Proximal Development* (henceforth ZPD). Vygotsky claims that the construction of meaning occurs in the meeting and interaction between language users. The support and input from higher-performing speakers benefit the lower-performing speakers and assist in developing language skills (Strandberg, 2006).

2.3 Challenges in Multi-level Classrooms

The Swedish Education Act states in chapter 3, §2, that education should be equivalent and adapted to all students' needs, backgrounds and previous experiences (SFS, 2010/800).

The Education Act stipulates that the education provided in each school form and in school-age educare should be equivalent, regardless of where in the country it is provided. National goals specify the norms for equivalence. However, equivalent education does not mean that the education should be the same everywhere or that the resources of the school are to be allocated equally. Account should be taken of the varying circumstances and needs of pupils. There are also different ways of attaining these goals. The school has a special responsibility for those pupils who for different reasons experience difficulties in attaining the goals that have been set up for the education. For this reason, education can never be the same for all.

Jill Bell (2001) supports the view presented above by stating that students cannot be given the exact same material and be demanded to perform the same task at the same level. The challenge in a multi-level classroom is for the teacher to adapt content, instructions, and assignments and simultaneously motivate and inspire everyone, regardless of proficiency level (Hess 2001; Lightbown & Spada 2013). The teacher needs to consider individual learning styles, learning abilities, cultural differences, and many other aspects of reaching, motivating, and engaging the students in the class activities, thus enabling them to develop their knowledge (Bell, 2001).

According to Hattie (2009), the relationship between a student and the teacher is the most prominent factor for successful learning. A positive relationship is built on reciprocal trust, empathy, warmth, respect and understanding, and the teacher's ability to convey the belief in the student's abilities to deliver and succeed. Such a relationship is not built in an instant, it takes time and dedication, and the teacher needs to be aware of the student's situation, background, proficiency, and goals (Hattie, 2009).

The second most important factor given is the teacher's feedback. In the article "The Power of Feedback", Hattie and Timperley (2007) further emphasise the importance of feedback but state that not all types of feedback enhance the learning process. To give each student accurate and meaningful feedback, the teacher needs to have first-hand knowledge about the student's proficiency, the process, and the progress and find the time and situation in the classroom, which can be time-consuming and challenging in a multi-level class (Hattie & Timperley, 2007; Bell 2001).

According to Gaitas & Martins' (2016) study on how teachers perceive implementing multi-level teaching, it is questionable if teachers receive sufficient training to address diversity in their classes. Al-Subaiei (2017) supports the above when stating that teachers might not know how to implement differentiated teaching methods and that the lack of training affects the teachers' ability to reach the students. In Sweden, the teachers in a compulsory school are, as mentioned, responsible for the content, material and methods used

in education and for ensuring that it adheres to the curriculum. Since motivation and interest are important factors for learning, teachers seek to prepare content areas aiming at the students' interests and ensure that they can proceed from their own starting levels (Hattie, 2012). To successfully inspire and motivate all students to consider their individual needs, background, and proficiency, and ensure that they progress by offering precise and efficient feedback can easily be understood as complex and problematic. Hence the feeling of not being able to fulfil the obligation and responsibility as teachers (Hess, 2001).

2.4 Methods for Teaching in Multi-level Classes.

In this section, I map some of the methods mentioned and used in multi-level classrooms to deepen the understanding of the study.

2.4.1 Grouping Students by Level of Proficiency

The method of grouping students by proficiency aims to create more homogenous learning groups where students perform similarly and at a similar tempo. The teacher can see the smaller learning groups as more accessible since instructions and assignments can apply to the entire group. Ability grouping might also allow the students to be more comfortable speaking in smaller groups. Conversely, the Swedish National Agency for Education (2009) argues that there might be negative consequences if we group students by proficiency level, especially for students with lower proficiencies who might perceive themselves as less capable, leading to lower self-esteem. Nevertheless, ability grouping is acceptable as long as it is applied for a limited period of time (Skolverket, 2009).

Vygotsky's theory of Zones of Proximal Development argues for grouping students of different proficiency levels since children develop differently and are motivated to learn with the aid of others (Strandberg, 2006). Nevertheless, it is a method that yields a more demanding preparation and planning to become efficient (Bell, 2001).

2.4.2 Adapted Material and Assignments

To adapt material and assignments implies that students are given the same or accustomed assignments and content, although the material is adapted to be carried out at different proficiency levels. For example, texts can be shorter or written with a more attainable vocabulary, and the assignments can contain more in-depth questions, or else the questions can be more accessible or carried out at a more superficial level. The teacher can produce the material, or the school can provide manufactured educational material. This method also

implies differentiated instructions for the students to understand the assignment. The method allows all students to be involved in the same projects and further enables them to put in an individual effort to motivate and inspire students in the learning process. On the other hand, students might be left to work independently, giving insufficient support for everyone to develop as many skills as possible (Bell, 2001). This method also implies more time and effort for planning and preparing the assignments since the teacher must organise the education on several levels to meet students' needs (Bell, 2001).

2.4.3 Theme-based Approach

The theme-based method can be compared and carried out together with the method of adapted material mentioned in 2.4.2. When employing theme-based approaches, the teacher works with areas of interest that apply to as many students as possible. The same material can be used, but it allows the students to perform and complete the task at different levels (Bell, 2001). Students with higher levels are asked and expected to perform at a higher level. The lower-proficiency students can participate and perform at a lower level of expectancy. Bell (2001) acknowledges that it takes well-planned tasks, assignments, and active supervision to see the students perform at their level. Students might deliberately choose to perform at the lower level to make the effort as little as possible. Bell also emphasises the importance of keeping up the interest and thus the motivation for all proficiency levels (2001). Another disadvantage is that higher-performing students might perceive the assignments as never-ending and that the teacher adds more and more tasks to keep them occupied. Therefore, students might perceive this method as unequal and unfair since the teacher demands more of them than of other students (Bell, 2001).

2.4.4 Differentiation

Differentiation aims to help teachers reach the students regardless of their learning abilities, backgrounds, or previous knowledge of the subject taught. It is an inclusive strategy with the individual student and the content in mind. Five instructional strategies have been identified as important for learning: content, process, product, learning and environment. The method enables students to choose from different materials, to carry out assignments and tasks in other ways or to use additional educational material. Carol Ann Tomlinson supports the method and upholds the view that the teacher should be responsible for enabling all students to learn as best as they possibly can, regardless of their differences (Tomlinson, 2016). Teachers claim to know how to apply the strategy, but according to Gaitas and Martins

(2016), it is not used to its maximum. It has been alleged to be hard to find materials and time for planning and preparations sometimes due to the teachers' lack of training and skills (Gaitas & Martins, 2016).

3 Previous Research

This section presents previous research on teaching EFL in multi-level classes in order to provide a deeper understanding. Firstly I will look into the challenges experienced in multi-level classrooms and continue by mapping different methods mentioned in the research reviewed.

3.1 Challenges in Multi-level Classrooms

A study on how some teachers of English in Swedish secondary schools experience the challenge of teaching English in multi-level classes shows that all 6 participants experienced the need to adapt their education to meet the vastly different proficiency levels within the same class (Lundström, 2017). The participants found it challenging to adapt the instructions since they were forced not only to use different methods but also to use Swedish and English to ensure that all students understood the assignments. Teachers stated it to be equally challenging to attend to the higher performing students' needs as the lower performing ones. Some teachers also mentioned that it was hard to find educational material and resources suitable for all levels (Lundström, 2017).

Al-Shammakhi's and Al-Humaidi's (2015) study on teaching English in multi-level classes in Oman revealed that almost all 170 respondents experienced difficulties teaching English in multi-level classes. The challenges mainly related to teaching and learning, but students' motivation and having suitable educational material were also mentioned. The study revealed that planning and preparing lessons for all levels were experienced as time-consuming and difficult. Additionally, it was shown that the participants tried to adapt different methods and strategies to overcome the challenges with little success. The researchers identified a need for further training and education for teachers to manage a multi-level class. (Al-Shammakhi & Al-Humaidi, 2015).

Al-Subaiei (2017) presents an equivalent study in Saudi Arabia which showed a similar outcome. Nearly all teachers experienced different types of challenges, and teachers struggled to meet the students' different proficiency levels. The most challenging areas were found in the teaching and learning areas, but motivation was again mentioned. The respondents gave evidence of "feeling out of touch" and claimed not to be in control of the students' need for

support since students' proficiency levels were so divergent (Al-Subaiei, 2017). Al-Subaiei continues by supporting the need for further teacher education and training to suit multi-level classrooms since the study showed that the participants tended to use more management strategies than strategies for teaching and learning to overcome the challenges (2017).

When looking into written resources and interviewing Swedish EFL teachers about the challenges in teaching multi-level classes, Svärd (2006) found that both sources gave evidence of challenges concerning the ability to motivate the students and to keep students' attention in the classroom. Furthermore, teachers in multi-level classes experienced the planning and preparation process as difficult and time-consuming. Svärd's (2006) study additionally showed that a positive, well-structured, and secure classroom situation that allowed students to voice their opinions and ask questions was beneficial for their learning. Helping students to improve their own learning techniques and creating good relations with students and peers enhanced collaboration and peer work in groups which were also mentioned as important factors for learning (Svärd, 2006).

Westwood and Arnold (2004) affirm a differentiated approach as desirable when teaching multi-level classes; however, implementing and sustaining such an approach is easier said than done. Large classes, teachers' overload, and lack of time for preparations are some of the reasons mentioned. Gaitas and Martins' (2017) study also shows that teachers find it challenging to meet the needs in a multi-level classroom because of a lack of training, material resources, and insufficient preparation time.

3.2 Methods for teaching in Multi-level Classrooms

According to a study on how teachers respond to the different needs in a multi-level classroom, Montes Reyes and Formoso Rodríguez (2005) claim that teachers need to be aware of and address learner factors such as aptitude, motivation, and attitude. To be able to meet students' needs, a combination of teaching methods has to be mastered. All respondents emphasised the importance of varying instructions to fit different learning styles and to keep the students motivated. Furthermore, the respondents were optimistic about dividing the class into smaller groups to facilitate individualising the content and methods (Montes Reyes & Formoso Rodríguez, 2005).

Westwood and Arnold (2004) cite some of the most common strategies to meet the needs of all students in their research. Differentiated/adapted material, theme-based approach and group work were mentioned as helpful strategies to facilitate differentiation. Grouping students by their ability or proficiency level is a method mentioned in more than one of the

reports reviewed. Lundström's (2017) results show divergent opinions about grouping students according to their proficiency. Positive aspects were expressed, such as students feeling included in a group with similar proficiency levels and the thought that it was easier to motivate higher-performing students when working with students with equal proficiency levels.

On the other hand, negative opinions about lower performing students feeling "not good enough" or excluded and that they were not having the benefices of interacting with the higher performing ones were mentioned. Lundström (2017) found that the positive aspects of ability grouping mainly concerned the teaching situation and facilitated the work for the teacher. Svärd (2006) confirms the above and continues by claiming that the teachers in her study were more positive towards grouping students and that, according to them, it was beneficial in the learning process. The respondents stated that the smaller groups made adapting the content, material, and tempo easier and that the teachers had more time to support the students in the smaller groups (Svärd, 2006).

Montes Reyes and Formoso Rodríguez's (2005) results also show that teachers were positive towards grouping students to meet the needs in a multi-level classroom. Ansari (2013) states in his article that grouping students by proficiency can benefit a multi-level classroom. "The main advantage of this strategy is the ability to separate material and to focus on needs separately. [...] A strong student may only need less instruction". Ansari (2013) continues, "Grouping students by ability can allow them to work on their own and be creative while giving you time to focus more on students who need more care" (p114).

Grouping students with mixed abilities is also advantageous, enhances peer encouragement, and adds mutual respect. Ansari (2013) claims that the stronger students can feel confident by being entrusted with a responsibility, and the weaker students can feel safer showing their knowledge in front of other students instead of the teacher. Ansari (2013) continues, "The final advantage is keeping the class as one. [...] even if you are not advanced in English you are an essential part of the class[...]" (p.114)

4 Method

This section explains the method chosen for the study and the underlying reasons for my choice. Additionally, the participants and the reliability and validity of the study are discussed.

4.1 Data Collection

The method used for this study is an online survey of a qualitative nature through both quantitative and qualitative questions. The chosen method gives manageable and analysable data, which permits a deeper analysis of the questions of a qualitative nature, allowing an understanding of the respondents' opinions, thoughts, and ideas (Trost 2010). The study and the questionnaire have been carefully designed, tested, and revised to be precise and ensure the purpose of the study. I chose to use a Google Forms questionnaire to reach the respondents digitally, retrieve manageable data and facilitate the data analysis (Trost 2012).

The questionnaire had three bio-data questions to investigate the respondents' working situation, 13 primarily multi-choice close-ended and ten open-ended questions. Open-ended questions can be seen as challenging to answer and can therefore be avoided or answered in ways that might not be usable or analysable, hence the choice of using both types. (Trost, 2012). The close-ended questions were used to ensure sufficient, manageable, and analysable data and the open-ended questions mainly to retrieve more detailed information from a previous close-ended question. A pilot study was made, and some questions were altered, added, or deleted. There are both open and multi-choice questions to retrieve precise and analysable data. The questions in the survey are formulated to avoid misinterpretations resulting in misleading answers. A pilot interview study was conducted amongst teachers in one school, and the present survey was altered in accordance with its result. The multi-choice questions and answers were designed based on the answers given in the pilot study. A possibility to add another option than the proposed was incorporated to enable other answers if needed. The survey can be viewed in full; see appendix A.

However, the chosen method does not allow for the more profound and spontaneous follow-up questions of an interview, nor do the respondents have the possibility to have the survey questions or answers explained to them (Trost 2010). The choice not to conduct personal interviews has been made to delimitate the study in the circumstances of the pandemic when personal visits and interviews were challenging and difficult to carry out.

4.2 Participants

Two groups of respondents were chosen consciously to validate the study by identifying and comparing any pattern within or between each group's answers. A digital invitation approached the main group of respondents through Facebook groups for English teachers. The members were invited to participate in a voluntary online survey, a choice of method

made in order to reach as many respondents as possible. The second group of respondents were English teachers in 6th grade in schools located in the southwestern part of Sweden. They were invited to participate in the same survey by a message through Microsoft Teams sent to 114 English teachers working in the same municipality. The reason not to rely exclusively on the answers of the Facebook groups is the difficulty of ensuring that the online respondent is in the right target group, a predicament which will be further discussed in section 4.3.

The choice of approaching English teachers in year six was made because they are often experienced in assessing and analysing the results of the National Tests in English in year 6. Such an experience is likely to give them a valuable perspective of the results in relation to the demands of the Swedish Curriculum for year 6. Furthermore, students in grade 6 have often reached a sufficient level of English to engage actively in English activities in and out of school. At these ages, students have more access to English-speaking forums and activities through their computers, mobile phones, or game consoles (Statens medieråd, 2021).

Twenty-seven respondents from the main group and two from the second group completed the study. Consequently, I choose to add the results from the two respondents from the second group to the results of the main group.

The respondents worked at both public (23) and private (6) schools in Sweden and had various experiences in teaching; 10 of them had 0-2 years of experience, 9 of them 3-5 years, 2 of them 6-9 years and 8 of them had more than ten years of experience.

I am aware that this study might not be representative or generalisable for all English teachers in Sweden. However, it will provide an idea of how some teachers are adapting and differentiating their teaching today and what additional needs they might have to improve their ability to meet their students' needs even further.

4.3 Data Analysis

To start the analysis, the questions and answers were read several times, digitally and in print, and notes were taken during the readings. The responses were then categorised and analysed. The answers to the close-end questions of a more quantitative nature were analysed according to a descriptive statistic approach (Lantz, 2013). The data was transmitted into Excel, summarised, organised, transcribed and presented by number or percentage in more attainable charts to ease comparison. Some multi-choice questions were categorised manually through a colour scheme to ensure that all answers were included and represented in the analysis.

Fejes and Thornberg (2015) refer to Flick (2014) when emphasising the importance of selecting and differentiating meaningful data from irrelevant data to identify patterns and important findings in qualitative analysis. The open-ended questions have, therefore, been analysed thematically, according to a phenomenological approach (Kvale & Torhell, 1997; Fejes & Thornberg, 2015). The responses were retrieved by categorising the answers in theme groups of meaningful keywords selected by frequency and organised into theme groups. By this, it has been possible to categorise and structure the data to analyse the answers. (Kvale & Torhell, 1997). Regarding the personally added answers, I have chosen to present them as are. In a few cases, I chose to omit personally added answers when I considered the information given irrelevant to the question or subject.

4.4 Validity and Reliability

According to the Swedish Research Council, Vetenskapsrådet, there are ethical requirements to consider regarding information, consent, confidentiality, and usage, amongst others, when conducting research (Vetenskapsrådet, 2017), all of which have been accounted for in the present study. The ethical requirements were effectuated by the following means: The potential respondents were informed about the topic in question and asked to participate voluntarily. Their active participation and completion of the survey were interpreted as their consent being given. Furthermore, the respondents were informed that their responses and personal information would be treated confidentially and used exclusively for this study.

The validity of a study measures how well the chosen method serves its purpose and, whether the results answer the research questions and fulfil the aim of the study. The reliability of a survey tells us whether the results could be similar if the same study were to be carried out again (Stukàt, 2011). However, Stukàt (2011) claims that it is difficult to achieve the same results twice since the respondents' opinions are dynamic and change over time. To reach higher reliability, it is important to ascertain that the questions are posed as unambiguously as possible.

The choice of a voluntary digital survey where the respondents cannot be controlled nor verified makes this research vulnerable to both validity and reliability (Trost, 2012; Stukàt, 2011). However, by choosing to parallelly conduct the same survey amongst English teachers in the neighbouring area, I hoped to realise a comparison between the two groups to identify patterns that would have increased the reliability of the study. Unfortunately, this attempt was unsuccessful due to the insufficient number of respondents in the second group.

5 Results

I first briefly present the respondents and their reported teaching situation in this section. I have chosen to include the number of students the teacher reports teaching and briefly describe their classes' composition. Secondly, questions, results, and findings are presented in subgroups based on the questions and their area of interest.

5.1 Teaching situation

The twenty-nine respondents working both in public (23) and private schools (6) completed the survey. The respondents' teaching experience varied from 0-2 years (10), 3-5 years (9), 6-9 years (2) and ten years or more (8). The respondents report teaching 1110 students in total, on average 38,3 students per teacher, the lowest amount being ten students and the highest amount being 81 students. To obtain a deeper understanding of students' composition in respondents' classes, the respondents were asked how many of the students in their classes were diagnosed with a learning, mental, emotional, or physical disability. The respondents claimed that 152 or 14% of the 1110 students were diagnosed, giving an average of approximately 5,2 students per participant teacher.

The respondents were asked how often they adapted the education in their year six classes, and the results show that all 29 respondents claimed to adjust their teaching to meet the needs of their students in their current English classes. Adaptations were reported to be made "all the time" by 15 of the respondents, and 14 made adaptations "most of the time". None of the respondents answered "rarely" or "never", as shown in Fig. 1.

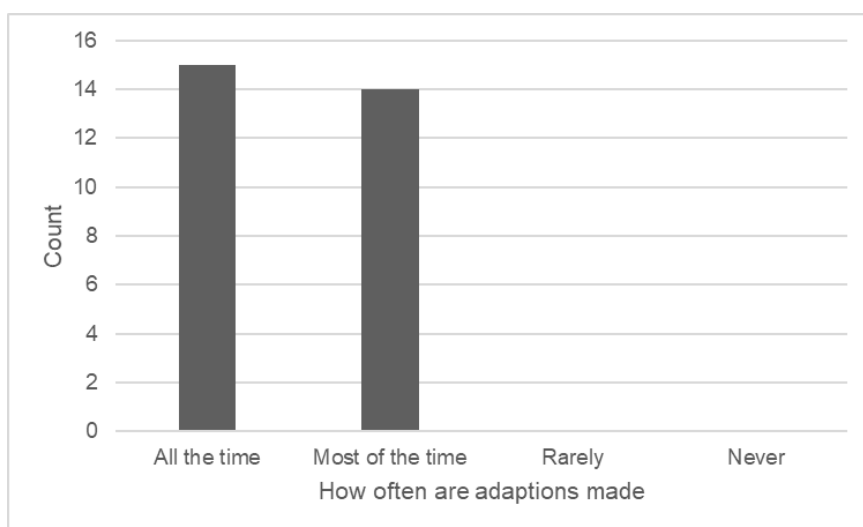


Figure 1

How often are you adapting the English education in your current class/classes to meet the students' level of knowledge?

When asked how many students in the respondents' classes need adapted teaching because of higher or lower knowledge, the results show that both options were equally represented. The participants answered that 15% of their students required adaptations due to a higher level of proficiency and 15% because of lower proficiency than expected in year 6, as shown in Fig. 2.

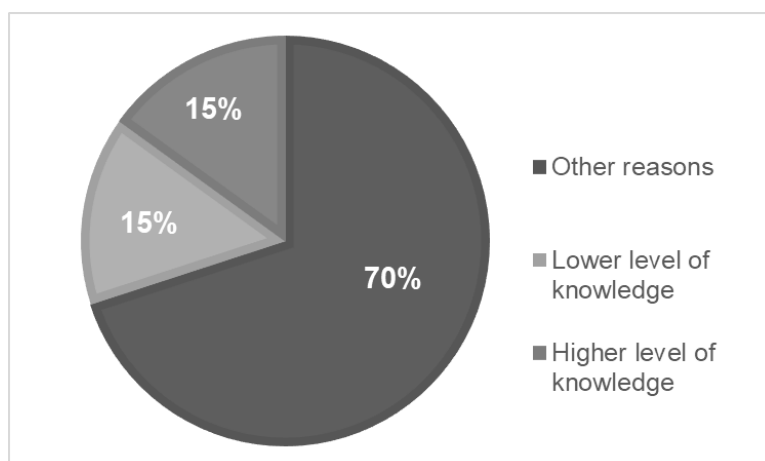


Figure 2

How many students in your current classes are in need of adapted education because of higher/lower proficiency?

5.2 Reasons for Adapting the English Education in Year 6

Apart from the reasons mentioned in 5.1, the respondents were asked to indicate the main reason for the adaptations made in their class/classes by means of open-ended questions. I have chosen to analyse the answers and divide them into five theme groups based on frequently used terms and their area of attention:

1. *level, proficiency level, knowledge*
2. *learn, learning, develop, developing, progressing*
3. *motivation, challenge, interest*
4. *pass, passing courses, grades, succeed, succeeding*
5. *duty, obligation, profession, curriculum*

1. When analysing the content of the 29 answers, it was shown that the most frequently used terms were *level, proficiency level* and *knowledge*. These terms were mentioned 14 times.

Examples of given responses are shown below.

- Resp. 2 - Level of knowledge mostly.
- Resp. 4 - Lower level of knowledge.
- Resp. 24 - Learning disabilities and very different levels of knowledge.
- Resp. 27 - Students on very different levels.
- Resp. 29 - Some students need to catch up to their classmates level.

2. The secondly most reported group of keywords contained the terms *learn*, *learning*, *develop*, and *development*; 9 respondents referred to the terms in sentences such as:

Resp. 6 - To make sure that all students develop their skills and learn English.

Resp. 12 - To make sure my students all learn English. If they reach the knowledge requirements is secondary - the learning is the main focus.

Resp. 18 - The main reason is that I want everyone to learn as much as possible.

Resp. 20 - So that pupils develop in accordance with their own capacity.

3. The terms *challenge*, *motivation*, and *interest* were used four times, never as the only reason but combined with other areas. Respondents answered:

Resp. 3 - To properly challenge all of my students at the right level. If I do that my students become more motivated and focused.

Resp. 9 - To enable pupils to have high levels of success and right amount of challenge regardless of their starting point.

Resp. 17 - Student motivation and so the students can feel like they are able to use the language even though they are at a lower proficiency level.

4. The next group, *passing grades*, *courses*, and *success*, was reported four times.

Examples of answers are:

Resp. 7 - Adaptation is good because most of the students, according to my experience, pass the grades and national tests in the end.

Resp. 11 - I want everyone to succeed.

Resp. 19 - To make sure all students find the lessons meaningful and making sure all students get a passing grade.

5. The fifth and less frequent subgroup is in answers where the terms *duty*, *responsibilities*, and *profession* are used. Only 2 of the respondents referred to the curriculum or the responsibility that comes with working as a teacher, e.g.,

Resp. 13 - It is my obligation as a teacher to differentiate the education to suit my pupils.

Resp. 28 - The English education in Swedish school should be adapted and compensatory to the individual level of the students-it's their right! Then again, when you teach, you want all your students to be able to learn.

5.3 Methods Used

According to the respondents, all are adapting their teaching to meet the needs of the students. When answering the question of which methods the respondents use, it was shown that all but one alternative was represented (Teacher helping online). The respondents could choose several options and add others if needed. The most frequent choices were to adapt the assignments, construct educational material and to give students different assignments depending on their level of proficiency, as shown in Fig. 3. Three respondents chose the other alternative, and the answers given were "Different levels of scaffolding" and "They are working in the same book but helping each other". One respondent did not submit an alternative choice.

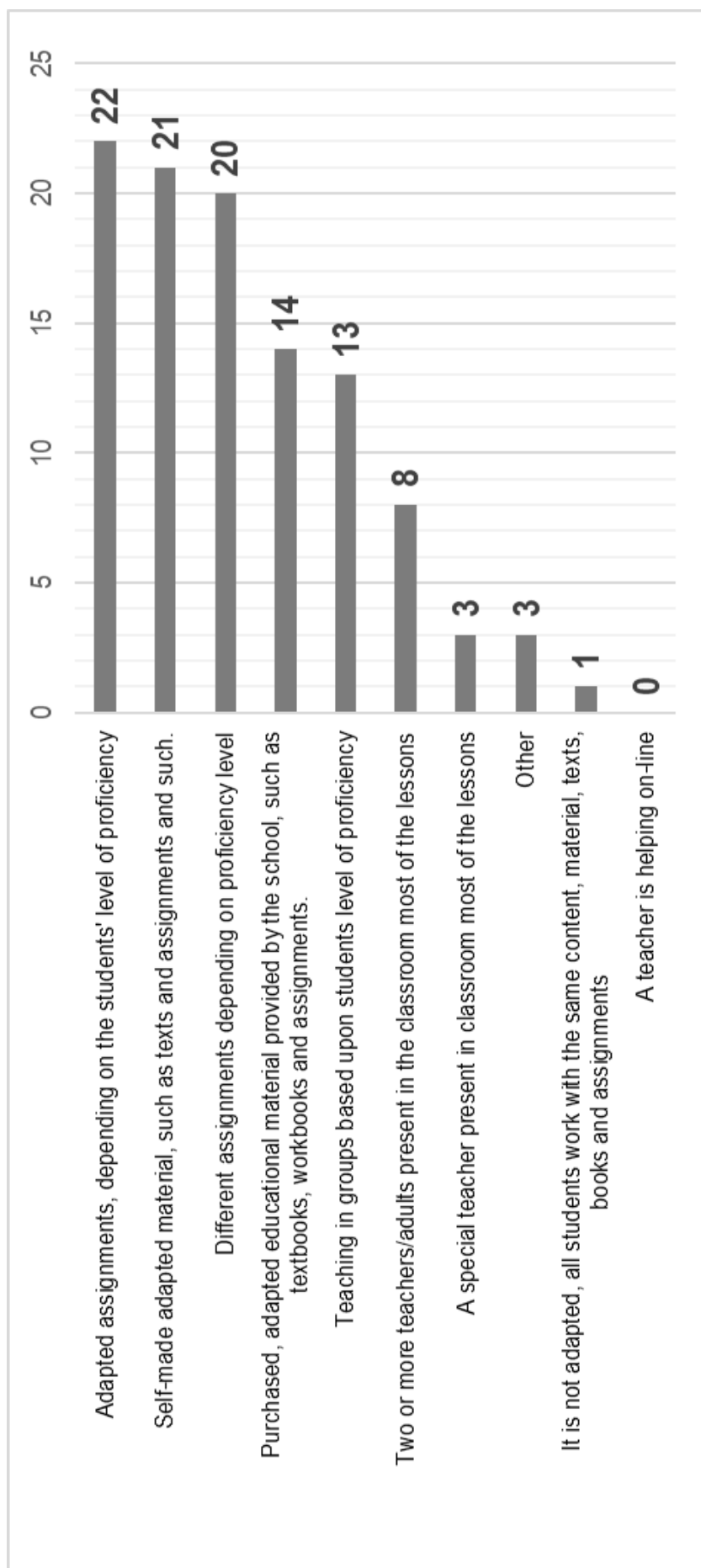


Figure 3.

In what ways is the education in your English class/classes adapted today?

5.3.1 Adapted Material

Subsequently, the respondents were asked which methods they applied most frequently. The method primarily used is to adapt the assignments given to the students based on their proficiency in English; 45% of the teachers claim to choose this method to suit the proficiency levels in their classes. The second most frequent method, applied by 31% of the respondents, is to use self-made adapted material, such as texts and assignments. See fig. 4. Apart from the survey's given choices, respondents added digital ICT tools, such as spelling or auditive programs and extra lessons or training lessons to work on grammar, reading and listening to the list of used methods.

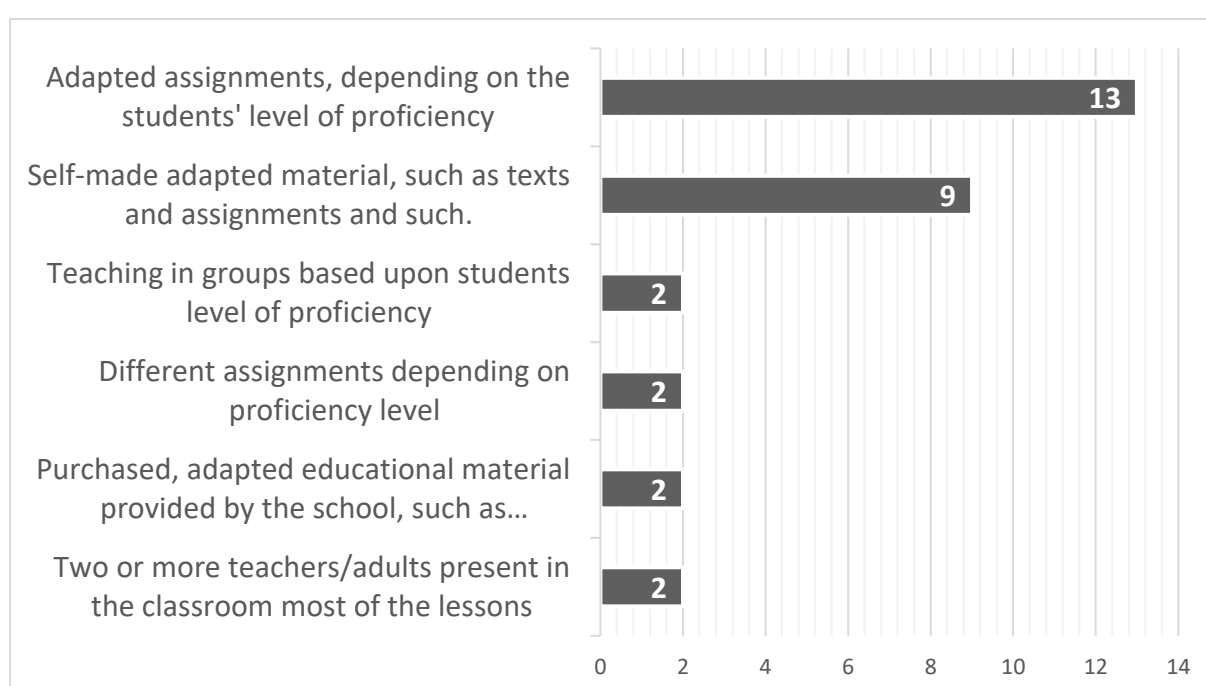


Figure 4.

Which adaption are you using the most in your year 6 class/classes?

5.3.2 Grouping

According to the survey, 13 respondents reported sometimes dividing the class into groups, but only 7 claim it to be the most commonly used adaptation. When asked how the groups are composed, the most frequent answer (14) was that the group is formed based on the students' abilities to cooperate and work efficiently together, regardless of proficiency level. The second most frequent answer is that groups are formed because the students' proficiencies are at the same level. Six of the respondents report grouping students with similar proficiency levels. Three respondents state that they compose groups of students with different

proficiency levels, whereas two prefer choosing students randomly or working with pre-assigned groups that work together regardless of school subject. Another option was used by one respondent who let the students choose the team members. Respondents also reported using additional training and the possibility of attending a "study room" outside of lesson hours for students with lower proficiency levels. Another respondent said that, depending on the assignment, any of the options could be used, see Fig 5.



Figure 5.

How are the groups most often formed?

The answers differed when the respondents were asked how the lessons were carried out when working in groups, as shown in Fig. 6. Approximately half of the respondents, 15 out of 29, supervised all the groups in the same classroom simultaneously. The approach of letting one or more groups leave the classroom to work primarily on their own was used by five respondents, and another 5 supervised all the groups in different rooms simultaneously. A special education teacher or a second teacher was reported present to assist during the lesson, mainly in another room in three cases or in the same room in one case.

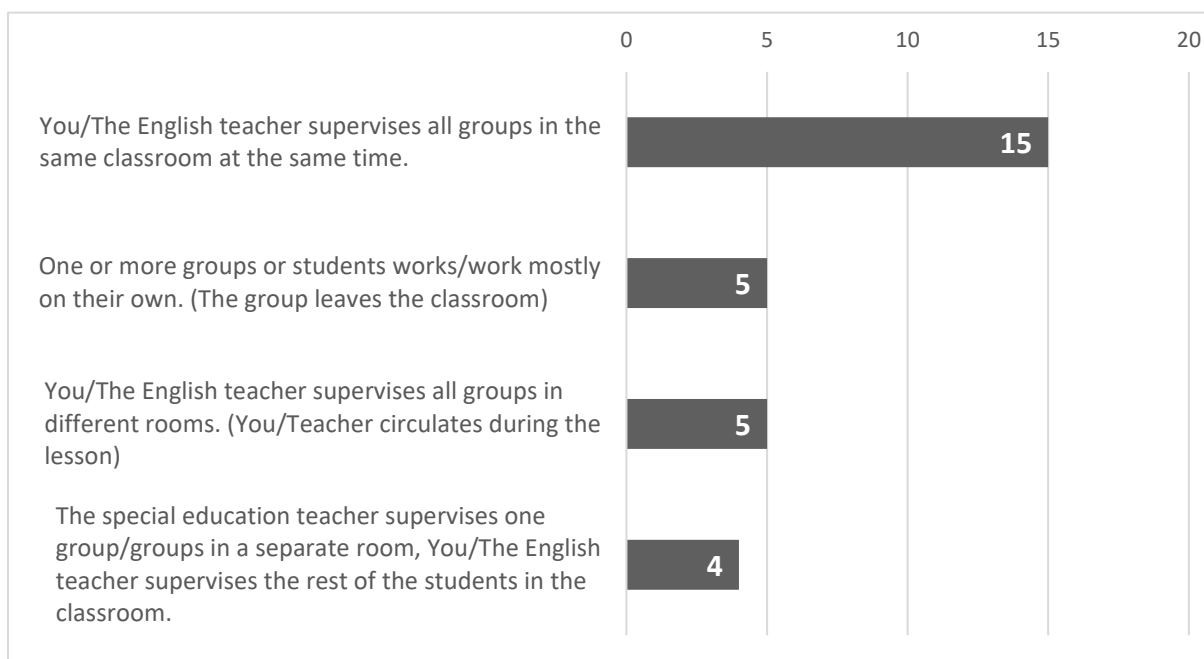


Figure 6

If your English class is divided into groups of students working together sometimes, how is the lesson most often carried out?

5.4 Planning and Preparations

Regarding planning and preparations for English teaching in year 6, 14 respondents replied that they mostly had sufficient time to plan and prepare the lessons, content, and material. Conversely, ten say they rarely have enough time, and five respondents claim they do not have enough time to plan and prepare their lessons. Out of the 29 participants, a substantial majority, 24 declare being singlehandedly responsible for most of the planning and preparation of the course content and the adaptations made for the students in class. Three of the participants report having assistance from special education teachers when planning and preparing, and in two cases, all the English teachers are planning and preparing the content and educational material together.

According to 14 participants, it takes more effort to meet the needs of students with a lower level of knowledge. Nonetheless, the remaining 15 believed it takes the same or more effort to meet the needs of students with higher proficiency levels, as shown in Fig 7.

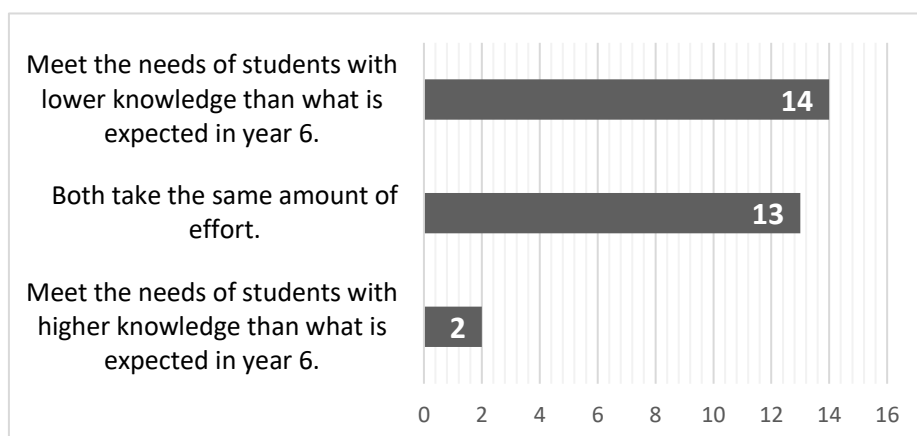


Figure 7.

What takes the most amount of effort, according to you?

Are the respondents able to meet the needs of the students? The study shows that 17 of the 29 respondents stated that they are not being sufficiently able to meet the needs of their students. Out of the 17, one participant claimed not to be able to meet the needs at all. The remaining 12 participants stated they could meet their students' needs well enough. None of the respondents reported being completely able to meet the needs in the classroom, as shown in Fig. 8.

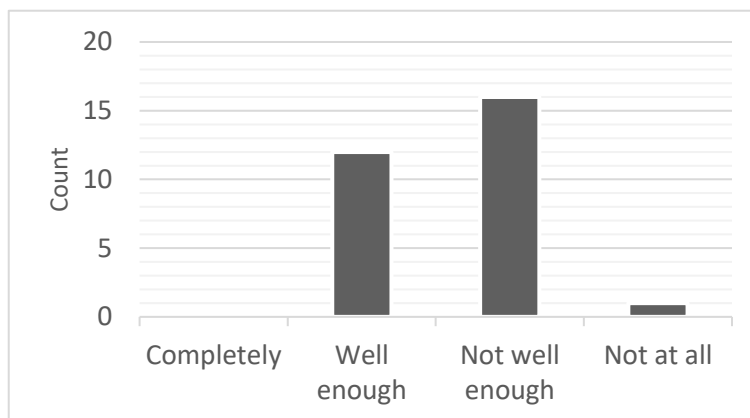


Figure 8.

To what extent do you, as an English teacher in your current situation, feel that you have the possibility to meet all the different needs of your students and make them develop their proficiency accordingly?

5.5 Additional Needs

When the respondents were asked about their needs for additional resources, the most frequent answer was the need for more time for preparation and planning, an option chosen 18 times. The second most frequent answer was to have more teachers present in class, selected by 17 participants, followed by having classes with fewer students, chosen by 16 participants.

The possibility of having more help to adapt existing educational material to suit the needs of the students was selected 14 times. Out of the 29 participants, seven wished for other educational material, but only four respondents reported a wish for more digital educational resources. There were four possible choices for the number of lessons a week or the length of the English lessons: "longer lessons", "shorter lessons", "1-2 longer lessons per week", and "three or more shorter lessons a week". Twelve respondents wished for three or more shorter lessons per week or shorter lessons. Contrary to this, seven respondents wished for "1-2 longer lessons per week" or "longer lessons". Other options added by the respondents were: "[m]ore money to buy extra materials, "[m]ore time for grading and feedback.", and "maybe even groups divided into interests- and skill levels. The results are shown in Fig. 9

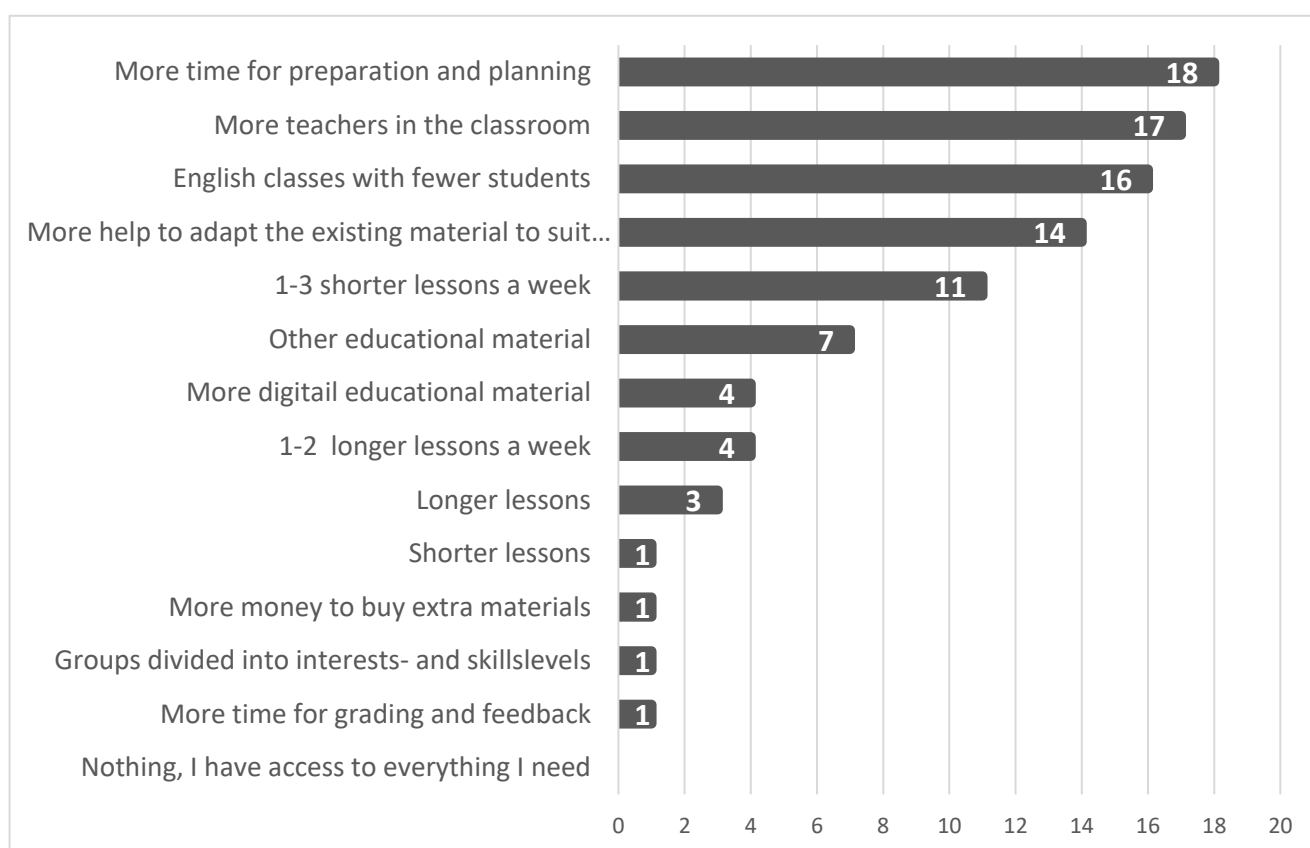


Figure 9.

What would you like to have?

The participants were asked to prioritise one choice from the list of additional resources to fulfil the obligation as a teacher and meet the needs of the students, as shown in Fig. 10. The most prioritised answer was to have English classes with fewer students. Out of the 29 participants, 11 of them prioritised that option. The second most chosen option by nine respondents was having more teachers in the classroom. The option to have more help to adapt the existing material was selected by three respondents. Having more time for preparations and planning was prioritised by two respondents, the same amount that prioritised other educational material. One of the respondents chose the option to have more digital material. Only one respondent decided to add a supplementary reply and replied, "[t]o continue having the class divided into two groups according to their level of English".

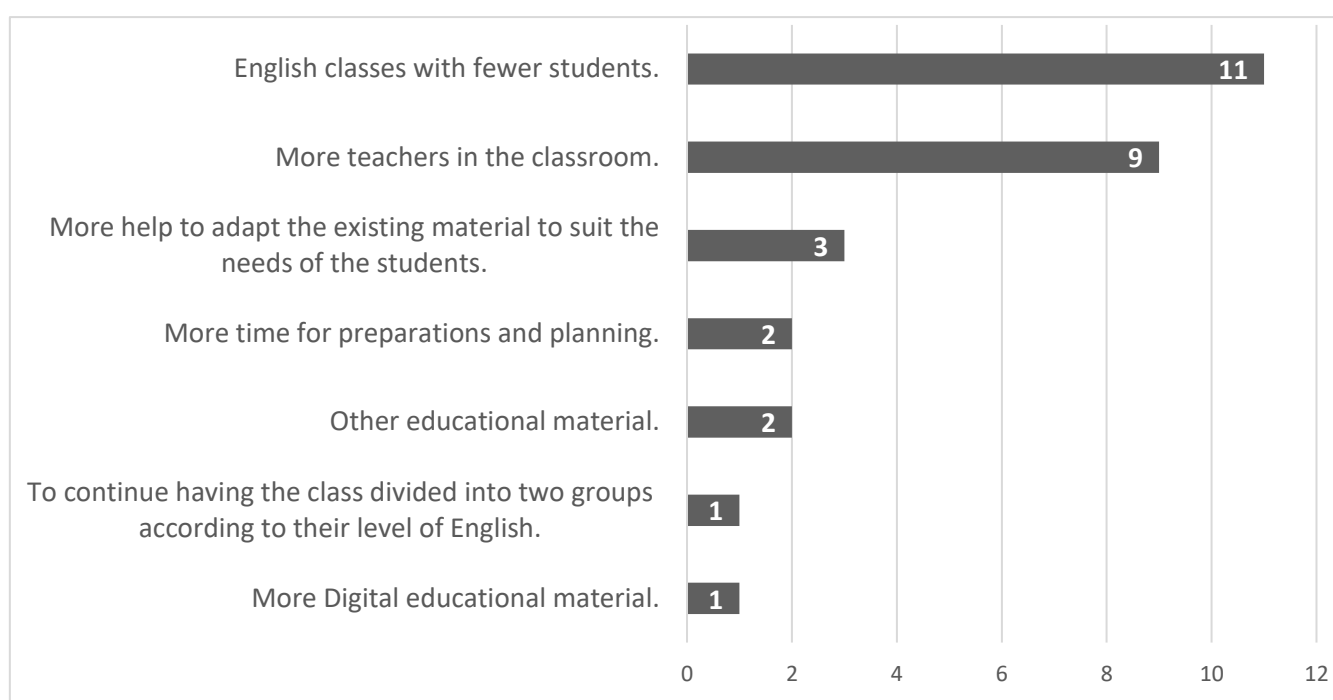


Figure 10.

Which of the choices [you would like to have] is your highest priority?

In addition to the given options above, the respondents were asked if there was anything else that could be done to meet the needs of their English year six students. The question was optional, with a free text answer, hence a collection of various forms of replies.

Eight respondents requested additional teachers in the classroom, 4 of whom explicitly wished for support from the Special Education Team. Furthermore, four respondents requested smaller classes or groups. In one case, the participant wished for additional group activity rooms. Three participants asked explicitly for other financial resources to purchase

adapted educational books and materials to meet the specific needs of their class. Having more scheduled lessons was requested by 2 of the respondents.

Furthermore, a request for additional time for planning and a wish for more content and language integrated learning (CLIL) possibilities were made by one respondent. Another participant wished to include the students more often in the planning, intending to find interesting and motivating course content. Ten of the respondents chose not to answer the question.

Another question regarded the need for additional educational material. The respondents were asked what type of material they wished for. Ten of the respondents claimed not to need any other educational material. Conversely, the remaining 19 respondents wished for supplementary material, shown below as an abbreviated list in alphabetical order.

- Additional digital resources for listening, reading, and listening exercises
- Better grammar instructions
- Better instructions
- Books to enable content and language integrated learning (CLIL) in English
- Digital educational material
- Educational material for ESL students with dyslexia
- Educational material for students with higher levels of knowledge
- Educational material for students with lower levels of knowledge
- Material for Basic English
- More textbooks
- Phonics resources adapted for ESL and older pupils
- Resources for skill training
- Resources for speaking exercises
- Something like Readtheory but for listening
- Textbooks and educational material with other explanatory languages than Swedish
- Textbooks available on different levels

5.6 Development of Students' Proficiency

The respondents were asked to share their thoughts about the development of their students' proficiency in English over time. Twenty-one respondents claimed that the students' proficiencies in year six had increased over their teaching time. Seven believed that the proficiency stayed at the same level. However, the remaining respondent believed it to have declined over time, as presented in Fig. 11

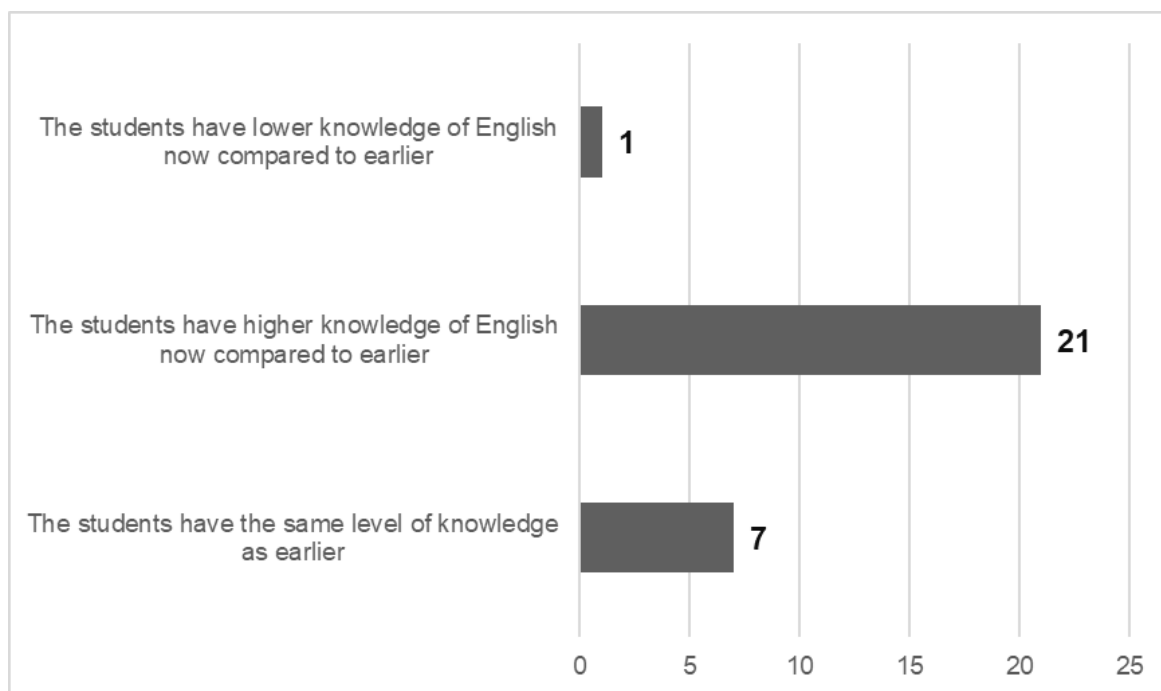


Figure 11

In your opinion, how has the proficiency of the students in year 6 developed during the years that you have taught English in year 6.

The respondents were asked to reflect upon which areas of proficiency they believe have developed the most through a free text answer. According to the respondents, the increased level of knowledge is primarily found in the areas of speaking/pronunciation; 15 of the 29 participants reported that their oral proficiency has improved, as stated by one of the respondents, e.g.

Resp. 8 - The oral proficiency has developed more than e.g., writing proficiency. I think the reason why the oral proficiency is stronger is because the students today are playing online games a lot these days, making oral communication a normal thing for them.

Another frequent reply concerns listening comprehension skills, reported by ten respondents and reading skills registered as an improved area by five respondents. Only two of the

partakers claimed that the student's writing skills have improved; on the other hand, five reported that all of the mentioned focus areas have improved. Some of the respondents continued their reflection by also observing the areas that, in their belief, are declining. The student's writing skills are mentioned explicitly two times, but reading and speaking skills are also noted to be falling, as shown in the following answers.

Resp. 11 - The pronunciation is often better now. Writing according to rules, like a capital I (jag) is worse. I also experience that the difference between the best students and those with problems is bigger nowadays

Resp. 28 - Listening and speaking has definitely improved and developed, while reading and writing have deteriorated.

The most frequent reason for the improved areas is the students' use of internet resources such as YouTube, video games and streaming services. In addition, the increased exposure to English is mentioned.

Resp. 18 - Students hear English all the time. Computer games can sometimes be a good thing.

Resp. 27 - Exposure to English both at home and during lessons.

Contrarywise this, the students' reading and writing skills are, according to more than a few respondents, weakened due to the deficiency of reading books, relying on computers, and thus, not using "pens and papers" as much as before. One respondent is mentioning speaking.

Resp. 1 - People in general don't read that much nowadays.

Resp. 14 - Students read less in general.

Resp. 28 - Our use of social medias focuses on speaking and listening. We are/wants to be increasing digital input in the school, while our brains by no means have the same executive functions as a computer, but rather need the "hands on" assignments by writing with pencil, feeling the movement of forming the words, "righting our wrongs" practically, giving the brain time to learn.

Other reasons for the changes mentioned are that students seem to work harder, e.g., more training and hard work. One respondent claimed that the students are lazier and not putting the same effort into their work nowadays. Lastly, one of the respondents who mentioned speaking skills as on the decline states that the students are less comfortable using English in the classroom since they are more and more afraid of being judged by others, which could be a reason for not being as proficient in speaking.

5.7 Added Comments

The respondents were finally asked if they wanted to add something; 3 of the partakers took the opportunity to express additional comments regarding their teaching in year six, which are presented below.

Resp. 3 - Swedish schools have to increase English lessons (minutes) in earlier years.

Resp. 5 - My greatest difficulty is to give the students on lower levels of proficiency a belief in themselves and their abilities since they always compare themselves with students who know a lot more English.

Resp. 11 - It is most often a pleasure to teach English since the students can see the benefits of good English skills. They like the subject and they do well.

6 Discussion

The necessity to adapt their teaching to meet the student's needs is undisputed and confirms the reviewed previous studies (Lundström, 2017; Svärd, 2006; Al-Subaiei, 2017). The reason for it differs, from meeting the needs of lower proficient students to meeting the needs of higher proficient students in equal parts. A few respondents claimed that the main reason for adapting teaching is the obligations that pertain to the teaching profession and the Swedish curriculum. Others referred to meeting the students' needs and developing the students' knowledge according to their level of proficiency. In accordance with John Hattie's (2009, 2012) successful strategies for teaching, the teachers aim to motivate the students and make their education interesting, meaningful and even challenging.

Furthermore, Hattie describes the teachers' expectancy of the students' performances and abilities as one of the most important influencing factors for learning. (2009, 2012). Interestingly, a few respondents referred to their personal wish for students to succeed, which can be evidence of a teacher's personal dedication and interest in the development of their students (Hattie, 2009, 2012).

It is common amongst the respondents to group their students during lessons. The students are grouped mainly by their ability to collaborate rather than by their level of proficiency; only three of the teachers report grouping according to Vygotsky's theory of learning by the help of others (Strandberg, 2006). Understandably, collaboration is essential when teaching since the teacher wants the group to work efficiently. Gathering students with the same level of proficiency is often seen as an 'easy-to-handle' option since all the students in the group can work with the same assignment at the same level (Al-Subaiei, 2017; Ansari, 2013; Bell, 2001). It is plausible that teachers often choose this solution as an easy way out and because it takes more effort to exit the comfort zone and try new methods. However, the

question of the optimal choice of arrangement made is yet to be answered. Would the students develop their knowledge further if they were grouped differently? Gaitas and Martins (2016) argue that one of the most challenging tasks, according to teachers in multi-level classes, is to provide optimal matches between the needs of the students to ensure that instructions and activities are individualised and suitable for each student. According to Vygotsky's theory, ZPD, gathering different proficiency levels in the same group has benefits (Strandberg, 2006; Ansari, 2013). To succeed in a multi-level grouping, teachers must be prepared to try new methods, which can be complex and challenging. An interesting topic for further research would be to investigate teachers' and students' opinions of the benefits of different grouping strategies, e.g., students with similar or differing proficiency levels.

Conversely to Gaitas and Martin's (2016) results, surprisingly few respondents report that they need other educational material than what exists today, even though they wish for supplementary material. Additional listening and speaking resources and educational material for different proficiency levels to facilitate teaching with higher and lower proficiencies are worth mentioning. Learning is triggered by motivation, and motivation is created when the subject taught is interesting, relevant, and challenging - yet manageable for the student (Lightbown & Spada, 2013). Being given the possibility to work with the same material/content as your peers but having the possibility to perform it on a different level might motivate and encourage students. Students can also be prompted to learn by the teachers' expectancies and trust in their abilities (Hattie, 2009). Al-Subaiei (2017) supports this vision saying, "teachers that have a positive attitude towards student diversity in terms of students' abilities are more successful in teaching mixed-ability classes" (2017, p. 186).

Another request is for material with other explanatory languages than Swedish to meet the needs of students with other mother tongues. Comprehensibly, the challenge consists in learning a third or fourth language through a language that is not your mother tongue, a reality for most schools in Sweden. Of all students in Swedish compulsory schools in 2021/2022, more than 28% are entitled to home language instruction (Sveriges Officiella Statistik, 2022), which implies another mother tongue than Swedish. Consequently, textbook publishers need to work with various explanatory languages to fulfil this request.

The amount of effort needed to meet students at their level can be hard to estimate since there are many ways of measuring effort. It is still interesting that almost half of the respondents report that it takes the same amount of effort or more to meet the needs of the higher-performing students as it takes to meet the needs of the lower-performing ones. It would be interesting to examine what methods are used exceptionally for high-performing

and low-performing students, respectively. As the results show in this study, the respondents claim to use seven of the eight proposed methods in the survey, but it is unknown which methods are targeted explicitly to which of the two groups. A further investigation might result in a deeper understanding and more detailed mapping of efficient teaching methods for each group, which would facilitate the task of motivating the students to continue even further in their learning.

Adapting the assignments given to the students is by far the most frequently used method. As discussed previously, adapting and implementing differentiation in both lessons and preparing content and material for each student takes more planning and time (Gaitas & Martins, 2016; Lundström, 2017; Svärd, 2006). A majority of the partakers reported that they singlehandedly adapt and prepare lessons, content and material to suit the students' needs and, thus, need more time for planning to fulfil their tasks. Accordingly, most of the respondents feel they cannot meet the different needs of the students. Surprisingly, very few partakers prioritise more time for planning when asked about their need for supplementary resources. A collaboration between English teachers and special education teachers in the same school, nearby schools, or schools in the same municipality might ease this burden. Cooperation between teachers and schools might be favourable for planning and preparations and for many other aspects such as sharing teaching methods, joint assessment and grading. Since findings from previous studies (Al-Subaiei, 2017; Lundström, 2017; Gaitas & Martins, 2016; Al-Shammakhi & Al Humaidi, 2015) revealed that further training or education for teachers might be necessary to implement efficient teaching methods for multi-level classes, a possibility to observe and share both methods, strategies and experiences between teachers could be beneficial.

Respondents prioritise having smaller classes or more teachers in the classroom. It is plausible to assume that having fewer students in class is easier and more manageable. Teaching smaller classes or involving more teachers in the classroom will give each student more teacher attendance, but it will also convey an economic strain that often hinders the presence of more than one teacher.

Most of the respondents find that Swedish students have improved their knowledge of English over time; nonetheless, the majority report that the increased proficiency is mainly shown in speaking and in listening comprehension exercises. The reason is believed to be the Internet, streaming services, and gaming habits, where students use English habitually. Movies, TV shows and series are rarely dubbed in Sweden but broadcasted in the original language, most often English, with or without subtitles. Furthermore, cell phones, tablets and

computers with internet access have increased dramatically in the last ten years, and the English language is present in many of the applications used by 9-12-year-olds today.

On the other hand, the survey shows that the participants believe that students' writing and reading skills have not followed the same positive course of development. The Swedish Media Council supports this belief by stating that daily reading among children between 9 to 12 has decreased from 31% in 2012 to 21% in 2020 (Statens medieråd, 2021, p. 26). According to Swedish researcher Schmidt (2013), the students in her research about literacy amongst nine Swedish ten-year-olds had more and easier access to online reading of various sources than to books. They also showed a certain resistance towards reading and did not see reading as meaningful. Schmidt states that the students were not recalling or referring to their reading experiences as meaningful or memorable but that their online activities' attraction and appeal were much stronger, providing greater satisfaction and more memorable experiences (2013). Schmidt continues by stating that to create a meaningful education around reading; teachers need to support and assist children in analysing, interpreting, and discussing texts regardless of source or nature (Schmidt, 2013). Involving students in planning and preparing content and material might also enhance their motivation and further improve their reading and writing skills.

7 Conclusions

This study is not representative of all English teachers in Sweden but is merely limited to illustrating the thoughts and opinions of the 29 respondents. It aims to indicate to what extent and what methods some English teachers in Swedish Compulsory school, year six, use to adapt their teaching to meet the needs of students and develop their English proficiency according to the Swedish Curriculum, (Skolverket, 2018).

All respondents must adapt their teaching by various methods to meet the different proficiency levels; nonetheless, few feel they are entirely successful. The question arises if the gap between the higher-performing students and the lower-performing ones is too wide to handle for one single teacher. The wish for smaller classes, more teachers or special education teachers to be present in the classroom is frequent and could point to the feeling of not being able to do enough for each student. However, such a wish brings the necessity to engage more personnel, which is hard to fulfil due to budgetary reasons, hence the search for other more easily applicable methods.

Grouping students is common but is the purpose of grouping to facilitate teaching or enhance students' learning? It might be favourable to analyse the reasons for grouping and look into the possible benefices of grouping students differently. By reason of potential pedagogical advantages, we might need to reconsider and face the more demanding strategies to enhance, e.g., reciprocal learning.

I believe that teachers want to be able to reach all students, and we are advised to awaken students' interest, motivation, and inspiration without relinquishing the curriculum and create a meaningful and productive relationship. Are methodology and content keys to meeting all needs and enabling the students to continue their learning path even further, regardless of proficiency level? We live and operate in a modern, increasingly digitalised world, where children from early ages are used to online access, updated information, and an unlimited number of activities in various languages via a world of specialised forums. They find immediate answers and instant satisfaction through digital devices, which understandably is a real challenge for teachers to compete with in our aim to create motivation and interest in learning. To achieve this, we might have to scrutinise existing educational material and content to meet the students in their fields of interest, turn to ourselves as teachers, and be prepared to revise our, sometimes orthodox, methods and change our ways.

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Appendix

Appendix 1:

Survey questions, *multiple choices in cursive:*

1. For how many years have you been teaching English in year 6?
2. In which school/schools are you currently teaching English in year 6?
 - *Public school*
 - *Private school*
3. How many students in year 6 are you currently teaching English?
4. Is there a need to adapt the education in any way to meet the individual needs of students in your current English class/classes in year 6?
 - *Yes/No*
5. How often are you adapting the English education in your current class/classes to meet the students' level of knowledge?
 - *All the time*
 - *Most of the time*
 - *Rarely*
 - *Never*
6. How many students in your classes are in need of adapted English education due to diagnosed learning, mental, emotional, or physical disability?
7. How many students in your year 6 classes are in need of adapted education because of a lower level of knowledge in English?
8. How many students in your year 6 classes are in need of adapted education because of a higher knowledge in English?
9. In what way/ways is the education in your English class/classes adapted today?
 - *It is not adapted, all students work with the same content, material, texts, books and assignments.*
 - *Two or more teachers/adults present in the classroom most of the lessons*
 - *A special teacher present in the classroom most of the lessons*
 - *A teacher is helping online*
 - *Purchased, adapted educational material provided by the school, such as textbooks, workbooks and assignments.*
 - *Self-made adapted material, such as texts and assignments and such.*
 - *Adapted assignments, depending on the students' level of proficiency*
 - *Different assignments depending on proficiency level*

- *Teaching in groups based upon students' level of proficiency*
- *Other:*

10. Which adaption are you using the most in your year 6 class/classes

- *It is not adapted, all students work with the same content, material, texts, books and assignments.*
- *Two or more teachers/adults present in the classroom most of the lessons*
- *A special teacher present in classroom most of the lessons*
- *A teacher is helping online*
- *Purchased, adapted educational material provided by the school, such as textbooks, workbooks and assignments.*
- *Self-made adapted material, such as texts and assignments and such.*
- *Adapted assignments, depending on the students' level of proficiency*
- *Different assignments depending on proficiency level*
- *Teaching in groups based upon students' level of proficiency*
- *Other:*

11. Are there other adaptations made in your English year 6 classes? If yes which ones?

12. In your opinion, what is the main reason to adapt the education in your class/classes?

13. If your English class is divided in groups of students working together sometimes, how is the lesson most often carried out?

- *You/The English teacher supervises all groups in the same classroom at the same time.*
- *One or more groups or students works/work mostly on their own. (The group leaves the classroom)*
- *The special education teacher supervises one group/groups in a separate room, you/the English teacher supervises the rest of the students in the classroom.*
- *You/The English teacher supervises all groups in different rooms. (You/Teacher circulates during the lesson)*
- *Other:*

14. How are the groups most often formed?

- *Same level of proficiency, members have similar levels.*
- *Mixed levels of proficiency in each group, members have different levels.*
- *Teacher forms groups based on efficient collaboration between members.*
- *Pre-assigned groups: members often work together regardless of school subject.*
- *Teacher forms groups based on students' social ties (friendship)*
- *Students' choice: members choose who they work with.*
- *Random choice: teacher chooses members randomly.*
- *Members chosen by lots.*
- *Other:*

15. Who is mostly planning and preparing the adaptations made for the lesson/course content and the material to meet the needs of the students in your English year 6 class/es?

- *No adaptations are made.*
- *All the English teachers together.*
- *The special education teachers.*
- *You/The English teacher responsible for the English class.*
- *You/The English teacher, together with the special education teacher.*
- *Other:*

16. To what extent do you, as an English teacher in your current situation, feel that you have the possibility to meet all the different needs of your students and make them develop their proficiency accordingly?

- *Completely*
- *Well enough*
- *Not well enough*
- *Not at all*

17. Do you have sufficient time for planning your teaching in year 6?

- *Yes, absolutely*
- *Yes, mostly*
- *Rarely*
- *No, not at all*

18. What else, in your opinion, could be done to meet the needs of your English year 6 students?

19. What you like to have?

- *Nothing, I have access to everything I need.*
- *More time for preparations and planning.*
- *English classes with fewer pupils.*
- *Other educational material.*
- *More teachers in the classroom.*
- *More help to adapt the existing material to suit the needs of the students.*
- *More Digital educational material.*
- *Longer lessons.*
- *Shorter lessons.*
- *1-2 longer lessons a week.*
- *Other*

20. Which of the choices is your highest priority?

- *Nothing, I have access to everything I need.*
- *More time for preparations and planning.*
- *English classes with fewer pupils.*
- *Other educational material.*
- *More teachers in the classroom.*
- *More help to adapt the existing material to suit the needs of the students.*
- *More Digital educational material.*
- *Longer lessons.*
- *Shorter lessons.*

- *1-2 longer lessons a week.*
- *Other*

21. Are you missing any type of educational material that doesn't exist at this moment? If yes, please develop your answer. (What type of material would you like to have.)

22. What takes more effort of you as a teacher in year 6, in your opinion?

- *Meet the needs of the students with higher levels of knowledge than what is expected in year 6*
- *Meet the needs of the students with lower knowledge than what is expected in year 6*
- *Both take the same amount of effort.*

23. In your opinion, how has the proficiency of the students in year 6 developed during the years that you have taught English in year 6?

- *The students have a lower knowledge of English now compared to earlier.*
- *The students have a higher knowledge of English now compared to earlier.*
- *The students have the same level of knowledge as earlier.*

24. Are there certain areas of proficiency that have developed less or more? If yes, please explain which ones and how those areas have developed, according to you.

25. What, in your opinion might be the reason for the answer above?

26. Is there anything that you would like to add?