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Leadership in digitalisation: A practice-oriented approach for expanding access and application of digital technologies in K–12 education

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Abstract

This thesis aims to identify, describe, and analyse practices in school organisers' and school leaders' collaborative efforts to expand access to and application of digital technologies in K–12 education from a leadership perspective. A practice-oriented approach has been used to analyse practices for expanding this access and application.-This approach facilitates a deeper understanding of the actual occurrences in municipalities when it comes to the expansion of digital technologies in their schools. The thesis employs the theory of practice architecture as an analytical tool to investigate the expansion of digital technologies in K–12 education from leaders' perspectives. The research took place in three Swedish municipalities. The data comes from document analysis, participant observations, interviews, and surveys. The thesis comprises four articles, each contributing valuable insights into digitalisation in K–12 education, with the first two focussing on the perspectives of school organisers and school leaders, the third emphasising the expansion of digital technologies, and the last exploring the perceptions of school organisers and school leaders regarding the expansion of digital technologies in K–12 education. School organisers underlined the importance of schools gaining access to digital technologies that are not only usable but also well suited for their intended purposes. At the same time, school leaders explained that the misapplication of digital technologies in K–12 education may generate negative effects. For example, nonuser-friendly interfaces in software may increase users' workloads and reduce teachers' motivation to use digital technologies in teaching due to a lack of support and digital competence. The school leaders highlighted that their collaboration with the school organiser and IT department has been successful in recent years. At the same time, they pointed out that the reduced number of staff at strategic and operational levels has created challenges in maintaining a productive dialogue with school organisers, consequently impacting digitalisation in schools. School organisers highlighted that leadership for expanding digital technologies in K–12 education should include a complete understanding of what digitalisation entails, which is vital to digital expansion and enhancing teaching quality. At the same time, they pointed out that school leaders need to prioritise their time and that digitalisation leadership training might not be the highest prioritisation in K–12 education. The results have implications for K–12 education leaders striving to expand digital technologies in their schools.

Keywords: Collaboration, digitalisation, digital competence, digital technology, K–12 education, leader, leadership, practice, schools.