

EFL TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS AND PERSPECTIVES ON THE USE OF THE INTERNET IN THE TEACHING PROCESS AT YARMOUK UNIVERSITY IN JORDAN

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Abstract

Although today the Internet use in EFL learning has brought great advantages to students, resistance to employ such technology in classrooms by many EFL teachers remain high. This study examined EFL teachers' perspectives and perceptions towards Internet-based EFL instruction at the language center at Yarmouk university. Data was collected using a questionnaire which includes : participants' background information; a four-point Likert scale to measure the participants' perspectives and perceptions towards using the Internet in the classroom; and open-ended questions to gather richer data on the participants' beliefs, attitudes, willingness, and concerns towards the use of the Internet into EFL instruction. The findings of the present study indicated that most of the participants showed positive attitudes and willingness to integrate the Internet into the classroom. However, factors such as large classes, limited time to finish the textbooks, lack of training on the use of the Internet, and lack of facilities could be possible impediments to the use of the Internet in the classroom. Based on the findings, some suggestions and recommendations were provided.

Keywords: Teachers' perspectives and perceptions, EFL (English as a foreign language), integration.

1.Introduction

The information age is moving and rapidly progressing and teachers will have to prepare and equip themselves with the relevant knowledge and skills in the information technology-related area. Teachers today have access to the Internet and are beginning to recognize it as a useful tool in the teaching and learning process. Yarmouk university is really

concerned about improving the ability of the young generation to use English effectively. To realize the university's aspirations, teachers' motivations and attitudes as well as the various problems that EFL teachers face in using the Internet must be all taken into consideration.

There is an extensive literature discussing the value of the internet in education in general and for second language teaching and learning in particular (e.g., Macdonald et al. 2001, Hill et al., 2005, Lewis, 1999). Researchers have drawn attention to a number of factors that could make the internet a very important tool for second language teaching and learning. Firstly, research has found that using the internet in the second language classroom can increase students' motivation. For example, Warschauer (1996) found that students think computers can help them learn better, faster, write more creatively and more independently. He also found that communicating with others could enhance motivation and personal power, overcome isolation and make communication less threatening.

Secondly, Godwin-Jones (2003) and Salaberry (2001) argue that the internet offers the potential for a huge increase in learner-learner and learner-teacher interactions. According to Luan et al. (2005), teachers and students who use the internet are not bound by traditional modes of learning; their interactions with one another are immediate, prompt and widely shared.

Thirdly, the collaborative nature of learning is increasingly important in education and the internet provides rich opportunities for interaction with other people, reciprocal exchanges of support and ideas, joint work on the development of performances and products, and co-construction of understandings through comparing alternative ideas and interpretations (Lock & Redmond, 2006). On-line collaboration can enhance learners' understanding and keep students more engaged (Suh, 2005), help develop critical thinking skills by exposing individuals to different perspectives (Lock & Redmond, 2006) and provide a fertile environment for interactivity through games and quizzes (Bork, 2001).

Furthermore, the internet is a massive source of authentic materials (Brandl, 2002, Gonzalez-Lloret, 2003). According to Bell (2005), on-line newspapers and podcasts are culturally richer than regular materials, more likely to reflect the complexities of real-life language and potentially more interesting for learners. However, careful attention needs to be paid to the selection of internet materials to weed out those poor in quality and linguistically inappropriate (Murray, 2005).

A further benefit is that internet communication allows us to communicate with people all over the world, synchronously using text and audio chat programmes or asynchronously using e-mail, discussion boards, and blogs (Shetzer&Warschauer, 2000). The

archived format allows us to record, reflect on, and refine our previous words as well as those we communicate with, thereby enhancing the accuracy and intelligibility of written and spoken communication (Greenfield, 2003, Jepson, 2005). It can also reduce social context clues related to race, gender, handicap, accent and status (Shetzer&Warschauer, 2000), allow individuals to contribute at their own time and pace (Hampel& Baber, 2003) and overall enhance students' interest and motivation for learning a second culture and a second language (Zeiss &Isabelli- Garcia, 2005, Shetzer&Warschauer, 2000).

Finally, technology is a strong catalyst for educational innovation, especially when the internet is involved (Venezky, 2004). Coppola (2004) argues that technology is vital to the educational reform process.

As to why teachers resist new technology, like the internet, Alexiou-Ray et al. (2003) suggest it is mainly due to their discomfort with the unknown. Madden et al. (2005) relate this discomfort to the superior internet skills of many students, coupled with the extra effort of classroom management. Shin & Son (2007) suggest, though, that teachers may have positive attitudes towards use of the internet for teaching EFL, but face difficulties in finding appropriate teaching materials and in integrating them into their curriculum. While it does not require a lot of effort or time to collect an enormous quantity of materials from the internet, the scale and diversity of the information available, the general lack of bibliographical control, and concerns with a lack of authenticity and reliability, mean that using these resources for teaching is problematic, which can be a significant de-motivating factor for anyone who wishes to locate teaching material quickly and to evaluate whether it is relevant and in a suitable format (Newton et al., 1998, Macdonald et al., 2001). Alexiou-Ray et al. (2003) comment on the same issue when they stress teachers' concern with the abundance of inappropriate and unreliable material available on-line, while Madden et al. (2005) remark that teachers doubt their students' ability to discriminate between reliable and unreliable websites. In a study to investigate teachers' perceptions of the dangers of the internet in education, Hope (2004) identifies three kinds of unsuitable on-line material, namely, pornographic images, hate-sites and websites encouraging experimentation with drugs or explosives. In addition, teachers have expressed anxiety towards copyright violations and the consequences for them personally or for their institution (Oliver et al., 1998).

Many researchers (e.g. Wood et al. 2005) stress limited availability of equipment and internet access as a potential barrier to the integration of the internet into classroom settings. Gibson & Oberg (2004) identify the challenges of financing and putting in place the hardware and connections necessary to provide and maintain internet access in schools as key potential

barriers. Studies of the Thai (Yutdhana, 2004) and Korean (Shin & Son, 2007) contexts found that inadequate infrastructure, especially low availability of computers, poor internet access, and poor quality network connections were major barriers to using internet applications in education. Insufficient time is regarded by many researchers (Wood, et al., 2005; Gibson & Oberg, 2004; Vrasidas & Glass, 2005) as a further potentially major obstacle for teachers in integrating new technologies such as the internet

2. The study background

The language center was established in 1979 and is one of the largest centers in Yarmouk university. Every semester the center serves nearly six thousands students from various disciplines with the aim to improve the performance of students in the basic English skills. The center teaches three courses in the English language which are compulsory for the undergraduate level. All exams for the university compulsory courses are computerized to ensure rapid feedback and strict neutrality in the measurement of student performance and evaluation of their achievement.

3. Purpose of the study

This study aims at answering the following questions:

1. What are EFL teachers' perceptions and perspectives on the use of the Internet in the classroom at the language center at Yarmouk university in Jordan?
2. How do EFL teachers use the Internet for their teaching purposes?
3. What are the factors affecting the use of Internet in the classroom?

4. The study

The subjects in the study were 30 EFL teachers (17 females 56.7% and 13 males 43.3%). The age range of the respondents was from 26-60 with a mean age of 40. Their teaching experience ranged from less than 5 years to more than 25 years with a mean of 15 years. The study used a questionnaire to document EFL teachers' perceptions and perspectives on the use of the Internet for English language teaching purposes. The questionnaire (shin & son 2007) consisted of three sections: a demographic section to get the respondents' background information; a multiple-choice section to find their perceptions and perspectives on the use of the Internet using a four-point Likert scale of strongly disagree (1), disagree(2), agree(3), and strongly agree(4), and an open-ended question section to investigate their general opinions or comments on the use of the Internet for teaching

purposes in the classroom. It was distributed on all the thirty teachers of EFL at the Language center at Yarmouk university in Jordan. A total of 30 completed questionnaires had been returned within 3 weeks during the second semester of the 2011/2012 academic year. The data collected from the questionnaire were analyzed quantitatively and qualitatively.

5. Results

The results of the teachers' responses to section two of the questionnaire are given in table (1). The majority of teachers agreed that the Internet provides non-native speakers of English with a rich learning environment (93.3%) and Internet tools can be used for teaching purposes(83.4%). As regarding the question that students can improve their English skills through the use of the Internet, 80% of the teachers agreed. To the question of replacing the textbooks with Internet resources, 76.7% of the teachers agreed. As to the easiness to find ESL/EFL materials on the web, 76.7% of the teachers showed their agreement. However, The teachers gave strong positive responses to the usefulness of ESL/EFL websites (73.3%). Most of them also indicated that students could be motivated by the use of the Internet(73.3%) and could improve their language skills through the use of the Internet(80%). In addition, they generally agreed with the possibility of students' self-directed learning in the use of the Internet resources(73.4%) and the improvement of students' communication skills by e-mailing or chatting with native speakers of English on-line(73.3%).

Disagreement with some items was also found. 53.4% of the teachers disagree that they are responsible for the success of Internet-assisted English language teaching. Moreover, about 56.7% of the teachers did not feel competent to use Internet-based materials in the classroom and about 63.4% of the teachers indicated that they did not know how to integrate Internet resources into existing classroom curricula.

A large number of the teachers (80.0%) agreed with the need for Internet literacy training and (56.7%) revealed that they would like to use Internet-based materials and activities in their classrooms as much as possible.

Table (1) : Teachers Responses to the questionnaire items

Item	SD	D	A	SA	Mean	Std. Deviation
1. The Internet provides non-native speakers of English with a rich learning environment.	2(6.7%)	-	16(53.3%)	12(40.0%)	3.27	0.785
2. Internet tools can be used for teaching purposes.	3(10.0%)	2(6.7%)	17(56.7%)	8(26.7%)	3	0.871
3. Internet resources can replace textbooks.	2(6.7%)	5(16.7%)	12(40.0%)	11(36.7%)	2.2	0.925
4. It is easy to find ESL/EFL materials on the Web.	2(6.7%)	5(16.7%)	12(40.0%)	11(36.7%)	3.07	0.907
5. ESL/EFL Web sites are useful for teaching English.	3(10.0%)	5(16.7%)	16(53.3%)	6(20.0%)	3.07	0.868
6. Students can be motivated by the use of the Internet in the classroom.	3(10.0%)	5(16.7%)	16(53.3%)	6(20.0%)	2.83	0.874
7. Students can improve their English skills through the use of the Internet	4(13.3%)	2(6.7%)	16(53.3%)	8(26.7%)	2.93	0.944
8. Students can learn how to use Internet resources for learning English for themselves.	2(6.7%)	6(20.0%)	17(56.7%)	5(16.7%)	2.83	0.791
9. Students can improve communication skills by e-mailing or chatting with native speakers of English on-line.	3(10.0%)	5(16.7%)	13(43.3%)	9(30.0%)	2.93	0.944

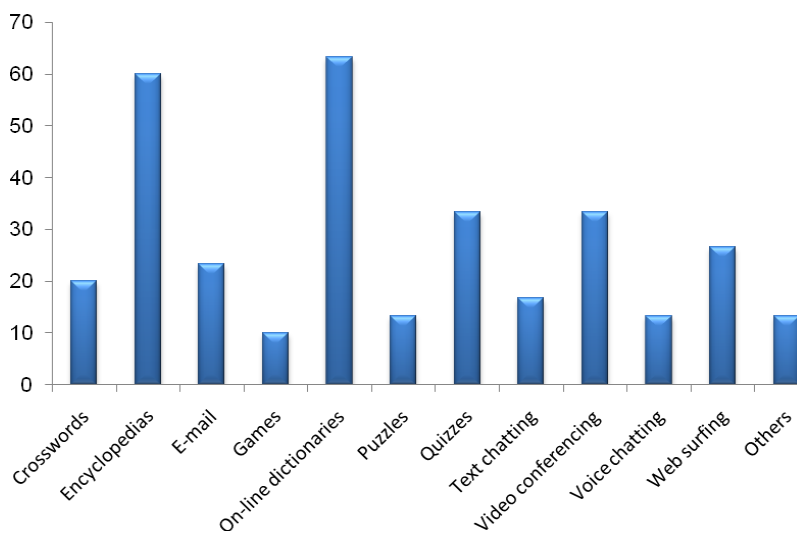
10. Students will be more attentive in Internet-assisted English language teaching classes.	2(6.7%)	8(26.7%)	16(53.3%)	4(13.3%)	2.73	0.785
11. I am responsible for the success of Internet-assisted English language teaching.	6(20.0%)	10(33.3%)	13(43.3%)	1(3.3%)	2.3	0.837
12. I am competent to use Internet-based materials in the classroom.	7(23.3%)	10(33.3%)	12(40.0%)	1(3.3%)	2.23	0.858
13. I know how to integrate Internet resources into existing classroom curricula.	10(33.3%)	9(30.0%)	10(33.3%)	1(3.3%)	2.07	0.907
14. I need training to improve my Internet literacy skills.	2(6.7%)	4(13.3%)	12(40.0%)	12(40.0%)	3.13	0.9
15. I would like to use Internet-based materials and activities in my classroom as much as possible.	4(13.3%)	9(30.0%)	14(46.7%)	3(10.0%)	2.53	0.86

SD- Strongly Disagree D-Disagree A-Agree SA-Strongly Agree

The results of the questionnaire indicate that the majority of the EFL teachers(93.3%) actually do not use the Internet in the classroom for their teaching purposes. About 3.3% of the teachers used the Internet once to twice a month inside the classroom. Many of the teachers(56.7%) used the Internet more for the preparation of teaching materials than directly with students. Of the 17 teachers who used the Internet for the preparation of their teaching materials, eight teachers used the Internet less than five hours a week.

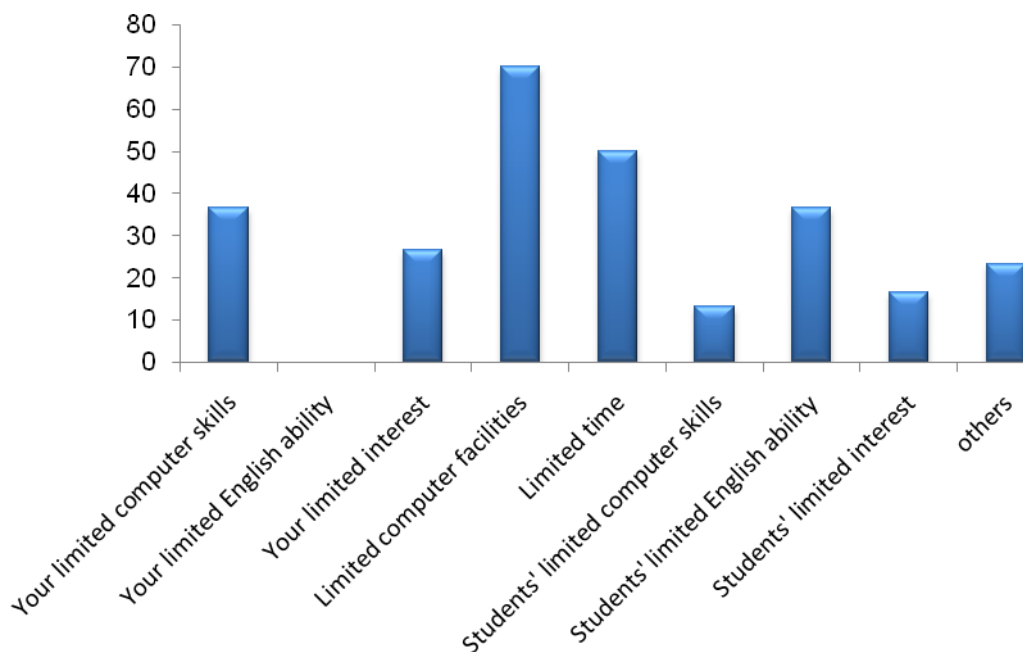
Teachers who did not use the Internet in the classroom wished to use more than one Internet activity in the classroom if they had Internet-assisted classes. They wished to use on-line dictionaries, encyclopedias, video conferencing with their students and quizzes.

Figure (1): Types of the Internet activities teachers wished to use in the classroom. (N=28)



The 28 non-users gave the reasons for not using the Internet in the classroom in the following order: limited computer facilities, limited time, students' limited English ability and teachers' limited computer skills, teachers' limited interest, students' limited interest, and students' limited computer skills. (see figure 2)

Figure(2): Reasons for preventing Internet use in the classroom .(N=28)



Seventeen teachers out of thirty used Internet resources to prepare their teaching materials because Internet resources were: up to date(14), easy to obtain(14), varied(13), authentic(12), easy to understand and free(8). On the other hand, the thirteen non-users reported that: they did not have interest in using it(8), internet resources were difficult to obtain(5), Internet resources were difficult to use with textbooks(4), not available(4), time-consuming and difficult to understand(2).

Only seven of the teachers indicated that they had participated in training courses to learn how to use the Internet for teaching purposes. Six of them were satisfied with the training courses. The 23 non-participants in training courses reported the reasons as: no courses available and no interest(9), lack of time(8), and cost(4).

In terms of professional development, about 43.3% of the non-participants showed their willingness to participate in training courses in the future.

Through the open-ended questions in the questionnaire, the teachers indicated some advantages of using the Internet in the classroom as follows: it provides authentic, varied, and up to date materials; it can improve some skills like reading, writing, and listening; it increases the students' motivation; it can make teaching and learning more interesting and fun; and students can learn at their own pace.

However, some of the teachers mentioned the disadvantages of using the Internet in the classroom. Their responses included: large classes at the language center makes it too difficult or even impossible to use the Internet in the classroom; students may misuse the Internet or be distracted; technical problems that may arise during the class; and finding appropriate teaching materials and integrating Internet resources into their classroom curricula.

Finally, the teachers made some comments on the use of the Internet in the classroom. These comments can be summarized as follows: it is difficult to apply because of large classes; teachers need intensive training courses to be able to integrate Internet resources into existing classroom curricula; students should bring lab-tops so teachers can direct them on certain useful sites; there are no facilities to serve this purpose; and very complicated and difficult to work with.

6. Discussion

EFL teachers at the language center at Yarmouk university reported a positive overall attitude towards the use of the Internet in the classroom. Of the thirty teachers, only two teachers used the Internet for students in the actual classroom while seventeen teachers used

it to prepare teaching materials but never used the Internet tools in their teaching. Non-Internet users did not seem interested to use the Internet but showed willingness to take in-service training courses if available. The teachers generally agreed that the Internet could be used for teaching purposes since it provides students with a rich learning environment and can improve their English skills. Teachers also considered the usefulness of ESL/EFL websites and believed that students could improve communication skills on the Internet.

Most teachers in the study believe that the Internet can be an effective tool for finding authentic, varied, and up-to date resources. However, They seem to have obstacles in using the Internet in the classroom which include: Limited computer facilities, limited class hours, limited technical support and large classes. Students may also visit irrelevant websites during the class which makes it difficult for the teacher to prevent this kind of behavior. Finding well-designed internet resources or materials can be also time-consuming or difficult to teachers.

56.7% of the teachers, in the responses of the teachers in section 2, would like to use Internet-based materials and activities in their classroom as much as possible. They expressed enthusiasm towards using it to facilitate classroom learning but also revealed their need to in-service training addressing technical and pedagogical needs to decrease levels of anxiety about Internet use. In order to sustain the teachers' willingness and enthusiasm in using the Internet, they need to be constantly trained so that they will have fruitful experiences in using the Internet.

7. Conclusion

This study found that, although the surveyed teachers have positive views on the use of the Internet for teaching EFL, their integration of the Internet into classroom teaching was very limited. The majority of the teachers showed some negative concerns regarding using the Internet in EFL teaching. These concerns result from: large numbers of students in the class, limited time to finish the textbooks, difficulty of managing and monitoring students who may be distracted and misuse the Internet, lack of technical and pedagogical training on the use of the Internet, and limited computer facilities.

To reduce such difficulties, teachers are required to develop Internet literacy and integration skills for themselves or through teacher training courses. In addition, integrating the Internet in EFL classrooms entails careful planning and continuous evaluation in order to achieve relevant curricular objectives.

The use of the technology in the classroom needs substantial investments of time, financial support, equipment, personal commitment and courage in order to explore teaching innovation in the EFL classrooms.(ISTE as cited in Angers.&Machtmes,2005).

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Appendix

Questionnaire

The purpose of this questionnaire is to elicit teacher perceptions of Internet use in teaching English as a foreign language in the language center at Yarmouk university. Please respond to all sections of the questionnaire.

SECTION 1

Please tick one.

1. Your gender? Male Female

2. Your age?

Under 25 26 – 30 31 – 35 36 – 40 41 – 45

46 – 50 51 - 55 56 – 60 Over 60

3. How many years of teaching experience do you have?

Under 5 5 – 9 10 - 14 15 - 20

21 -25 Over 25

5. Do you have access to the Internet at home?

Yes No

6. Do you use the Internet in your classroom for teaching purposes?

Yes No

6.1. If yes, how often do you use the Internet in your classroom?

Very often (more than three times a week)

Often (once to twice a week)

Sometimes (once to twice a month)

Rarely (once to twice a semester)

6.2. If yes, what types of Internet activities do you usually use in your classroom? (Tick all items that apply.)

- Crosswords Encyclopedias E-mail Games
 On-line dictionaries Puzzles Quizzes
 Text chatting Video conferencing Voice chatting
 Web surfing
 Others: Please specify _____

6.3. If no, what are the main reasons preventing Internet use in your classroom? (Tick all items that apply.)

- Your limited computer skills Your limited English ability
 Your limited interest Limited computer facilities
 Limited time Students' limited computer skills
 Students' limited English ability Students' limited interest
 Others: Please specify _____

6.4. If no but you have interest, what types of Internet activities would you like to use in your classroom? (Tick all items that apply.)

- Crosswords Encyclopedias E-mail Games
 On-line dictionaries Puzzles Quizzes
 Text chatting Video conferencing Voice chatting
 Web surfing Others: Please specify _____

7. Do you use the Internet when you prepare teaching materials?

- Yes No

7.1. If yes, how much time do you spend on the Internet preparing teaching materials each week?

- Very often (over 15 hours) Often (10 to 15 hours)
 Sometimes (5 to 10 hours) Rarely (under 5 hours)

7.2. If yes, what are the main reasons for searching for Internet resources to prepare teaching materials?

(Tick all items that apply.)

- easy to understand varied up to date
 easy to obtain free authentic
 Others: Please specify _____

7.3. If no, what are the main reasons for not using Internet resources as your teaching materials?

(Tick all items that apply.)

- difficult to understand time-consuming
 difficult to use with textbook resources not my interest
 difficult to obtain not available
 Others: Please specify _____

8. Have you taken any training course(s) to learn how to use the Internet for teaching?

- Yes No

8.1. If yes, were you satisfied with the training course(s)?

- Yes No

8.2. If no, what is the main reason preventing your participation?

- No courses available Distance to training courses
 Lack of time Cost No interest
Others: Please specify _____

8.3. If no but you get a chance, will you take a training course to learn how to use the Internet for teaching?

- Yes No

SECTION 2

Please indicate the level of your agreement or disagreement with the following statements, by circling the number that best represents your answer.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	agree	Strongly Agree
SD	D	A	SA
1	2	3	4

	SD	D	A	SA
1. The Internet provides non-native speakers of English with a rich learning environment.	1	2	3	4
2. Internet tools can be used for teaching purposes.	1	2	3	4
3. Internet resources can replace textbooks.	1	2	3	4
4. It is easy to find ESL/EFL materials on the Web.	1	2	3	4
5. ESL/EFL Web sites are useful for teaching English.	1	2	3	4
6. Students can be motivated by the use of the Internet in the classroom.	1	2	3	4
7. Students can improve their English skills through the use of the Internet	1	2	3	4
8. Students can learn how to use Internet resources for learning English for themselves.	1	2	3	4
9. Students can improve communication skills by e-mailing or chatting with native speakers of English on-line.	1	2	3	4
10. Students will be more attentive in Internet-assisted English language teaching classes.	1	2	3	4
11. I am responsible for the success of Internet-assisted English language teaching.	1	2	3	4
12. I am competent to use Internet-based materials in the classroom.	1	2	3	4
13. I know how to integrate Internet resources into existing classroom curricula.	1	2	3	4

14. I need training to improve my Internet literacy skills.	1	2	3	4
15. I would like to use Internet-based materials and activities in my classroom as much as possible.	1	2	3	4

SECTION 3

Please answer the following questions as much as you can.

1. What do you think are the advantages of using the Internet in the classroom?

2. What do you think are the disadvantages of using the Internet in the classroom?

4. Do you have any comments on the use of the Internet for the teaching of English as a foreign language in the language center at Yarmouk university?

Thank you for completing this questionnaire