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Using the Internet in Education – Strengths and Weaknesses

A Qualitative Study of Teachers' Opinions on the Use of the Internet in Planning and Instruction

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Abstract

The Internet plays a significant role in the lives of young people today. Previous research points to advantages as well as disadvantages of the use of the Internet in a formal educational context. The aim of the current study was to investigate the influence of the use of the Internet on planning and instruction. Five upper secondary school teachers were interviewed face-to-face. Five recurrent themes were identified in the interview data: general opinions on and experience of the Internet, attitudes to teaching and learning, opinions on the use of the Internet as a planning and teaching resource, effects of the use of the Internet on students and teachers, and drawbacks of the use of the Internet in the school. It was found that the teachers think that the Internet is a valuable source of information and an important additional teaching tool. The Internet can e.g. motivate the students, make teaching more fun, and allows variation in teaching. Four major drawbacks of the use of the Internet were reported by the teachers, viz. students' cheating, unreliable information, technical problems, and students' extracurricular activities during lessons.

Key words: the Internet, the qualitative interview, young people, upper secondary school, English teachers, recurrent themes, additional teaching resource.

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Introduction

The best of all possible worlds would be for computers and the Internet to become part, and probably only a small part, of a thriving academy of motivated learners whose time in cyberspace is significantly exceeded by time spent reading, visiting interesting places and people, having fascinating conversations, helping their peers, developing their physical and artistic talents, and enjoying life. (Chapman 2005:342)

The Internet plays a major role in the lives of young people today. Children and youngsters engage in online activities both inside and outside the classroom (Sefton-Green 2004). Formally, that is in the school, young people use the Internet for instance, when searching for information and when completing tests. Informally, that is in their spare time, they chat with friends, play online computer games and are involved in fan fiction, i.e. using published material to create pictures and films etc. (Olin-Scheller & Wikström 2010).

Christina Olin-Scheller and Patrik Wikström contend that fan fiction forums on the Internet could be considered “informal learning settings” (Olin-Scheller & Wikström 2010:41). In fan fiction young people not only consume culture, but also produce it themselves. Original characters and settings in films/stories (for instance, *Harry Potter*) are transformed into another fictional context whereby a new story is created. The author of this new narrative publishes his/her text online, which makes it available to a worldwide audience of editors/critics. Thus, fan works give young people the possibility to expand their knowledge sphere and to interact and collaborate with other young people (41-43). Moreover, fan fiction web sites give young people the opportunity to experiment with different identities (Jewitt 2010; Olin-Scheller & Wikström 2010).

Olin-Scheller and Wikström further discuss the generation gap that exists between students and teachers nowadays. Young people have been brought up in the digital era, whereas adults have

gained their skills in ICT later in life. Consequently, there is generally a 'digital knowledge gap' between a teacher and his/her students (43). Taking this issue one step further, however, it follows that young people who regularly surf the Internet are exposed to incorrect use of the English language from a prescriptive point of view. How does the continual use of the Internet influence students' language skills? Moreover, how should teachers handle ESL (English as a Second Language) and EFL (English as a Foreign Language) students' exposure to incorrect language use? This circumstance creates a possible conflict between the formal and the informal side of language in the classroom. For instance, one of the teachers in the current study expresses concern over the fact that students think that skills in informal language use is more important than knowledge in formal language use.

Aim and research questions

The major aim of the current study is to investigate if and how the Internet is used as an educational tool, that is, as a complement to teachers' use of the national curriculum, (course) literature, newspapers, films, tapes etc. in their short-term course/lesson planning and English teaching. The study will focus exclusively on the perspective of English teachers working in upper secondary schools in the Aland Islands. An aspiration I have is to be able to suggest classroom practices for teachers who wish to benefit from using the Internet in their everyday work (based on my interview data). As Rachel A Karchmer (2001) argues, teachers can learn a great deal from other teachers who regularly use the Internet in instruction.

The research questions of this study are: Can teachers benefit from using the Internet in their English classes; when planning lessons/projects, constructing tasks, promoting student motivation etc.? If so, what are the advantages? Are there any side effects to the use of the Internet in lesson/course planning and teaching? If so, what are the drawbacks?

The current study is a pilot study within an ongoing research project at Högkolan i Gävle, "Learner English: development of multi-literacies and patterns of language use in formal and

informal learning contexts". The overall purpose of this larger research project is to compare teenagers' written English produced in Internet-based contexts with their written English produced in the school. As a part of this larger project, another aim of the current study is to test and evaluate an interview guide (see appendix 2).

Thesis statement

Today teachers worldwide are encouraged and expected to implement Information and Communication Technology (ICT) in instruction (Gibson & Oberg 2004). However, teachers might find it difficult to know how to use the Internet in the classroom (Tuvér & Blomqvist 2009). One reason is that the environment that teachers work in undoubtedly has an impact on their work, in particular if access to the Internet is readily available or not at their school (Madden et al 2005).

Another reason could be that teachers lack knowledge/experience of and familiarity with ICT. According to Songül Kilimci (2010), teachers might find it difficult to use ICT in their classrooms due to the rapid technological development. Yet another reason could be insufficient command of the English language, which forces teachers to want to control their teaching. Thus, teachers' awareness (of their linguistic deficiencies) might have an impact on their work.

The thesis statement of the present study is that it is of utmost importance that teachers are familiar with modern technology, and moreover that they can benefit from using the Internet as an additional teaching resource. Previous studies/literature in the field confirm this hypothesis (Acikalin, 2009; Cunningham & Andersson 1997; Dudeney 2007; Gibson & Oberg 2004; Gray et al 2007; Harmer 2007; Karchmer 2001; Kennedy 2010; Kilimci 2010; Kuo 2008; Madden et al 2005; Muehleisen 1997; Sayed Abdallah 2007; Sharples et al 2008; Singhal 1997; Tuvér & Blomqvist 2009; Young 2003).

It is important that teachers have knowledge in the use of the Internet in planning/teaching for two reasons. First, a teacher who makes use of the Internet as an additional teaching tool will most likely earn his/her students' respect and regard, which in turn will give the teacher a sense of

security and confidence. However, Gary Chapman (2000) notes that teachers might feel reluctant to use the Internet in the classroom since some students are very ICT competent. The fear of being “outperformed” by their students might hinder teachers from using the Internet in class. Yet Madden et al (2005) found that teachers who frequently use the Internet are confident users, and they are less likely to feel that their students have more knowledge about the Internet than they do.

Second, lesson/course planning and teaching will most likely benefit from the teacher's knowledge and use of the Internet in his/her daily work. For instance, using the Internet in instruction increases students' motivation to learn English (Muehleisen 1997), fosters students' responsibility for their studies (Chapman 2005; Kennedy 2010), and motivates students to write when they know that their written products will be available to readers worldwide (Cunningham & Andersson 1997; Karchmer 2001).

Theoretical framework

In the same vein as Olin-Scheller and Wikström, Julian Sefton-Green (2004) claims that:

[c]omputers and other aspects of ... (ICTs) allow children and young people a wide variety of activities and experiences that can support learning, yet many of these transactions do not take place in the traditional educational settings. (4)

Thus highlighting the positive aspects of the use of the Internet on learning outside the classroom, he states that many researchers propose that this new technology might come to change the nature of education and learning completely. Therefore it is important that we expand our vision beyond the scope of traditional learning. Sefton-Green further argues that acknowledging this fact, implies recognizing learning that takes place outside the school (4-6).

Benefits and drawbacks of the use of the Internet in formal education

Equally vital is to acknowledge learning that takes place inside the classroom through the use of ICT. A number of researchers point to the benefits of using the Internet in formal education. Mahmoud Mohammad Sayed Abdallah (2007) argues that the Internet is used in education because

it facilitates learning, teaching and communication. It is possible to find a great deal of (course/subject) information online and to do so any time. Specifically commenting on advantages of the Internet for English Language Teaching, he mentions that students can study any topic in English independently online, and they can also find many activities on the Internet to use in order to improve their proficiency.

In an early observation by Meena Singhal (1997), advantages of the Internet for the individual student are highlighted, especially the vast amount of information that can be found online at all times: “The World Wide Web is ... a virtual library at one's fingertips; it is a readily available world of information for the language learner” (Singhal 1997:4). She particularly highlights the benefits of emailing, which is beneficial to use with shy students who can thus communicate without having to speak up in class. Moreover, via email, language students can communicate with native English speakers, rendering the communication an authentic context.

In a speech given at a conference in Japan, Victoria Muehleisen (1997) lists a number of reasons why the use of the Internet is beneficial to English teaching. She claims that students' motivation to learn English is promoted by their learning how to use computers, and in so doing they come to realize that English is an international language (most of the online information is in English). Moreover, online projects have an interactive aspect (students work actively, for instance when they search for information), and are generally easier to realize in practice than other projects (Internet access is often available in e.g. computer rooms in schools and public computers in Internet cafés). Muehleisen concludes by encouraging English teachers to use the Internet in the class room, as it increases students' motivation to use English in out-of-school settings.

Kilimci (2010) goes one step further when he argues that the Internet can be used as “... the main aid in teaching a language and as a basic source of communication in distance education”, not only as a complement to other teaching resources (Kilimci 2010:109). The World Wide Web provides teachers and students with the possibility to listen to radio programs, television programs,

the news etc., thus to listen to native speakers online. Moreover, the Internet gives students access to libraries and a great deal of reading material, and also the opportunity to familiarize themselves with many different cultures and peoples (109, 112).

Jeremy Harmer (2007) writes that students and teachers can find practically any kind of information they want on the Internet. They can access newspapers, encyclopedias, history sites, film guides, lyrics, and broadcasting associations (e.g. the BBC). However, due to the size of the Internet and the vast amount of online information there is, it may be awkward to use for teachers and students. It might be difficult to find the spot-on information that one is searching for, because it is a skill that must be acquired. Thus if teachers want their students to do successful searches on the Internet, they have to teach them this skill (190-91).

In an article addressing the issue of e-safety amongst other things, M Sharples et al (2008) discuss the dilemma of allowing children and young people to make use of the learning opportunities the Internet has to offer, and simultaneously protecting them from possible harmful 'side effects'. The use of the Internet poses certain risks to the younger generation, such as bullying (e.g. to post hurtful messages/pictures), harmful adults (e.g. paedophiles), unsuitable content (e.g. violent and pornographic material) and cheating (e.g. to copy paste online material). This dilemma is indeed a problem for schools and the authors acknowledge that at present there is no simple solution (70, 72-74). According to Sharples et al (73), if schools forbid students to access inappropriate web sites, they will soon find other ways of doing so (see also Cunningham & Andersson 1997:289).

Other researchers have also explored drawbacks of the use of the Internet in education. Singhal (1997) mentions technical problems/lack of Internet access, teachers' lacking knowledge and experience, unsuitable information for children, and time-consuming browsing on the Internet. Chapman (2000) brings up threats of Internet use for young people. Among other things, there is information about drug use and bomb making on the Internet.

He states further that “[a] great deal of information on the Internet is of questionable value, inaccurate or misleading” (Chapman 2005:335). Teachers are thus faced with a new pedagogical challenge, namely to teach their students how to use the Internet in a responsible manner. This task is a burdensome one for teachers, as it is combined with another educational task, that is, to explore ways of using the Internet to promote learning in general. Chapman mentions yet another challenge for teachers, which is to keep updated on the technological development (308, 314).

Practical guidelines for teachers on the use of the Internet in the school

In 1997 the University of the State of New York issued an introduction guide for adult educators in the use of the Internet as an instructional tool. The manual includes, among other things, fifteen hands-on lessons (including hand-outs) on different topics. In "Integrating ICTs into the Curriculum: Analytical Catalogue of Key Publications", published by UNESCO in 2005, detailed strategies on how to integrate ICT successfully into education are described. The catalogue includes abstracts and excerpts from a number of different publications on the implementation of technology in teaching practice.

Läraren – eleven - Internet (1997) by Una Cunningham and Staffan Andersson contains a great many practical tips on how to use the Internet in the classroom. The authors list a number of advantages of the use of the Internet in teaching. It is possible to locate information online that is not to be found in course books or printed dictionaries, and to get recent updates on for instance the political development in other countries or natural disasters (i.e. information that continuously changes). Moreover, the Internet gives students the opportunity to learn about other cultures, and to communicate directly with people abroad (16-17).

By publishing their work on the Internet students can reach an even wider audience, which can be a motivating factor. More specifically, the Internet can be a motivator for students with learning disabilities. Being allowed to use the computer and to read about subjects that interest them, these students could be stimulated to read more, or even to read in the first place, and to write

as well (using, for instance, the online spell check). Regarding advantages for teachers, there are a great many teaching resources on the Internet, such as mailing lists and lesson plans (17, 73, 90-91, 103, 131).

Cunningham and Andersson stress the fact that there are no publishing restrictions on the Internet, anyone can publish what they want, which is also emphasized by Karchmer (2001:446). They thus point out that it is important to know who is responsible for the online information one finds, to be able to evaluate it properly for reliability. Discussing the new role of the teacher with the advent of ICT in the school, the authors state that because there is also incorrect and misleading information on the Internet, teachers have to pick and choose among the material they present to their students. Students, on the other hand, need to learn how to deal with vast amounts of information (Cunningham & Andersson 17, 21, 107, 137).

In a chapter discussing the negative aspects of the Internet, the authors state that there are for instance sites containing information about extreme groupings and criminal activities that children and young people can get access to (284). In agreement with Cunningham and Andersson (1997), Gavin Dudeney discusses negative aspects of the use of ICT in the classroom in his practical guide *The Internet and the Language Classroom* (2007). One drawback is problems with technology, which is why teachers always should have a back-up lesson plan (36-37).

Another drawback is “‘questionable’ content” on the Internet (Dudeney 2010:37). Dudeney observes that there is indeed information on the Internet that is not suitable for young people; however, it is not as common as the media pretends. Yet teachers are responsible for making sure that their students do not access inappropriate web sites during class (37).

Dudeney mentions two approaches to deal with students' possible access to unsuitable material. One possibility is to install a piece of software which blocks certain sites, for instance Net Nanny (see also Cunningham & Andersson 1997:18). However, it has the negative consequence that it might restrict a teacher's access to (useful) information more than is desirable. The other approach

is to do regular checks (such as checking temporary Internet files and downloads of images to computers) as well as to instruct students in the correct use of the Internet (38-39).

Dudeny gives examples of a number of Internet-based activities (elementary to advanced level), ranging from activities about teenage problems, famous people and borrowed words in English to online tools, such as webquests, discussion lists and different writing projects (2007:43-140). When students can publish their writing online, they put more effort into the presentation of their work (such as accuracy). Dudeny states that, for instance, email exchanges with key pals from other parts of the world are very motivating for students, giving them the opportunity to communicate with an authentic audience (115, 132).

Echoing Harmer (2007), Dudeny writes that there is a great deal of information on the Internet, if one only knows how and where to find it. He regrets the fact that training in ICT is not very common in teacher education, and so individual teachers have to gain knowledge and experience in this area on their own (2, 19). Nevertheless, teachers can benefit from using the Internet as a teaching resource, as it “opens up a world of possibilities” for teachers and students (Dudeny 2007:32).

Students' and student teachers' opinions of the use of the Internet

Young (2003) investigated possible effects of the integration of ICT in an ESL class in a vocational senior high school in Taiwan. In the study most students report having a positive attitude to the use of the Internet in their English class. Advantages of Internet use are that it makes it possible to find friends in other countries, to readily practice English vocabulary and grammar, to make mistakes anonymously, to find interesting information, and to practise computer skills. Students also mention that the use of the Internet in instruction makes them feel less pressured. One disadvantage students mention is lack of Internet access. Young concludes that, despite the fact that a teacher cannot rely solely on the Internet in teaching, it could improve students' motivation to learn English (452-53, 457-58).

In another study conducted in Taiwan, Ming-Mu Kuo (2008) looked into student teachers' opinions of the Internet in EFL teaching and learning. As in Young's study (2003), most informants have a positive attitude to using the Internet in education. They believe that the Internet promotes autonomous learning and can be an important teaching aid in their future careers as teachers. Yet quite a few trainee teachers are not of the opinion that EFL/ESL web sites are useful in instruction, and a majority of the respondents do not think that these sites can replace course books. Likewise, most of the student teachers feel that they lack sufficient knowledge to be able to integrate ICT into the curriculum. Kuo argues that if student teachers are to become proficient in the use of ICT, they should be offered more training and learning experiences during their teacher education.

Mehmet Acikalin (2009) studied Turkish pre-service teachers' opinions on the use of the Internet in teaching (social studies). As the respondents in Young's (2003) and Kuo's (2008) studies, the student teachers in Acikalin's study generally have a positive attitude to the use of the Internet in the classroom; it can be used for homework, research projects and information seeking. Other advantages are that it is easy to access online information and that the Internet is a time-saver (311-12, 316).

Nevertheless, the student teachers also reported negative aspects of the use of the Internet, such as the risk of coming across biased/unreliable information, and the problem of finding accurate information. Thus the Internet should be used with care and consideration. Another disadvantage, which might seem as a paradox, is that the ease of accessing Internet sources creates a “dependence on prepared information” (Acikalin 2009:315). According to Acikalin, this dilemma in turn might have a negative impact on the development of students' research and analytical skills (312, 316-17).

Previous studies on teachers' opinions on the use of the Internet

There are a number of studies on the use of the Internet in the classroom. The current study focuses on the perspective of the teachers, which is why studies concerned with the students' use of the Internet will not be included in the presentation below (see e.g. Young's study above).

An American perspective

In a study based on elementary and secondary school teachers' email reports, lesson plans and reflective journals, Karchmer (2001) investigated the influence of the Internet on literacy instruction. The teachers in the study were regarded as “exemplary at using technology” by colleagues (Karchmer 2001:442). All the teachers in the study report that regularly using the Internet in teaching increases their work load. It takes a great deal of time to learn how to use the technology and to implement it in teaching, thus more time has to be devoted to planning. Compared to when they were using textbooks, the elementary teachers have to devote more time to finding appropriate online material which is neither too easy nor too difficult for the students. Therefore they preview the information they plan to use in class beforehand. However, at times the teachers are unable to find suitable web sites to use (454-56).

Moreover, out of concern that students can get access to inappropriate information on the Internet (such as pornographic material), the teachers in the study have taken certain precautions to protect the students: they demand parental permission, they use monitoring systems that block inappropriate web sites, they prohibit browsing altogether, and they discuss with their students what kinds of information can be found on the Internet (i.e. use it as a learning experience) (457).

Nevertheless, the teachers find it important that their students learn to question information on the Internet. Consequently, they not only discuss in class how important it is to evaluate online information, but they have also developed evaluation criteria for their students. Using these web page criteria, the students can evaluate online material on their own. If they come across biased information while surfing, the teachers take the opportunity to discuss the discrepancies in class (457-58).

In addition, one of the teachers sees it as an experience to learn from: why is the information not correct? Another teacher instructs her students to use several sources in order to find reliable and correct information (458). In conclusion, Karchmer (2001:454,458,461) found that the use of

the Internet in the classroom influences literacy instruction to some extent, in particular writing and reading. For instance, when (elementary) students are aware that their written work will be published online their motivation to do well increases, which is in agreement with Cunningham & Andersson's (1997:73) and Dudeney's (2007:132) claims.

A British perspective

Gray et al (2007) studied Modern Foreign Language teachers in their effort to implement new ICT into their teaching practice. Interactive White Boards (IWB) were installed in the teachers' classrooms and they were forced to use them (ordinary whiteboards, OHPs etc. were removed). The teachers' professional development was not based mainly on formal training, but rather on successful trial-and-error, collegial sharing of material, personal experience/experimentation, and gradually collecting a stock of teaching material (412-13, 422-23).

The major advantage experienced by the teachers was that the use of ICT allowed them to control and manage the class, both their learning materials and their students' behaviour. Being aware that there is a great deal to learn about the use of new technology, the teachers held on to their firm beliefs about learning and teaching, implementing new ICT at their own convenience (421, 423). The authors conclude that it is important to acknowledge “the huge investment of time and effort” that a change in established teaching practice demands of teachers (Gray et al 2007:424).

In another study conducted in the UK, Madden et al (2005) administered a questionnaire to teachers in a secondary school with the aim of getting information about their perceptions of the usefulness of the Internet as an educational resource. Not surprisingly, they found that teachers who have more experience of the Internet are more likely to use it in teaching than teachers who have less knowledge. A majority of the teachers in the study had acquired their Internet skills by personal experience or by learning from colleagues (i.e. informally) rather than by training (i.e. formally). Moreover, experienced teachers are less likely to feel that students are more knowledgeable about

ICT than they are. About two thirds of the respondents believe that some pupils seemingly learn more from the Internet than from course books (255, 266, 270).

Teachers who use the Internet frequently think it is easy to use search engines and to find useful teaching material, and they believe that the World Wide Web is a valuable source of information. However, a majority of the teachers express concern about the reliability of online information; web sites might change or disappear, and the information might be too biased to use or not appropriate for the National Curriculum (267-69). In their summary, Madden et al (2005:272) state that although teachers acknowledge that the Internet is a valuable teaching aid, they express doubts that the students might not be able to distinguish reliable information from unreliable information on the Internet. Yet, the authors note further that teachers who frequently use the Internet in teaching have the possibility to supervise how his/her students make use of it (269).

A Canadian perspective

In a three-year research study, Susan Gibson and Dianne Oberg (2004) investigated the realities and visions of the use of the Internet in schools in Canada. They interviewed ministry of education and teacher association officials, and administered a questionnaire to teachers and school administrators. An analysis of the collected data yields three themes: purposes for the use of the Internet and factors enhancing/limiting Internet use. As regards the first theme, the respondents report two main purposes for the use of the Internet: a tool for promoting students' learning (e.g. to prepare students for a future in the technological era), and a tool for supporting teaching (e.g. through the Internet teachers can access lesson plans and other valuable information) (571, 573-74).

Regarding the second theme, factors limiting Internet use, the informants report challenges such as financing, access and infrastructure support. Thus inadequate funding, Internet access and direction for Internet use in teaching restrict the use of ICT in the school. Other concerns for teachers are time constraints, unreliable technology, and also the nature, relevance and reliability of online information. As far as the third theme is concerned, one factor enhancing Internet use is

teachers' opportunities to learn. According to Gibson and Oberg, about two thirds of the teachers perceive themselves as proficient Internet users. They increase their knowledge by for instance collegial work, studying manuals/books/online tutorials, taking a course, trial-and-error and by working with their students (575-78).

Another factor enhancing the use of the Internet is motivation for teachers to learn. Teachers feel motivated to use the Internet because they are curious and wish to learn new teaching aids, because the curriculum so requires, and because students are interested in the Internet (578-79). Gibson and Oberg (2004:580, 582) conclude that the informants in their study are positive to using the Internet as a tool for promoting learning and teaching, yet they used the Internet only infrequently. The authors suggest that teachers need both adequate support from specialists, and sufficient time to become familiar with the use of the Internet in order to benefit from its full potential in teaching.

A Swedish perspective

Alexandra Tuvér and Elin Blomqvist (2009) explored students' and teachers' views on the use of the Internet in learning and teaching in two upper secondary schools in Sweden (one private, the other municipal). They interviewed four teachers and administered a questionnaire to one hundred students (23, 25). As the focus of the current study is teachers' opinions on Internet use in education, only the results pertaining to the latter group will be discussed here.

All the teachers in the study use the Internet in their teaching. Positive aspects of the Internet are for instance that it is a valuable source of information, that it increases teacher-student communication and is a means of communication to the rest of the world, that students think it is more fun to read online information than to read books, and that there is a great deal of teaching materials on the Internet which makes instruction more fun for the students. Negative aspects are that the Internet might distract students during lessons (for instance, they want to check their Facebook status), that there is a lot of incorrect/biased information on the Internet, and that it is

difficult for the students to separate reliable sources from unreliable ones. According to one teacher, students often choose the first hit that comes along (28-29).

Thus it is important that teachers teach their students how to evaluate and question information on the Internet, which is also emphasized in Karchmer's study (2001). Moreover, students have to learn how to cite their sources properly (e.g. to use quotation marks). Some students do not know that it is not allowed to copy and paste online material, and they might copy large amounts of texts without indicating that they have done so. However, the teachers are in agreement that it is easy to detect plagiarism, and that it is actually easier now with the Internet as students and teachers have access to the same information. Paradoxically then, it is easier to cheat (for students) but at the same time it is easier to detect cheating (for teachers) (28-32).

Yet there are other problems with the use of the Internet in education. Two of the teachers mention technical difficulties in the classroom. Therefore one teacher always has a plan B of one kind or another in case there are technical disturbances during a lesson (cf. also Dudeney 2007). Another problem is that the Internet is not completely safe for young people. One teacher thus finds it important to inform the students about possible risks on the Internet. Another teacher points to the fact that as the younger generation uses the Internet so much in their leisure time, they become familiar with it, and so they do not see the dangers 'out there' in the same way as the older generation does (30-32).

Tuvér and Blomqvist (2009:41-42, 46) conclude that the Internet is a useful tool in instruction when used with sense and precaution; yet it is not always easy for teachers to know how to use the Internet as a teaching resource (cf. also Kuo 2008). It might be difficult to determine what is reliable information and what is not. Moreover, besides what has been mentioned above concerning negative aspects, the authors mention that the computers might come to replace the role of the teacher in the classroom. Consequently, the student-teacher relationship will be negatively affected, and the instruction too in the long run. The authors argue that students need adults who are

present in their lives to guide and motivate them in their daily work and personal development.

The teachers in the study are convinced that students perceive of the Internet as their primary (or only) source of information. According to Tuvér and Blomqvist, it is quite in order provided that the students know how to evaluate and question online information. However, as their study reveals that this is not the case, the authors ask the pertinent question: whose main responsibility is it to teach students how to distinguish between reliable and unreliable sources?

Tuvér and Blomqvist claim that the best method is to combine information from different sources and thus to use the Internet as a complement to other teaching aids (42-44).

Preconditions for teaching and learning in the Åland Islands

The school system at the upper secondary level in the Åland Islands is currently undergoing a major reform. The present organisation with six separate schools, Ålands handelsläroverk, Ålands hotell- och restaurangskola, Ålands lyceum, Ålands sjömansskola, Ålands vårdinstitut and Ålands yrkesskola, will be merged into the new school authority, Ålands gymnasium, as of August 2011. Two schools will be included in Ålands gymnasium: Ålands lyceum and Ålands yrkesgymnasium (i.e. the other five schools mentioned above). At Ålands lyceum, with its theoretical profile, students will receive a more general education. Ålands yrkesgymnasium, comprised of five occupational schools, will give students a basic vocational education (Ålands Landskapsregering 2008).

The curriculum at the upper secondary school level

Ålands Landskapsregering is the public authority that stipulates the basis for a curriculum for the upper secondary school level in the Åland Islands. Based on these principles, a curriculum for each educational program is established. The principles state the educational aims of Ålands Landskapsregering by describing for instance basic values, approaches to knowledge and overall purposes. The principles also describe the structure and extent of upper secondary school education in the Åland Islands, as well as the courses that are included in each educational program. Taking

the specific needs and characteristics of the Åland Islands into consideration, the principles contain corresponding aims and content as the curriculum principles at the upper secondary school level in Finland and Sweden (Ålands Landskapsregering 2007:5).

Ålands Landskapsregering appoints different boards of directors that, among other things, formulate and stipulate curricula for each educational program. Teachers are obliged to use these, as well as the basic principles, as guiding rules in their work. The role of the teacher is not only that of an instructor (of knowledge), but he/she should also act as a model, guide and tutor. The curricula should be revised continuously, as society changes and so do the needs of the students (Ålands Landskapsregering 2007:5-6, 17).

Internet-based learning and teaching

In the curriculum principles it is stipulated that the students should be able to develop their “digital proficiency” during their education (Ålands Landskapsregering 2007:20, my translation). When students have a digital proficiency, they are confident and critical users of ICT in their work life, in their spare time and in their higher studies. This competence is built upon basic qualifications in ICT, that is, the use of computers in order to find, produce, store, evaluate, show and exchange information, and also to partake in communications and community networks on the Internet. The student should continually reflect upon the technological development and how it has influenced society at large/a specific vocational field (Ålands Landskapsregering 2007:20).

Moreover, in 2007 Ålands Landskapsregering formulated a vision regarding the use of ICT in the schools: “Internet-assisted instruction should be a natural part of all exam-based education in the Åland Islands, and it should also be possible to receive Internet-assisted instruction in all other education” (Ålands Landskapsregering 2008, my translation). This overall aim describes Ålands Landskapsregering's aspirations for the use of ICT in education (Ålands Landskapsregering 2008), and it is reflected in the curriculum principles for the upper secondary school, as students are expected to become proficient users of ICT during their educational years.

Besides formulating its idea of Internet-assisted learning in 2007, Ålands Landskapsregering initiated the “Internet-based Pedagogics Project”, a three-year project (1.2.2008-31.12.2010) for further education in ICT (my translation). One aim of the project was to instruct individual schools to develop their own ICT strategies. These strategies contain concrete methods for progress and development in the area of ICT in the schools. Another purpose was to give teachers the possibility of increasing their knowledge of Internet-assisted teaching and learning, in order for the schools to be able to use the full potential of ICT in education (Ålands Landskapsregering 2008; 2009).

Method

The research procedure

As stated above, the aim of the current study is to interview English teachers working at upper secondary vocational schools in the Aland Islands (i.e. Ålands yrkesgymnasium). The total sample amounts to eight teachers. The teachers were asked to participate in the study either via a telephone call or by email contact. No test interviews were conducted, as one of the purposes of the current study was to carry out a pilot study within the larger research project “Learner English: development of multi-literacies and patterns of language use in formal and informal learning contexts”.

In preparation for the interviews, the respondents were sent an information sheet (appendix 1). The purpose was to inform them of the aim of the study, and of the ethical principles of scientific research, i.e. the principles of confidentiality, consent, information and employment (Vetenskapsrådet 1990, my translation).

Two of the teachers declined participation in the study, due to time pressure. One of the teachers who agreed to participate did not want to be recorded, and thus the interview was conducted via email. Consequently, the possibility of the interviewee asking for clarification and/or the interviewer asking follow-up questions was removed. As Karchmer points out, email interviews eliminate “... the richness of face-to-face discussions” (Karchmer 2001:451). Correspondence via

email also gives informants the possibility to carefully reflect upon their responses, and what they prefer to share with the interviewer. In addition, writing may not come as easy to everyone (Karchmer 2001).

Moreover, the email interview in the current study is considerably shorter than the other interviews, and so much less informative. Based on the negative aspects of email interviews mentioned by Karchmer (2001) and other methodological considerations, it was decided that the interview conducted via email in this study should be excluded from the sample, yielding a total of five interviews.

The interviews were conducted face-to-face in a separate, quiet room. Except for occasional interruptions by an outsider (although the room was booked beforehand), the atmosphere was free of disturbance during the interviews. On average the interviews lasted 30 minutes (+/- 10). The interviewer used an interview guide (appendix 2) as a reference frame during the interviews (Kvale & Brinkmann 2009:118). As is evident, the interview guide is a "... detailed sequence of carefully formulated questions" (Kvale & Brinkmann 2009:146, my translation). All the questions in the interview guide are open-ended.

When the interview questions were formulated, Steinar Kvale and Svend Brinkmann's *Den kvalitative forskningsintervjuen* was consulted (2009:150-53). The interview questions are divided into three categories: introductory, standard and additional questions. The first two set of questions (introductory and standard) were obligatory and thus addressed to all the teachers. As far as the third category is concerned (additional questions), whether the questions were asked or not was a matter of time as the interview was claimed to require about 30 minutes. Thus, the teachers were asked the same set of questions, however, not necessarily all the questions in the interview guide (i.e. the additional questions). The teachers could then talk freely around the topics, and the interviewer was allowed to ask ad hoc follow-up questions (Kvale & Brinkmann 80).

The interviews were recorded with a hand-held tape recorder. The equipment was tested

before the first interview was conducted, and found to function effectively. However, during the first interview it became clear that the equipment is very sensitive to any kind of noise. For instance, when the interviewer hums or gives a short affirmative response (such as 'yes' or 'aha') during the interview, it is not possible to hear what the respondent says. Thus, the interviewer took all reasonable precautions to minimize external disturbances during the following interviews by only nodding in response.

The recorded interviews were subsequently transcribed and analysed, which the teachers were informed of beforehand. When no longer needed for analytical purposes, the recorded tapes were destroyed in accordance with the recommendations of Kvale and Brinkmann (203-4). The informants were also informed that the transcribed interviews will be securely stored in the archives of Högskolan i Gävle (203). All the interviews were transcribed by the interviewer. In the transcriptions the interviewer marked when there was hesitation and simultaneous speech, and also when she was unable to hear what was said on the tape. However, laughter, silence, pauses and emphases were not indicated.

Methodological concerns

Kvale and Brinkmann (2009) recommend that interviewers keep an open mind concerning issues of consent and confidentiality etc., and that they do not try to solve these areas of uncertainty before their research projects are launched (85-86). Thus these issues have been reflected upon continuously in the current study.

According to Kvale and Brinkmann, the open structure of the interview is both a drawback and a benefit in qualitative research. To put focus on the former, there are for instance no standard procedures to follow when conducting interviews (115). Yet it was decided that face-to-face interviews was the most proper research method in the present study, as the purpose is to explore teachers' opinions and experiences of the use of the Internet as a teaching tool more in depth. "Qualitative research interviews give people the opportunity to express their views, expectations

and worries in their own words” (Kvale & Brinkmann 2009:332, my translation). Thus a quantitative method, such as a questionnaire, or classroom observations was not an option (131).

Kvale and Brinkmann state that it is common that interview analyses are considered non scientific as different interpreters might interpret the same interview differently. Yet they claim that embedded in this argument is the understanding that the aim of the analysis is to find the one and only true and objective meaning of a statement (227). As the authors note, there is also “*reflexive objectivity*” in which researchers aim at objectivity in relation to their subjectivity, by reflecting upon “... their own contributions to the production of knowledge” (Kvale & Brinkmann 2009:260, my translation). Researchers should thus strive to be sensitive to their own preconceptions (i.e. their subjectivity) and acknowledge them in their research reports (260).

The present study makes no claim to be objective in the common-sense meaning of the term, that is “*freedom from bias*” (Kvale & Brinkmann 2009:260, my translation), but rather is more in line with post-modern and hermeneutic thought (227), and acknowledges the influence of the interviewer (i.e. has a subjective perspective). At the same time, the possibility of interviewer bias distorting the results must be admitted. Relevant questions to pose then are: Would the answers have come out differently if another interviewer had asked the questions? Would another interpreter have analysed the results differently?

According to Kvale and Brinkmann, the concepts of reliability and validity are relevant to qualitative research. Reliability refers to the consistency of the results, for instance whether interviewees are likely to change their responses during the interview. More generally, it bears reference to the issue of whether a study is possible to reproduce by other researcher at other times. The authors state that although researchers should aim at increasing the reliability of their results, it should be done with modesty as it could otherwise obstruct the richness of variety and creativity (118, 263-4).

Validity, on the other hand, refers to the extent to which a method/study investigates what it

is supposed to investigate. More specifically, it is a matter of how adequate the method is for the aim of the study, or how reliable the interviewees' responses are, to name but a few (118, 264, 267). Kvale and Brinkmann argue that although it is important to validate methods, results, conclusions etc. in qualitative research, too strong a focus on the issue of validity could prove counterproductive: "... the more you validate, the greater the need for further validation" (2009:279, my translation).

The informants

According to Kvale and Brinkmann, researchers need to consider possible harmful consequences that the informants of their research projects may suffer (89-90, 292). A primary concern in the current study is the small total sample (eight teachers), and so the possibility of the teachers' personal integrity being jeopardized. However, the fact that all the consulted teachers did not participate, removes the possibility of the individual teachers being identified. In order to adhere to the principle of confidentiality, the teachers will be referred to as Teacher 1-Teacher 5 (abbreviated T1-T5). Moreover, the anonymity of the respondents will be protected by the exclusive use of the pronoun "she" (85, 89, 293). Consequently, gender is not a possible identifier in this study.

Teacher 1 is a frequent Internet user. She uses the Internet in her leisure time for emailing, when she reads newspapers and blogs, and when she pays her bills.

Teacher 2 is not a frequent user of the Internet. In her spare time she uses the Internet for emailing, when reading the news and when looking for other kinds of information, like gossip.

Teacher 3 is a frequent user of the Internet. She uses the Internet in her spare time when reading newspapers and different kinds of magazines.

Teacher 4 uses the Internet frequently. In her leisure time she uses the Internet as a source of general information and for social activities.

Teacher 5 is a frequent Internet user. She uses the Internet to find information, to keep in touch with family members and friends, and when she pays her bills.

Average teaching years: 12.

Discussion of the results

The analysis of the interviews

The analysis was done in three steps. First, the interviews were analysed for recurrent themes (cf. Gibson & Oberg 2004; Gray et al 2007). The researcher perused each interview several times, reflected upon relevant themes in the interviews, and noted down interpretations (Kvale & Brinkmann 2009:253). Second, the teachers' responses in relation to the recurrent themes were compared to each other. Third, comparisons were also made between the teachers' responses and the previous studies/literature review discussed above. These comparisons were made with the purpose of increasing the researcher's understanding of the meaning in the interview data (252).

The following five recurrent themes were discovered in the teachers' responses: general opinions on and experience of the Internet, attitudes to teaching and learning, opinions on the use of the Internet as a planning and teaching resource, effects of the use of the Internet on students and teachers, and drawbacks of the use of the Internet in the school. Each theme will be discussed separately below. The inserted quotes, which exclusively represent the five recurrent themes, are not necessarily reproduced verbatim but might be slightly reformulated for the purpose of readability (e.g. repetitions have been left out) (301, 312).

General opinions on and experience of the Internet

All the teachers generally have a positive attitude to the Internet. Teacher 3 finds the Internet helpful for both the students and herself, and Teacher 4 says that the Internet has changed the way she teaches. At the same time the teachers emphasize the need to be careful/critical when using the Internet, especially in the school. Teacher 1 thinks that students know a great deal about the Internet, however, they might lack knowledge about how to use it properly in the formal learning context. Teacher 3 is of the opinion that the use of the Internet must be controlled. She highlights the fact that as the Internet is generally quite easy to use, we might use it in the wrong way.

Teacher 2 finds that the Internet sometimes is too vast. “It's difficult to choose what to choose from what you find” (L 7). By the same token, Teacher 5 maintains that students might find it difficult to choose what is important among the huge amount of online information. Teacher 1 cautions that you have to be careful when you use the Internet, while Teacher 2 expresses the concern that many people spend a great deal of time socializing on the Internet rather than meeting in person like they used to do before. Two of the teachers voice a personal dislike for Facebook (T1 and T2), while two other teachers (T4 and T5) are regularly engaged in Facebook activities.

All the teachers have experience of the Internet, but to varying degrees. Three of the teachers think that they have quite good/enough knowledge of the use of the Internet (T1, T3, T5). Teacher 2 feels that she does not have enough knowledge/experience of the Internet, and teacher 4 says that she is somewhere in between being experienced and inexperienced. Teacher 1 and teacher 4 mention that they sometimes feel that their students are more competent in the use of the Internet than they are. Teacher 4 says that “[the Internet] is like mother's milk to them, but it's something which you really need to keep an open mind about when you're a bit older ...” (L 110-11).

In Madden et al's study (2005) less experienced teachers were more likely to feel that students are more knowledgeable in the use of ICT than they are. It is noteworthy that the teacher in the current study (T2) who perceived herself as lacking adequate knowledge of the Internet, did not mention that she thinks her students know more about the use of ICT than she does. It is possible that she did not do so because the question was not directly put to her. It is also possible that she is not of the opinion that the students are more competent in the use of the Internet than she is.

In Gray et al's (2007) and Madden et al's (2005) studies a majority of the teachers had gained their knowledge informally (e.g. through collegial sharing and trial-and-error). This is in agreement with the results in the current study; all the teachers have gained their knowledge of the Internet through experience. Teacher 5 is the only one who mentions that she has been given some formal training in the use of the Internet (at the school where she is working). Teacher 1 says that she has

gained her knowledge mainly from discussions with people/colleagues who know more about the Internet than she does. Teacher 3 and Teacher 4 have developed their skills over the years by surfing the Internet. Teacher 2 only uses web sites where she feels relaxed, but she has an open mind about asking her colleagues for help in finding good web sites to use.

Attitudes to teaching and learning

Although the teachers were not specifically asked any questions about their attitudes to teaching and learning, it was found to be a recurrent theme in the interview data. Two of the teachers (T1 and T5) emphasize the need to create a good classroom atmosphere in order for the students to learn. Therefore they do not force their students to speak English in front of their classmates, as it might be deterring to some. Instead they have pair or group discussions so that students can practice speaking the language in a less intimidating context. Teacher 1 maintains that a teacher's mission is to promote student learning.

Teacher 1 moreover thinks that it is important for teachers to have a purpose with the material that they use, to know what the students are going to learn from doing a certain task. She also tries to create variation in her teaching in order for her students to learn better. She finds that the Internet is a good tool in this respect, however, as a teacher you should not depend too much on it. She says “I think that the students spend so much time on the Internet in their daily life that I want to do classrooms tasks as well, communication between two people in real life” (L 209-11).

Teacher 3 thinks that it is important that students learn the difference between the use of the computer/Internet as a tool and as a toy. She explains that computers that the students receive from the school will crash when they are used in the wrong way, which is a valuable learning experience for them. Teacher 4 points out that it is necessary that students learn to be critical to any source of information that they use, as it is a part of the scientific research method. Teacher 2, on the other hand, highlights the fact that students are so focused on learning for tests and exams, and emphasizes the need to explain to them that they learn for their own good and for their future.

Opinions on the use of the Internet as a planning and teaching resource

The five teachers in the present study use the Internet in planning/teaching, which is in line with the vision of Ålands Landskapsregering (2008) that Internet-assisted instruction should be an integral part of all education. They find the Internet applicable in planning/teaching in different ways. Teacher 3 thinks that the Internet is the major source of information, whereas for Teacher 4 it is one of the sources she uses. Teacher 1 thinks that the Internet is most usable when she has to find facts about an issue/a topic, while Teacher 2 finds it is most applicable when she has run out of ideas. Due to curriculum requirements, Teacher 5 has the most use of the Internet in non-obligatory courses.

All the teachers agree that the Internet is an additional teaching resource. Teacher 1 gives an example of an advantage of the Internet for her as a teacher living in a non-English speaking country. “That's where I can find the latest research, the latest everything, the latest news [in English]” (L 250-1). Teacher 2 thinks that the Internet adds variety to her teaching, that it allows her to be impulsive and to see things from different perspectives. She says that if one wants accurate or the latest news, then the Internet is a very good source. In the same vein, Cunningham & Andersson point out that one can get recent updates on different issues on the Internet (1997:16).

Another benefit of the Internet that Teacher 3 mentions is that it might be a time-saver when you want to find information quickly. She is in agreement with Teacher 4 that it is easy to find information on the Internet, but not as easy to find good and accurate information. Teacher 4 says “I find it more and more difficult to find the really spot on material” (L 97-8), thereby echoing Harmer's argument (2007). Teacher 3 establishes the fact that as the Internet is generally quite easy to use, students might think that it is also easy to find information on the Internet. “But to find good information on the Internet is very difficult. You have to know how to do it, how to find it” (L 13-4).

This statement is in line with Harmer's argument that teachers must teach their students how

to do successful searches on the Internet (2007:190-91). According to Teacher 2 and Teacher 3, students might not know how to find the correct/best information on the Internet. A similar concern voiced by teachers in previous studies is that students are not able to differentiate between reliable and unreliable sources (Madden et al 2005; Tuvér & Blomqvist 2009). Teacher 3 states that students often choose the first hit that an Internet search yields, an opinion she shares with one of the teachers in Tuvér and Blomqvist's study (2009).

The teachers in the present study use a number of web sites in their planning/teaching, both in English such as the National Rail, the BBC, the Guardian and Englisch Hilfen, and in Swedish such as Nationalencyklopedin, Utbildningsradion, Dagens Nyheter, tyda.se and lektion.se. You Tube is a site that a majority of the teachers use. Teacher 3 uses an online platform for teaching which facilitates her work, and Teacher 1 has the possibility to use the smart board in the classroom. In addition, the Internet provides teachers with the opportunity to access speaking, vocabulary and grammar exercises as well as crosswords and a multitude of texts in English written by native speakers.

In a similar manner, advantages of using the Internet in instruction has been pointed out in previous studies/literature in the field (Acikalin, 2009; Cunningham & Andersson 1997; Dudeney 2007; Gibson & Oberg 2004; Gray et al 2007; Harmer 2007; Karchmer 2001; Kennedy 2010; Kilimci 2010; Kuo 2008; Madden et al 2005; Muehleisen 1997; Sayed Abdallah 2007; Sharples et al 2008; Singhal 1997; Tuvér & Blomqvist 2009; Young 2003).

The teachers in the current study give examples of a number of Internet-based tasks that they have administered to their students, e.g. to find out about animal life in Australia, the British school system, British politics, famous people in Britain, the British railway system, gangs in New York, happenings in major English-speaking cities, Ireland (e.g. the conflict), diseases, the BRIS report, the Aland Islands and song lyrics. It is also possible to communicate with key pals in other countries on the Internet, which is very motivating for students according to Dudeney (2007).

Teacher 1 and Teacher 5 mention the advantage of the Internet to be used for 'fill-out lessons' at the end of the term. Teacher 5 says “sometimes we have an extra lesson or two and then I almost always choose to use that time to do something on the Internet” (L 182-4).

All the teachers state that they allow their students to use the Internet in the classroom and for homework assignments (although it might not happen that often for various reasons, e.g. curriculum requirements, distractions on the Internet). Generally the students use the Internet as an information seeking tool. Teacher 3 says she knows her students will use the Internet to search for information, and if she wants them to go to the library she specifically has to instruct them to do so. Teacher 4 points out that she wants her students to prove that they can find information on their own, and for this purpose the Internet is a major advantage. Yet it is important to check who is responsible for the information one presents, which is also emphasized by Cunningham and Andersson (1997:21, 48).

Teacher 4 thinks that the Internet might be advantageous for students who have difficulties learning or who are not very eager to study. These students might be deterred by having to read books in order to complete a task of a scientific nature, whereas the Internet might feel more at home for them and thus less of an obstacle to use. In previous studies/the literature it has been pointed out that the Internet can be motivating for students with learning disabilities (Cunningham & Andersson 1997:131), and that it is possible to support students with “special educational needs” through the use of the IWB in the classroom (Gray et al 2007:419).

The teachers in Tuvér and Blomqvist's study (2009) agree that the Internet should be perceived as an additional teaching tool, which is in accordance with the results of the current study. For instance, Teacher 3 notes that one purpose of formal education is to prepare students for a life after school, which is why it is not realistic to rely on the Internet as the primary teaching resource. In the same vein, Teacher 2 and Teacher 4 point out that teachers need both written published material as well as the Internet in their planning/teaching.

Effects of the use of the Internet on students and teachers

All the teachers in the current study think that the use of the Internet has observable effects on their students. Teacher 2 says that using the Internet in the classroom is a change from what the students are used to doing. This change in turn causes students to pay more attention and make more of an effort (e.g. to speak English), because they want something different from traditional teaching. The Internet has positive effects in that it either increases the students' motivation, or makes learning more fun and interesting. Similarly, in his study of high school students, Young (2003) concludes that the Internet could improve students' motivation to learn English.

Teacher 3 finds that the use of an online platform for teaching has the positive effect that students have to take more responsibility for their studies. They have to be more active and keep updated on the platform (e.g. for instructions, deadlines, assignments), instead of habitually receiving assignments/instructions in class from the teacher. Chapman (2005) and Kennedy (2010) also emphasize the benefits that the use of the Internet in teaching have on student responsibility.

Two of the teachers (T4, T5) in the present study state that the Internet is something that the students are familiar with. They also mention that the Internet seems to be less of an obstacle to the students compared to using (course) books. Whereas a book of several hundred pages might feel somewhat intimidating, the Internet comes natural to them. Teacher 5 says that the Internet appeals to students and is modern, whereas a grammar book might seem old fashioned. This reasoning is in line with the results from a previous study, in which it was found that a majority of the teachers are of the opinion that some students learn more from the Internet than from course books (Madden et al 2005). In another study it was found that students think it is more enjoyable to read texts on the Internet than printed ones (Tuvér & Blomqvist 2009).

Teacher 3 maintains that there is in effect no difference between the Internet and more traditional sources in this respect. Although students think that they have to do less reading on the Internet compared to when they use printed sources, it is in fact the case that when you use the

Internet as a source you have to do a great deal of reading. More often than not, the first few hits do not represent the best/most correct information. Yet she points out that students can probably cover more information when they use the Internet as a source than when they use books because it is a quicker system, provided that they learn how to find the best/correct information.

According to teacher 4, an advantage of the Internet is that it is quick to use, yet students need to learn to be critical to online information. Teacher 5 mentions another advantage, namely that the use of the Internet might increase students' knowledge sphere. "They pick up things that they perhaps would not pick up otherwise" (L 92-3). Teacher 3 thinks that the Internet can be used to make learning stuff more accessible to the students as moving pictures facilitates recollection. Thus a teacher can show, for instance, clips from You Tube to highlight certain points. She also finds that the use of the Internet in the classroom can promote student activity. "That they actually can find the right answers themselves makes it more interesting if you compare to the teacher handing out: 'this is the text to read and the right answer is here'" (L 97-9). The fact that students are active themselves in searching for the correct answer increases their learning.

All the teachers in this study believe that the use of the Internet also has effects on themselves, however, in different ways. Four of the teachers (T2, T3, T4, T5) mention time factors. Teacher 2 says that it takes more time to plan lessons using the Internet because she has to find exercises that are applicable to the class at hand, which is also pointed out by teachers in Karchmer's study (2001:454). Yet she feels that it is always worth it for both herself and her students. "If I know we are going to do something that they like, it gives me more energy" (L 185-6). Teacher 5 thinks that it probably takes more time to plan courses using the Internet, yet it is not as tiresome to plan these courses as courses with a very strict course plan (which basically have the same content year after year).

Teacher 4 states that since the Internet is so vast it takes time to find the information one is looking for, which echoes Harmer's argument that the Internet might be difficult to use for teachers

and students alike due to its size (2007:190). She emphasizes that teachers have to know where to find information on the Internet, and this work has to be done before they begin their lessons. In agreement with the teachers in Madden et al's study (2005), Teacher 4 points out that the Internet is volatile, the information changes rather quickly. Thus, compared to printed literature, the Internet requires more from teachers as there is a constant need to keep updated.

Teacher 3, on the other hand, thinks that lesson planning takes less time with the Internet. She uses a platform for teaching which, among other things, enables her to use the same course material multiple times. "I just have to do it once" (L 118). These three teachers' differing attitudes concerning time are reflected in previous studies. The pre-service teachers in Acikalin's study (2009) think that the Internet is a time-saver, whereas in Karchmer's study (2001) the teachers report that more time has to be devoted to planning with the use of the Internet. In a similar vein, the teachers in Gibson and Oberg's study (2004) express the concern that they lack adequate time for Internet use.

Two of the teachers (T1, T3) in the present study mention that the Internet makes their work easier. Teacher 3 can put the course material on the teaching platform which makes it accessible at all times to the students. Teacher 1 says that teachers can find dictionaries on the Internet, and other information that might be useful in teaching and interesting for the students as well. One of the teachers (T5) state that using the Internet in planning increases her motivation and makes teaching more enjoyable.

Drawbacks of the use of the Internet in the school

Four major disadvantages of the use of the Internet in formal educational settings were found in the interview data, viz. students' cheating, extracurricular activities, technical problems and biased/unreliable information.

Sharpley et al (2008) maintain that cheating is a risk that the use of the Internet in the school poses to young people. They state further that children might not regard copy-pasting, which they

are empowered to do, as cheating (74). All five teachers in the current study think that the fact that students might cheat is a drawback with the use of the Internet in the school. They all confirm how easy it is for students to just copy from online texts and paste it into their own texts. Teacher 1 says “it's very easy to think 'well I can use this, it's on the Internet'” (L 316-7).

According to teacher 2, students might not see the difference between if they copy a text that someone else has written, or if they write a text themselves. “They feel if they have spent the time looking for it, finding it, printing it and handing it in to me, then they have done the job” (L 278-9). Where does this attitude stem from, that it is allowed to use information on the Internet as if it was public property?

Three of the teachers (T1, T3, T4) believe that it is very tempting for students to copy information from the Internet because it is so easy to do. Teacher 3 says “for many it's difficult to avoid, to keep away from it” (L 252-3). They do not have to do any writing, and hardly any reading. She points out that it might be the case that students are not aware of what they are doing when they copy online information. Teacher 4 highlights the fact that the problem might be that students are ignorant about how to present their material/sources properly, and thus appear to be cheating. In a similar manner, the teachers in Tuvér and Blomqvist's study (2009) note that students might not know that it is not allowed to copy paste information from the Internet.

Therefore they emphasize the need to teach students how to present their sources and how to quote (Tuvér and Blomqvist 2009). A majority of the teachers in the current study (T1, T4, T5) are in agreement that it is important to talk to students about plagiarism. Teacher 1 discusses with her students what is allowed and what is not when using online material, and Teacher 4 informs her students what they risk losing if they cheat. Teacher 5 says that the disadvantage of students cheating would not deter her from using the Internet in teaching, but rather would make her even more eager to inform her students about the risks. The fact that these teachers discuss ethical issues of Internet use with their students, satisfies the aspirations of Ålands Landskapsregering (2007) that

students are to develop digital proficiency during their education.

Teacher 4 and Teacher 5 also inform their students about the possibilities they have of checking whether someone has copied material from the Internet. Almost all the teachers (T2, T3, T4, T5) think that it is quite easy to detect cheating. They can sense that a text is probably not written by a particular student because it is too advanced/complicated or changes stylistically. Teacher 3 finds that students might become surprised at her finding out that they have copied material from the Internet, which proves that they lack sufficient knowledge of both the English language and of how the Internet works. The opinion that it is easy to find out if a student has cheated, is confirmed in Tuvér and Blomqvist's study (2009).

Two of the teachers (T3, T4) bring up consequences that cheating has for students in their respective schools. Both teachers state that plagiarism is something their schools take very seriously. The consequences of cheating might be that an assignment/a course is given a failing grade, that a student has to do the task again, or that he/she gets a warning from the headmaster. Teacher 3 speculates that plagiarism might become an even more severe problem if university students start using the Internet to a greater extent.

Another disadvantage of the use of the Internet in the school that a majority of the teachers (T1, T2, T3) mention is extra curricular-activities that students devote their time to during lessons, in particular Facebook, although it is not allowed. Teacher 1 says that she sometimes chooses not to let her students use the Internet in class because she knows the temptation to check their Facebook status is too strong, and that they will get more work done if they do not go to the computer room. Teacher 2 thinks that Facebook should be banned from the schools, and Teacher 3 requests the possibility to turn off the Internet in the classroom. In Tuvér and Blomqvist's study (2009) it was also found that the Internet might distract students during lessons.

Technical problems is the third drawback that two of the teachers (T1, T2) mention. Following the recommendations of Dudeney (2007), Teacher 1 always has a Plan B when she uses

the Internet in class, in case something goes wrong. Teacher 2 would like to use the Internet for current news that might interest the students, but she has experienced so many technical disturbances over the years that she now avoids using the Internet in the classroom. That technical problems is a concern for teachers is confirmed by other authors (Dudeny 2007; Gibson and Oberg 2004; Singhal 1997; Tuvér & Blomqvist 2009).

A fourth disadvantage of the use of the Internet is biased and untrustworthy information on the Internet, which two of the teachers mention (T1, T4). Teacher 1 expresses concerns that students might not find the correct, or even false, information if a teacher simply instructs them to browse a specific topic. Teacher 4 has a similar opinion: “there is a lot of information [on the Internet] which is biased and which you absolutely cannot use” (L 68-9). The problem of unreliable online information has been pointed out by teachers in previous studies (Acikalin 2009; Gibson & Oberg 2004; Madden et al 2005; Tuvér & Blomqvist 2009) and in the literature (Cunningham & Andersson 1997).

Consequently, Teacher 1 thinks it is important to discuss ethics on the Internet with students, to guide them to reliable texts. In this respect it is vital to give students guidelines and to set a time limit for browsing activities. In previous studies it has been documented that teachers find it important to teach their students to question and evaluate information on the Internet (Karchmer 2001; Tuvér & Blomqvist 2009).

Closely related is another disadvantage that Teacher 1 mentions, namely the existence of inappropriate online information for children and young people. Quite a few authors highlight the problem of the Internet not being completely safe for students to use (Cunningham & Andersson 1997; Dudeny 2007; Karchmer 2001; Sharples et al 2008; Singhal 1997; Tuvér & Blomqvist 2009). In this context it is interesting to note that only one teacher in the current study specifically points to inappropriate content as a disadvantage of Internet use in the school. It is possible that the other teachers do not consider it to be a major problem in their teaching; it is also possible that they

did not come to think of it at the time of the interview.

There are other drawbacks of the use of the Internet in the classroom. Teacher 3 expresses concern that the Internet might become the major teaching tool. In the same manner as students use the Internet as their primary source of information (Tuvér & Blomqvist 2009), so might the teachers come to rely too much on the Internet in their planning/teaching. She points out that the student-teacher relationship is crucial, which is in agreement with Tuvér and Blomqvist's argument (2009) that students need adults who are present in their lives for guidance and motivation.

Touching upon the concern of Teacher 3 that the Internet might become the primary teaching resource, Teacher 4 fears that it might come to replace printed literature. "I think it's sad if the Internet becomes a complete substitute for books" (L 145-6). Tuvér and Blomqvist (2009) observe that, if the Internet is used as the main teaching tool, there is a risk that young people acquire a negative attitude to long texts and books. In a similar vein, Chapman (2005) contends that the use of computers might have the effect that books are devalued by students.

A disadvantage mentioned by Teacher 5 is that the Internet might influence students' writing skills negatively. "Spoken language has become so much more important to them so they don't pay much attention to writing properly" (L 105-6). Some students do not see the difference between formal and informal language, and over the years students' spelling and grammar errors have increased. Lastly, Teacher 2 regrets that the computer room is not always readily available. Similarly, one of the teachers in Gray et al's study raises the issue of limited access to the computer room (2007:419).

Evaluation of the interview guide

All the teachers answered all the questions addressed to them, that is, no teacher refused to answer any of the questions. On the whole, the questions in the interview guide posed no problems to the respondents. Only one question, number 6 (i.e. "Where do you find the Internet most applicable in planning and instruction?"), caused some of the teachers to ask for clarifications, whereupon the

interviewer rephrased the question somewhat (e.g. “Where do you find the Internet most usable in planning and instruction?”).

However, it should be noted that the teachers might have interpreted basic concepts differently, for instance, the term 'teaching' pertaining to question number 5 (i.e. 'Do you use the Internet when teaching English (in class)?') in the interview guide. Whereas one teacher might also include student activity during lessons (e.g. when they are looking for information on the Internet) in the concept 'teaching', another teacher might regard only her own actions in the classroom as 'teaching'.

The interviewer posed freely formulated yet pertinent follow-up questions during the interviews. The purpose was partly to pursue relevant and interesting information, and partly to clarify the teachers' responses in order to increase the possibility of performing a more substantiated analysis (Kvale & Brinkmann 2009:80, 127). One quality criterion for an interview suggested by Kvale and Brinkmann is the amount of short questions and more substantial responses in the interview interaction (180). An attempt was made to conduct an analysis of the standard interview questions in the interview guide in the present study.

However, the attempt was unsuccessful due to methodological difficulties. How short is a short research question? What is considered to be a long response? What about follow-up questions; should the responses to those questions be included in the answers to the standard questions? However, setting these issues aside, it can be established that no single standard question in the interview guide was answered with simply a 'yes' or a 'no' by any of the teachers. Moreover, some of the questions yielded answers of several pages from some of the teachers (including follow-up questions and responses).

Methodological concerns revisited

Gray et al notice “the inevitable bias of interpretation” in their study (2007:413). Similarly, one weakness of the present study is the fact that there was only one interviewer/interpreter of the

results. Thus it was not possible to test the reliability of interpretation between interviewers. Yet Kvale and Brinkmann argue that an acknowledgement of a subjective perspective/inherent bias could contribute to a production of knowledge encompassing many different perspectives. In addition, taking different meanings of the concept into account, such as reflexive objectivity, the qualitative interview could be regarded as an objective research method (186, 262).

The author thus strived at being sensitive to her own preconceptions while analysing the interviews. For instance, it was acknowledged that positive responses about the use of the Internet as a teaching resource might be accepted more readily than negative ones, which in turn would have an impact on (i.e. bias) the interpretation of the results. Moreover, the five themes discovered in the interview data were reached at through “personal intuitive interpretation” by the interviewer, hence no formal procedure was applied (Kvale & Brinkmann 299, my translation). Consequently, it is most likely that another interpreter would have analysed the results differently.

The present study has aimed at a modest degree of reliability, that is, a balance between allowing the interviewer to improvise and ask follow-up questions, and to render the study possible to reproduce (263-4). Given the acknowledged subjective perspective of this study, it is considered most likely that the answers would have come out differently if another interviewer had asked the questions. Another interviewer would have posed different follow-up and leading questions, which would have yielded different responses from the interviewees. Yet both interrogative approaches were an integral part of the study.

As all the interviews were transcribed by the same person (i.e. the author), it was not possible to test for reliability between different transcribers (200). However, an analysis was conducted in order to test the reliability of the interviewees' answers. It was found that one of the teacher's responses might be considered somewhat inconsistent. On the one hand, she says that she has enough knowledge to implement the Internet in planning and teaching; on the other hand, she says that she does not know if she is experienced. However, there is a semantic difference between

these two concepts. The teacher in question might feel that although she has good knowledge of ICT use in the school context, she still lacks enough general experience of it.

The interviews were conducted in a friendly atmosphere. None of the teachers questioned the interviewer/the interview questions nor withdrew from the study. Yet it must be taken into account that (some of) the teachers might have withheld information deliberately from the interviewer (49). The possibility of biased responses in the interviews is thus acknowledged (cf. Gray et al 2007:413). Consequently, leading questions were consistently asked with the purpose of questioning the reliability of the respondents' answers, and of confirming the interviewer's interpretation of their responses (Kvale & Brinkmann 188).

However, an analysis of individual interview questions and answers reveals that the interviewer did not ask follow-up and leading questions in a consistent manner, hence failing to validate the responses adequately during the interviews (267). For instance, typically the interviewer followed up one respondent's response to a certain question in greater detail than another respondent's answer to the same question. The reason for this fallibility could be that the interviewer sensed that the respondent in question did not want to develop the current topic further.

Taking the above mentioned methodological weaknesses into account, it can be established that the method of choice (i.e. the qualitative interview) is adequate for the aim of this study, which was to investigate the influence of the Internet on English teaching and learning. As the purpose was to explore teachers' opinions and experiences of the use of the Internet as a teaching resource more in depth, another qualitative method (e.g. classroom observations) or a quantitative method (e.g. a questionnaire) was not a valid option.

Summary and conclusion

Young people of today have been brought up in a digital era. The Internet constitutes a major and natural part of their lives. Research points to advantages of the use of the Internet in an informal context (Jewitt 2010, Olin-Scheller & Wikström 2010, Sefton-Green 2004) as well as in a formal

learning setting. In the school context the Internet can be used to find for instance different kinds of information (Acikalin 2009; Cunningham & Andersson 1997; Harmer 2007; Kilmici 2010; Madden et al 2005; Sayed Abdallah 2007; Singhal 1997; Tuvér & Blomqvist 2009; Young 2003), diverse linguistic activities (Dudeny 2007; Kilimci 2010; Sayed Abdallah 2007; Tuvér & Blomqvist 2009; Young 2003), and other people in the world to communicate with (Cunningham & Andersson 1997; Dudeny 2007; Singhal 1997; Tuvér & Blomqvist 2009).

Research also describes negative aspects of the use of the Internet in the school, such as bullying (Sharples et al 2008), unreliable/inappropriate information (Acikalin 2009; Cunningham & Andersson 1997; Chapman 2005; Dudeny 2007; Karchmer 2001; Madden et al 2005; Sharples et al 2008; Singhal 1997; Tuvér & Blomqvist 2009), and lack of Internet access/technological disturbances (Dudeny 2007; Gibson & Oberg 2004; Singhal 1997; Tuvér & Blomqvist 2009; Young 2003).

The overall aim of the current study was to investigate the influence of the use of the Internet on English planning and instruction. Five upper secondary teachers working in vocational schools in the Aland Islands were interviewed. The interviews were conducted, transcribed and analysed by the author. Five recurrent themes were identified in the interview data: general opinions on and experience of the Internet, attitudes to teaching and learning, opinions on the use of the Internet as a planning and teaching resource, effects of the use of the Internet on students and teachers, and drawbacks of the use of the Internet in the school.

Although the sample size of the this study is in accordance with the size of other interview studies, no claims of generalizability are made (Kvale & Brinkmann 2009:130). The sample size is considered to be too small for the conclusions to be generalized to other groups (280), thus the results are representative of English upper secondary teachers working in vocational schools in the Aland Islands.

All the teachers in the current study generally have a positive opinion of the Internet. They

all have experience/knowledge of the Internet, which they have gained on their own (i.e. informally). Four of the teachers can be described as frequent and confident users, whereas one teacher thinks she lacks enough knowledge/experience of the use of the Internet. This finding is reflected in the teachers' interview responses. The teacher who describes herself as an infrequent Internet user, also has the least positive attitude towards the use of the Internet in the classroom. She generally avoids using the Internet in class as she has experienced so many technical disturbances over the years.

The teachers in this study think that the Internet is a valuable source of information and educational tool. They mention a number of advantages of the use of the Internet in planning and instruction. The Internet can be used to find facts/recent news, dictionaries, exercises of various kinds, authentic English texts, key pals in other countries, and to get ideas/different perspectives. Moreover, the Internet allows variation/impulsiveness in teaching, makes learning more enjoyable/interesting, motivates both students and teachers, and can be a time-saver. In addition, one teacher states that the Internet has changed the way she teaches. Finally, the Internet is not only used by the teachers for information seeking but also by students.

Yet the teachers list a number of disadvantages of the use of the Internet in planning and teaching. They mention four major drawbacks, viz. biased/unreliable information, students' cheating and extracurricular activities, and also technical problems. Furthermore, the teachers point out that it might be difficult to find accurate news/correct information on the Internet, and to differentiate between reliable and unreliable sources. The teachers also voice concerns that the Internet might become the major teaching tool, that planning takes more time when using the Internet, and that (young) people spend too much time on the Internet.

The research questions of this study, that is, what the benefits and drawbacks are of the use of the Internet when planning lessons/courses and teaching English, have thus been answered satisfactorily. It should be pointed out though, that the open nature of the qualitative interview

means that the respondents are free to choose what to share with, and withhold from, the interviewer. Moreover, the informants might have interpreted basic concepts differently. Hence there is a possibility that these methodological shortcomings have had an effect on the results.

Having acknowledged this fallibility, it should also be emphasized that the qualitative interview yielded unexpected outcomes in this study. The analysis of the interview data revealed a recurring theme (the teachers' attitudes to teaching and learning) that was not expected, as no questions in the interview guide addressed this issue. Hence, it must be considered a methodological value of the qualitative interview that it might produce unexpected yet pertinent results.

However, my aspiration to be able to suggest classroom practices for teachers who wish to benefit from using the Internet in their everyday work was not fulfilled. The reason is, again, limitations of the interview data. No single question in the interview guide is directed at specifically finding out about what Internet-based methods the teachers use in the classroom. Moreover, I, as an interviewer, failed to ask follow-up questions that would have probed into the area of Internet-assisted classroom practices.

Closely related is another methodological flaw that was discovered during the analysis of the interview data: the interviewer failed to ask follow-up questions in a consistent manner. As a result, it is not possible to draw general conclusions about the teachers' views on certain topics which surfaced during the interviews, for instance concerning the issue of plagiarism. Consequently, the teachers' responses to this crucial topic differ quite substantially. Only three of the teachers mention that they discuss cheating and the consequences of it with their students. Yet, due to the nature of the current study it cannot be concluded that the other two teachers do not. As they were not specifically asked if they discuss plagiarism with their students, it is possible that they did not come to think of it at the time of the interview.

The possibility of students' cheating seems to cast a shadow on the use of the Internet in the school. Indeed it must be considered a major disadvantage of Internet use that students find it

difficult to resist copy pasting parts of texts, or even whole texts, from the Internet. It is not as simple as students' not knowing that it is not allowed to use Internet sources as if they were public property. Granted, some students might be ignorant of this fact, but not all. In fact, some students deliberately copy paste online information without citing their sources. Since it is more cumbersome to steal parts of texts from printed literature, they are likely to choose online sources as it makes it easier to cheat.

Another possible scenario is that the ease of copy pasting online information might tempt some students to cheat who would not otherwise do so. Consequently, it could be claimed that it is not appropriate to advocate the use of a forum in the school that is a temptation to students to copy (parts of) texts and pass them off as their own work. However, to argue logically, a student who has the intention to cheat would probably do so regardless of the source. Furthermore, it would not be fair to prohibit the use of a valuable source of information from the large number of students who would never cheat.

Thus it is urgent that teachers teach their students to be responsible users of sources in general, and Internet sources in particular. It is vital that students understand that it is not legal to use information from online sources without indicating they have done so. The teachers in the current study clearly take responsibility for informing their students about plagiarism and the consequences of it. The students are informed of what they risk losing if they cheat, and also of the possibilities that teachers have of checking whether a student has plagiarized (parts of) a text. These approaches most likely have a deterrent effect on students.

When discussing the use of ICT in education, the fact that there is a great deal of information on the Internet that is not suitable for young people must be recognized. Is it really appropriate to let students use the Internet in the school when there is a possibility that they will come across, for instance, pornographic and violent material? Granted, it is individual teachers' responsibility to ensure that students do not access web sites containing objectionable information

during the school day (Dudeney 2007). However, students spend (a great deal of) time on the Internet in their spare time, and how they use the Internet when they are not in school is beyond the school's control. Therefore, the best alternative is to allow teachers and students to benefit from the learning and teaching opportunities that the Internet has to offer, provided that every precaution to protect students from exposure to inappropriate information has been taken.

Similarly, the fact that there is a great deal of incorrect and biased information on the Internet must also be acknowledged. It seems to be a common view among young people that what is published on the Internet is correct and trustworthy information (cf. also Tuvér & Blomqvist 2009). Hence it is highly important that students learn to separate reliable sources from unreliable ones. They should be taught to check several sources on the same topic, and to compare the information presented to them (Karchmer 2001:458; see also Tuvér & Blomqvist 2009). They should be instructed to always check who is responsible for the information they come across while surfing the Net (cf. also Cunningham & Andersson 1997:140).

As was pointed out by teachers in the current study, a good strategy is to guide students to a few reliable sources, and then let them continue practising their search skills on their own. Undoubtedly, if a teacher always presents his/her students with correct and reliable online sources, they will not learn to be critical to and question information on the Internet. Paradoxically then, what at first glance seems to be a negative aspect of the use of the Internet in the school, could be transformed into a valuable learning experience for students.

Once students learn how to evaluate information on the Internet, they are in a position to benefit from the learning opportunities it has to offer. As was found in the current study, the Internet has the potential of increasing student activity during lessons. Rather than being presented with learning stuff from the teacher, students actively search for and find the required information on the Internet themselves. However, the teachers also highlighted the fact that the Internet can be a distraction for students in the classroom. Students might find it difficult to stay focused on the task

at hand, instead their minds drift away to community networks and the like, such as Facebook.

I would like to claim that the Internet in the classroom gives rise to a dilemma. On the one hand, the Internet can be a valuable teaching and learning resource. For instance, it can increase motivation in both students and teachers, making it more fun and interesting to teach and learn. On the other hand, the Internet is a distraction in itself, taking students' attention away from what they are supposed to be learning. Thus, students have to be taught the difference between the use of the Internet as a learning tool and as a spare-time toy. Consequently, web sites that might distract students during lessons should be blocked, so that students and teachers can benefit from using the Internet as it should be employed in education, that is, as a valuable source of information and teaching/learning material.

Having said that, I find it is relevant to ask a burning question: is the Internet a good or a bad thing for young people? Yet it seems impossible to answer this question with a simple yes or no. Hence it is the author's position that the Internet is both good *and* bad for young people. On the one hand, youngsters enjoy spending time on the Internet, they are familiar with the use of it, and it can offer them many different learning experiences. On the other hand, there is a risk that young people, metaphorically speaking, 'get caught in the Web', that is, that they spend too much time in cyberspace. Returning to Chapman's introductory quote, young people also need to engage in non-computer-based activities, and in personal and social relationships, in order to lead a satisfactory and enriching life.

According to Gibson and Oberg, “[t]he Internet has often been hailed as an innovation with unprecedented potential for the improvement of teaching and learning” (Gibson & Oberg 2004:570). As the current study reveals, the Internet is regarded as a valuable additional teaching resource by the interviewed teachers, yet they caution that teachers and students alike have to stay critical/sceptical to online information. They further point out that the Internet should be used as a *complement* to other teaching aids, which is also emphasized by the teachers in Tuvér and

Blomqvist's study (2009).

One teacher in the current study expresses the concern that teachers might come to rely too heavily on the Internet in teaching, which is a justified worry. It is easy to imagine a stressed teacher resorting to the Internet in an effort to save time; with just a few clicks on the keyboard, he or she can access a great deal of teaching material and enormous amounts of information readily available at all times. Yet the fact that the Internet is so huge can make it somewhat deterring and difficult to handle. Clearly, it takes both time and effort to learn how to find accurate and reliable information on the Internet, and this is a skill that teachers too have to acquire (cf. also Harmer 2007).

Another issue of personal concern for teachers is technical disturbances in the classroom. I would like to argue that technical problems can be a hindrance to the use of the Internet in instruction. It could be that teachers who are less confident in the use of ICT are more prone to feel overwhelmed by technical disturbances in the classroom. In contrast, a confident ICT user might feel that technical problems are part and parcel of Internet-based teaching. It is also possible that teachers refrain from integrating the Internet into their teaching because they overrate the occurrence of technical problems. In any case, it is of utmost importance that teachers have the possibility of getting adequate technical support and guidance at work, so that they can gain confidence and a sense of security in the use of ICT (see also Gibson & Oberg 2004:582).

There are also other aspects to take into consideration concerning the use of the Internet as an additional planning/teaching tool. First, most likely, all teachers and their students do not have the same access to computers/the Internet in the school. Hence, the use of the Internet in planning/teaching might be prevented by circumstances outside the teacher's control. Second, the Internet might not be equally applicable in planning/teaching for all teachers. There are, for instance, syllabus requirements that might not allow teachers to use the Internet even if they would like to.

Third, the fact that teachers might have different attitudes to the implementation of new

teaching resources must be respected. Some teachers might more willingly than others accept the use of the Internet in planning/teaching, while others might feel a stronger need to hold on to their 'traditional' ways of teaching (see also Gray et al 2007). Lastly, as with any innovation, integrating the Internet in planning/teaching takes time as there is a great deal to learn (Gray et al 2007). Nevertheless, some teachers are more technically advanced than others so the Internet might be a time-saver for them, but a time-consumer for teachers who are less familiar with the use of ICT. Would it be possible then, to meet these differing conditions so that all teachers and their students can benefit fully from the use of the Internet in the classroom?

As previously stated, it is the author's opinion that it is of utmost importance that teachers are familiar with modern technology, and that they use the Internet when teaching and planning courses/lessons. The obvious reason is that students are interested in and spend a great deal of time on the Internet. Yet it is also my opinion that a requirement to integrate the Internet in planning/instruction should not be imposed upon teachers. Individual teachers should have to opportunity to decide when and how to use the Internet in their everyday work. However, should teachers be required to implement ICT into their classrooms, it must be accompanied by adequate formal training. It should not be expected, or taken for granted, that teachers have the will, time or inclination to acquire necessary skills on their own.

By way of conclusion, the Internet has the potential of making teaching more fun and interesting, and thus to increase students' motivation to learn. Here it is justified to readdress the relevant issue of students' exposure to informal language use. It would be interesting to find out how students' language skills are affected by continual surfing. For instance, is it the case that ESL and EFL students generally focus predominantly on spoken language at the expense of written language? Another possible area of research is ESL/EFL teachers' use of the Internet in teaching in practice. One approach would be to collect assignments and lesson plans from teachers who actively use the Internet in planning and instruction. Ideally, this research would result in a manual

of classroom practices for ESL/EFL teachers who want to benefit from the use of the Internet as an additional teaching resource in their daily work.

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Appendix 1: Information sheet

Studiens syfte: att undersöka engelskalärares användning av Internet i sin kurs- och lektionsplanering samt undervisning. Informanter: gymnasielärare i engelska vid yrkesskolor på Åland (sample: 8).

Undersökningen är ett examensarbete, och ingår som en pilotstudie i ett större forskningsprojekt vid Högskolan i Gävle.

Metod: halvstrukturerade intervjuer (ca 30 min) som spelas in och transkriberas för analys. De transkriberade intervjuerna arkiveras därefter vid Högskolan i Gävle. De insamlade uppgifterna kommer inte att användas för något annat syfte än för forskning.

Forskare: Lärarstuderande Camilla Brändström

Handledare: Dr Tore Nilsson, Högskolan i Gävle

Publicering: den färdiga studien kommer att publiceras elektroniskt i Digitala Vetenskapliga Arkivet (<http://www.diva-portal.org/smash/aboutdiva.jsf>).

Forskningsetiska principer

Informationskravet: Forskare ska informera de av forskningen berörda om den aktuella forskningsuppgiftens syfte.

- Du bör ha blivit informerad om Din uppgift i projektet och vilka villkor som gäller för Ditt deltagande, samt att Ditt deltagande är frivilligt.

Samtyckeskravet: Deltagare i en undersökning har rätt att själva bestämma över sin medverkan.

- Du bör ha blivit informerad om att ditt samtycke krävs, att Du har rätt att självständigt bestämma om, hur länge och på vilka villkor Du ska delta, samt att Ditt beslut att delta/avbryta inte får åtföljas av otillbörlig påtryckning/påverkan.

Konfidentialitetskravet: Uppgifter om alla i en undersökning ingående personer ska ges största möjliga konfidentialitet och personuppgifterna förvaras på ett sådant sätt att obehöriga inte kan ta del av dem.

- Du bör ha blivit informerad om att alla uppgifter om identifierbara personer ska antecknas, lagras och avrapporteras på ett sådant sätt att enskilda människor inte kan identifieras av utomstående, att personuppgifter inte får lämnas ut till utomstående, samt att åtgärder måste vidtas för att försvåra för utomstående att identifiera enskilda individer/grupper av individer.

Nyttjandekravet: Uppgifter insamlade om enskilda personer får endast användas för forskningsändamål.

Appendix 2: Interview guide

Introductory questions

1. How many years have you been working as an English teacher?
2. What is your general opinion about the Internet?
3. Do you use the Internet in your leisure time?
 - If YES, in what way(s)?

Standard questions

4. Do you use the Internet in your lesson and short-term course planning?
 - If YES, in what way(s)?
 - If NO, why not?
5. Do you use the Internet when teaching English (in class)?
 - If YES, in what way(s)?
 - If NO, why not?

* * * * *

TO TEACHERS WHO USE THE INTERNET IN COURSE/LESSON PLANNING AND INSTRUCTION:

6. Where do you find the Internet most applicable in planning and instruction?
7. What websites do you use the most?
8. What (observable) effects, if any, does the use of the Internet in lesson/course planning and teaching have on the students? (for instance, on students' learning, motivation and interest in English as a subject).
 - Advantages? Disadvantages?
9. What (observable) effects, if any, does the use of the Internet in lesson/course planning and teaching have on you as a teacher? (for instance, the time spent on lesson/course planning).
 - Advantages? Disadvantages?

TO TEACHERS WHO DO NOT USE THE INTERNET:

10. Would you like to start using the Internet in planning and instruction?

- If YES, why? Benefits?
- If NO, why not? Drawbacks?

* * * * *

11. What is your opinion of the Internet as an additional teaching resource?

- Advantages/disadvantages?

12. Do you feel that you have enough knowledge of the use of the Internet to implement it in course/lesson planning and instruction?

- If YES, how have you gained this knowledge?
- If NO, how would it be possible for you improve your skills?

13. Students use the Internet both formally and informally today. Do you allow your students to use the Internet in class or to complete homework assignments?

- If YES, what are the benefits?
- Are there any drawbacks?
- If NO, why not?

Additional questions

14. Do you see yourself as an experienced or inexperienced Internet user?

15. What other teaching aids do you use?

16. Do you feel there is an increased risk of cheating with students' access to the Internet in the classroom?

- If YES, why?
- If NO, why not?

17. Anything else you would like to add?

Thank you very much!