

## English Teachers' Barriers to the Use of Internet in English Language Classrooms

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**Abstract:** *This paper aimed to discuss what features may hinder to possibilities of the mainstream use of internet in teaching English as a second language. These categories of barriers to the use of internet in English language classrooms are (a) financial barriers, (b) availability of computer hardware and software (c) technical and theoretical knowledge and (d) acceptance of technology.*

*One of the basic findings of the study is the lack of technical and theoretical knowledge of some teachers. Not only is there a shortage of knowledge about developing software to promote learning, but many instructors do not understand how to use the new technologies. Failing to do this would result in distorted findings and provide educationalists with data that only reflect one segment of the whole picture. One would need to understand that improper use of technologies can affect both the teacher and the learner negatively.*

**Key Words:** *Internet, Computer Hardware and Software, Financial Barriers, Globalization, Technology,*

### Introduction

Globalization and the advancement of ICT have had a profound impact on the teaching of English as a second language and a foreign language. While it is sometimes assumed that this is a relatively recent phenomenon, there is in fact quite a history of using computer technology to assist in English Language Teaching (Kern & Warschauer, 2000; Fotos & Browne, 2004).

The Internet has emerged as an important teaching-learning tool as learners better appreciate the learning process when it is mediated. Teachers should be provided with professional development opportunities to help them model effective use of the Internet as a tool for students' learning, including integrating Internet learning with regular classroom learning.

Further, the Internet provides authentic language learning contexts that are rich in communication and in global diversity. When effectively exploited, the Internet enables students to participate in a wide range of meaningful and interactive tasks (Derewianka, 1997; Singhal, 1997; Silc, 1998; Graus, 1999; Levy & Debski, 1999; Warschauer, 1999, 2000, 2001; Krajka,

2000; Kern and Warschauer, 2000; Warschauer, Shetzel & Meloni, 2000; Harmer, 2001; Kasper, 2002a; Murray, 2005). As Hanson-Smith (2001) puts it:

. . .The widespread use of software, local area networks (LANS) and the Internet has created enormous opportunities for learners to enhance their communicative abilities, both by individualizing practice and by tapping into a global community of other learners (p. 107).

Especially valuable for ESL learners are both the ‘authentic language material’ (Wilson, 2004:5) available on the Internet and its interaction possibilities (Warschauer, 2001), as such learners may have for other means of obtaining genuine communication in the target language.

The aim of this paper is to discuss what features may hinder to possibilities of the mainstream use of the Internet in teaching English as a foreign language. Although the problem can be approached from many different aspects, there are only few which will be discussed here. Without any attempt at prioritization, the paper will look at the following common categories of barriers to the use of Internet in English Language classrooms (a) financial barriers, (b) availability of computer hardware and software, (c) technical and theoretical knowledge, and (d) acceptance of the technology.

#### **The research questions for this study are:**

1. To what extents do the Filipino English language teachers’ use the Internet?
2. What are Filipino English language teachers’ practices of using the Internet for English language teaching?
3. What are the barriers that hinder Filipino English language teachers’ use and practices of the Internet in terms of English language teaching?
4. To what extent does the Internet contribute to the overall professional development of the Filipino English language teachers?

#### **Review of Literature**

The Internet is constantly growing in popularity and availability. Many people use the Internet daily, sometimes without even being aware of the fact that they use the Internet on a daily basis. As noted by Warschauer, Shetzer and Meloni (2000), the Internet has been reshaping many aspects of society such as on-line education, advertising, marketing and sales. A number of language teachers have become interested in using the Internet since recent developments in ICT support diversity in learning methods and multimedia materials that can be useful for language learners. The vast amount of information linked by hypertext on the Web seems highly valuable for learners with a self-directed learning style. Each learner is allowed and encouraged “to

manage the learning process independently and to explore linked pieces of information non-sequentially on the basis of their personal preferences and needs” (Son, 1998, p.121). Language teachers, accordingly, can make their classes individualized and personalized, resulting in self-empowerment and autonomy in learning (Warschauer, Turbee & Roberts, 1996).

Alomari, (2009) and Maor (2003) argue that teachers should take on the roles of a researcher or a facilitator to engage students to become involved in active, collaborative and constructive learning experiences. However, without a teacher to organize the resources and then contextualize the learning possibilities within the curricula, the power of Internet will dissipate and the potential of teaching will be lost. Therefore, teachers need to engage in more powerful roles that include not only using technology appropriately, but also finding ways to build in meaning purposeful connections and relationships to the larger world and community outside the school building (McCombs 2000).

Hence, teachers’ practices of the Internet have to mirror their new roles so that learning experiences can be enhanced and enriched through engaging learners in authentic and meaningful activities that the Internet can facilitate and support. Earlier studies have explored such possibilities with quite exciting outcomes. LeLoup (1997), for instance, notes that email provided teachers the access to discussion groups and newsgroups, which in turn allowed teachers to design activities and projects that enhanced their curriculum and provided students with opportunities to communicate directly with foreign language speakers. These discussions allowed the teachers to gain confidence and to learn and rely on and support each other (Taylor & Stuhlmann, 1998). Also, through discussions in an online networking environment, English language teachers contributed to mutual encouragement and recognition amongst teachers, which took form in giving positive feedback on ideas, materials and classroom practices (Tsui et al 1996) that benefit learners. Also, the Internet offers English teachers the opportunity for on-going collaboration and professional development through various online activities such as online sharing, online collaboration and online researching (see Kabilan & Mohammed Amin 2004; Kabilan & Mohammed Amin; 2006 Kabilan 2005) that contributed to better classroom practices in terms of teaching and learning of English.

### **Methodology**

The subjects in the study were 168 College English teachers (38 males and 130 females) of the three state universities and one state college in Cagayan Valley Philippines namely: Isabela State University (Isabela), Nueva Vizcaya State University (Nueva Vizcaya), Quirino State College and Cagayan State University (Cagayan). The age range of the respondents was from 21- 64 years with a mean age of 34. Their teaching experience ranged from less than 5 years to more than 25 years with a mean of 15 years. The study used a questionnaire to document Cagayan Valley, Philippines College English teachers’ perceptions and barriers on the use of the Internet

for English language teaching purposes. The questionnaire consisted of three sections: a demographic section to get respondents' background information; a multiple-choice section to find their perceptions and barriers on the use of Internet using a modified Likert scale; and an open-ended question section to elicit their general opinions or comments on the use of the Internet for teaching purposes in the classroom. It was distributed on-line and off-line to 168 College English teachers of Cagayan Valley, Philippines. A total of 168 questionnaires had been returned within three-month time and the data collected from the questionnaire were analyzed quantitatively and qualitatively.

### Findings and Discussions

Of the 168 returned questionnaire, only 72 (43%) teachers indicate that they have access to the Internet and have used the Internet for some kind of teaching and learning activities in classrooms or have used the Internet for professional development purposes. Remaining teachers (n=96) report that they have not used the Internet at all for the purpose of teaching English, even though some of them might have access to the Internet. The teachers' reasons for not using the Internet are indicated in Table 1.

**Table 1.** Filipino teachers' reasons for not using the Internet

Reasons for using the Internet	Yes	F (%)	No	F (%)
1. Don't know how to use	70	(73)	26	(27)
2. No time to learn about the Internet	55	(57)	41	(43)
3. No time to use	36	(37.5)	60	(62.5)
4. No interest at all	26	(27)	70	(73)

Most of the teachers are not using the Internet mainly because they do not know how to use the Internet and they have no time to learn about the Internet. Only a 27% of the teachers indicate that they have no interest at all in terms of using the Internet for teaching English. Studies have shown that there are teachers who do not prefer online activities, and sometimes it is very difficult to encourage teachers' engagement in online activities (Kabilan 2003; Moonen & Voogt 2000; Owen 2000). These are because teachers have little or no knowledge and experience of technology or telecommunications in general (Levin & Thurston 1996), just like what was stated by the Filipino teachers in this study. For the following sections, the data analysed and discussed would be concerned with the Filipino teachers who have access to the Internet and have used the Internet for the teaching of English.

### Filipino English Language Teachers' Use of Internet

Table 2 shows the number of hours Filipino English language teachers who accessed and used the Internet in a week (by hours). Majority of the teachers spend about 1-5 hours per week, and 15% spend more than 20 hours per week.

**Table 2.** Overall usage of Internet in a week (by hours)

Number of hours	F	(%)
1-5	25	(34)
6-10	21	(28)
11-15	13	(18)
16-20	3	(4)
More than 20 hours	10	(14)
N	72	

Tables 1 and 2 imply that the issues of accessibility and lack of facilities and lack of time are the key factors that hinder teachers' effective utilization of the Internet in Cagayan Valley Philippines. The same issues and problems have been identified earlier by Demirbilek (2009) in the Turkish context and by Kabilan and Mohamed Amin (2004); Kabilan (2003), and Kabilan and Mohamed Amin (2002) in the Malaysian context. In the open-ended question of the problems faced in using the Internet, even though the 72 Filipino teachers accessed to the Internet, they still lamented that they have difficulties accessing the Internet, slow Internet connection or disconnection, technical problems during the class, finding appropriate teaching materials and integrating Internet resources into their classroom curricula, taking much time to prepare and arrange facilities to use the Internet; and finding students' plagiarism. These issues, to some extent, have hindered the teachers' use and practices of the Internet. Though the Internet overcomes the lack of time factor for some conventional form of professional development, it seems that the Filipino teachers still do not have the time to use or learn more about the Internet. This is not surprising because teachers are busier than ever – teaching, writing reports, co-curricular activities, disciplining students, meetings, checking and marking students' work, invigilation of examinations, and the list goes on (Kabilan & Mohamed Amin 2004).

### Teachers' Practices and Barriers of the Internet and WWW

Table 3 gives the degree of importance of the teachers' practices of the Internet using; emails, chat rooms, messenger tools and online forums. It is revealed in this study that Filipino English language teachers' practices of the Internet are mainly to develop and enhance their communication skills, increase their communication levels with other teachers and to seek information related to the teaching of English.

**Table 3.** Teachers practices of the internet

Teachers' Practices	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree	Mean
1. The Internet provides non- native speakers of English with a rich learning environment.	0	16 (9.5%)	127 (75.5%)	25 (15%)	3.05
2. Internet tools can be used for teaching purposes.	3 (1.8%)	9 (5.4%)	120 (71.4%)	36 (21.4%)	3.12
3. Internet resources can replace textbooks.	2 (1.2%)	30 (17.9%)	97 (57.7%)	39 (23.2%)	3.05
4. It is easy to find ESL/EFL materials on the Web.	2 (1.2%)	11 (6.5%)	133 (79.2%)	22 (13.1%)	3.04
5. ESL/EFL Websites are useful for teaching English.	5 (3%)	9 (5.4%)	124 (74%)	30 (12%)	3.05
6. Students can be motivated by the use of the Internet in the classroom.	3 (1.8%)	13 (7.7%)	128 (76.2%)	24 (14.3%)	3.02
7. Students can improve their English skills through the use of the Internet.	4 (2.4%)	5 (2.98%)	122 (72.6%)	37 (22%)	3.14
8. Students can learn how to use Internet resources for learning English for themselves.	2 (1.2%)	8 (4.7%)	130 (77.4%)	28 (16.7%)	3.09
9. Students can improve communication skills by e-mailing or chatting with native speakers of English on-line.	3 (1.8%)	5 (3%)	141 (83.9%)	19 (11.3%)	3.04
10. Students will be more attentive in Internet-assisted English language teaching.	4 (2.4%)	7 (4.1%)	136 (81%)	21 (12.5%)	3.03
11. I am responsible for the success of internet-assisted English language teaching.	2 (1.2%)	9 (5.4%)	126 (75%)	31 (18.4%)	3.10
12. I am competent to use Internet-based materials in the classroom.	3 (1.8%)	11 (6.5%)	139 (82.7%)	15 (8.9%)	2.98
13. I know how to integrate Internet resources into existing classroom curricula.	4 (2.4%)	10 (6%)	140 (83.3%)	14 (8.3%)	2.97
14. I need training to improve my Internet literacy skills.	4 (2.4%)	7 (4.2%)	139 (82.7%)	18 (10.7%)	3.01
15. I would like to use Internet-based	3	3	145	17	3.04

materials and activities in my classroom as much as possible.	(1.8)	(1.8)	(86.3)	(10.1)	
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In Table 3, two items with the lowest mean scores are 'I am competent to use internet-based materials in the classroom' and 'I know how to integrate Internet resources into existing classroom curricula.' Previous studies elsewhere also indicate that English teachers are less engaged in activities related to professional support and discussions of TESL issues with fellow teachers compared to other online activities such as developing communication skills and seeking TESL-related information (see Kabilan & Mohamed Amin 2006).

Filipino English language teachers' practices of WWW are purportedly to search TESL-related information, to learn about a variety of TESL topics, to be acquainted and oriented in a world of information, to search relevant materials and to read articles from online journals (Table 4). They emphasized that finding exercises, test questions/language testing materials questions and lesson plans are important reasons for surfing the Internet. As regards the practices of Filipino English teachers of WWW, Table 4 reflects they are willing to try to improve their teaching by engaging in activities such as searching for TESL-related information, reading academic articles and, searching for materials, exercises, questions and lesson plans. It appears that they are interested to use Internet applications for the teaching and learning of English.

**Table 4.** Filipino English language teachers practices of WWW

Teachers' Practices	Mean Scores
1. to search TESL-related information	3.01
2. to learn about variety of TESL topics	3.12
3. to be involved in a world of information	2.90
4. to find materials	3.36
5. to read academic articles from online journals	3.0
6. to present creative works	3.12
7. to experience creative works	2.97
8. to find exercises	3.01
9. to find questions for exams/tests	3.07
10. to find lessons	3.07

Several researchers such as Gonzalez-Bueno (1998), Graus (1999), and Chafe (1999) have extensively discussed the reasons behind using the Internet in the ESL classroom. Among these reasons is the fact that the human society is becoming an information society and the role of school is to equip students with necessary skills that enable them to function properly in the 21<sup>st</sup> century and keep up with the changes and challenges that are taking place outside the walls of school. Nevertheless, the Filipino English language teachers in this study have indicated several

barriers that they feel have seriously hindered their Internet use and practices. They are: (1) technical and theoretical knowledge (3.04), (2) availability of computer hardware and software (2.89), (3) financial barriers (2.87) and, (4) acceptance of technologies (2.86) (See Table 5). Only a small number of Filipino teachers admit that they lack the knowledge on using the Internet expertly.

**Table 5.** Mean scores of barriers faced by Filipino English language teachers

Barriers	Mean
1. Technical and Theoretical Knowledge	3.04
2. Availability of computer hardware and software	2.89
3. Financial barriers	2.87
4. Acceptance of technologies	2.86

#### **Technical and Theoretical Knowledge**

As reflected in the table above, lack of technical and theoretical knowledge topped the list of the barriers in using the internet in English language classrooms in state universities and colleges in Cagayan Valley Philippines. Not only is there a shortage of knowledge about developing software to promote learning, as shown above, but many teachers do not understand how to use the new technologies. Furthermore, little is known about integrating these new means of learning into an overall plan. In the communication between McClelland and C. Dede (1995), Dede indicated the more powerful technologies, such as artificial intelligence in computers, might promote learning of higher- order cognitive skills that are difficult access with today's evaluation procedures and, therefore, the resulting pedagogical gains may be under- valued. Improper use of technologies can affect both the teacher and learning negatively (Office of Technical Assessment, 1995).

#### **Availability of Computer Hardware and Software**

The most significant aspects of computer are hardware and software. Availability of high quality software is the most pressing challenge in applying the new technologies in education (Herschbach, 1994; Miller, 1997; Office of the Technology Assessment, 1995; Noreburg & Lundblad, 1997). Underlying this problem is a lack of knowledge of what elements in software will promote different kinds of learning. There are few educators skilled in designing it because software development is costly and time- consuming (McClelland, 1996).

McClelland (1996) indicated having sufficient hardware locations where learners have access to it problematic and is, of course, partly a financial problem. Computer hardware and software compatibility goes on to be a significant problem. Choosing hardware is difficult because of the

many choices of systems to be used in delivering education, the delivery of equipment, and the rapid changes in technology.

### **Financial Barriers**

Financial barriers are mentioned most frequently in the literature by language education practitioners. They include the cost of hardware, software, maintenance (particular of the most advanced equipment), and extend to some staff development. Froke (1994b) said, “concerning the money, the challenge was unique because of the nature of the technology.” Existing universities policies and procedures for budgeting and accounting were well advanced for classroom instruction. The costs of media were accounted for in the university as a part of the cost of instruction. Through the initial investment in hardware is high, inhibiting institutions’ introduction of advanced technologies; but Hooper (1995) recommends that the cost of computers will be so low that they will be available in most schools and homes in the future. Lewis et al. (1994) indicate three conditions under which Computer-assisted Learning and other technologies can be cost effectiveness: Computer-assisted Learning costs the same as conventional instruction but ends up with producing higher achievement in the same amount of instructional time, it results in students achieving the same level but in less time. These authors indicate that in examples where costs in using technologies in education are calculated, they are usually understood because the value of factors, such as faculty time and cost of equipment utilization, is ignored (McClelland, 1995).

Herschbach (1994) argues firmly that new technologies are add-ons expenses and will not, in many cases, lower cost of providing educational services. He stated that the new technologies probably will not replace the teachers, but will supplement their efforts, as has been the pattern with other technologies. The technologies will not decrease educational costs or increase teacher productivity as currently used. Low usage causes the cost barrier. Computers, interactive instruction TV, and other devices are used very few hours of the day, week, or month. Either the number of learners or the amount of time learners apply the technology must be increased substantially to approach the concept of cost effectiveness. There are other more quick and less expensive ways of reducing costs, no matter how inexpensive the technology being used (Kincaid, McEachron, & McKinney, 1994).

### **Acceptance of Technologies**

We live in a time of change. Gelatt (1995) stated that change itself has changed. Change has become so rapid, so turbulent, and so unpredictable that it is now called “white water” change (p.10). Murphy & Terry (1998a) indicated the current of change moves so quickly that it destroys what was considered the norm in the past, and by doing so, creates new opportunities. But, there is a natural tendency for organizations to resist change. Wrong conceptions about the use of technology limit innovation and threaten teachers’ jobs and security (Zuber-Skerritt,

1994). Instructors tend not to use technologies that require substantially more preparation time, and it is tough to provide instructors and learners access to technologies that are easy to use (Herschbach, 1994).

Engaging in Computer-assisted Language Learning is a continuing challenge that requires time and commitment. As we approach the 21<sup>st</sup> century, we realize that technology as such is not the answer to all our problems. What really matters is how we use technology. Computers can/will never substitute teachers but they offer new opportunities for better language practice. They may actually make the process of language learning significantly richer and play a key role in the reform of a country's educational system. The next generation of students will feel a lot more confident with information technology than we do. As a result, they will also be able to use the Internet to communicate more effectively, practice language skills more thoroughly and solve language learning problems more easily.

### Overall Contribution of the Internet for Teachers' Professional Development

The Filipino teachers in this study regard the Internet as important in their effort to enhance their professional development. They use the Internet to share ideas/views with other teachers, to grow professionally, to improve teaching skills, and to be aware of the latest developments in ELT (Table 6).

**Table 6.** The importance of Internet's contribution to the overall professional development of the Filipino English language teachers

Importance of Internet	Mean
1. to share ideas/views with other teachers	3.08
2. to grow professionally	3.06
3. to improve teaching skills	3.03
4. to be aware of the latest development in ELT	3.08
5. to expand experiences for career/promotion purposes	3.05
6. to learn new skills related to ELT	3.08
7. to prepare self for innovation	3.07
8. to facilitate thinking abilities	3.04
9. to gain motivation	3.04
10. to remain interested in teaching	3.03

When asked if the Internet has had a positive impact on the teachers' practices of teaching and learning, 96 teachers (57.14%) stress that the Internet is useful and that the Internet is likely to lead to significant changes in the way they teach in the near future. Quite similarly, 76% of the Malaysian English language teachers in the Kabilan and Mohamed Amin's (2002) study state

that the Internet has been useful to them, and have contributed meaningfully to their professional development. The Filipino teachers' positive view of the Internet's contribution to their professional development indicate that the Internet is a tool for these teachers to get connected to the outside world, to retrieve information, to keep in touch with the latest news, ideas and approaches to the teaching and learning of English. Hence, the Internet has a huge potential to engage these Filipino teachers to form collaboration with other teachers outside Philippines, especially for the construction of knowledge and ideas.

This study provides a clear indication that the Filipino English teachers are not lagging behind in terms of information, knowledge and professional development as the Internet has kept them informed of the current educational development, especially in the field of teaching English. The current trends of research and practice in enhancing teachers' professional development using the Internet tools (or online professional development) are gearing towards "*a more self-managed and self-directed process of enhancing professional development*" (Kabilan 2005, p.55). With such use of the Internet, teachers actually have the opportunities to learn and gain valuable teacher competencies such as computing skills, creative and critical thinking and communication skills (Kabilan 2005). From the data, it is evident that the Filipino teachers in this study are aware of the potentials of the Internet to help them gain the competencies mentioned by Kabilan (2005).

## Conclusion

As a final note, it should be pointed out that internet can or will never substitute teachers but they offer more opportunities for better language practices. They may actually make the process of language learning significantly richer and play a key role in the reform of a country's educational system. The next generation of students will feel a lot more confident with information technology than we do. Therefore, the use of the Internet cannot be considered as the ultimate goal or the only solution for language teaching problems. There are and will be both advantages and disadvantages of its use. In sum, it needs to be looked at only as a working compromise-like everything else in education.

## Suggestions and Recommendations

It is therefore necessary for the government authorities to take the initiative to encourage the use of the Internet for teaching English in Cagayan Valley, Philippines. This can be achieved by being more active and supportive in terms of:

1. Increase funding for technology especially computers and Internet facilities and access.
2. The different universities in the region should introduce computer/technology education into existing curricular as well as teacher education and professional development programs.

3. In-service courses which focus on the use of Internet in language education will experience a boom in the upcoming years, but will decline as pre-service institutions restructure their courses to meet the demands of public education. However, this is not a very fast process and will take perhaps a decade to produce tangible results. It is therefore suggested that state universities and colleges must provide support in the form of networks, technical support, resources and facilities and time allocation for teachers.

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