

13 The Internet in English language teaching in Oman

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1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Aims

The internet is assuming increasingly greater importance in education worldwide. This study investigates the attitudes of Omani English teachers towards the internet as a resource for teaching.

1.2 Background

With the advent of Basic Education in the Sultanate of Oman, use of the internet has been integrated into the curriculum. Learning Resource Centres (LRCs) and Computer Labs (CLs) now feature in school design and children are encouraged to learn about developments in Information and Communication Technologies (ICT), including e-mail and the Internet (ELCD, 2001). ICT is both taught separately (from Grade 5) and integrated into the teaching of other subjects. With regard to English, web page design and construction, research strategies using web browsers, animation and multimedia presentations of research findings are some ways of integrating ICT into the curriculum that visiting consultants, e.g. Gordon (2003), have recommended. Training in ICT is part of both pre-service and in-service teacher training.

1.3 Rationale

The internet has great potential for improving the quality of education, enabling learners to access powerful information sources previously beyond reach and supporting and facilitating learning, by encouraging exploration and providing collaborative learning environments (Bell, 2005, Oliver et al., 1998). However, to use the internet as a teaching and learning tool, teachers need to be content experts, technology specialists, motivators, cooperative and collaborative learning advocates and monitors of student progress (Luan, 2005). Challenged in these ways, teachers

need positive attitudes towards the internet as they will constantly face unfamiliar formats and need innovative teaching strategies (Duggan et al., 2001). Yet, among factors that may negatively affect teachers' attitudes are anxiety, low self-efficacy (Sam et al., 2005), inadequate support and training, and low motivation (Yang, 2005). In this light, it seems important to investigate the attitudes of Omani English teachers towards the internet, as this is increasingly important in their work.

2 LITERATURE REVIEW

There is an extensive literature discussing the value of the internet in education in general and for second language teaching and learning in particular (e.g., Macdonald et al. 2001, Hill et al., 2005, Lewis, 1999). Researchers have drawn attention to a number of factors that could make the internet a very important tool for second language teaching and learning.

Firstly, research has found that using the internet in the second language classroom can increase students' motivation. For example, Warschauer (1996) found that students think computers can help them learn better, faster, write more creatively and more independently. He also found that communicating with others could enhance motivation and personal power, overcome isolation and make communication less threatening.

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

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

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

Moreover, students can use the internet to acquire information from a large number of sources for a variety of purposes (Shetzer & Warschauer, 2000, Hill, et al., 2005, Warschauer, 2000, Singhal, 1997). Knowing how to navigate internet sources, search for information, and critically evaluate and interpret the results, represent crucial skills of electronic literacy. Searching the internet enhances higher thinking abilities and enables judgements to be made about the source, validity, reliability

and accuracy of information. Using skills such as skimming, scanning and higher order thinking skills, transforms reading on-line into critical literacy, because those who cannot make critical transferring evaluations cannot possibly find what they need to read (Shetzer & Warschauer, 2000). Indeed, unsupervised and indiscriminate use of internet-sourced material can lead to plagiarism.

In addition, students can use the internet to construct and publish their own work, thereby becoming not only consumers of content, but also generating their own (Singhal, 1997, Lee, 2000), using media, such as graphics, audio and video (Shetzer & Warschauer, 2000). Teachers can publish their own materials, knowledge and ideas for other teachers, creating homepages and putting materials on-line (Shetzer & Warschauer, 2000, González-Lloret, 2003). New internet publishing technologies such as blogs, wikis, and podcasts serve as media for publishing and distributing creative work (Singhal, 1997), providing valuable experience of writing in a digital format (Bloch, 2007). They give students and teachers a greater sense of the variety of possible real audiences, help them develop understanding of these audiences and learning strategies for responding to them (Warschauer & Meskill, 2000, Bloch, 2007).

A further benefit is that internet communication allows us to communicate with people all over the world, synchronously using text and audio chat programmes or asynchronously using e-mail, discussion boards, and blogs (Shetzer & Warschauer, 2000). The archived format allows us to record, reflect on, and refine our previous words as well as those we communicate with, thereby enhancing the accuracy and intelligibility of written and spoken communication (Greenfield, 2003, Jepson, 2005). It can also reduce social context clues related to race, gender, handicap, accent and status (Shetzer & Warschauer, 2000), allow individuals to contribute at their own time and pace (Hampel & Baber, 2003) and overall enhance students' interest and motivation for learning a second culture and a second language (Zeiss & Isabelli-Garcia, 2005, Shetzer & Warschauer, 2000).

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

Nevertheless, research has shown that computers are used less often in the classroom than in other organisations and this is strongly related to resistance within schools to the use of technology. While Martins, Steil & Todesco (2004) cite the role of authorities and administration in adopting the innovation of using the internet in schools, Vrasidas & Glass (2005) argue that the dominant traditional culture of schools may inhibit technological innovations from playing a central role in educational reform. For instance, Jamieson-Proctor et al. (2006) found that teachers who do not use ICT believe it clashes with their personal beliefs and professional philosophy of teaching. Yet, for any educational innovation to succeed, a systematic approach involving the collaboration of all stakeholders, including teachers, is required. Innovations may fail if teachers are not actively involved (Vrasidas & Glass, 2005).

As to why teachers resist new technology, like the internet, Alexiou-Ray et al. (2003) suggest it is mainly due to their discomfort with the unknown. Madden et al.

(2005) relate this discomfort to the superior internet skills of many students, coupled with the extra effort of classroom management.

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

Overall, Madden et al. (2005) found that teachers seemed to appreciate that internet technology helped improve their productivity. They could also recognise the value of the internet as an educational resource, a finding supported by Luan et al. (2005), who found that greater familiarity with the internet increased positive attitudes. If convinced of its benefits either as a teaching tool or as a learning medium, teachers would integrate new technology effectively into their teaching.

Yet training is needed for this, as teachers may initially be reluctant to relinquish the role of expert transmitter of knowledge or lack understanding of how to work with ICT to promote learning (Condie & Livingston, 2007). Indeed, many researchers have reported the importance of support as a key factor in implementing any innovation. Gibson & Oberg (2004) identify ongoing infrastructure and administrator support, and ongoing professional development as key elements in integrating the internet into the classroom. Hsu, Cheng & Chiou (2003) emphasise the need for support from the school administration as well as computer skills and instructional strategies to integrate the internet into the classroom. Many researchers have identified pedagogical support as a major factor that contributes to successful incorporation of the internet in teaching (Condie & Livingston, 2007; Yutdhana, 2004; Gibson & Oberg, 2004). Technical support is another crucial factor because teachers who are supported technically are less likely to feel threatened, more likely to become proficient users of technology in the classroom and more likely to develop positive attitudes toward technology (Alexiou-Ray et al., 2003).

Lack of adequate training in the use of new technologies has a negative influence on teachers required to implement ICT initiatives by increasing their discomfort and

doubts about their abilities (Davies, 2003). Wood et al. (2005) suggest that with the rapid changes in internet-related applications, prior successful training experiences are essential to help teachers develop a sense of self-efficacy and mastery, before they can become comfortable with integrating the internet into their teaching. De Freitas (2007) argues that ICT skills training and e-learning development require greater numbers of ICT skills tutors, to help embed e-learning into practice. On the other hand, Wood, et al. (2005) consider such training to be of less concern as newly graduated teachers are more capable of using new technologies such as the internet, while older teachers have more access to workshops, and other sources of training.

Training provided needs to be practical. A recent study of 50 teachers from one region of Oman (Sharqiyah North) questioned the relevance of pre-service and in-service teacher training courses in ICT. There was a recommendation that future computer courses should use software designed for the Omani classroom to help teachers integrate computers into their lessons (Al-Huneini, 2006).

Many researchers (e.g. Wood et al. 2005) stress limited availability of equipment and internet access as a potential barrier to the integration of the internet into classroom settings. Gibson & Oberg (2004) identify the challenges of financing and putting in place the hardware and connections necessary to provide and maintain internet access in schools as key potential barriers. Studies of the Thai (Yutdhana, 2004) and Korean (Shin & Son, 2007) contexts found that inadequate infrastructure, especially low availability of computers, poor internet access, and poor quality network connections were major barriers to using internet applications in education. Insufficient time is regarded by many researchers (Wood, et al., 2005; Gibson & Oberg, 2004; Vrasidas & Glass, 2005) as a further potentially major obstacle for teachers in integrating new technologies such as the internet.

3 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The study aimed to answer the following questions:

1. What is the level of computer literacy amongst Omani teachers of English?
2. How much do Omani teachers of English use the internet in their classrooms?
3. What are the attitudes of Omani teachers of English towards classroom use of the internet?
4. What factors contribute to these attitudes?

Participants were 24 male and 16 female Omani Basic Education teachers of English, randomly selected from Cohort 6 BA (TESOL) students on summer school in Leeds. Though they varied in teaching experience, all were involved in Basic Education and expected to integrate technology into their teaching. At the time of this research, they were studying an ICT course at the University of Leeds.

Two research methods were used to collect data; questionnaires and interviews. A questionnaire was developed, consisting of 4 parts with 74 items, mostly requiring responses on a five-point Likert scale. After piloting, various adjustments were made. Forty questionnaires were then distributed to Omani English teachers. Of these, 37 were returned, 2 excluded for inconsistency, leaving 35 for analysis. Males represented two thirds of these respondents, but teachers from urban and rural areas were fairly equally represented. A large majority had more than 10 years

experience, with two thirds teaching Cycle one of Basic Education, and a majority teaching between 10 and 20 periods per week. Approximately, half had less than 5 years experience of using computers.

Semi-structured face-to-face interviews were conducted with a sub-set of these teachers: 3 females and 1 male. These interviews were tape-recorded for analysis.

4 FINDINGS

Questionnaire data provided the following information (see Al-Adi, 2007, for the original tables). Firstly, with regard to their own computer skills, teachers perceived these as ranging from good to average in using Microsoft Office applications, organising and managing files, and accessing information on the internet. Abilities in sending and receiving e-mails were rated high. Respondents reported widely varying abilities in installing software and using scanners, and weak to no skills at all in web-design and troubleshooting.

The vast majority of respondents identified self-study as the main source of their computer knowledge, followed by learning from friends and relatives and courses at college. Courses conducted by the Ministry of Education (MoE), learning at school or at a commercial computer centre all received low ratings.

A great majority of respondents indicated they had never used any internet tools in their teaching. Moreover, 90% did not have any knowledge of blogs, wikis, or podcasts. Only a very small percentage of respondents used e-dictionaries, e-maps, e-newspapers, on-line games and video sharing.

Teachers reported a positive overall attitude towards the internet, declaring it can improve the standard of teaching, will not replace the human teacher and makes a great contribution to education. And yet a significant minority viewed the internet as very complicated and difficult to work with, though most said it would not make them feel stupid in front of their students. There was strong agreement that the internet can make teaching and learning more interesting and fun, that it can improve the life of a teacher and that it constitutes a fast and efficient means of learning.

Most teachers reported they would use the internet if easily available in their schools, particularly with a good internet connection and more than one computer per classroom. However, teaching responsibilities and insufficient time prevented the majority from accessing the internet.

The majority of respondents agreed that, to use the internet effectively for teaching, training is essential. Most reported they had not been adequately trained to use the internet on their pre-service course and needed in-service training. A majority felt that training provided by the MoE was insufficient.

Teachers recognised the importance of technical support. Overall, 60% felt in-school technical internet support was necessary, while two thirds indicated it would make them feel more comfortable. Respondents also recognised the importance of pedagogical support with a great majority agreeing that clear instructions in the teacher's book on the use of the internet would promote teacher's confidence and more effective use of the internet. Furthermore, respondents recognised administrative support as an important factor. A majority indicated that the encouragement of their headteacher would motivate them to integrate the internet

into their teaching, with the headteacher's encouragement considered more important than that of the supervisor. All agreed that opportunities for sharing ideas with other teachers would make them more likely to use the internet in teaching.

Interviewees confirmed most of the findings from the questionnaires. They particularly identified insufficient computers in their schools, coupled with poor or no internet connection as two major obstacles to using the internet in their teaching. They felt that just one computer lab or learning resource centre in each school available for all subjects was insufficient. Also, they felt they lacked knowledge and training in classroom management, lesson planning and teaching strategies for use with the internet. They also lacked the technical skills for using internet tools and materials for teaching English.

The teachers also mentioned various factors that had not been raised in the questionnaire that contributed to their infrequent use of the internet. They said they face discipline problems when using the internet, because classes are large and students' computer and internet literacy, especially in rural areas, is limited. Teachers also reported that it needs tremendous effort to keep students focused on the lesson material, rather than navigating away to unrelated websites. Added to this, teachers reported that students' low language levels increased the possibility of unsuccessful internet lesson outcomes.

When asked to prioritise the factors that contributed to their attitudes, they all identified administrative support, especially from their headteacher, as the most important factor. When asked about their recommendations for more effectively integrating the internet in teaching, they all said it should come as part of a nationwide innovation from the MoE.

5 DISCUSSION

I now discuss the findings in relation to my research questions.

5.1 What is the level of computer literacy amongst Omani teachers of English language?

Respondents felt they had sufficient knowledge and skill for accessing information and sending and receiving e-mails; some said they also use discussion forums, chat sites, and share videos. However they recognised their skill levels were weak in more advanced areas involving the use of hardware, software and troubleshooting computer problems.

Neither gender nor location (whether a teacher came from an urban or a rural area) nor years of experience with the computer appeared to have any noticeable effect on level of computer literacy. Many studies have found that gender is not an influential factor (e.g. Sam et al., 2005). However, the insignificant correlation between computer use experience and computer literacy levels does not support the view that 'more is better', which is contrary to the findings of Sam et al. (2005).

Respondents reported that competencies were self-taught, with friends and relatives as secondary sources of knowledge. These findings are consistent with

many studies mentioned by Luan et al. (2005), who found self-teaching and learning from peers to be the commonest methods of learning. Similarly, Gibson & Oberg (2004) found that most teachers developed computer and internet skills through trial and error. The limitations teachers reported in their skills could also be attributed to the sources of their computer literacy, namely self-study, friends and relatives, all of which are non-professional and non-technical.

5.2 How much do Omani teachers of the English language use the internet in their classrooms?

Teachers reported very limited classroom use of the internet. While non-use of web design is unsurprising, very few teachers reported using e-mail, discussion forums, on-line newspapers or on-line radio channels in class. Similarly e-games, e-portfolios, e-maps and e-dictionaries were not used. Interviewees reported that though they were experienced in using traditional forms of these elements, they lacked confidence in using the electronic versions. They also mentioned lack of technical support, lack of time and insufficient access.

Wikis, blogs and podcasts are considered to be valuable tools for teaching generally and for TESOL specifically, so it was expected that some teachers would be incorporating them into their teaching, but respondents actually had little or no knowledge of them and made no use of them.

Some argued that their main concern was to "finish the book before the end of the semester". Others cited their heavy workload. Some cited their limited internet skills as well as limited and slow internet access, some said they prioritised after-school internet time for personal and entertainment purposes to compensate for a long, hard day at school.

Others blamed their ignorance on lack of training provision. They argued it is the role of the MoE to introduce them to educational innovations through workshops and to incorporate internet tools into the curriculum in a systematic way. Thus, they expected the Ministry to make the first step, seeing it as their own role to follow regulations and policies rather than take the initiative.

In my opinion, and as remarked by Vrasidas & Glass (2005), the responsibility for improving the use of internet tools in English teaching must be a responsibility shared by the MoE, headteachers, supervisors and teachers themselves. While it is the responsibility of the MoE to provide technical support, access and training for incorporating these tools into classroom teaching, teachers are responsible for their own professional development. To change, teachers, according to Watson (2006), have to realise the possibilities and the potentials of the changes that the internet is bringing and their role in being responsible for their own professional development.

5.3 What are the attitudes of Omani teachers of English towards using the internet in the classroom?

Teachers' attitudes towards the internet were measured in terms of overall attitude, anxiety, enthusiasm, and productivity and efficiency.

In terms of overall attitude, respondents were very positive about the potential

of the internet for improving teaching, and teaching English as a second language in particular, though as a supplementary tool, not one that could replace a human teacher. This understanding that the internet is a friend, not an enemy, is in line with Shin & Son's (2007) findings. Respondents' uncertainty as to whether there are limits to the possible uses of the internet in teaching can probably be attributed to their lack of internet literacy and lack of experience in using the internet in teaching.

Teachers showed a high level of anxiety towards actually using the internet for teaching. They said they find it frustrating to work with in class because it is complicated; that while using it does not cause them to feel embarrassed in front of their students, they do not feel confident using it. Anxiety was also shown in teachers' belief that only colleagues with a high level of computer skill can use the internet in teaching, ignoring the fact that using the internet does not require advanced computer skills. Respondents' reported sense of confusion may be attributable to several factors. Various writers, e.g. Shin & Son (2007) and Gibson & Oberg (2004) were named large classes, time pressure, and lack of pedagogical knowledge in how to incorporate internet tools into their teaching as factors that have the potential to create anxiety. Condie & Livingston (2007) related teacher anxiety to fear of losing professional status, because of being seen to be unable to use a tool or on-line material.

In terms of enthusiasm, teachers recognized the potential of the internet and were keen to learn how to incorporate the internet into their teaching. They recognised that the internet is motivating and could make the teaching and learning process fun for them and their learners. This is consistent with the studies of Shin & Son (2007), Yutdhana (2004), and Condie & Livingston (2007), who remarked that teachers recognize the potential of the internet for motivating learners and positively influencing the quality of their work.

With regard to productivity and efficiency, respondents strongly agreed that the internet is a fast and efficient means of learning and that it can make their lives as teachers easier. This is consistent with the findings of Luan et al. (2005), who remarked that teachers believe technology can improve teaching standards, teachers who are convinced of its effectiveness develop more positive attitudes towards it and teachers with more internet experience have more control over the internet, which determines its effectiveness. It is also consistent with the view of Wood et al. (2005), who suggested that part of the positive attitude of the teacher towards the internet is the feeling of self-efficacy achieved by mastering and incorporating it in teaching.

5.4 What factors contribute to these attitudes?

In this study the factors that may contribute to the teachers' attitudes were categorised into three groups: access, training and support, each of them consisting of subcategories.

Regarding access first, respondents reported that poor infrastructure is one of the obstacles that frustrates and discourages them from using the internet. Specifically, there is only one computer lab in each Basic Education school. This is shared between all subjects and often lacks fast, reliable internet access. The importance of

robust infrastructure in forming positive attitudes amongst teachers is emphasised by many researchers, who relate the limited use of the internet by teachers to inadequate internet access (Gibson & Oberg, 2004; Yutdhana, 2004; Martins et al., 2004, and Hill et al., 2005).

Lack of time was also reported to be another powerful limiting factor. Teachers reported they are overwhelmed with teaching and other school responsibilities, which consequently do not allow them the time to include the internet in their lesson plans. A further obstacle reported was that the length of the teaching period is insufficient to incorporate the internet in teaching, especially if we consider the time needed for students to move from their classes to the computer lab. This finding agrees with those of Shin & Son (2007) and Gibson & Oberg (2004), concerning the significance of time-related factors.

Regarding training, respondents generally agreed that pre- and in-service training in using the internet for teaching is insufficient and unsatisfactory. This is consistent with Al-Huneini (2006) who found that the training offered to both pre- and in-service teachers was below their expectations and insufficient. Lack of training can be directly connected to levels of anxiety, according to Condie & Livingston (2007), who state that teachers who are weak in using ICT feel anxious about using it in front of their classes, while Martins et al. (2004) found that training in using internet sources leads to successful diffusion of the internet as an educational tool. The importance of in-service training is emphasised by Shin & Son (2007), Hsu, Cheng & Chiou (2003) and Yutdhana (2004) who particularly focus not only on the technical side of using the internet, but also on the pedagogical aspects of integrating it into teaching.

Regarding support, respondents considered technical, pedagogical and administrative support important as factors that would motivate them to integrate the internet in their teaching. Regarding the first of these, findings show teachers value technical support highly and consider it a factor which would reduce their anxiety towards using the internet in the classroom. Alexiou-Ray et al. (2003) and Gibson & Oberg (2004) emphasise the role of technical support, particularly in evaluating the quality of internet material. Wood et al. (2005) note that without adequate technical support it is too demanding to integrate the internet into teaching.

Respondents also stressed the value of pedagogical support, specifically guidance in the teacher's book, as a factor that would build confidence and help reduce their anxiety in using the internet. This is consistent with the findings of Hsu, Cheng & Chiou (2003), Condie & Livingston (2007), Yutdhana, (2004) and Gibson & Oberg (2004) who emphasised the importance of giving teachers the opportunity to develop learner-centred teaching strategies for integrating the internet their teaching (Shin & Son, 2007).

Regarding administrative support, teachers emphasised the importance of the headteacher, notably in contrast with that of the supervisor, in motivating teachers to use internet tools in into their classrooms, a view that confirms the critical role headteachers play in the Omani educational system. The role of the headteacher in supporting teachers in change processes was emphasised by Martins et al. (2004). Besides the headteacher, respondents also agreed it important to share ideas with

colleagues to gain encouragement. The crucial supportive role of colleagues in helping teachers understand the potential of the internet is emphasised by Gibson & Oberg (2004).

Teachers also remarked on several difficulties associated with managing the classroom while conducting a lesson using the internet, due to the large number of students. This source of concern, identified by Shin & Son (2007), could be related to teachers' lack of pedagogical training in conducting successful lessons that integrate the internet.

5.5 Summary

To summarise, this study has identified significant limitations in teachers' computer literacy and current integration of internet tools in teaching English. Teachers' current computer knowledge and skills have been gained mainly through self-study rather than from professional courses. Limited computer knowledge and internet literacy and anxiety about these can be related to the lack of pre- and in-service training teachers have received.

Attitudes towards the internet were generally positive, but anxiety levels towards using the internet in the classroom were average to high. Teachers identified and prioritised the factors that contributed to their attitudes, as well as identifying several obstacles to using the internet in their teaching. Low internet literacy skill levels, poor internet access in schools and lack of technical, pedagogical and other support were factors that created a negative attitudinal stance towards using the internet in the classroom.

6 IMPLICATIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

6.1 Recommendations

A number of recommendations can be proposed to create positive attitudes, decrease anxieties and facilitate integration of the internet into teaching. First, the findings showed gaps in teachers' general computer knowledge and internet literacy. An on-going programme of in-service training is recommended, aimed at addressing technical and pedagogical needs and decreasing levels of anxiety about internet use. Second, the study identified a need for continuous in-school technical, pedagogical and administrative support for teachers in using the internet. Support could be provided in the form of guidance in the teacher's book, on-line materials, on-going in-service training workshops, regular school-based meetings of teachers to exchange ideas on how to integrate the internet into teaching. To provide the necessary pedagogical, technical and affective support in-school on a daily basis, it is recommended that there should be an ICT co-ordinator in each school. Third, steps should be taken to ensure there is a sufficiently strong infrastructure to support the integration of the internet into teaching. It is important that schools throughout the country be provided, as a matter of urgency, with fast internet connections and sufficient computers, connected to local area networks. It is also recommended that either class sizes be further reduced or a teaching assistant be

recruited for ICT classes. Fourth, the MoE should focus on spreading the importance of the internet in education. The integration of the internet in education in general and in English classes in particular should be planned systematically by the MoE. According to the findings of this study, teachers are open to this innovation and ready for the reform.

6.2 Limitations

The main limitations relate to the sample, which could have been more representative of Omani teachers of English. Firstly, female respondents were under-represented, which affected the ability of the study to uncover gender differences. Secondly, the sample consisted only of diploma-holding teachers enrolled on the BA (TESOL) Programme of the University of Leeds, and so graduates from Sultan Qaboos University, where pre-service computer training is more intensive (Al-Huneini, 2006), were not consulted.

Thirdly, most respondents had been teaching for at least 10 years, so their experience of pre-service training was distant. Finally, the teachers surveyed were studying an ICT course as part of their BA degree at the time of completing the questionnaire. This course could have positively affected their computer skills, internet literacy and attitudes towards the internet.

6.3 Conclusions

This study found that, although the teachers surveyed were experienced in personal use of computers and the internet, their integration of the internet into classroom teaching was very limited. Teachers claimed to value the role of the internet in education and expressed enthusiasm towards using it to facilitate classroom learning, but also demonstrated high levels of anxiety and discomfort about their own internet literacy, as well as concerns about access, support and training. The Basic Education reforms are providing an excellent opportunity for incorporating the internet into teaching, but the extent to which integration is successful will depend upon developing an effective infrastructure and paying attention to the attitudes, anxieties and needs of teachers.

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