

## **THE INTERNET AS A RESOURCE FOR ESL TEACHERS**

**Teoh Swee Ai**

*MARA Institute of Technology, Shah Alam*

### **ABSTRACT**

The Internet can be a very useful resource for ESL teachers. This paper will discuss some of the ways in which ESL teachers can use the Internet.

Firstly, ESL teachers can be members of the TESL-L discussion group which functions as a support group for ESL practitioners. Members of this group share teaching ideas and ask questions to clear their uncertainties. It is also possible to retrieve past discussions on certain themes and academic articles contributed by members.

Secondly, there are many sites on the World Wide Web (WWW) dedicated to ESL learning. Some of these sites contain interactive exercises which teachers can refer their students to for self-access learning. Alternatively, teachers can download and print these exercises or the non-interactive ones for use in the classroom. The WWW also has sites which are essentially electronic reference books which students and teachers can refer to for language points.

In conclusion, ESL teachers should make use of the Internet as a tool for interacting with their peers, as a source of teaching ideas and materials and as a reference library.

### **Introduction**

Members of the teaching profession are information handlers: they transmit information to students, they lead students to the relevant information and they teach students the different ways of processing information. Thus, it is important that teachers themselves be well-informed.

The conventional sources of information for teachers have been the library, the bookstore and even their colleagues. In addition, today's teachers can obtain a multitude of diverse information from almost anywhere in the world quickly and easily through the Internet. This has given new meaning to the phrase "information at one's fingertips"!

### **How to get information from the Internet**

Information from the Internet can be accessed via electronic-mail (e-mail) or from the World Wide Web (WWW). People in Malaysia can access the Internet if they have an account with either Mimos

(Jaring) or Telekom Malaysia (TMnet), or have a sub-account at their workplace if the organization that they work for is already an Internet subscriber. Those who do not have an Internet account can get onto the WWW from cybercafes, cyberkioeks and certain libraries.

Internet users need not worry if they do not know the address, referred to as the uniform resource locator (URL), of Internet sites relevant to their needs. Internet browsers (software for accessing the WWW) like Netscape have a search facility which allows users to type in a suitable key word/phrase at the site of any of the search engines, an example of which is *Yahoo*. The search engine will then produce a list of sites which contain the key word/phrase and users can actually access those sites by clicking on the list itself.

### **English Language Usage over the Internet**

The main language used over the Internet is English. As such, there is an immeasurable amount of materials which could be used directly or adapted by the English Language teacher. For instance, teachers can develop a reading comprehension exercise by forming questions to go with an article from an on-line periodical.

Furthermore, the fact that English is not the first language for most Internet users has spawned a vast amount of information pertaining to the learning and teaching of English as a Second or Foreign Language (ESL/EFL). ESL teachers should thus tap into this rich source of information related to usage, and the teaching and learning of the English Language.

### **Reference Materials**

There are reference materials for all users of the English language. ESL teachers would find them helpful and can also refer their students to them. There are dictionaries, encyclopedia and thesauri among others; some of the better known ones accessible via Yahoo's <<http://www.yahoo.com>> sub-directory for Reference materials are *Webster's Revised Unabridged Dictionary*, *Encyclopedia Britannica* and *Roget's Thesaurus*. One can also find quotations, and check out acronyms and abbreviations; and under the category English Language Usage, there are materials such as:

1. *11 rules of Grammar*
2. *Five tools for Writing Timed Essays*
3. *Grammar and Style Guide*
4. *Punctuation*
5. *Wordpower*

### **Exercises for Students**

Both interactive and non-interactive exercises are available on the Internet. Interactive exercises allow learners to submit their answers to be corrected within a few seconds by a faraway computer. There are two types of non-interactive exercises: the first type requires learners to think of the answer and then click on the button next to the question to find out the answer, while the second type requires learners or their teachers to print out the worksheet for them to write their answers on (if

answers are provided they are on a separate electronic page; sometimes no answers are provided). Some of these exercises are available from:

1. *CNN Newsroom and Worldview for ESL* - vocabulary and grammar exercises based on current issues <<http://lc.byuh.edu/cnn-n/cnn-n/page.html>>
2. *Self-Study Quizzes for ESL Students* - over 100 exercises on grammar, reading comprehension, vocabulary/idioms, writing <<http://www.aitech.ac.jp/~iteslj/quizzes/index.html>>
3. *Fluency through Fables* - reading comprehension, vocabulary, written discussion exercises based on fables <<http://comenius.com/fable/complete.html>>

Teachers can refer students to the interactive and the first type of non-interactive exercises for self-access learning. Teachers can also print out both the interactive and non-interactive exercises for use in the classroom.

Listening exercises are also available, for example, from BBC Radio Home Page <<http://www.bbc.co.uk/worldservice/BBCEnglish/>>, but only schools with multi-media computers can obtain the audio information.

## Lessons Plans and Language Games

For teachers who are looking for something to make their classes more interesting and fun, the Internet is a good place to visit. Ideas for conducting lessons can be found from the many lesson plans available. For example, *Links to ES/EFL Lessons & Lesson Plans* <<http://www.aitech.ac.jp/~iteslj/Links/LessonLinks.html>> provides access to lesson plans such as "Newspaper Conferencing" and "Student-Centered Conversations".

In addition, there are language games on the Internet. Some of these include:

1. *Grammar Safari* - hunt for the target part of speech <<http://deil.lang.uiuc.edu/webpages/grammarsafari.html>>
2. *John's Word Search Puzzles* - with categories like birds, fruit, sports, space <<http://www.neosoft.com/~jrpotter/puzzles.html>>
3. *Renewable Energy Crossword Puzzle* - based on the energy conservation theme <<http://www.energy.co.gov/education/puzzleshtml/crosswordl.html>>

There is even a web-site called *Brendan's On-Line Anagram Generator* <<http://mmm.mbhs.edu/~bconnell/anagrams.html>> which teachers could use to custom-make their own anagrams.

## Discussion Groups

The Internet is host to a large number of electronic discussion groups. These groups cater for the specific interests of Internet users, for example *Creative Writing in Education for Teachers* (CREWRT-L), *Teaching English to Children* (TESLK-12), and *Teaching English as a Second Language* (TESL-L). ESL teachers should join TESL-L which has sub-groups like:

1. TESLCA-L (*Computer-Assisted Language Learning and Educational Technology*)

2. TESLIE-L (*Intensive English Programs, Teaching and Administration*)
3. TESP-L (*English for Specific Purposes*)

A discussion group is like a members-only bulletin board where one can read whatever has been put there by other members and one can put up one's own messages. The messages can be opinions on certain issues like whether writing helps speaking or what is considered good writing. Members can also ask the group for ideas or help in solving professional problems. Members with experience in those situations will respond with advice/recommendations. Discussion groups also archive their past postings so that members can later retrieve them if necessary. Also retrievable from the archives are articles contributed by members.

As discussion groups are conducted via e-mail, there is a need to have an e-mail account to participate. It is not necessary to have a computer with *Windows* installed to participate in e-mailing; the *DOS* operating system would suffice. However, for people who have access to the WWW (at libraries, etc.) but do not have personal accounts, free web based e-mail accounts are available from certain Internet sites, for instance, Hotmail <<http://www.hotmail.com>>. To be a member of a particular discussion group, a subscription message has to be sent to the administrator of the group. For instance, to join TESL-L, one should send a message in this format:

SUB TESL-L FIRSTNAME LASTNAME

to

LISTSERV@CUNYVM.CUNY.EDU

## Professional Matters

The Internet is useful for keeping ESL teachers informed about professional matters. A good site to begin with is the *AskERIC Virtual Library* <<http://ericir.syr.edu>> *AskERIC InfoGuides* provide annotated lists of available information on specialized areas, for example, ESL-K12. AskERIC's Question and Answer Service will respond to queries within 48 hours with results of its searches through its database, digests and Internet resources. In addition, *AskERIC* has a searchable calendar of conferences. Through AskERIC, a search can be made of the ERIC Database for abstracts and bibliographic information of educational research papers. The ERIC Digests, which are short reports on different areas in education, are also obtainable from here. Furthermore, there is the ERIC Toolbox which provides links to Internet sites like *The Roadmap96 Workshop* which is a useful resource for teachers, researchers, students and Internet beginners.

Professional journals help ESL teachers keep up with the latest developments in their field and provide helpful teaching tips. They are expensive though, and even if teachers can afford to buy them, they may be cumbersome to store. Accessing electronic journals (e-journals) via the Internet solves these two problems of cost and storage, and there is a bonus as well: the luxury of variety. Among the journals relevant for ESL teachers are:

1. *The Internet TESL Journal*  
< <http://www.aitech.ac.jp/~iteslj>>
2. *The English Teacher*  
< <http://www.cc.au.ac.th/~elc/elt/index.html>>

3. TESOL Journal  
< <http://www.public.asu.edu/~boosalis>>
4. TESL-Electronic Journal  
< <http://www.kyoto-su.ac.jp/information/tesl-ej/index.html>>

## Conclusion

Being a member of the Internet community is like being a participant in a mammoth international conference cum exhibition at one's convenience. The Internet is a vibrant place as new information is constantly being added on and whatever is already available is regularly being updated and improved upon. Furthermore, there are discussion groups which can act as professional-support groups. Thus, ESL teachers should be able to make use of the Internet to enrich the teaching-learning process and to empower themselves.

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