

# The Use of the Internet in Teaching English in Junior High Schools in Japan

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The purpose of this paper is twofold. First, to review briefly the significance of the use of technology in teaching English as a foreign language, particularly in the area of the Internet. Second, to research and understand how the Internet is employed as a part of the process of teaching English in Japanese junior high schools. A survey of English teachers will be described and analyzed.

**Keywords** : Internet, English, Japan

## Introduction

The study of foreign civilizations, their history and languages has been one of the means to go across frontiers between cultures, and for foreign language teachers, the Internet presents an unequalled device to energize this study anew. Bilingual and foreign language websites are well-established in cyberspace and well-stocked with electronic publications ranging from classic works of literature to the latest sports scores. Borders virtually disappear at these websites, enabling students to live within the discourse of another language and even sample its special variations in the cultures of many lands.

The main purpose of this paper is to investigate and understand the use of the Internet as a part of the process of teaching English as a foreign language (TEFL) in Japan, especially in junior high schools. The authors observed and collected data on how the English language is taught by teachers using the Internet. When possible the authors will provide their own insights and share their experiences and learn from both Japanese English teachers and students.

In chapter one, we will explore the usage of technology in TEFL, especially in the area of the Internet.

In chapter two, we will describe how the investigation is conducted. For this investigation, the following research question was posed:

*Has the usage of the Internet as a tool to teach English been considered during the classroom activities planned in junior high schools in Japan?*

To answer this question, the authors conducted a questionnaire (see the appendix) on the use of the Internet in junior high schools.

In chapter three, we will analyze the data obtained from our questionnaire. Finally, in Conclusion, based on the discussion in the three chapters, we will proceed to make some recommendations for the benefit of teaching English in Japan.

## 1. Background

### 1.1 Computer science in the education system

There is no doubt that computers have come to find their niche in every single aspect of our lives. They have also made their way inside the education system in many countries of the world; within the varied applications performed by computers we can mention two that can be used simultaneously: the use of multimedia devices and the Internet. The first, multimedia application can be easily adapted to the world of learning since it reflects the way the student thinks, learns and remembers. It allows the learner to explore the information with words, sounds, animations and

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videos giving him enough opportunities to pause, analyze, and interpret the information on the screen at his own pace. This way the student can achieve the equilibrium between the stimulus and the capacity of understanding abstract ideas (Rivera, 1993).

As a consequence, multimedia in computers has become a powerful and versatile tool that turns students from being passive subjects into active ones. In this way students are able to understand the information using their own rhythm, turning themselves into autonomous learners who are able to shape their own learning.

The second and perhaps more important one is the Internet. Dudeney (2000) says that “[the Internet] has often been described as the biggest communications revolution since the advent of the printed book…” (p. 1). Also, Warschauer (2000) states that the Internet can be defined as “the largest worldwide network of computers networks” (p. 171). The Internet is being used by many schools around the world to complement the regular academic process of teaching by adding fresh vitality to the traditional class. However, there are still many schools and teachers that use the Internet only in Computing classes and leave aside many of the advantages that it can bring to teaching methodology. The Internet and the multimedia can be used simultaneously. For instance, the Internet needs multimedia to reproduce audio or video material that cannot be processed without the correct multimedia software.

### **1.2 The Internet and English teaching**

In discussing the reasons for using the Internet in the English language class, Warschauer (2000, p. 7) gives us five main reasons:

- (1) Authenticity: the Internet gives students 24-hour access to authentic material on any topic on the Web. Students can connect simultaneously to many events happening around the world.
- (2) Literacy: students can read, write, edit, communicate, research, and publish their own papers on the Internet, and also write comments on people’s papers.
- (3) Interaction: students can communicate with native English speakers by means of message boards or virtual chat rooms using a camera and microphone.
- (4) Vitality: classes can be turned into spaces where the information can be obtained from innovative and updated resources on the Internet.
- (5) Empowerment: the Internet gives students and teachers more control over their learning process. It develops their own criteria to choose people or information that help them to be less dependent on traditional sources of information.

Our experience as teachers has shown us that technology is simply a tool that we use when we learn, and our students are finding that it is a tool that they reach more frequently with growing ease. By using the Internet, they can research events that are significant to them, experience the fun of finding information, and share that information with classmates.

Technology offers students the opportunity to be creative in their presentation of information, and challenges them to consider a wider audience for their topics of study. For instance, we imagine a class of American poetry where the students access the Internet to gather information about the hometown of the author of a selected poem, and then try to make contact with students of that city by means of email exchange to learn about them. We have been using the Internet daily in the planning of our classes, with the frequency that we used to have in visiting the library just to find an answer to a question. We think that the Internet gives us endless possibilities for creating classes that develop the critical thinking of our students.

Another aspect of using the Internet is that, in our opinion, it is very important to prepare the teachers in the usage of computers and some common software, and then teach students how to use the Internet effectively. Teachers should understand that many students are already using the Internet in areas such as chatting, playing games, etc. Knowing that, it is necessary to start advocating the use of the Internet in our daily classes. We may find resistance from other teachers and school leaders, but we can invite them to use the tools they have at hand in a very amiable manner.

### **1.3 The Internet as a resource bank**

One of the most common reasons, according to our experience, to spend time in the Internet is to use the Web

as a source of infinite material to use offline. Teachers search the Internet for information for a specific topic or to get images that later they will print out to use with their classes. Also, there are dozens of websites where teachers and people collaborate to create material to be used by teachers that want something more authentic and dynamic than their textbooks. However, not all the information found in those websites is reliable and endorsed by serious institutions that edit and choose the best material to be published on their homepages, so we need to be careful in choosing material.

#### **1.4 The Internet as a classroom tool**

If teachers want to bring the Internet inside the classroom, they will need a room that has a set of computers, not necessarily the latest models of the market, and these computers must be connected to the Internet. This way the teacher and students are able to access information in real time around the world, taking part in collaborative projects on a global scale; they will also send emails and homework to their teachers (Dudeney, 2000).

To use the Internet satisfactorily, it is recommended that the teacher thoroughly learn how to use it with the class and to establish clear goals to be accomplished by the students using the Web. It is a good idea to use the Internet along with activities that are included in the textbook. The Internet can support the teacher's job but can not be a substitute. The teacher is needed to establish real dialogue with the students and to monitor the activities done by them. He is the mediator between the real world and the virtual one, especially when many people create stronger links with their virtual friends on the Internet and may forget how to create and maintain their own real relationships.

Finally, as with any new technology available, we should watch over the activities of our students on the Internet, and we need to know which websites they are visiting and ban certain ones that could be considered inappropriate or dangerous. It is the responsibility of the teachers and parents to help them to use the Internet without any risk for them.

## **2. Investigation**

### **2.1 The research question**

One of the TEFL methods that is widely accepted in Japan is the grammar-translation (G/T) method. III: Resource Material Handouts by the Council of Local Authorities for International Relations (1990) given to the Japan Exchange Teaching participants goes on to say that

G/T was introduced in Japan when it was universally accepted as the best way to teach a foreign language. The enduring popularity of the method lies in its ability to produce measurable results; unlike communicative methods, G/T can be easily tested. (p. 66)

Since communicative competence seems not to be tested on many of the university entrance examinations, it seems that the Japanese students that go through these tests do not have real incentive to study practical English; hence, there is not an immediate reason, for some people and teachers, to improve teaching methods or at least to try new ways of strongly motivating those students in junior and senior high school.

However, considering the broad acceptance of the Internet in many countries as a tool for assisting teachers in education, and also as an authentic way to turn the learning process into something more dynamic and interesting, it is almost impossible to find academic papers written in English which focus on the effect of the usage of the Internet to teach English as a foreign language in Japan. Moreover, it is not common to listen to many Japanese English teachers combining their traditional English classes with some exercises dedicated to connecting their students online and engaging in activities where the ability of searching, understanding and obtaining information in English play an important role in learning.

As Mendez took a course in the use of the Internet for English teaching at Mie University taught by Hayase, we wanted to see how the process of using this tool is applied in junior high schools. For the investigation, we formulated the following research question:

*Has the usage of the Internet as a tool to teach English been considered during the classroom activities planned in junior high schools in Japan?*

## 2.2 Participants and procedure

The data collected comes from 30 teachers of different junior high schools teaching English as a foreign language as part of the national curriculum of education in the Tokai area. All the teachers belong to the public school system.

The questionnaire was conducted at the end of September of 2006 during a teachers' meeting in Tsu, Mie Prefecture. It was also sent through email and given back by email or normal mail during October and November of 2006.

## 3. Results

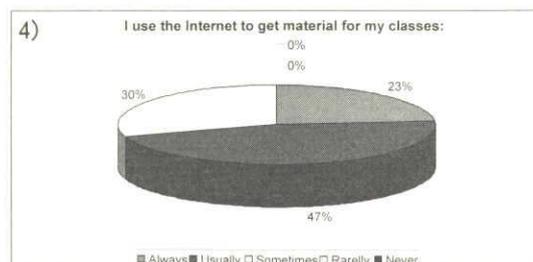
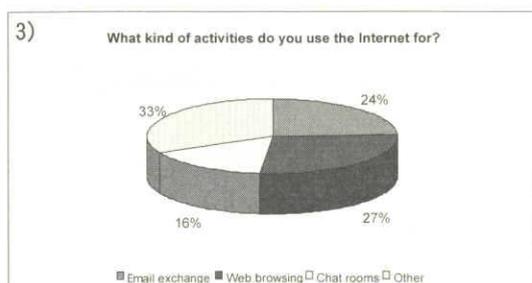
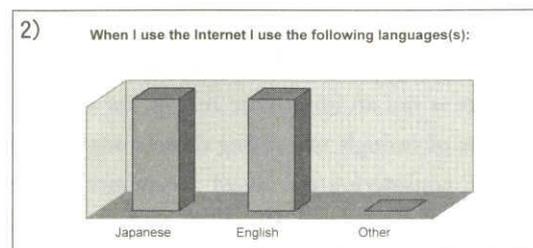
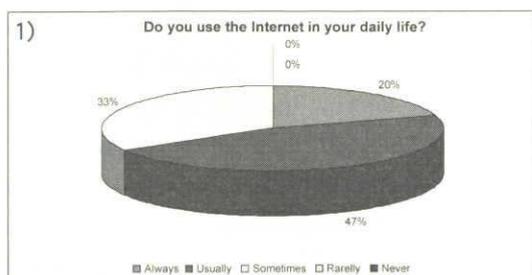
The results reported below provide the data for considering whether or not the Internet has been used in learning English; it also shows the teachers' opinion of its usage during the classes. Though the number of teachers that answered the questionnaire was 30, the scores of 27 teachers were utilized because three of them did not answer it properly; for example, two teachers failed to answer the second page of the questionnaire.

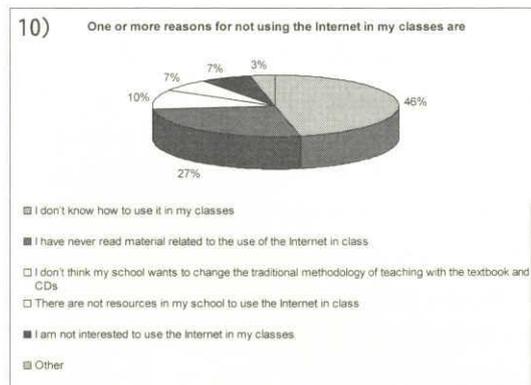
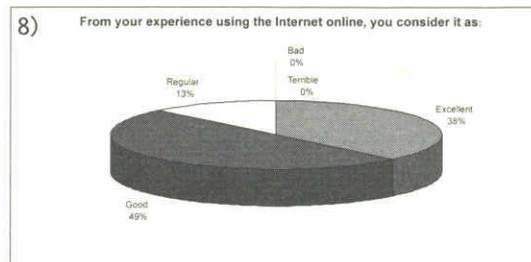
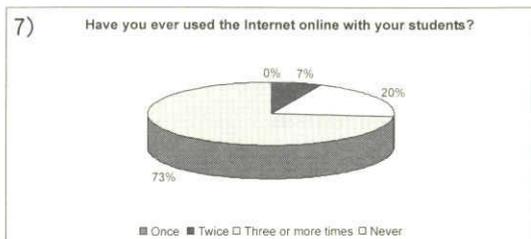
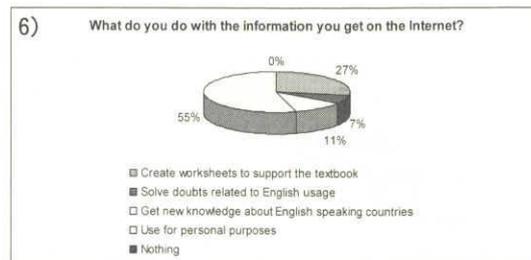
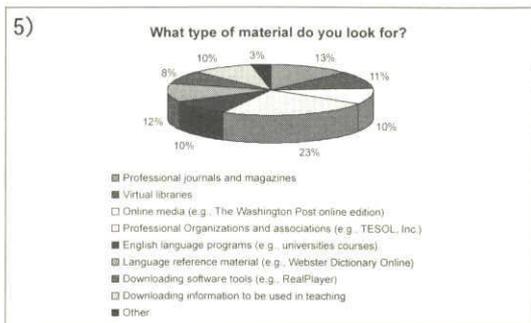
### 3.1 Questionnaire

As mentioned above, the number of questionnaires answered correctly was 27. We show the results in percentage of the ten (10) questions included in the questionnaire.

### 3.2 Questionnaire answers

- 1) The first question referred to the frequency they use the Internet as a daily life tool. The results are as follows:
- 2) The second question dealt with the language(s) used. This is what the teachers answered:
- 3) The third question was about the ways the teachers use the Internet.
- 4) We asked the teachers how often they use the Internet for their classes. These are the answers:
- 5) Then we inquired the teachers about the type of material or information they look for on the Web.
- 6) We wanted to know once they retrieve some information from the Web, how the data is used. This is what we found:
- 7) We asked the teachers if they had used the Internet online during their lessons.
- 8) If they had used the Internet, we asked to rate their experiences from being excellent to being terrible.
- 9) Question number 9 was not answered since the teachers didn't score their experience in number 8 as bad or terrible. Refer to the appendix to check both questions.
- 10) Finally those teachers that rarely or never used the Internet stated their reasons for it.





### 3.3 Discussion

This questionnaire was intended to find out whether junior high school teachers in Japan use the Internet online or offline as a part of their teaching activities.

Most of the teachers involved in the study use the Internet during their daily lives. A high percentage uses it *usually* (47%), while 30% *sometimes* and 23% *always*; but nobody answered *rarely* or *never*. Moreover, all those English teachers without exception use Japanese and English language when they browse the Internet.

Once we understand that all the teachers use the Internet in their lives we have the answer for the third question about the ways they interact with the Web. Significantly 33% answered *other* but didn't provide any examples that illustrate that option. However, they tend to browse the Web (27%), exchange mail (24%) and connect to virtual chat rooms (16%).

If those teachers are interested in doing non-educational activities on the Web, we also presume that they are using it as a resource bank for their teaching practice. In question number 4, 30% answered *sometimes* I used it, followed by 47% *usually* and 23% using it *rarely*.

One answer in question number 5 was that 23% of the teachers look for material from professional organizations and associations. This answer was supported by the fact that 13% stated that they check professional journals and magazines. From both answers we can think that teachers need to keep an eye on research and open forums being discussed that provide a foundation to their teaching practices. Similarly, the second preference on material was shared among virtual libraries 11%, online media 10%, downloading information to be used in teaching 10% and English language programs 10%. It is important that we check the Web for getting information that makes our classes authentic and diverse.

Question number 6 introduces us to the treatment of information obtained from the Web. Even though they get educational material from the Web, it is clear that only 27% use it to create worksheets to support the textbooks. Resonantly 55% stated that the material they get is for personal purposes 11% improve their knowledge of the countries where the language is spoken, and 7% solve doubts related to English usage. We can speculate that the teachers get most of the information from their textbooks because those are easily organized and are easy to access at any time without thinking about being connected to a computer and spending precious hours browsing the Web for material and ideas that seem to be elusive.

The next question is number 7. To the inquiry about using the Internet online in the classroom, a huge 73% of

the teachers said they have never used it in class. Those who admitted twice 7% or three times 20% were small in number. No doubt that to use the Net with the students is not a preferable option to that of the textbook or more traditional approach. We visited some schools and observed the language laboratories they have, we conclude that perhaps many teachers don't really know where to start in terms of the usage of the Internet. Probably they haven't received any specific training to have Internet skills or perhaps many universities don't include this issue in their teaching curriculum for future training teachers.

From those teachers that use the Internet online in the previous question we learn that just 38% affirmed that they have an excellent experience, while 13% pointed out that the experience is regular. Almost half of the educators, 49%, agreed that the experience is good.

We can add that if teachers know how to use both the Internet and the computer software well with clear goals, they will get successful results within their classes. Also, it is important that teachers practice their online activities before bringing them into the class to avoid trouble with the Internet or the connection.

In view of the fact that nobody had a bad or terrible experience with the Internet we will skip question number 9 and move on to the final one that explains why some teachers don't use the Internet in their classes.

The main reason given was the fact that they don't know how to use the Internet within their classes (46%), and the second one affirmed that they have never read material that instructs them how to use the Internet while teaching languages (27%). We can argue that if one is not familiar with instruction that enables him to acquire skills to use Internet and other technologies he will fail to use them in class.

Also, there is a small group of teachers that argue their schools probably don't want to introduce activities that are far from the traditional language teaching methodology in Japan (10%). It may mean that the traditional approach with the textbook and its audio CDs is used, and that perhaps some extra handouts are created by them. We can suggest that school authorities should encourage more new ways of improving the teaching practice, keeping in mind that the benefits will spread not only between students and teachers but also the society in general.

7% mentioned the lack of resources. We are not sure what they really mean, since we observed that all the schools visited had at least the basic resources to connect to the Internet. But we also observed that the equipment was sometimes old or it was not in real use.

Finally 7% said that they are not really interested in using the Internet in their classes. This is a small number of teachers; however, we need to know why they are not really interested in it and we need to try to offer alternatives that enrich their teaching repertoire.

## Conclusion

The research question was answered with an outstanding majority of teachers in junior high school not using the Internet while teaching English. We learned that a high percentage of the teachers involved in this research had never used the Internet in their classes. However, the small percentage of teachers that had used it had had a good experience.

Many teachers don't know how to use the Internet within their classes, and they have never read material that instructs them how to use it; this is an issue that has to be considered by those people involved in training teachers.

We may ask, in a new questionnaire, those English teachers why they haven't taken courses in the use of new technologies in teaching. Whatever the reason is, it is necessary to generate discussion between teachers about the possible benefits of using the Internet while teaching English.

On the other hand, it is useful to look into the textbooks currently in use to find out whether they offer students interactive resources to bring lessons to life. Do textbooks take into account Web-based programs that allow students to learn English? Textbooks may be combined with authentic and innovative resources that turn the learning process into something more enjoyable.

There is no doubt that the Internet should be placed together with traditional teaching techniques to produce expected results. We saw that in all the public schools visited there were computers laboratories connected to the Internet. They are meant to be used together with the traditional system. The truth is that the computers are there,

but many English teachers vacillate in using them to get the best for their classes.

The solution is simple: generate workshops where English teachers learn the necessary skills to use the Internet and the multimedia tools that computers bring. Once they learn those basic skills they will start creating lessons that increase the motivation of the students in using the language with people around the world while living in Japan.

Moreover, all teachers must remember that they are learning together with their students. By showing that teachers themselves are using the technology amiably, they can help students see themselves as people who are evolving with the current trends of life.

There is no final recipe for teaching languages; in fact, there are many new ideas every day. The challenge is to see the process of learning as one of life's enjoyments while developing new abilities necessary for the immediate future of our students.

Quoting Fox, (2003), "As technology started becoming more affordable, it became viewed as an efficient way to provide instruction at lower class levels. Teachers found that the basic skills review practice they were providing were also found in computer programs. These programs would use colorful visuals and animations to "drill and skill" students on simple math problems or spelling words."

What we suggest is this: let us move ourselves with the current trend. Teachers have a heavy responsibility to provide and help students access new technologies. If we don't assimilate the events happening around us, we take the risk of being left out or worse, not being able to understand our students' needs in a world where the Internet exists with us. As a consequence, we, teachers, will become less and less necessary for satisfying our students' demands in this fast changing world. It is us, teachers, who have the duty to create links between the students and the vast of information on the Internet.

Instructional multimedia and the Internet are creating a revolution in teaching. The creation of material that motivates learners should be realistic, easy to use, challenging and engaging. If teachers can provide access to technology with these characteristics and provide activities that encourage exploration and engagement, then a great deal of progress will be made in the teaching of English as a foreign language.

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## Appendix : Questionnaire

Dear teacher,

The following questionnaire is totally anonymous and is used only for our research. We will appreciate the information provided. Thank you.

### Instructions:

Mark with an "x" inside the blanks given or write down the corresponding information when necessary.

Sex: Male \_\_\_\_\_ Female \_\_\_\_\_

High school level which you teach: junior \_\_\_\_\_ senior \_\_\_\_\_

Prefecture \_\_\_\_\_

### Questionnaire

Read the following questions and answer with an "x" next to each item given. More than one answer is possible.

1) Do you use the Internet in your daily life?

Always \_\_\_\_\_ Usually \_\_\_\_\_ Sometimes \_\_\_\_\_ Rarely \_\_\_\_\_ Never \_\_\_\_\_

(If your answer is *rarely* or *never* please go to question number 10)

2) When I use the Internet I use the following language(s):

Japanese\_\_\_\_ English\_\_\_\_ Other\_\_\_\_\_

3) What kind of activities do you use the Internet -non educational purposes- for?

Email exchange\_\_\_\_

Web browsing\_\_\_\_

Chat rooms\_\_\_\_

Other\_\_\_\_\_

4) I use the Internet to get material for my classes:

Always\_\_\_\_ Usually\_\_\_\_ Sometimes\_\_\_\_ Rarely\_\_\_\_ Never\_\_\_\_

5) What type of material do you look for? (educational purposes)

Professional journals and magazines\_\_\_\_

Virtual libraries\_\_\_\_

Online media (e.g., The Washington Post online edition)\_\_\_\_

Professional Organizations and associations (e.g., TESOL, Inc.) \_\_\_\_\_

English language programs (e.g., universities courses)\_\_\_\_

Language reference material (e.g., Webster Dictionary Online)\_\_\_\_

Downloading software tools for educational purposes (e.g., RealPlayer)\_\_\_\_

Downloading information to be used in teaching

Other\_\_\_\_\_

6) What do you do with the information you get on the Internet?

Create worksheets to support the textbook\_\_\_\_\_

Solve doubts related to English usage\_\_\_\_

Get new knowledge about English-speaking countries\_\_\_\_

Use for personal purposes \_\_\_\_

Nothing \_\_\_\_

7) Have you ever used the Internet online with your students?

Once\_\_\_\_ Twice\_\_\_\_ Three or more times\_\_\_\_ Never\_\_\_\_

(If your answer is *never* go to question number 10 please.)

8) From your experience using the Internet online, you consider it as:

Excellent\_\_\_\_ Bad\_\_\_\_

Good \_\_\_\_ Terrible\_\_\_\_

Regular\_\_\_\_

9) If you answer *bad* or *terrible* above, please mark the option that is more suitable for you:

I didn't plan the activity well\_\_\_\_\_

The instructions were not clear\_\_\_\_\_

The students reacted in an unexpected way to my plans\_\_\_\_\_

There was trouble with the equipment at the moment of using it\_\_\_\_\_

The connection was not working properly\_\_\_\_\_

Other\_\_\_\_\_

10) One or more reasons for not using the Internet in my classes are:

I don't know how to use it in my classes\_\_\_\_\_

I have never read material related to the use of the Internet in class\_\_\_\_\_

I don't think my school wants to change the traditional methodology of teaching with the textbook and CDs \_\_\_\_\_

There are not resources in my school to use the Internet in class\_\_\_\_\_

I am not interested to use the Internet in my classes\_\_\_\_\_

Other\_\_\_\_\_