

## THE USE OF THE INTERNET BY HIGH SCHOOL EFL TEACHERS FOR PROFESSIONAL PURPOSES

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### Abstract

This article reports the findings of a descriptive study that aimed to examine the websites used by high school EFL teachers for professional purposes. The study included high school English Language Teachers working in the city centre of Diyarbakır in the spring semester of 2010-2011. Forty-five English teachers working at the Private High Schools and Anatolian High Schools in the city were taken as samples. A questionnaire prepared by the researchers was used to collect data. The results revealed that the language teachers mostly followed resource websites, forums and social networks, dictionaries, magazines, newspapers and blogs respectively. A list of the websites that are most commonly followed by EFL teachers is also presented in the study.

**Key words:** language teaching and the Internet, language teachers, professional development

## LİSELERDE ÇALIŞAN İNGİLİZCE ÖĞRETMENLERİNİN İNTERNETİ MESLEKİ AMAÇLA KULLANIMI

### Özet<sup>1</sup>

Bu betimsel araştırma liselerde çalışan İngilizce öğretmenlerinin mesleki amaçla kullandığı web sitelerini incelemektedir. Çalışmanın evreni 2010-2011 Eğitim-Öğretim yılı bahar yarıyılında Diyarbakır şehir merkezinde çalışan İngilizce öğretmenlerini kapsamaktadır. Araştırmanın örneklemi ise Anadolu liseleri ve özel liselerde çalışan 45 İngilizce öğretmeninden oluşmaktadır. Veri toplama amacıyla araştırmacılar tarafından hazırlanan bir anket kullanılmıştır. Araştırma sonuçları İngilizce öğretmenlerinin sırasıyla kendilerine kaynak sağlayan web sitelerini, sosyal ağları, sözlükleri, gazete, dergi ve blogları takip ettiklerini göstermiştir. Öğretmenlerin en çok kullandığı web sitelerinin adresleri de çalışma kapsamında belirtilmiştir.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Dil öğretimi ve İnternet, İngilizce öğretmenleri, mesleki gelişim

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## **Introduction**

Professional development of teachers is regarded as the keystone of educational development by researchers (Dede, Ketelhut, Whitehouse, Breit, & McCloskey, 2009: 8; Desimone, Smith, & Ueno, 2006: 180). Teachers have the crucial role of assisting students and providing them with the knowledge that they will need in the later phases of their lives. In order to achieve this hard goal, it is vital for them to keep up with the rapidly developing world.

With the increasing use of the Internet as a tool for information access and communication (Oliver & Towers, 2000: 382), more and more people have started to live in an increasingly interconnected world (Chai & Lim, 2011: 3). This situation has made it possible for the people to reach information resources easily and have better communication practices.

Language teachers are among those who have to use the computers effectively. In his study, Warschauer (1996: 5) expresses that language teachers should start thinking about the implications of computers for language learning. In the field of ELT, computers may offer solutions to the problems that people in this area have been facing for a long time such as finding authentic materials, providing better feedback, increasing student autonomy and motivation (Braul, 2006; Salaberry, 2001; Warschauer & Meskill, 2000). From this point of view, it is understandable that language teachers are expected to learn and practice the integrations of the Information and Communication Technology (ICT) more often and more effectively day by day. Warschauer & Meskill (2000: 2) mentioned the power of the Internet as a tool to assist language teaching and regarded it as a vast medium. As stated by Dettori & Lupi (2010: 271), the World Wide Web (WWW) provides “real documents which offer meaningful examples of current language use” as well as “educational materials of various kinds, from simple collections of exercises to large sites with complex and diverse offer”.

Tezci (2009: 1289) has found that the Internet is the most commonly used and well-known type of ICT for the teachers in Turkey. Similarly, Smith et al. (2008a, as cited in Morris, 2010: 49) has reported that the Internet appears to be increasingly used by teachers. These results give a clue about the connection of teachers with the Internet as a technological level. Since the Internet helps people improve themselves not only in personal but also professional ways, teachers may feel like using this technology more as it is widespread in many parts of the world today. According to Kirschner & Davis (2003: 136), the Internet “provides access to huge array of previously untapped information”. For this reason, teachers should adapt and transform their practices to benefit from the power of technology as much as possible.

According to Windeatt, Hardisty and Eastment (2000: 6), “not only does the Internet provide a faster and more convenient alternative to conventional communicative writing, but it is beginning to allow audio and video communication in ways that have never been practical”. They state that, in the

future, the Internet may be used more than print resources, because it will be more easily available.

The present study examines the websites that high school EFL teachers use for professional purposes. The following research questions were sought in the study:

1- What are the websites that high school EFL teachers use for professional purposes?

2- Do ELT teachers use the social networking websites for professional purposes?

In order to understand the Internet, it is necessary to explore the term World Wide Web or simply Web which has been used quite often in the past decade and taken its part in the lives of people of modern society. Web, which is sometimes used interchangeably with the Internet, is a major source of sharing information, communicating, uploading and downloading different types of materials and many other things that can be integrated into educational setting. The term Web 1.0 (read-only) environment has given its space to Web 2.0 (read/write) technologies. Owing to these web technologies, users can have access to authentic and rich materials and interact within a target language context. In addition, they can create their own materials with the help of some programs and share it with the whole world. Especially with the introduction of Web 2.0, which was first used in 2004, the second generation of web-based services started to offer options for online collaboration and sharing (Baltacı-Göktalay & Özdilek, 2010: 4738).

Examples of internet applications include but not limited to wikis, blogs, social networking, social bookmarking, net meeting, instant messaging, video-conferencing etc. Merriam Webster dictionary defines a *blog* as a “web site that contains an online personal journal with reflections, comments, and often hyperlinks provided by the writer” or “the contents of such a site” (Merriam Webster Online, 2010). Abbreviated from Weblog, blog is a type of personal website where the ‘blogger’ shares content in the form of text, picture, audio and video as well as links to various websites. *Wikis* (What I Know Is) refer to collaborative websites that allow users to interact by adding, removing, or editing site content” (Ajjan & Hartshorne, 2008, p.72). A widely used and known wiki on the web is Wikipedia (<http://www.wikipedia.org/>). A *social network* allows people to keep in touch with their friends, families, and colleagues by having a direct access to their ‘pages’ on which basic information, status updates, and shared audio and/or video content are found. Ajjan & Hartshorne (2008) offered that these websites could be used to establish academic connections or improve the cooperation of the academia in the higher education.

## Method

The present research is based on a descriptive approach. Quantitative data collection method was used in the study. A questionnaire was prepared by the researchers including questions about the demographic features of the participants. Then, the participants were asked to answer an open-ended question exploring the web sites that they used for their professional developments. Data collection procedure took place during the spring semester of 2010-2011. Before collecting

data, the Ministry of National Education (MNE) District Office in Diyarbakır was contacted and permission was obtained for the administration of the instruments. Each of the participants in the private high schools or Anatolian high schools was visited after the approval of the school principals.

### Participants

The study included all high school English Language Teachers working in the city centre of Diyarbakır in the spring semester of 2010-2011. The Private High Schools and Anatolian High Schools in the city were taken as samples. A purposive sampling technique was used in order to identify the participants. This technique is defined by Patton as to “select information-rich cases strategically and purposefully” (2002: 243). Therefore, English Language Teachers working at Private High Schools and Anatolian High Schools were selected as the participants of the present study. According to the information gathered via the official website of the MNE District Office ([www.diyarbakir.meb.gov.tr](http://www.diyarbakir.meb.gov.tr)), 17 schools matched the criteria for participation in the research. Ten of these were Anatolian High Schools and seven of them were Private High Schools or Private Anatolian High Schools. At the time of the visits, the total number of high school EFL teachers who matched the criteria was 52. Each of these schools was visited and the teachers were contacted at various times. 86% of the intended participants (n=45) agreed to fill in the questionnaires. In order to increase the reliability and validity of the study, all of these teachers were visited and, for those who were not at school at the time of the visit, the school was revisited after a while. The researcher could not contact with four teachers although the related schools were visited twice. Two teachers were on maternity leaves during the visits whereas two of them could not be contacted. Three of the intended participants refused to fill in the questionnaire and they stated that they did not use technology at all. A list of the number of the high school EFL teachers who took part in the study, and the school types are presented in Table 1.

**Table 1**

School types and number of EFL teachers participated in the study.

School Type	n
State Anatolian High School	31
Private Anatolian High School	9
Private High School	5
Total	45

### Findings

Table 2 below shows the demographic information about the participants. As the table suggests, 57.8% (n=26) of the high school EFL teachers that contributed to this study were female whereas 42.2% (n=19) of them were male. 46.7% (n=21) of the teachers were between the ages of 20 and 29, 31.1% (n=14) of them were between 30 and 39 and 22.2% (n=10) were over 40 years. The majority of the high school EFL teachers in the study (95.6%, n=43) were graduates of English Language Teaching Departments of various universities in Turkey. 33.3% (n=15)

of the teachers had working experiences between 6 and 10 years and they were followed by 26.7% (n=12) of the participants who were in their first five years of teaching. Teachers who responded that they had work experience in the field more than 20 years were 22.2% (n=10) of the participants and the teachers with the experience between 11 and 15 years were 17.8% (n=8).

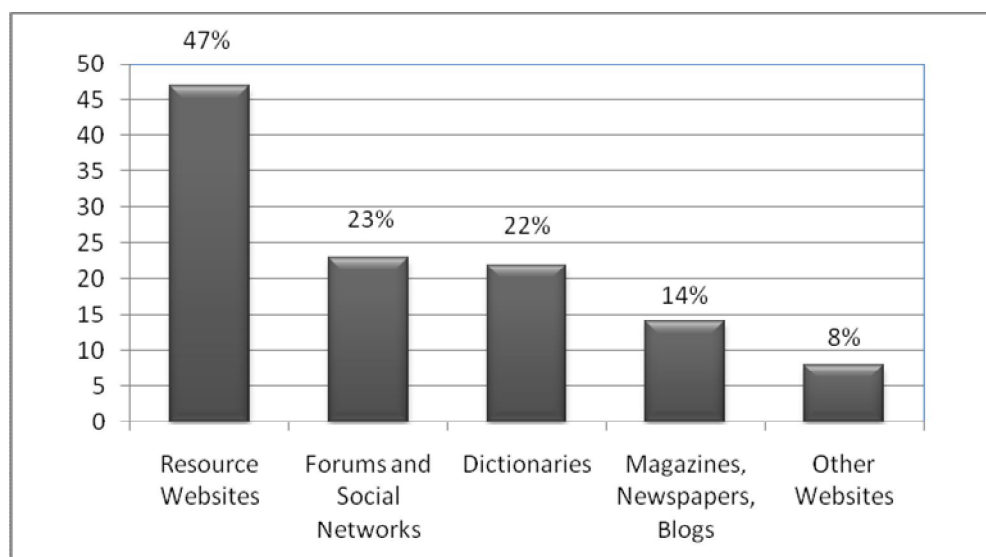
**Table 2.**

Demographic Features of the Participants

<b>Variable</b>	<b>Category</b>	<b>f</b>	<b>%</b>
<b>Gender</b>	Female	26	57.8
	Male	19	42.2
<b>Age</b>	20-29	21	46.7
	30-39	14	31.1
	40 and over	10	22.2
<b>Educational Background</b>	English Language Teaching	43	95.6
	English Language and Literature	1	2.2
	Other Faculty	1	2.2
<b>Teaching Experience (years)</b>	1-5	12	26.7
	6-10	15	33.3
	11-15	8	17.8
	16 and over	10	22.2

*Research 1- What are the websites that high school EFL teachers use for professional purposes?*

As part of the present study, the participants were asked to share the websites that contribute them at professional level. It was thought that specific names of the websites would provide a valuable data in order to understand how high school EFL teachers used the Internet for their professional development. An open-ended section of the questionnaire was used for this aim and teachers were asked to write down the names of the websites that they visited for professional purposes.



**Figure 1.** Websites Used by the Participants for Professional Development

After analyzing the data, it was seen that 86% (n=39) of the participants provided 114 replies. According to the data, five main types of websites were used by the participants. These websites have been categorized under five categories: Resource Websites (n=47), Forums and Social Networks (n=23), Dictionaries (n=22), Magazines, Newspapers and Blogs (n=14), Other Websites (n=8) (Figure 1). Below, each of these categories is examined in detail.

### Resource Websites

The participants of the study provided 17 different websites that match this category. The websites in this group offer language learning and teaching materials, worksheets, audio and video resources as well as printable materials, which are usually available for students with various levels of English and teachers. The details for each website are given below.

[www.englishtips.org](http://www.englishtips.org) (accessed on May 4, 2011) was mentioned by nine teachers. It is a resource website offering many English course books, live communication, latest educational trends and techniques, tips and tricks of learning the language for the users. The website had approximately 470.000 members.

[www.britishcouncil.org](http://www.britishcouncil.org) (accessed on May 4, 2011) was noted by eight of the participants. This website is considered as the cultural relations body of the United Kingdom and it provides learning materials for students and teaching resources for teachers including four main language skills as well as language abilities such as grammar and vocabulary.

[www.bbc.co.uk/worldservice/learningenglish](http://www.bbc.co.uk/worldservice/learningenglish) (accessed on May 4, 2011) was mentioned by four teachers who filled in the related section of the questionnaire. It is a rich website offering listening podcasts, videos, quizzes and lesson plans for

learners and teachers. The site also has weekly shows prepared for the learners and teachers of English, which attract people to visit the website regularly.

<http://elt.oup.com> (accessed on May 4, 2011) is the official website of the Oxford University Press, which offers extra practice activities and ideas for classroom teachers, extra interactive games and activities for students to practice online. This site was mentioned by four of the participants.

[www.kpds.org](http://www.kpds.org) (accessed on May 4, 2011) is a website designed mainly for people who want to improve their English and prepare for the national language exams conducted in Turkey, such as KPDS (Foreign Language Proficiency Exam for State Employees). The website, which was mentioned by four of the participants, offers different types of exercises, quizzes and materials.

[www.yolyordam.com/ing/index.php](http://www.yolyordam.com/ing/index.php) (accessed on May 4, 2011) is a website offering content for English language teachers and was pointed out by four participants. The site has a rich variety of English materials from stories, songs, and flashcards to the worksheets, lesson plans and questions.

[www.englishpage.com](http://www.englishpage.com) and [www.onestopenglish.com](http://www.onestopenglish.com) (accessed on May 4, 2011) were mentioned by four participants. Free online English lessons and EFL resources are available in the first website while the second one offers materials in various categories including business English, activities for different age groups, and sample tests.

The following websites mentioned by only one or two participants (All of them were accessed on May 4, 2011):

- <http://everydayenglish.com/> (audio, video links, practices for students)
- <http://voanews.com/learningenglish/home/> (Language website of the Voice of America)
- <http://english-4u.com/> (printable ESL lesson plans)
- <http://eslprintables.com/> (worksheets, lesson plans, flashcards)
- <http://busyteacher.org/> (printable worksheets for teachers)
- <http://myths.e2bn.org/> (myths and legends for students and teachers)
- <http://ingilizcekaynaklari.com/> (language materials for Turkish EFL teachers)
- <http://ingilizce.tk/> (ELT materials and resources mainly for Turkish teachers)

### **Forums and Social Networks**

The second groups of websites were forums and social networks. Nine different websites in this category were pointed out by the 23 participants. These websites provide the teachers an opportunity to communicate with fellow teachers and create a community in which they can exchange information and data from time to time. The details for these websites are provided below.

[www.myingilizce.net](http://www.myingilizce.net) (accessed on May 5, 2011) was the most frequently mentioned website (n=8) in this category. Turkish teachers of English can become members of the forum free of charge. They can provide materials for the website, or download the materials that other teachers share, in addition to contributing group discussions about a number of topics ranging from language teaching to

literature. There were more than 158.000 members of the website at the time of the visit.

[www.eltpool.net](http://www.eltpool.net) (accessed on May 5, 2011) was noted by four participants and similar to the other websites in this category, it has a forum for the teachers of English from different countries although the members of this website were as low as 600 at the time of visit. The website also offers useful documents and materials to its visitors.

<http://www.eltplanet.net/forum/index.php> (accessed on May 5, 2011) was mentioned by two participants and had approximately 19.000 members at the time of the visit. This website provides a forum and communication opportunities for teachers of English from Turkey. The members can share almost anything related to English language teaching and some other topics such as literature, music, and art.

The following forums and social networking websites were also mentioned by a limited number of participants. (Accessed on May 5, 2011)

- <http://dilforum.com>
- <http://eltforum.com>
- <http://demethoca.com>
- <http://ingilizceforum.net>
- <http://etwinning.net>
- <http://facebook.com>

### **Dictionaries**

Seven different online dictionaries were named by a total of 19 participants. In addition, three of the participants noted that they used dictionaries although they did not recall the websites. There were two main groups of dictionaries, used by the EFL teachers: English dictionaries prepared for Turkish users such as [www.zargan.com](http://www.zargan.com), [www.seslisozluk.com](http://www.seslisozluk.com), and [www.tureng.com](http://www.tureng.com) and the online versions of globally well-known dictionaries such as Oxford Dictionary, Cambridge Dictionary, Longman Dictionary, and Merriam-Webster Dictionary. The details about those websites are provided below.

<http://zargan.com/> (accessed on May 6, 2011) was pointed out by six participants who took part in the study. It is a Turkish-English and English-Turkish dictionary mainly for Turkish users, free of charge. Zargan.com offers words and idioms as well as terms and jargons of various fields.

<http://seslisozluk.com/> (accessed on May 6, 2011) used by four of the teachers. The website was one of the earliest dictionaries serving the online vocabulary needs of Turkish learners and teachers. The site also offered audio versions of the words that were searched.

<http://oxforddictionaries.com/> (accessed on May 6, 2011) was cited by three of the teachers and the website offers a comprehensive data of vocabulary. The site has categories such as ‘word of the day’, ‘quote of the week’, ‘language tip of the week’ and special sections for puzzles and games.



<http://dictionary.cambridge.org/> (accessed on May 6, 2011) was pointed out by three participants. The website offers different types of dictionaries online such as Advanced Learner's, Essential British English, Essential American English, Idioms, and Phrases. Recently, the website started to offer English-Turkish, Turkish-English dictionaries to its database as well.

<http://ldoceonline.com/> (accessed on May 6, 2011) was mentioned by two teachers who filled in the questionnaire. There are nearly 50.000 indexed English entries offered on the website.

The other two online dictionaries mentioned by the participants were <http://tureng.com/> and <http://merriam-webster.com/> (accessed on May 6, 2011). Only two of the participants mentioned these dictionaries. Similar to the other on-line dictionaries, they offer vocabulary-searching functions for users although the first one is mainly for Turkish people.

### **Magazines, Newspapers and Blogs**

Magazines, newspapers and blogs were also reported to be used for professional development by the high school EFL teachers. The websites in this category were mentioned 14 times by the participants. Five of the participants wrote that they followed online newspapers, three of them mentioned that they followed blogs online, and two of them wrote that they followed online magazine and website offering actual news related to their professions. Only four of the participants provided examples of websites in this category. Two of them exemplified these websites, <http://newsweek.com/> and <http://newyorker.com/> and two of the participants mentioned <http://dersimiz.com/> (all of them were accessed on May 7, 2011), which is a website where teachers can find educational news and update themselves in terms of recent developments in their fields.

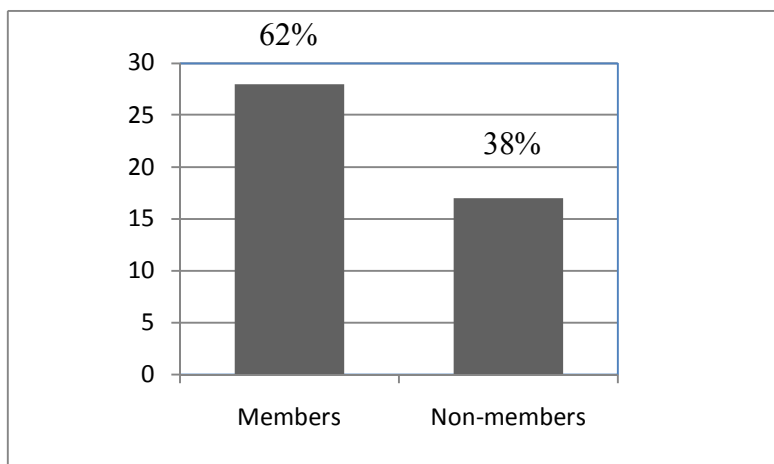
### **Other Websites**

Apart from the resource websites, forums, social networking sites, newspapers, magazines, and blogs, there were other websites mentioned by the eight of the participants of the present study. <http://en.wikipedia.org/> (n=3), search engines (n=2), <http://yahoo.com/> (n=1), and <http://youtube.com/> (n=1) were mentioned by the teachers.

*Research 2- Do ELT teachers use the social networking websites for professional purposes?*

In order to see whether high school EFL teachers make educational use of the social networks, they were asked about their membership status. They were also asked if they used social networking websites like Facebook for their professional development as well as social reasons.

The statistical data showed that 62% (n=28) of the participants was a member of a social networking website such as Twitter and Facebook (Figure 2). 38% (n=17) of the teachers indicated that they were not members of any social networking websites.



**Figure 2.** Social Networking Website Membership Statuses of EFL Teachers

The participants were asked about their use of social networking websites for the educational purposes. The statistical analysis of the results showed that almost half of the participants (48.9%) stated that they did not use social networking websites for educational purposes. 26.6% (n=12) participants agreed that they used social networking websites (like Facebook) for their professional development.

### Discussion

The present study examined the use of the Internet by high school EFL teachers and the web sites they followed for their professional development. The teachers who contributed to the study mentioned the names of many web sites. This is mainly because of the great variety of activities, materials and printable exercises available on the Internet. Colorful and attractive exercises are available and easily accessible on the Internet. This huge information source enables them to improve their professional abilities, as they are likely to come across new techniques or read the comments of their more experienced colleagues.

The study also showed that teachers were members of some websites related to English language teaching, and exchanged their opinions with other teachers of English through forums or social networks. These may help teachers create an online community where they can exchange information and share their teaching experiences. Teachers are also members of some websites that offer free audio, video, and paper-based content to its members. They are able to reach a larger community of colleagues and share experiences with them.

According to the results of a survey performed in 27 European countries, 86% of teachers in Europe think that students are more motivated and attentive when computers and the Internet are used in class (Empirica, 2006). The preparation of a website specifically for the teachers of English can increase the efficient use of the Internet and the variety of the lessons. There can be curriculum-compliant materials, exercises and activities offered to the teachers. The website can also

have a forum section where teachers from different cities can create an online community and collaborate for a better English language teaching. Besides, a web page can be created for teachers and students to have access to the related materials of the course book online.

This study has a number of limitations. First, the study has been conducted in the Anatolian High Schools and Private High Schools in Diyarbakır. The results might have been different if the other school types had been included to the study. Second, the data is based on a questionnaire. Other sources of data might have led to different results.

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