

**ENGLISH TEACHERS' MOTIVES FOR JOINING TEACHING SPECIFIC
FACEBOOK GROUPS AND THE PERCEIVED USEFULNESS OF THEM**

Bachelor's thesis
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English
April 2018

JYVÄSKYLÄN YLIOPISTO

Tiedekunta – Faculty Humanistis-yhteiskuntatieteellinen tiedekunta	Laitos – Department Kieli- ja viestintätieteiden laitos
Tekijä – Author Vera Vesala	
Työn nimi – Title English teachers' motives for joining teaching specific Facebook groups and the perceived usefulness of them	
Oppiaine – Subject Englanti	Työn laji – Level Kandidaatin tutkielma
Aika – Month and year Huhtikuu 2018	Sivumäärä – Number of pages 31+ 3 liitettä
<p>Tiivistelmä – Abstract</p> <p>Erilaiset sosiaaliset mediat ja niiden käytön laajeneminen on ollut yksi suurimmista puheenaiheista teknologian saralla viimeisen parin vuosikymmenen aikana. Suurin ja eniten käyttäjiä keräävä sosiaalisen median kanava nykypäivänä on Facebook. Alusta onkin herättänyt suurta kiinnostusta myös koulutuksen ja opetuksen tutkimuksen saralla. Suurin osa aiemmin tehdystä tutkimuksesta on keskittynyt Facebookin soveltuvuuteen opetusalueena, opiskelijoiden väliseen kommunikointiin sekä kuinka opettajan Facebookin käyttö vaikuttaa hänen uskottavuuteensa. Täten opettajien välistä kommunikointia Facebookissa ei ole juurikaan tutkittu.</p> <p>Tämän kandidaattitutkielman tehtävänä oli selvittää, miksi suomalaiset englannin kielen opettajat liittyvät Facebookissa oleviin opetus- ja opettaja-aiheisiin ryhmiin ja kokevatko he niiden jäsenyyden auttavan heitä heidän urakehityksessään. Tutkielma myös koitti tarkastella, mikäli vastaukset paljastaisivat joitain mielenkiintoisia ajankohtaisia ilmiöitä ja mahdollisesti jopa ongelmakohtia, joita opettajat kohtaavat ammatissaan. Aineistonkeruumenetelmänä käytettiin kyselylomaketta, joka sisälsi sekä monivalintaa että avoimia kysymyksiä. Aineisto analysoitiin käyttäen hyväksi laadullista sisällönanalyysia.</p> <p>Tutkimus osoitti, että opettajat liittyvät opetus- ja opettaja-aiheisiin Facebook-ryhmiin saadakseen omaan opetukseensa erilaisia vinkkejä, ideoita ja materiaaleja. Myös vertaistuki korostui vastauksissa. Hyvin suuri osa vastaajista koki ryhmien jäsenyydet itselleen hyödyllisiksi, sillä niistä sai paljon erilaisia ideoita, ne mahdollistivat keskustelun muiden opettajien kanssa ja jotkut olivat jopa saaneet sijaisuuksia ryhmien avulla. Ryhmät myös vahvistivat heidän omaa opettajaidentiteettiään. Vaikka ryhmät koettiin hyvin positiivisesti, saattoivat ne osalle aiheuttaa myös negatiivisia tunteita, kuten riittämättömyyden ja ahdistuneisuuden tunteita, heidän nähdessään muiden opettajien projekteja ja ideoita.</p>	
Asiasanat – Keywords social media, Facebook, community of practice, foreign language teaching	
Säilytyspaikka – Depository JYX	
Muita tietoja – Additional information	

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1 INTRODUCTION

The rapid development and expansion of social media and different social network sites has been one of the most influential and discussed phenomena in digital technology in the recent decade worldwide. After making their first appearance in the late 1990s, followed by rapid expansion in the years 2003-2006 with the creation and recognition of social media services such as LinkedIn, Myspace, Twitter, Youtube and Facebook, these social networking sites have become an integral part of our everyday lives (boyd and Ellison 2007: 214; Page et al. 2014: 7). In addition, the development of technical devices has made accessing these sites easier than ever before. For example, currently 86% of Americans state that they use the Internet and various social media net sites frequently (Pew Research Center 2016). According to Statistic Finland's report (2016), in Finland internet is used by 88% of the population. However, the report states that almost everyone under age 55 uses it. In addition, 76% of Finns are stated to browse internet multiple times a day, 65% using a smartphone to access it outside of work and home environment. Thus, it seems that different social network sites are easily accessible and available to the majority of Finns regardless of time and space.

Currently, the most widely used social network site worldwide is Facebook, totaling over 1.4 billion daily users (Facebook 2018a). The service is also the most popular social media outlet in Finland with 53% of population using it frequently (STT info 2016). Thus, the popularity of the platform has awoken increasing interest in conducting research on the site. This also includes the educational field. However, the focus of the studies researching Facebook from an educational point of view has been on the possible educational uses of Facebook as a learning platform. In addition, interaction between students on the site has been widely popular, which has left teachers' interaction through the site widely unexplored, even though the platform offers a great means of joint discussion with professionals all over the world.

This particular study explores the motives that Finnish teachers of English language have for joining a Facebook group that is specific to their profession, and whether the teachers perceive them as beneficial for their career development. As stated above, the topic has not been studied

extensively, especially in Finland and in Finnish foreign language teaching context. Furthermore, the interest has not been on foreign language teachers' engagement in the groups but instead on class and subject teachers' motives and actions in these groups in general. Thus, the study aims to illustrate the reasons why Finnish teachers of English gather to these Facebook groups and whether the teachers perceive that the group memberships influences their practice positively. In addition, the study tries to indirectly investigate the current issues or challenges that might be prevalent in the field of foreign language teaching in Finland today.

This study consists of five sections. In the second section, relevant research on the topic and definitions of the key concepts relating to the study are presented. Furthermore, Facebook and its group functions are also explored briefly. In the third section, the aims of this study are illustrated with the descriptions of data gathering and methods of analysis. In addition, the background information of the participants can also be found in this section. Afterwards, the findings of the study are presented in section 5. They are then later discussed more extensively in section 6.

2 BACKGROUND

2.1 Key concepts

2.1 Social media and social network sites (SNS)

The background section of this thesis aims to present some central concepts and previous research relevant to the field of study in addition to the topic itself. Firstly, concepts such as social media and social networking sites are explored, followed by a brief introduction of Facebook, its history and especially its group feature. In addition, the concept community of practice and its subcategory virtual communities of practice are also presented. Afterwards, previous research on teacher communication through virtual platforms is also presented and discussed in the context of this study.

Social media and different social networking sites have become a part of our everyday life.

However, social media is a quite recent phenomenon, making its first appearance in 1997 with a site called SixDegrees.com, which is considered to be the first web platform attaining the primary characteristics of a social network site in a format we know today (boyd et al. 2007: 214). Later, more successful social network sites, such as Friendster, Myspace, LinkedIn and Facebook, were able to emerge as the technology advanced in the early 2000s (Page et al. 2014: 6-8).

Various researchers have made an effort to define the term social media and the key characteristics social media sites have. According to Page et al. (2014: 5-6), social media comprehends websites which promote interaction among the users of the site. They want to highlight that social media should be distinguished from traditional mass media, where information usually is broadcasted from one to many, such as in television or radio. In contrast to this, in social media anyone can create content and publish it to a large audience. Meikle's (2016: 7) simple definition of social media, however, is that "social media are *networked database platforms that combine public with personal communication*". Thus, Meikle's definition explores the two sides of social media. On one hand, many social media platforms have an option to share content publicly to a wider audience, as previously mentioned by Page et al. (2014), in addition with the possibility to follow other people's shared content. On the other hand, many social media sites have also an option to a more private communication between individuals using the platform. For example, sites such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and Snapchat have a "direct message" feature incorporated in them, making it possible to contact individuals also privately. Thus, in social media people can converse with each other publicly, but they also have a possibility to do it in private if they desire so.

Social media can be considered to be an umbrella term, consisting of different types of social network sites. In line with the other definitions, Raacke and Bonds-Raacke (2008: 169) define social network sites (SNS) as virtual places in which people who have similar interests gather to communicate, share and discuss different ideas, thus sharing similarities with the definitions of social media. However, boyd et al. (2007) define SNS more precisely, giving three criteria which a site has to fulfill in order to be considered to be a social network site. According to them, first the users have to be able to create a public or a semi-public profile. Second, the site must be able to articulate a list of users who share some sort of a connection together, generating various

networks. And third, the list of different profiles can be viewed and traversed by other users within that site. In other words, users of social network sites usually create a public profile, which other users of the site can view. In many of SNS, the users can also adjust the privacy settings of their profile, limiting some users' access to their profile's information. In addition, the users then tend to "friend" or "follow" other members of the site, creating "friends" or "followers" lists which are usually displayed in the users' profiles. Oftentimes, the other users have access to these lists and, therefore, can see with whom the user is connected. Thus, true to their name, social network sites are able to generate and display these complicated social relations between the users. Furthermore, Boyd et al. (2007: 211) also note that social network sites are usually used to keep up with already existing social ties, not to create new ones.

According to DNA (2017), currently the most used social media platforms in Finland are Facebook (including the Facebook Messenger app), WhatsApp, Youtube, Instagram, different discussion boards, Snapchat and Twitter. In addition, blogs, professional SNS such as LinkedIn and also dating apps such as Tinder have a significant user base. The report also states that there are differences in social media use between the genders. For women, the use of Facebook and Instagram is more significant than among men. However, the report claims that men browse Youtube and discussion boards more frequently than women.

2.1.2 Facebook

The previous sections of this study have already established Facebook's success as the most used SNS used both in Finland and in the whole world. According to Facebook's (2018b) own history, the company was launched in 2004 as a social network site for the students of Harvard University. In order to create an account on Facebook, the user had to have a verified student email address. The site rapidly gained popularity among the students and, therefore, other students from major American universities gained access to the registration of the site soon after the launch. For two years the site worked as a networking site just for the tertiary education students, but finally in 2006 the company expanded its registration policy so that anyone could join the site.

During its history, Facebook has added a number of memorable features that have shaped the format of SNS. The most notable one is the “like” button, introduced in 2009, which has also gone through changes over the years (Facebook 2018b). It was the first of its kind and later other SNS adopted it. However, a feature of Facebook that is the most relevant to this study is the “groups” feature, which was launched in 2010 (Facebook 2018b). Any user of Facebook can create groups, which usually serve as communities where people who share the same interest can converse with each other. The user can browse through content posted to the group by looking at the group page itself. Oftentimes, Facebook also elevates some of the group’s posts to an individual’s own news feed so that the user does not have to go to the group page to get updates.

Facebook groups can have three privacy settings: open, closed and secret. Anyone can search and access the posted content in the open groups. Furthermore, anyone can also join open groups. In both closed and secret groups, the user has to be accepted into the group by a moderator before having access to the group discussions and the information shared in the group. The difference between closed and secret groups is that the closed groups show up as a result when using the search bar. The secret groups are hidden and, thus, usually the moderator of the group has to add a user to the group if they wish to become a member. In this study, open and especially closed groups are discussed.

According to Kosinski et al. (2015), Facebook is rapidly gaining recognition as an efficient and powerful research tool, especially among social sciences. They explain that Facebook provides a vast and diverse pool of participants and various possibilities for different types of research and data gathering methods. However, they also note that even though Facebook offers efficient means for conducting research, the ethical issues have to be carefully considered before planning the research.

2.1.3. Communities of practice (CoPs)

A central concept in this study is the notion of communities of practice. One of the coiners of the term, Wenger (1998; 2004) defined communities of practice (CoPs) as groups of people who share the same passion for something, who know how to do it, and who interact with each other

in order to improve in their passion. According to him, just a mere interest towards the topic is not sufficient for formulating a community of practice. He notes that the participants need to want to actively improve in their desired set of skills by gaining insight from other practitioners of the field. Thus, as Wenger himself notes, the communities of practice serve as cornerstones of knowledge management since the experts of their fields come together for a joint problem solving and discussion in them. Teacher and teaching related Facebook groups can, therefore, be considered to be CoPs since the teachers gather together to discuss topics relevant to their practice. Furthermore, they share and consume ideas, advice, and concrete tips in order to get better themselves but also to encourage others in improving in their own practice.

In addition, Wenger (2004) characterizes three main components for these communities of practice, which are 1) Domain, 2) Community and 3) Practice. Domain is the specific area of knowledge that brings the community together. In the framework of this study, it is the profession of teaching English that brings the teachers together and gives the group its identity. Community is the group of people to whom the domain is relevant. In this case, it is the Finnish foreign language teachers of English or those who are interested in teaching English. Lastly, there is Practice which embodies the knowledge, different tools, methods and stories which the members of the CoPs share and develop together. This component also includes the specific professional jargon the professionals within the discipline use and which the outsiders of the community might not understand. Thus, all the discussions held in the groups, the shared advice and information, can be seen as a part of Practice.

The emergence of different social network platforms have also enabled the shift from concrete communities of practice to virtual based ones. Thus, different virtual communities of practice (VCoPs) are easier to establish today than ever before. Dubé et al. (2005: 147) define this subcategory of CoPs as CoPs in which the primary mode of interaction is through information technology. They note that, for example, geographical dispersion among the practitioners might be a good reason why online resources might be more suitable and efficient means of communication. In addition, the researchers note that VCoPs share a similar evolution pattern with CoPs and, thus, working the same way as a concretely meeting community of practice. Furthermore, in order to succeed, these virtual communities of practice need an encouraging

environment where participants feel that they can contribute freely. Dubé et al. (2005) note further that especially restricting protocols and strict rules are a hindrance to the sustainability of these communities.

Thus, these teaching and teacher specific groups on Facebook fulfill the definitions of communities of practice and even more precisely virtual communities of practice. First, the teachers gather together in these groups for a joint discussion about their profession in order to improve in it. Second, in these groups they share information, tips, news and advice concerning this connecting issue of teaching English, helping each other in becoming better in the profession. They have their shared stories, professional jargon and established ways of practicing their profession. Third, the means of communication is electronic, enabling teachers across the nation to participate in these communities of practice.

2.2 Previous research

The use of SNSs and Facebook in the educational field has mainly concentrated on the educational use of the sites and the way teachers and students interact in these services. For example, Facebook's usefulness as a learning management system has been studied somewhat extensively, proving that the service can also adapt to educational use in certain circumstances, even though the students did not consider the platform to be ideal for it (Mazman et al. 2010; Siddike et al. 2015; Wang et al. 2012). The student-teacher relationship on Facebook, and the motivation to build these online relationships, has also gained vast attention in educational research (Asterhan et al. 2015; Hershkovzt et al. 2017; Sheldon 2016). Furthermore, a more specific topic in student-teacher relationship research has been how the teachers' use of SNS might affect their credibility in the eyes of their students (Hutchens et al. 2014; Mazer et al. 2007). Noteworthy is that the majority of these studies have been conducted in higher education setting, studying the perceptions and attitudes of university level students. Thus, these limitations need to be considered when trying to apply the results of these studies to lower level education.

The impact and relevance of peer support through Facebook has also gained increasing interest in the educational field. A handful of studies (see, for example, Edwards et al. 2016; Garcia et al.

2015; Salminen 2014) have explored the usefulness of Facebook, and especially the group feature the service affords, in tertiary education. The studies state that in many cases the use of social media, such as Facebook, can facilitate socialization and peer learning among the target group. Furthermore, these studies explain that the use of social media platforms as a learning management system was perceived more positively when the individuals were not able to interact sufficiently in the offline world. Thus, the learning groups in these platforms offered a great means of participation in activities, such as socializing and giving practical information about relevant topics when the students felt that they were not able to do that in their everyday lives. The studies, therefore, suggest that a membership of a peer support group could encourage additional learning and possibly strengthen social ties among the participants.

However, a growing body of researchers have also grown an interest towards teachers' professional use of Facebook. The main interests in this field of study have been the different motivations teachers have for joining a Facebook group specific to their profession. In addition, the attention has also been on the different activities teachers participate in within these groups. Furthermore, teachers' perceptions about the benefits of these groups have also gotten slight attention among the researchers. Next, a few studies relating to this topic of interest are presented.

According to Ranieri et al. (2012), the main motives of teachers for joining a profession specific Facebook group depends on whether the Facebook group is more generic or thematic. In generic groups, where teaching as a practice is discussed as a whole, the main motives for joining were sharing various ideas and giving visibility to their own. In the thematic groups, which are meant for discussing more specific topics such as, for example, dyslexia or different teaching practices, the main motivational factors were the longing for a sense of belonging and wanting to feel less lonely. Thus, in this study the main motives for teachers' professional use of Facebook seem to center around socializing and self-presentation, which are in line with Nadkarni's (2012: 247) proposition of people's main motives for using Facebook altogether. In the same study, Ranieri et al. (2012) also tried to shed light onto the issue of whether the membership of these Facebook groups was beneficial for the teachers' career development. Their findings suggested that the group membership of a generic teaching group can indeed carry benefits to the teachers' offline

practice. The researchers proposed that the members of the groups can get inspired by other teachers' projects, which they then might try themselves in their own classroom practice. Thus, the membership of a teaching specific group can be beneficial for teachers' career development.

Kelly and Antonio (2016) studied what kind of support teachers might give each other in these teaching practice related groups. In line with Ranieri et al.'s (2014) study, they found out that the teachers predominately used the groups for connecting and socializing with other teaching practitioners. In addition, the groups were used for seeking and providing practical information and advice about teaching and its practices. This seems to be a primary motive for many teachers to join a profession specific Facebook group since also the study of Lantz-Andersson et al. (2017) shares the results. However, in the observed Facebook groups, Kelly et al. (2016) did not detect any major signs of teachers providing or asking for emotional support. The teachers, therefore, did not discuss their own practice in the groups in detail nor asked for emotional reassurance in these groups. Instead, the support was given in a form of practical knowledge which the teachers could apply into their own teaching. Kelly et al. (2016) suggest that the teachers were reluctant to provide or give emotional support to each other because the observed Facebook groups were classified as "open". They added that in order for people to feel comfortable to ask for help from each other, trust is needed. Creating trust in these large, open groups can be challenging and thus, teachers might be unwilling to discuss their own practice in great detail. Kelly et al., (2016) therefore, suggested that the case might be different in groups, which are smaller in size and are also "closed".

This claim is supported by Tseng and Kuo (2014) who studied which factors encouraged teachers to share repertoires and knowledge with each other in an online environment. They found out that the members who had closer ties with the other participants in the community were more likely to participate in altruistic behavior. In other words, the better the members knew each other, the more they were willing to share their knowledge and expertise. They also found that the membership of a professional online community seemed to heighten the pro-social behavior of teachers, making them more willing to help and solve other people's problems. Thus, Tseng et al. (2016) note that cultivating a friendly atmosphere where sharing is encouraged can be highly beneficial for the members of the group, providing a means of career development and possibly

increasing the teachers' belief of self-efficacy.

It seems, therefore, that even though the focus of researching Facebook in the educational field has concentrated on Facebook's properties as a learning management system, there are also indicators that it also works as a platform for functional virtual communities of practice. Furthermore, the previous research also indicates that these VCoPs are useful for teachers and their practice. Sharing of advice, information and support seems to both improve and inspire the practice but also, in the most favorable scenario, heighten the teachers' self-belief and self-efficacy.

3 THE PRESENT STUDY

3.1 The aim of the study and research questions

This study aims to examine the reasons why Finnish teachers of English language decide to join profession specific Facebook groups and whether they perceive the membership of these groups to influence their own practice positively. Thus, the study tries to give an answer to two research questions:

- 1) Why do Finnish teachers of English join teaching or teacher specific Facebook groups?
- 2) Do the teachers consider the memberships of these groups as beneficial for their career development and if so, how?

The topic is interesting for various reasons. First, the motivational factors for joining teaching related VCoPs is a topic that has not been extensively studied. Furthermore, Finnish teaching specific VCoPs have gotten even less interest as a research area. In addition to this, there are no studies related to foreign language teaching VCoPs. The study, therefore, tries to shed light on a topic that has not been researched widely before.

Second, the study might give an interesting insight to the foreign language teaching as a field in general. One of the assumptions while planning and conducting this study was that in their

answers teachers were more likely to recite things that are problematic for them in their practice. For example, if the teachers were often to mention getting help with technological aspect of teaching as one of the most beneficial things they have gotten out of the group, it might indicate that there is a collective pressure to use ICTs in teaching in the profession. Thus, it is supposed that the study might indirectly also reveal some current phenomena, and possibly even issues, that are prevalent in the field.

Third, the study might also have an educational benefit, especially to teacher trainees. If the responders were to answer positively to the question of whether they consider the groups beneficial for them, it means that teachers and especially new teachers, who are still integrating to the profession, should be encouraged to join these groups. The study also aims to examine how these groups are useful for teachers and, thus, provide information on situations in which the group membership might be beneficial and recommended.

3.2 Methods and analysis

The method chosen for data collection was to conduct a survey. When researching social media and communication through different SNS, one must consider the community guidelines of the service and possible ethical issues that might arise. By using a survey, the majority of these issues were evaded. In addition, since conducting a questionnaire is seen to be an efficient means to map out the target group's attitudes, opinions and feelings towards the desired topic or issue (Dörnyei and Taguchi 2009), this specific data gathering method was chosen.

The survey was made by using a professional survey making service Webropol, provided by the University of Jyväskylä. The survey, conducted in Finnish, started with five demographic questions. These included questions about the age, gender and experience of the teacher. Furthermore, the participants were asked about the number of teaching specific group memberships and if they taught or had taught English. The questions from question 6 to question 11 were designed in a way that would help most with answering the research questions. In question number 6, the respondents of the study were able to choose from a list of multiple options all the motives they felt they had at the time of joining the teaching specific groups.

Question 7 inquired whether the respondents felt that the groups had been useful for them. After answering to question number 7, the respondents were asked to detail in their own words why or why not the groups influenced their teaching positively. To give the researcher and the study additional information, a question about whether the respondent had considered ever leaving the teaching specific groups was added. If the respondent responded affirmatively, they were asked to ponder why they had done so. All the survey questions both in Finnish and English can be found from the appendices 1 and 2.

The survey was then distributed to four closed foreign language teaching specific Facebook groups. The first teaching specific group was a large group with over 3,000 members. This particular group was designed for general discussion of teaching English language in Finland and did not, for example, make any differentiation between the educational levels. The rest three of the chosen groups did so. One of the groups were created for foreign language teachers, not just English teachers, teaching in the first six grades of comprehensive school. The second group targeted the foreign language teachers who taught the grades from seven to nine in Finnish comprehensive school. The third group chosen was for teachers teaching specifically English in high school. All these three groups had 700-3,800 members in them and, thus, could also be classified as large sized. Before choosing the groups, their activity and frequency in posting were observed. After an observation period of a couple of months from November 2017 to the end of January 2018, these particular groups were chosen because they were deemed as the most active ones and, therefore, the survey had the possibility to reach as many people as possible from the target group. Furthermore, for the same reason, it was decided that all the educational levels except higher education in Finland were to be targeted and, thus, in addition to the one general group, the three more specific ones were also chosen.

Before posting the survey to the groups' walls, a permission for it was asked from the group moderators for ethical reasons. After getting the permission from all the groups' moderators, the survey was then shared to the groups in the end of January 2018. The survey was open for responding for three days within which the desired number of responses was achieved.

The survey provided both numeric and qualitative data. The answers to closed questions were

compiled with the help of Webropol. In these, the data was given both in numbers and percentages. The answers to the open questions, however, were analyzed by the means of qualitative content analysis. The aim of the content analysis is to find and categorize reoccurring themes from the gathered data based on explicit rules of coding (Tuomi and Sarajärvi 2002: 105). Thus, the responses to the open questions were individually analyzed in order to find reoccurring answers and themes, from which three categories were later formulated. All the themes found from the answers were counted and marked in an Excel spreadsheet, giving the mentions in both numbers and percentages. Qualitative data was, therefore, also quantified. Thus, as a result, the study is highly quantitative in nature.

3.3 Participants

The questionnaire yielded a total of 216 responses. Five responses were initially discarded because the respondents had chosen “no” to question number 4, which asked whether the teacher taught or had taught English. It is possible that these responders were teacher trainees who still lack their own experience in teaching English language in schools, but who are confident that they will be doing so in the future. However, because some of the Facebook groups in which the survey was posted were not English teaching oriented but instead discussed foreign language teaching in general in a specific educational level, these responses were not taken into account in the analysis part of the thesis in order to ensure that the data came from the wanted target group. In addition, one response was furthermore discarded because the respondent had not disclosed their age properly. Thus, 210 responses were used for further analysis.

97% (n=204) of the survey respondent were women and 3% (n=6) were men, whereas none had chosen the option “other”. This difference in willingness to respond to the survey between the genders might either reflect the general user base of the groups, suggesting that women might be more active in the teaching and teacher specific groups than men, or that women were more interested in replying to this survey in general. The age distribution of the survey respondents is shown below in Figure 1.

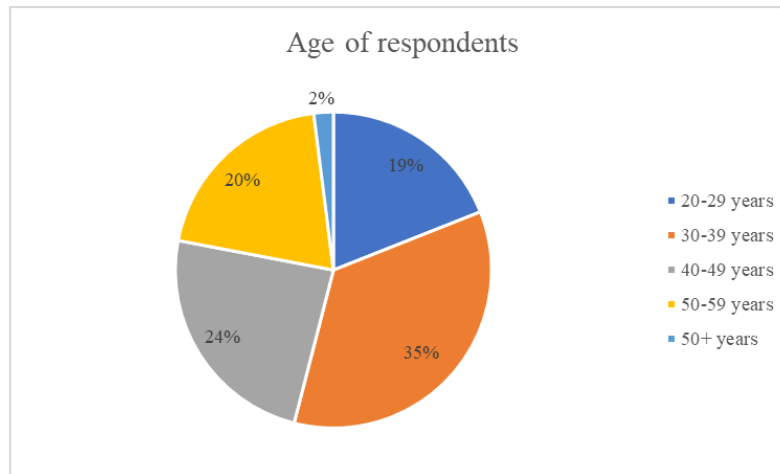


Figure 1. Age of respondents (Question 1).

The age distribution already suggests that the user base of these groups is compiled of teachers who are already quite experienced since the age groups 30-39 years (n=74), 40-49 years (n=50), 50-59 years (n=42) are majorly represented while age group 20-29 years (n=39) is slightly smaller. This is further confirmed in Figure 2, which shows the teaching experience that the responders stated to possess. The small number of responders from age group 60 years and more (n=5) might be explained by either the retirement age in Finland or that this age group might not be as familiar with social media and different SNS' possibilities

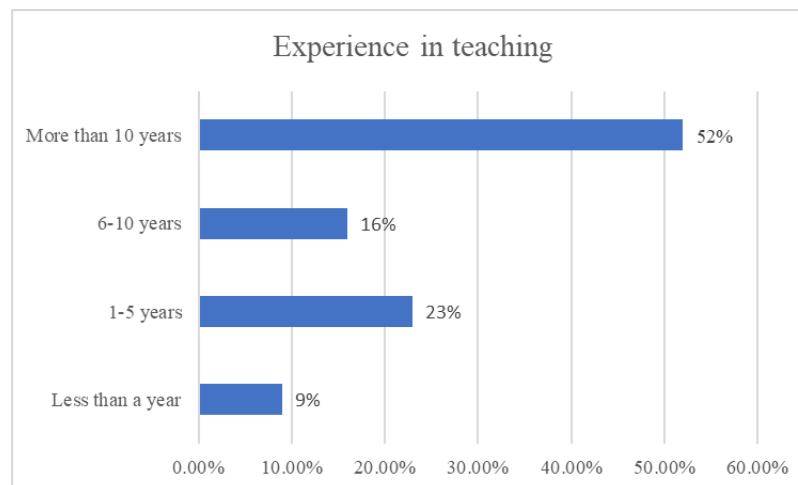


Figure 2. Experience in teaching (Question 3).

The survey responses also suggest interestingly that the teachers seem to have a tendency to

follow multiple different teaching specific Facebook groups, as shown in Figure 3.

Approximately 90% of the teachers responding to the survey seem to be members to three or more of these groups.

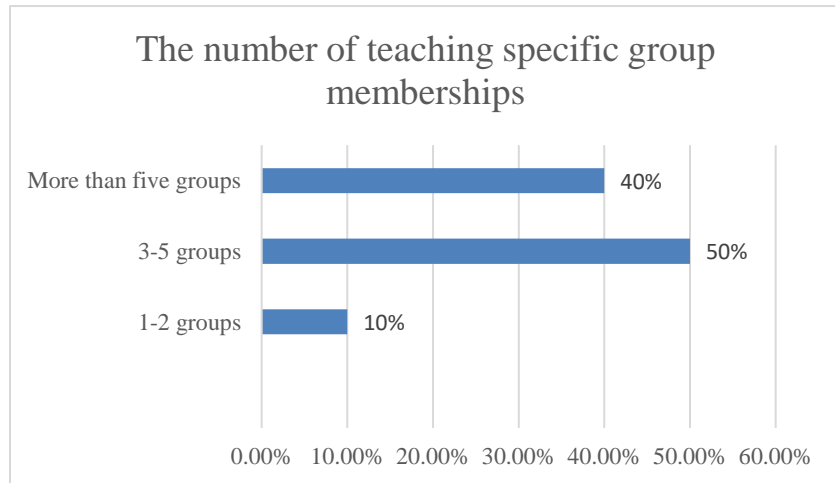


Figure 3. The number of teaching specific group memberships (Question 5).

4 RESULTS

4.1 Motives for joining a teaching specific Facebook group

In question number 6, the responders were asked to choose from multiple options all the motives they considered to have when deciding to join a teacher and teaching specific Facebook group.

Motives and the amount of times they were chosen are visible from the Table 1.

Table 1. Motives for joining (Question 6)

Getting ideas, tips and advice to one's own teaching	99% (n=208)
Sharing one's ideas, tips and advice to others	37% (n=77)
Getting different teaching materials	63% (n=132)
Sharing different teaching materials	18% (n=38)
Getting support from other teachers	67% (n=141)
Supporting other teachers	37% (n=77)
Following the current news or things happening in the field	72% (n=152)
Discussing matters relating teaching with other teachers	53% (n=111)
Discussing matters that do not relate to teaching with other teachers	2% (n=4)
Getting to know other teachers	5% (n=10)
Getting information about job opportunities, e.g. substitutions.	9% (n=18)
Getting information about further trainings or training opportunities	36% (n=76)
Other	3% (n=6)

The table shows that the most popular motive for joining was getting ideas, tips and tricks for their own teaching, which was chosen by 99% of the respondents. The second most chosen motive was to follow the news and the current issues regarding their own profession, which was chosen by 72% of the teachers. Other popular motives were to get support from other teachers and different teaching materials and to be able to discuss their own field with their peers. Thus, it seems that the main motives for joining a teaching specific group seem all to be linked to teachers getting useful information, material and a support network which benefits their own practice. This is even clearer when these results are contrasted with the options which center more on the altruistic behavior. 37% of the respondents chose sharing their own tips and advice as their motive while 18% of the teachers stated that sharing different teaching materials was one of their incentives for joining. 37% of the respondents also expressed that giving other teacher support in the matters that puzzle them was among their motives. In addition, many also listed getting information about different job opportunities, such as substitutions, and further trainings as their motives for initial joining. It is therefore quite visible from the answers that the main motives for joining is to improve one's own teaching but also helping others in doing so. Furthermore, the

motives also seem to center around getting practical and concrete advice concerning the practice itself and not just to build new social networks or discuss matters outside of the field of practice. This is visible from the fact that only 2% of the respondents chose discussing matters not relating to their profession as their motive. The same goes with networking, 5% of teachers chose getting to know other teachers as their motive for group membership.

Additionally, six teachers chose the “other” option in question number 6. Two teachers mentioned that one of their motives were to strengthen their identity as a teacher. Other replies were either more related to a certain specific task, such as making the process of designing a new text book more efficient (n=1) or just generally following the discussion held in the groups (n=2).

4.2. The perceived usefulness of the groups

98% (n=206) of the respondents felt that the groups have been beneficial for their own practice. Only four teachers stated that they did not consider the groups to be useful in their own teaching. From four of these teachers, two responded to the open-ended question section which was designed to detail the reasons why teachers felt that the groups had not influenced their teaching nor practice positively. Both of these responses stated that the discussions held in the groups were not relevant to their own teaching situation and where they were as a teacher. Also, the abundance of information shared was also stated as one of the reasons why the groups were not useful for them:

Example 1:

There's just so much material! Going through it is just exhausting. Usually it's easier to just scroll past it. In addition, very few tips seem to be relevant to my own situation.

However, the vast majority of the responding teachers perceived the groups as beneficial for their practice. Out of these, 190 responded to question number 8 which was designed to map out the reasons for this opinion. Through analysis, three categories in which the responses could be placed into were found: 1) getting practical advice and materials for one's own teaching, 2) the

peer support and networking and 3) career development and strengthening one's own teacher identity.

4.2.1 Getting practical advice and materials for one's own teaching

82% (n=155) of the open-ended question answers mentioned aspects which belong to this category. The most stated reason for the groups' usefulness was getting concrete, practical ideas and tips to one's own practice:

Example 2:

You can get a lot of new ideas and tips to your own teaching. Often even the simplest things that you wouldn't realize yourself.

Example 3:

I have gotten good, concrete advice on how to discuss some certain things/topics.

Getting these concrete, practical ideas to enrich one's own teaching was mentioned in the answers 139 times. Getting ready materials (n=45) was the second most often recited reason for usefulness. In addition, getting advice on how to use different teaching methods and especially how to teach English through different games and other physical activities also belonged to this category. They were mentioned in the responses 15 times.

One of the reasons why teachers stated that these tips and tricks were beneficial for their own practice was that it saved them a lot of time. In many of the responses, it was recited that looking for different new materials and links tends to be time consuming and thus other teachers' input facilitates their own work:

Example 4:

Looking for materials and new ideas worth executing from the internet is laborious and slow. The ideas shared in the groups are mainly proven to work in practice.

4.2.2 Peer support and networking

The aspects belonging to this category were recited the second most. 51% of the answers (n=96) mentioned peer support and networking as one of the beneficial things that these groups offered. The most popular responses in this category were the peer support that was given in these groups (n=41) and the possibility to discuss things that puzzled teachers about their own profession (n=23) and being able to follow the current new of the field effortlessly (n=11). The importance of the peer support was especially highlighted in the cases where a teacher could not get support in his or her own working place for one reason or another. This was recited as a reason 14 times.

Example 5:

As I'm the only English teacher in a small school I don't get peer support from my work place. In the groups I can hear how others have taught a certain theme or a grammatic rule, how evaluation is done etc. Groups also give support in problematic cases such as electric exams not working. Other teachers also share very nice practical tips, sometimes even materials. Sometimes I also participate in the discussions.

As seen from Example 5, being able to do comparisons between the practices different schools possess was also one of the most frequently recited reasons for teaching and teacher specific groups' usefulness. Especially the new syllabus which was put in use in 2016 (n=8), evaluation altogether (n=6) and the different text and workbook series (n=6) were the topics in which being able to do comparisons from a distance were seen to be beneficial. In addition, the pressure to use technology increasingly in teaching can be seen from the responses. Getting peer support to different technical problems, such as in the new electrical matriculation examination, was recited 13 times.

The usefulness and the peer support provided in the groups also manifested in the form of relieving the stress of teachers when realizing that other teachers were also having the same problems as they did. This was more prominent when the teacher did not have a lot of experience:

Example 6:

-- I have also felt a sense of relief when realizing that the other teachers are struggling with the same things and problems as I do.

4.1.3 Career development and strengthening one's own teacher identity

This third category is the smallest one of the three, having mentions in 7% of the answers (n=14). However, it still was very prominent in the responses. This category includes all the concrete opportunities that the teachers were offered through the groups, such as working opportunities and possibilities for further training and enriching their own abilities as a teacher. One of the teachers wrote that they had gotten a substitution through the groups which they would not have heard of otherwise. Six answers mentioned that they had found interesting trainings from the groups, which they then had attended. However, the most frequently recited benefit was that the groups offered affirmation and validation to their thoughts concerning teaching English and thus strengthening their own identity as a teacher. This was especially important when the responder was a teacher trainee and needed affirmation to his or her own practice:

Example 7:

I have gotten plenty of tips and validation to my own thoughts concerning many things related to language learning.

Example 8:

(With the groups) I can get a glance to more experienced teachers' everyday life and to experiences that puzzle them. I know what to expect when I'm in the working life.

4.2 The downsides of usefulness

The vast majority of the survey respondents considered these virtual communities of practice beneficial for them. However, surprisingly 23% of the survey takers (n=48) reported that they had considered leaving the groups. Thus, it is evident that even though the groups were beneficial most of the time, they also had some problems in them or incited unwanted feelings which made the respondents think about unfollowing the group activities.

The main reason for considering leaving the groups were that the content in the groups were somehow irrelevant to the teachers' needs or current situation. This category was mentioned 17 times in the open-ended question, which got a total of 45 responses. The teachers expressed that the information shared was not either relevant to the educational level they were teaching in or to their situation (n=13). In addition, they expressed that they also either disagreed with the general opinion or atmosphere in the group (n=4).

The second most recited reason for the thoughts of leaving the groups was the constant flood of information that was coming to their Facebook feeds from the groups. It was mentioned 14 times that this was the sole reason for considering leaving the groups. Connected to this is also the third most recited reason (n=10), which was work permeating the free time through the groups:

Example 9:

From time to time there's too much happening in the groups and my Facebook feed gets filled with work-related stuff. Especially during my vacations I tend to take a break from following the groups without leaving them per se.

However, one of the most surprising things found in this study was that even though the groups provide useful information, material, examples and peer support, they can also cause unwanted feelings of inferiority when seeing other teachers' projects. This issue was very visible in the answers of this section, totaling 9 mentions.

Example 10:

The constant consciousness about what amazing things others do in their teaching causes me to feel inadequate.

Example 11:

Sometimes other teachers' efficiency/energy makes me feel anxious when I don't have any energy myself.

Example 12:

-- Secondly, I feel anxious when everyone else seems to be more skillful, have more energy and have more time to do stuff than me. Thus, the inferiority complex tends to swallow me when I'm browsing through the groups.

Thus, it seems that even though the groups are helpful in many ways, they also create additional stress and anxiety for the teachers.

Other cited reasons for considering leaving were connected to the problems within the groups themselves and the desire to delete their Facebook account altogether. Five responses detailed that the groups' inactivity and the lack of moderation within the groups had made them think about leaving. Two of the respondents had thought about resigning Facebook altogether, which would also mean leaving the groups.

5 DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The aim of this study was to find the main motives of teachers to join teaching specific Facebook groups. In addition, the study tried to find out whether the membership of these groups carried any benefits to teachers' own career development. The idea was furthermore to figure out indirectly the possible challenges and problem areas that the teachers might encounter in their working life by investigating and counting the things teachers recited as being useful for them.

The idea behind this was that the teachers were more prone to express issues that they found problematic in their practice in the answers. Thus, if certain themes were to reoccur it would mean that these issues were prevalent in the field altogether.

The main findings of the study were that the main motives for joining were centered around getting concrete, practical tips and advice for one's own teaching and being able to discuss the profession with other practitioners. Even though the initial motives chosen from the list of options were centered around teachers getting something for themselves and their own practice, the teachers also recited that they joined the groups in order to give others the advice and support they might need. Thus, it is evident that these Facebook groups are virtual communities of practice when using the framework and definitions provided by Wenger (1998; 2004) and Dubé et al. (2005). The results indicate that the teachers gather into these groups in order improve to in their own professions whilst helping others in the same endeavor.

Furthermore, the results of this study are also somewhat similar to the results of previous research about this topic. In their studies, Kelly et. al. (2016) and Lantz-Andersson et al. (2017) stated that the main motives for teachers' joining were indeed getting practical information and advice on practicing in addition with the social aspect and peer support that the groups offer. However, the present study did not concentrate on the different types of support that the teachers give each other like Kelly et al.'s (2016) did and, therefore, this study compiles all kinds of support teachers offered each other as peer support. Thus, the findings of this study cannot state whether emotional support, as Kelly et al. (2016) define it, was a big factor for joining for the teachers.

However, the results contrast slightly with Ranieri et al.'s (2012) study. They recite that in their study, the main motives for teachers to join were to be able to share various ideas and give visibility to their own in addition to the feeling of belonging and feeling less lonely. Even though all of these motives were chosen in the study, they were not the most popular options. In this study, the emphasis was on getting advice, tips and support, while participants of Ranieri et al.'s study (2012) recited that their emphasis was on self-expression. Thus, the results of this study also contrast slightly with Nadkarni's statement (2012: 247) that people mainly use Facebook for self-presentation. This difference between the results of this study and Ranieri et al.'s (2012)

might be explained by cultural and historical differences. The size of the observed groups is somewhat similar, meaning that the barrier to start communicating in groups should be the same for both if Tseng et al.'s (2014) remark that prosocial behavior in the groups is more frequent when people know each other is considered. The study of Ranieri et al. (2012) was conducted in an Italian environment and, thus, one could hypothesize that the Finns might be more reserved to share their own ideas than stereotypically more socially open Italians. However, this is just a vague assumption and, thus, should not be considered too seriously.

The findings of the study also showcase that the teachers find the groups beneficial for their own practicing and career development, which is in line with the findings of Ranieri et al. (2012). The teachers recited in their answers that the tips, resources and ideas shared in the groups enriched and inspired their own teaching. In addition, the groups provided a platform in which the teachers could discuss and follow the current issues and news of the field. This seemed to be especially important to those who could not get the peer support that they needed from their own working place. The groups also worked as a means to strengthen one's own teacher identity which might carry positive effects to one's belief of self-efficacy and thus further development. In addition, some even found concrete opportunities for career development via different job opportunities and further trainings that were offered or advertised in the groups. Thus, the groups seemed to have a lot of ways in which they could affect teachers' career development positively.

However, one of the most interesting and unexpected findings of this study was that even though teachers generally perceive the groups as beneficial, the group memberships could also generate negative feelings. A couple of teachers stated that they felt inferior and demotivated when they saw other teachers' projects and how they practiced their profession. Thus, even though teachers generally enjoyed the fact that the other teachers shared their own ideas and tips, for some this might momentarily shake their belief of self-efficacy and teacher identity. This might be either a positive or a negative thing depending on how the teacher in question views and handles the situation. For some, the feelings of inferiority and anxiety might give a boost to improve one's own practice while for some, it might act as a further demotivating factor and generate even more feelings of inadequacy. Thus, it might be worth noting that even though for some the groups are useful, the case might not be the same for everyone, depending on the personal traits one

possesses.

In addition with all of this, the study also brought up some subjects that might be considered as current topics in the field. The pressure to use technology in teaching seems to be prevalent since getting links to different useful websites and games were recited multiple times in the answers. Furthermore, the fact that getting help in technical problems was recited as a beneficial thing that the groups provide seems to strengthen this assumption. The want or pressure to make language learning more engaging via physical activities and different games is also a subject that seems to be prevalent among the practitioners. In addition, the field of teaching seems to have gone through a lot of changes in recent years and the challenges this has brought seem to puzzle teachers. The new national curriculum and especially the changes made in high school education seem to raise questions which the teachers try to solve together in the groups.

It is noteworthy to remark that even though the number of responders was quite significant for a bachelor's thesis, the results might not be applicable for various reasons. Firstly, the results reflect only a minority's opinion. The number of responders was quite small considering the actual size of the groups. Furthermore, the study focuses on English teachers and, thus, it might not be applicable to other teacher and teaching groups. Secondly, the responders of this study were mostly women (98%) and, therefore, the study predominately reflects only women's thoughts on the topic. This might bias the results even though the general user base of the groups and the teaching as a profession is dominated by women (Opetushallitus 2016). Thirdly, in survey's question number 6 the responders had to choose pre-defined motives they felt they had when they decided to join a teaching specific Facebook group. Even though the option "other" was provided, some teachers might have not chosen it even though they would have had other motives too. Thus, the pre-defined motives might have directed the responders and there might have been more possibilities for motives that were not expressed in the study.

Despite all of this, the study provides an interesting insight into a phenomenon related to the profession of teaching that has not been explored in great extent before. For example, the study seems to be the first one researching teacher's virtual communities of practice in a Finnish context. Thus, it would be advisable that the subject is researched further in greater extent since it

might provide useful information which could be used, for example, to improve teacher training.

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APPENDICES

Appendix 1: the questionnaire in Finnish

1. Ikä

2. Sukupuoli

Mies

Nainen

Muu

3. Kokemus opettamisesta ja opetustyöstä

Alle vuosi

1-5 vuotta

6-10 vuotta

4. Enemmän kuin kymmenen vuotta

Opetatko tai oletko opettanut englannin kieltä?

Kyllä

En

5. Kuinka moneen opetus- tai opettaja-aiheiseen Facebook-ryhmään kuulut?

1-2

3-5

Enemmän kuin viiteen

6. Miksi halusit liittyä opetus- ja opettaja-aiheisiin Facebook-ryhmään?

Saadakseni ideoita, vinkkejä ja ohjeita omaan opetustyöhöni

Jakaakseni omia ideoitani, vinkkejäni ja ohjeitani muille

Saadakseni erilaisia opetusmateriaaleja

Jakaakseni erilaisia opetusmateriaaleja

Saadakseni tukea muilta opettajilta minua askarruttavissa asioissa

Tarjotakseni tukea muille opettajille heitä askarruttavissa asioissa

Seuratakseni oman alan uutisia ja ajankohtaisia asioita

Keskustellakseni muiden opettajien kanssa opetusalaan kuuluvista asioista

Keskustellakseni muiden opettajien kanssa opetusalaan kuulumattomista asioista

Tutustuakseni muihin opettajiin

Saadakseni tietoa erilaisista työmahdollisuuksista, esim. Sijaisuuksista

Saadakseni tietoa erilaisista koulutuksista ja kouluttautumismahdollisuuksista

Muu, mikä?

7. Koetko, että opetus- ja opettaja-aiheisten Facebook-ryhmien jäsenyys on ollut sinulle hyödyllistä omassa opetustyössäsi?

Kyllä

Ei

9. Miksi koet, että opetus- ja opettaja-aiheisten Facebook-ryhmien jäsenyys on ollut sinulle

hyödyllistä omassa opetustyössäsi?

10. Miksi koet, että opetus- ja opettaja-aiheisten Facebook-ryhmien jäsenyys ei ole ollut sinulle hyödyllistä omassa opetustyössäsi?

11. Oletko harkinnut eroavasi näistä ryhmistä?

Kyllä

Ei

12. Miksi olet harkinnut eroavasi näistä ryhmistä?

Appendix 2: the questionnaire in English

1. Age

2. Gender

Male

Female

Other

3. Experience in teaching and teaching as a profession

Less than a year

1-5 years

6-10 years

More than 10 years

4. Do you teach or have you taught English?

Yes

No

5. In how many teaching or teacher specific Facebook groups do you belong?

1-2

3-5

More than five

6. Why did you want to join into teaching or teacher specific Facebook groups?

To get ideas, tips and advice to my own teaching

To share my own ideas, tips and advice to others

To get different teaching materials

To share different teaching materials

To get support from other teachers in things that puzzle me

To offer support to other teachers in things that puzzle them

To follow the current news or things happening in my field

To discuss matters relating teaching with other teachers

To discuss matters that do not relate to teaching with other teachers

To get to know other teachers

To get information about job opportunities, e.g. substitutions.

To get information about further trainings or training opportunities

Other, what?

7. Do you think that the memberships of the teaching and teacher specific Facebook groups have been beneficial for you in your own teaching?

8. Why do you think that the memberships of these teaching and teacher specific Facebook groups have been beneficial for you in your own teaching?

9. Why do you think that the memberships of these teaching and teacher specific Facebook groups have not been beneficial for you in your own teaching?

10. Have you ever considered to leave these groups?

Yes

No

11. Why have you considered to leave these groups?

Appendix 3: the original response extracts and their translations

Example 1:

Materiaalia on niin paljon! Sen läpikäyminen uuvuttaa. Yleensä helpointa on vain selata ohi. Lisäksi harva vinkki näyttää sopivan juuri minun tilanteeseeni.

There's just so much material! Going through it is just exhausting. Usually it's easier to just scroll past it. In addition, very few tips seem to be relevant to my own situation.

Example 2:

Ryhmistä saa paljon ideoita ja vinkkejä omaan opetukseen. Monesti ihan yksinkertaisiakin juttuja, joita ei tule itse ajatelleeksi.

You can get a lot of new ideas and tips to your own teaching. Often even the simplest things that you wouldn't realise yourself.

Example 3:

Olen löytänyt hyviä, konkreettisia vinkkejä siihen, miten käsitellä jotain tiettyjä asioita/aihepiirejä.

I have gotten good, concrete advice on how to discuss some certain things/topics.

Example 4:

Materiaalien ja toteuttamiskelpoisten uusien ideoiden etsiminen netistä on työlästä ja hidasta. Ryhmissä jaetaan pääasiassa käytännössä toimiviksi todettuja ratkaisuja.

Looking for materials and new ideas worth executing from the internet is laborious and slow. The ideas shared in the groups are mainly proven to work in practice.

Example 5:

Pienen koulun ainoana englanninopettajana ei vertaistukea työpaikalta löydy, niinpä ryhmissä pääsee kuulemaan, miten muut ovat vaikka jonkin tietyn teeman tai kielioppiasian käsitelleet, miten he arvioivat yms. Ryhmistä saa myös paljon vertaistukea ongelmatapauksissa, kuten sähköisten kokeiden toimimattomuuden kanssa. Muilta opeilta saa myös tosi kivoja käytännön vinkkejä, toisinaan jopa ihan materiaaleja. Osallistun itsekin keskusteluun jonkin verran.

As I'm the only English teacher in a small school I don't get peer support from my work place. In the groups I can hear how others have taught a certain theme or a grammatic rule, how evaluation is done etc. Groups also give support in problematic cases such as electric exams not working. Other teachers also share very nice practical tips, sometimes even materials. Sometimes I also participate in the discussions.

Example 6:

Olen saanut hyviä vinkkejä opetukseen (en niinkään oppimateriaalia, mutta ideoita). Olen saanut myös huojennusta omaan oloon, sillä olen huomannut että muut opettajat painivat samojen asioiden ja ongelmien kanssa kuin minäkin.

I have gotten good tips (not that much teaching material, but ideas). I have also felt a sense of relief when realising that the other teachers are struggling with the same things and problems as I do.

Example 7:

Olen saanut paljon hyviä vinkkejä ja vahvistuksen omille päätelmilleni monenkin kielioppimisen asian suhteen.

I have gotten plenty of tips and validation to my own thoughts concerning many things related to language learning.

Example 8:

Näin saa silmäyksen kokeneempien opettajien arkeen ja heitä askarruttaviin kokemuksiin. Tiedän, mitä odottaa työelämässä.

I can get a glance to more experienced teachers' everyday life and to experiences that puzzle them. I know, what to expect when I'm in the working life.

Example 9:

Toisinaan tapahtumia on liikaa ja tuntuu, että feedi täyttyy vain työaiheisista asioista. Etenkin lomilla laitan seurannan tauolle, eroamatta varsinaisesti ryhmästä.

From time to time there's too much happening in the groups and my Facebook feed gets filled with work-related stuff. Especially during my vacations I tend to take a break from following the

groups without leaving them per se.

Example 10:

Jatkuva tietoisuus siitä mitä kaikkea hienoa muut opetuksessaan tekevät saa minut tuntemaan riittämättömyyden tunnetta.

The constant consciousness about what amazing things others do in their teaching causes me to feel inadequate.

Example 11:

En ehkä tosissaan, mutta toisinaan muiden opettajien tehokkuus/aktiivisuus ahdistaa, kun itse ei aina jaksa.

Not maybe for real, but sometimes other teachers' efficiency/energy makes me feel anxious, when I don't have any energy myself.

Example 12:

On mielestäni vähän stressaavaa kun haluaisi rentoutua Facebookissa ja sitten operyhmät näkyvät sivupalkissa. Kai ne voisi paremminkin piilottaa, mutta taas käytettävyys kärsii, jos ryhmät piilottaa kovin taitavasti. Toiseksi ahdistun siitä että kaikki muut tuntuvat osaavan ja jaksavan ja ehtivän paljon enemmän kuin minä, ryhmiä selaillessa joudun siis usein alemmuuskompleksin valtaan.

I find it stressful when all you'd want to do was to relax and then all the teaching groups are visible in the side bar. It's a possibility to hide them better but then again, the usability of the groups suffers if you manage to hide the groups skillfully. Secondly, I feel anxious when everyone else seems to be more skillful, have more energy and have more time to do stuff than me. Thus, the inferiority complex tends to swallow me when I'm browsing through the groups.