

## **Open-minded to Open Content? An Examination of Israeli Teachers' Attitudes to Using Wikipedia for Educational Purposes \ Alon Gadi**

### **Abstract:**

The main goals of this study were to examine if high school and middle school teachers consider 'open content' to be educational material and the degree of their willingness to allow students to use 'open content' as material they can learn from.

Within this study these issues were examined: Teachers' opinion of Wikipedia, the degree to which they use Wikipedia for different purposes, how they rate the quality of articles in Wikipedia, and the extent of the teachers' knowledge of other sources of 'open content'. In addition, the study examined how teachers evaluate other content available on the Internet and whether teachers instruct and teach their students to evaluate material they find on the Internet.

The methodology of this study was qualitative and is based on open interviews conducted with 51 high school and middle school teachers in the central part of the country. The teachers Recruited Through 'snow ball ' samplings – the interviewees recruited their friends to be interviewed. The split of teacher gender in the study is consistent with that of the teachers in Israel according to the data released by the Central Bureau of Statistics 2003-2004.

After completing the interviews, I analyzed the criteria that arose from the teachers' answers. The findings of the study are as such: Teachers are aware that their students use Wikipedia as a source of information for writing their papers. The teachers themselves use Wikipedia for a variety of purposes and think that it is acceptable to use Wikipedia for educational purposes. But most of the teachers are not familiar with the different processes in use in Wikipedia.



Teachers do not know how to evaluate material that originates from Wikipedia. They do not use clear and comprehensible guidelines or rules in order to locate results of quality and reliability. Schools provide no structured guidance nor clear instruction regarding the evaluation of information in general and specifically information, that originates in internet 'open content'. Most teachers are not educated on the topic of 'open content' and know little more than a few forums and popular websites, such as, YouTube.

We recommend conducting additional studies in order to examine the connection between the subject the teacher specializes in and his or her use of Wikipedia. The basic assumption is that teachers of exact sciences tend to prefer content that relies on hard fact. We also recommend examining the age factor of the teachers and the degree to which they use Wikipedia. It can be assumed that older teachers prefer to use more classic sources of information rather than a source that relies on shared information.

Our hope is that this study will help increase awareness to the possibility of using 'open content' for educational purposes in Israel and will also bring to light the necessity for a structured curriculum to teach how to evaluate traditional sources of information as well as 'open content' as a source of information.

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