

USING WIKIPEDIA FOR EDUCATIONAL PURPOSES IN ESTONIA

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Abstract

Over the past two decades, there has been an increasing amount of scientific literature some of which reflect a somewhat contradictory attitude towards Wikipedia in the educational context. Considering that schools determine the attitude towards Wikipedia and willingness to contribute to its development, it is important to study how Wikipedia is used in general education schools both from the students' and teachers' perspectives. The aim is to give an overview of the initial results of the research that has been conducted in Estonian general education schools and to provide a basis for discussion on how to implement Wikipedia-based pedagogy more widely in Estonia.

Keywords: Wikipedia in school, 21st century skills, school literacy, critical thinking

Introduction

Over the past two decades, Wikipedia has evolved into a new paradigm for knowledge creation and dissemination [1], an open archive [2], whose pedagogical potential is increasingly valued [3]. While several studies confirm the continuing reluctant attitude of teachers towards Wikipedia [4], the view that Wikipedia as a resource cannot be avoided is nowadays becoming prevailing [5]. Instead, schools should find innovative approaches to integrate Wikipedia into their teaching process in order to raise students' awareness of Wikipedia [6]. Considering that schools shape the attitude towards Wikipedia and determine the willingness to contribute to its development, it is important to study how Wikipedia is used in general education schools.

As Estonian schools have all the facilities to incorporate digital technologies into their teaching and students have the necessary digital skills, the question arises as to how the educational potential of Wikipedia as a collaborative online encyclopaedia has been harnessed in Estonian general education schools [7,8]. The research *Using Wikipedia for Educational Purposes in Estonia* seeks to examine the use of Wikipedia in Estonian schools for educational purposes both from the students' and teachers' perspectives.

Data and Methods

The objective of the 1st study was to explore students' experiences of using Wikipedia in the educational context. Data were collected between December 2022 and January 2023 using a multipart questionnaire. The sample consisted of 381 students, 121 of whom studied in grade 9 (15 year olds) and 260 in grade 12 (18 year olds). 11 schools from different regions of Estonia were integrated into the study. Descriptive statistics were used to analyse the multiple-choice questions in the questionnaire, responses to open-ended questions were analysed thematically.

The objective of the 2nd study was to investigate Wikipedia's educational potential from the teacher's perspective. 11 semi-structured focus group interviews were conducted between November 2022 and February 2023 with 49 teachers whose students completed the questionnaire (1st study). The sample included the different subject teachers who have used or whose students have used Wikipedia for educational purposes. The transcribed interviews were analysed according to the principles of qualitative content analysis.

Results

General results of the 1st study:

- Estonian students use Wikipedia at least a couple of times a week, girls tend to use it more often than boys.
- The English Wikipedia is used a little more often than the Estonian Wikipedia because it is considered to be more relevant and up-to-date.
- Students use Wikipedia to find information (mainly for school assignments), only 7.5% of students have written a Wikipedia article.
- 24% of students said that teachers have no objection to using Wikipedia, 3% said that teachers do not allow to use Wikipedia and 47% said that some teachers do and some do not.
- Teachers (mainly History, Geography, Music and Literature teachers) guide students to search and critically evaluate information on Wikipedia.
- According to the students, problems with Wikipedia include outdated or incorrect information, and complex content.

General results of the 2nd study:

- Teachers often use Wikipedia for personal use. Their trust in Wikipedia has increased over time.
- Teachers have used Wikipedia to prepare and deliver lessons, given students a variety of Wikipedia-based assignments, and guided them to participate in Wikipedia-related extra-curricular activities.
- Wikipedia-based tasks include discussions about Wikipedia as a source and fact-finding. Few teachers have given students the task of writing a Wikipedia article.
- Usually, it is allowed to use Wikipedia as a reference source in grade 9 but not in grade 12.
- The factors facilitating and hindering the educational use of Wikipedia are related to Wikipedia as an environment, to the knowledge, skills and attitudes of students and teachers, and to the school internal and external circumstances.

Discussion

The results provide an insight into the Wikipedia use habits among students and teachers in Estonian general education schools. Estonian students often use Wikipedia as a primary source of information, but that their use of Wikipedia for learning tasks is guided by teachers' attitudes towards it. The students perceive Wikipedia as a convenient source of information, but are uncertain about its reliability. Under teacher guidance, they have developed their information searching and source evaluation skills, while more attention is needed to develop academic literacy, including both text comprehension and text composition.

Considering that teachers play a crucial role in shaping students' attitudes towards Wikipedia, it is important to support teachers in integrating Wikipedia into their teaching. There is a need to create guidance materials and sample exercises to save teachers' time and to encourage them to implement new practices. Authentic tasks related to Wikipedia allow for the development of a range of subject-specific and transferable skills for students, but with the uncertainties and unpredictability of the real digital world, teachers will need the support of colleagues and experts to cope with the challenges ahead.

Enhancing Wikipedia-based pedagogy is an essential investment in future skills. As a useful learning tool, Wikipedia contributes to both modernising and improving the quality of teaching. By bringing Wikipedia into the

classroom as a respected teaching tool, teachers prepare their students to be both smart consumers and producers of information.

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