Review for Martin Kučera's Bachelor Thesis

Title: Making use of ICT for Teaching and Learning English at Lower and Upper Secondary Schools

Author: Martin Kučera

The title of Martin Kučera's bachelor work is Making Use of ICT for teaching and learning English at Lower and Upper Secondary Schools.

In his abstract he states the thesis will include a discussion of making use of data projectors and interactive whiteboards at English lessons. I believe he meant to say "in" English lessons. This is the first of many mistakes throughout the bachelor thesis. "It is researched how to motivate students for the self-study of English at home." This sentence in the abstract is little contradictory because the title suggests that the thesis will focus on teaching and learning at schools which does suggest a pedagogical theme but after discussing the convenience of using whiteboards in class, the focus seems to rest on self-study. In that case besides the legal requirements of attending school, it may not be necessary to learn English in school but rather focus on self-study at home. The second mistake in the abstract reads as "Thanks to electronic devices English lessons can be more effective and students have many opportunities to practice English at home by activities that they enjoy."

In the introduction he explains why he chose this topic. " a cell phone or even a tablet whose popularity increases greatly" "I have personal experience with how useful it can be." "They seem to carry a great potential to be extremely effective tools in English lessons." "very frequently they practice their English even if they are not directly trying to."

In the next section he offers definitions of key terms used in the thesis. In the next section he writes about making use of ICT for teaching English. "However data projectors have a much broader range of usage." "In case of exercises(no comma)"data projectors even allow students….""since everything out of ordinary lesson activities is usually more interesting."   The errors in language use which at this stage along with a final presentation of a work of this advanced level shows a deficiency in language competence. Based on these errors in translation, I suspect that he has not mastered the necessary fluency to write a work of this complexity. I should also comment on his opinion which he certainly has a right to express, however, I think these opinions, based around an academic theme, should be verified by observation or by other academics who share his opinion. This is where I also notice a deficiency of citations which would have lent support to his opinion that "everything outside of ordinary lessons is usually more interesting."(P.8)

I would also have liked him to define "ordinary" lesson and what specifically he is referring to. Is this based on personal experience or general opinion of the student population? I think this also could have been a valid research question. "and some might pay more attention."(p.8) With this sentence he is speculating. In academic works speculation with the use of "might" is valid, however, when "might" is used, there has to be some observations to back this speculation up. They might pay attention or they might not. I think when one speculates, there has to be some content or else we can guess that it "might" rain tomorrow or it might be sunny without looking at any meteorological data to justify these weather patterns. This also could have been a research question to lend support to this speculation. I think that "might" is used a bit too freely throughout the work where there is

little or no observation to support the supposed conclusion. This allows one to suggest virtually anything, but does not give much strength to the argument regarding the extended use of ICT.

In the next section he discusses interactive whiteboards " they can do everything data projectors can with much more convenient operating" "If used to it, not only does the whiteboards save time, they also allow to explain the subject matter more illustratively while still keeping the qualities of regular computers allowing them to be used…..in case of a student's request for an extremely uncommon word."(p.9) I consider this language use rather awkward for an advanced level work. "Nevertheless, there exist English textbooks available in an electronic form that can be very well used on interactive whiteboards." "telling a student to draw a picture and letting others guess what is drawn."

The next section is titled "Motivating students for studying English."(p.11) I question the correctness of the sentence " motivating students for reading articles." I would suggest "motivating students to read articles" as a more correct option. For this section, rather than simply get the students attention, and with the reference to Kopp and the "16 percentile-point gain in student achievement,"(P.10) I think that he could have expanded on the learning potential of the students besides drawing circles on the whiteboard which they could also do on a blackboard. How in his view might this potential be achieved beyond simply getting the students' attention which could be lost just as quickly if new stimulus is not provided? I would have liked to have read more of a discussion and analysis and some of his views on how to improve ordinary lessons beyond "drawing perfect circles" and the

" teacher not having to walk between the board and the computer as in the case of regular data projectors." In this section it would also have been a good idea to define motivation since he does often mention "motivating students." Here there are some questionable unsubstantiated assumptions, perhaps based on personal opinion or experience but for the purposes of an academic work such as this one, I think these need to be substantiated or verified. "If they manage to do so, students will not feel the need to avoid English in their free time and that might be the most important step." I would put forth the question how does he know that students feel the need to avoid English in their free time? I think when writing a work such as this, the author has to be careful that every sentence has some validity or support or else it is difficult to take his argument seriously. It also indicates that by using "might" he is not sure or is assuming something to be true because there is no further information to support the statement. Here again, if he is going to write this kind of statement, a citation supporting it is needed. Another statement on p. 11 "there are many possibilities for students to get better at English by themselves" "The biggest advantage is that it does not necessarily have to be somehow boring activities like filling in exercises." In addition to the incorrectness of the language use, since boring is subjective, I would have liked him to define "boring." Is this simply a personal opinion or is it shared by the majority of the student population? I think that, as with the previous examples, could have been supported by a citation or even more research is needed to validate this statement. Here, seemingly in contrast to the title of the work "Making use of ICT for learning English at Lower and Upper Secondary schools," the focus seems to have shifted to self-study where school takes a secondary role in education behind games and films so perhaps the title should have been geared towards self-study since that is also mentioned in the introduction.

The next section is titled "Making use of ICT for Studying English" Here again on p. 12 he uses the word "boring" since it has been used subjectively twice, I think it should be defined. "they need to

know English on many occasions" "to describe universal options." Again on p. 12 the use of the word "may" "It may improve the person's writing and reading skills, they practice grammar, vocabulary, learn the right spelling." It may not improve the person's writing skills. I think there should be more information to support this statement through research or citations or better yet, standing alone, not to use it at all. "not yet able to communicate orally well." "he or she can have problems with talking to someone." I am not disagreeing with his suggestions but for a work of this importance, he has provided only basic everyday common knowledge and has not contributed to a discussion regarding the topic. He has simply verified what most of us already know without reading this bachelor thesis.

"It can certainly work for some people and is absolutely worth a try."(p.12) I think there could have been more investigation into the topic than what has been written. (p.13)"Finding a hobby that requires the student to read English web sites regularly is certainly one of the most profiting options." "in fact gives a high chance of being without mistakes." I think to list all of the errors in use, I would need to attach an appendix but this gives an indication of the level of the language used for this bachelor work. He then goes on to list, literally,(p. 14) applications for learning English. There is little discussion to this list so it is not clear what the reader should do with it. I think it would have been better to take two or three as examples and give them more depth and analysis. In the next section on p.15 he discusses video games " at least younger generations of the male population like them very much." I think the older generation also likes them too(or at least give an age range as to what he means by younger.) "If they want to enjoy the game and play through the most interesting content, they must know English." There are two points I could bring up in this section. I would like him to define "interesting" since that is also subjective. I also noticed that he has not mentioned the female portion of the population.

If the female population(roughly half the population) does not enjoy playing video games as much as the male population, how should they be motivated to learn English? He does not mention the female students in his discussion so I am curious what he suggests for them to do. I question the validity of the quotation on p. 16 from McGonigal.(Video games: An Hour a Day is Key to Success in Life) It does read as too general since there are both introverts and extroverts who co-exist and I am skeptical if a video game can make them " more out- going in real-world social situations." I would have liked to read some further research to support that statement. The following sections discuss other devices such as movies, videos, computers, readers, cell-phones and tablets. One statement on p. 16 " the perfect passive knowledge of the English language helps him to him to improve his or her speaking very fast." After 20 years of teaching all levels of students both in lower and upper secondary school as well as primary school, I am skeptical of this broad statement without further proof or analysis. The bachelor work from this point seems to go farther and farther away from the title regarding teaching and learning in secondary schools.

On p. 16 "Thus it does not only encourage the students to a hobby-like-self-study, it can motivate them to pay more attention." This reads like an assumption and I cannot see how he can claim such a connection between the hobby and paying attention in ordinary lessons will take place without further proof or support. With statements like these it is possible to say literally anything we imagine without having to justify it.   On P. 13 he discusses websites "you can easily learn mistakes as well." " most of the mistakes are in written language so if the motivation of the student is to learn to communicate, even forums can be useful." I think this statement could use more verification. "since some students are well rested thanks to playing them it can result in paying more attention in English

(and other) lessons as well." Again, this statement would need to be justified because it could be taken as an assumption with little base or justification.

The next section is the practical section. Here on p. 22. There is minimal discussion of the results. I think there could have been more analysis beyond a few sentences at the bottom as to why he considers these results important and what implications they serve for teaching in the classroom as stated in the title. As with the data on p. 23 there could have been more analysis and discussion of the data beyond a few sentences. The fact that teachers do use electronic devices is not new information(p. 24) so there could have been more discussion as to the implications beyond just students paying attention as stated in the theoretical section. The next section deals with the questionnaire for students. As with the teachers, there could have been more discussion of the results beyond a few sentences and potential implications for learning, beyond the fact that students enjoy the electronic devices. On p. 27 the data shows that " not many students are more motivated or that the devices help them to understand the subject matter more easily." This fact does not seem to support an earlier section on motivating students. If he is claiming that that the devices are useful for the teaching and learning of the English but the students state that not many students support this, whose opinion is more important, the students or the author of the bachelor work? Is it enough to claim they should be used if the students do not find them more useful beyond the fact that they are more interesting and according to the author will pay attention? What if the students are not interested in a topic? Will they still pay attention, even with electronic devices? Will they pay attention to a film when it stops being interesting to them? How is the fact that the lessons are more interesting a" very good outcome" of the research? Which is more important, to have a more interesting lesson, one which they may or may not remember, or being able to understand the material more? As a teacher, I would choose the latter option. I personally am not against using electronic devices in class, It just appears that his data does not support some of his earlier statements about learning effectively in English class.

On p. 30 he states "….but students at technical schools might not be interested in English lessons at all, which means that any usage of electronic devices might bother them." Having taught at lower secondary school for nine years and at a technical school for six years, I cannot agree with this assumption. It reads to me like a kind of stereotype that only grammar school students are interested in English. So why does the title say upper and lower secondary schools if he is only referring to grammar schools in this section? What should we do about the other schools? I can say from personal experience that the students at the technical school were interested in English and the technical school I taught at has whiteboards, computers and other such equipment and the students are not bothered at all but rather look forward to using them and do projects on them. This refers to my earlier statement about making general assumptions which have no base or research or citations to back them up. He also includes a lesson plan in which he suggests as stage 4(p.31) "students complete exercises 6,7,8,). I am not against this activity but this contradicts an earlier statement about exercises being labeled as "boring." Why in this case did he recommend doing exercises in the lesson plan? As a final statement on p. 32 he claims that electronic devices "most importantly try to engage students' attention and save time." What about teaching and learning in secondary schools, as the title states? Is that really the most important part, saving time? How long can you keep the students' attention before they have to learn something?

Based on all the questions and statements, I question the amount of necessary thought and the quality of work that went into this final work. The title appears, Making use of ICT for teaching and Learning English at Lower and Upper Schools appears misleading. In the abstract he states "It is researched how to motivate students for the self-study of English at home." Therefore, the bachelor thesis appears to go in two different directions: On the one hand he introduces whiteboards which are becoming more and more common in classrooms today, but does not discuss how the whiteboards help to improve the learning process. Additionally, his research from the students' perspective show that the whiteboard does not improve their learning, it is simply more interesting which according to the thesis is enough to improve students' learning level because he claims the students pay more attention. So as an opponent, I am wondering, based on the views of the author, which supports which? Does self-study support learning in schools or does learning in schools support self-study? I am not sure what the author is really proposing beyond the fact that the teachers should "at least try it."(technology in the classroom) If the teachers do not like it after they try it, should they not have to use technology in class ever again? If the technology does not help the majority of students to understand the material better(according to the students)what argument should we offer the teachers who have tried it, found it to be a lot of work and decided they don't need it? In the section about movies (p.16) the author states "To some extent it is more important for them than written and highly formal English." Is he suggesting that formal English(perhaps the kind we learn in school)is not important to high school students? Wouldn't this limit their ability to communicate in more formal situations that they may have to deal with in their future real-world lives?

With the deficiency in correctness of language use, unsubstantiated assumptions, themes which appear not to focus on teaching and learning in secondary school as the title states and contradictions in the work, as an opponent, I think I could have been more satisfied. I think that the argument would have been stronger if there were more citations used within the text. This would have eliminated the need for these unsubstantiated statements which need to be questioned as to the level of their validity and his statements would have been supported by recognized sources which would have at least opened the topic for debate. As it stands now, it is his opinion alone that dominates the thesis and in my view that is not enough to be validated academically without further proof from outside sources. With all that has been stated, I think Mr. Kučera should have the opportunity to clarify some of these statements and further explain some of these questionable statements to the committee. With that in mind, I recommend to the committee, the mark of dobry/nedostatečne(3/4) and let the mark be decided based on the quality of his defense.

Craig Morgan

Charles University, Prague 23.May, 2013

.