

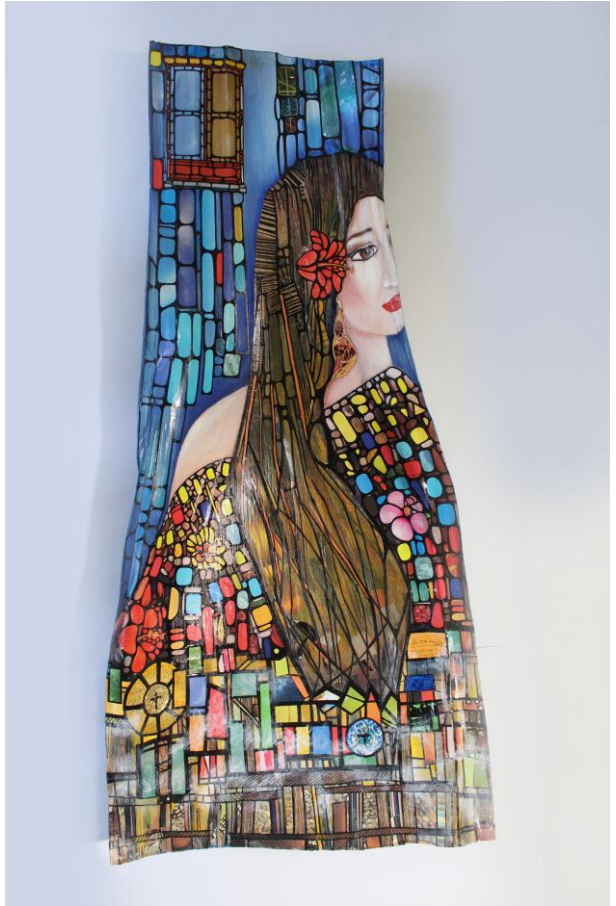
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Engender student-teachers' english communication skills in a public university in Sabah

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Abstract

This research explores the use of Padlet.com to promote student teachers' communicative skills through collaborative knowledge building. Questionnaire and focus-group interviews were used to gather data as a method. It was found that Padlet.com has successfully improved student teachers' English communicative skills through collaborative knowledge building in particularly learners' preparedness (mean=3.91), academic improvement (mean=3.46), flexible learning (mean=3.78) and learning management (mean=3.89). In conclusion, it is recommended that Padlet.com be used as a future online learning tool for improving learning in the university.

Keywords: Communicative Skills Development,
Knowledge Building.

Generar habilidades de comunicación en inglés de estudiantes y maestros en una universidad pública en Sabah

Resumen

Esta investigación explora el uso de Padlet.com para promover las habilidades comunicativas de los docentes estudiantiles a través del desarrollo de conocimiento en colaboración. Se utilizaron entrevistas con cuestionarios y grupos focales para recopilar datos como método. Se encontró que Padlet.com ha mejorado con éxito las habilidades comunicativas en inglés de los profesores de los estudiantes a través de la creación de conocimiento colaborativo en particular la preparación de los estudiantes (media = 3.91), la mejora académica (media = 3.46), el aprendizaje flexible (media = 3.78) y la gestión del aprendizaje (media = 3,89). En conclusión, se recomienda utilizar Padlet.com como una futura herramienta de aprendizaje en línea para mejorar el aprendizaje en la universidad.

Palabras clave: desarrollo de habilidades comunicativas, construcción de conocimiento.

1. INTRODUCTION

Numerous past reports had reported that the number of jobless graduates has increased drastically in the past few years. According to Student Statistical Report by the Ministry of Education (MOE), unemployment among graduates is high at 24% and most of them from the technical and vocational line. The report states that 30,000 out 44,000 unemployed graduates are without jobs, while another 5,000 chooses to apply for further their studies. According to Hesketh (1999), Shabbir et al. (2016) there is a mismatch of skills that the graduates possessed with what is needed by the industries. Therefore, the

MOE particularly the universities need to introduce new teaching with technology approaches to improve the communicative skills among student teachers in order for them to be ready for the job market. For example, declarative learning via ubiquitous Web 2.0 tools such as blogs, Facebook and supporting learner-centred learning tools such as vodcast and podcast can contribute to the successful improvement of communicative skills (Lee et al., 2006; Kweka and Ndibalema, 2018; Owagbemi, 2018; Masciantonio and Berger, 2018). This research evaluates the supporting features of Padlet.com as a forum-based platform to engender the development of communicative skills among student teachers. It will provide vital information on how student teachers construct knowledge and exchange ideas via a collaborative approach using the various Padlet.com's features. This research intends to investigate the following questions:

- (a) Are Padlet.com's features effective in supporting the collaborative efforts of the student teachers in promoting the cultivation of their communicative skills?
- (b) Will Padlet.com improve the communication (CS), critical thinking and problem solving (CTPS) and teamwork skills (TS) of student teachers while working collaboratively?

2. BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

Affordances are known as how users use the various functions web-based tools creatively to create new knowledge or product

(Burden and Atkinson, 2008). Affordances are not the same for different users and can differ according to their respective learning objectives. Affordances can be associated with social connectivism and support and the sharing of information collaboratively. In this research, the affordances that help student teachers to work collaboratively to promote their communicative skills will be identified. These affordances will indicate some form of the efficiency of Padlet.com as a collaborative web-based tool for student teachers. This research uses the affordances as proposed by Resta and Laferriere (2007):

- Learners' preparedness in learning

- Improving learner's deep understanding and cognitive performance

- The flexibility of learning time and space

- Tracking of learner's engagement, discussion and work

According to Scardamania and Bereiter (2006), a web-based forum platform can enhance learning through collaborative efforts by the users. Most researchers would refer to it as the free-formed forums where comments and ideas are put up can trigger active participation and discussions among the users to create knowledge building. The

most recent Web 2.0 free forum platform that becomes popular is Padlet.com. Figure 1 shows a screenshot of a Padlet.com page.

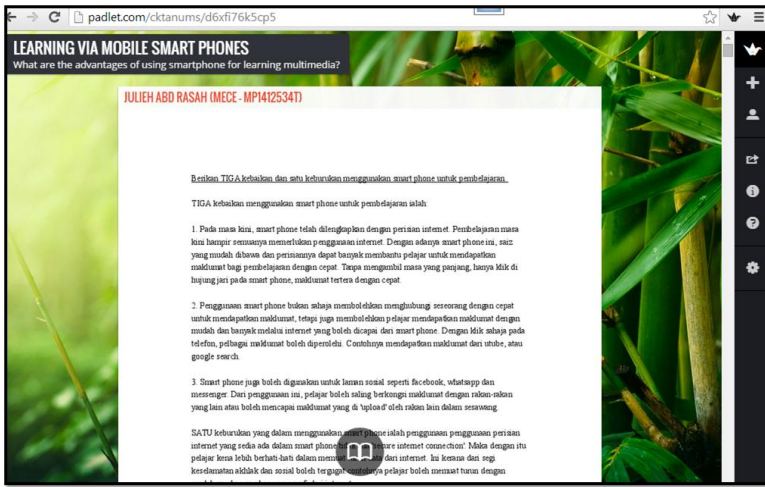


Figure 1: A screen shot of Padlet.com's page

Padlet.com (formerly called Wall wisher) is a versatile free online tool for teachers to gather feedback from pupils as part of formative assessment. It also serves as a visually attractive tool for individuals or groups of pupils to present ideas in a way which can be edited, kept private to a user, or shared with specific individuals, or made public. Padlet.com works on any internet-enabled device, whether PC or mobile device as no software or apps are required to be downloaded or installed. Unlike the linear rigidity found in some discussion board layout, Padlet.com is not so rigid compares to another forum-based platform. It is a reliable and good platform for student

teachers to develop multimedia content for collaboration with their friends (Teachersfirst, 2012).

3. LITERATURE REVIEW

3.1. Theory of Communicative skills Cultivation via Digital Method

Web 2.0 tools can be used for digitally communicative skills cultivation. Adams and Morgan propose the Learning Triangle Model Adams and Morgan (2007) to propagate communicative skills through knowledge construction. The three important communicative skills learning triangle components are shown in Figure 2.

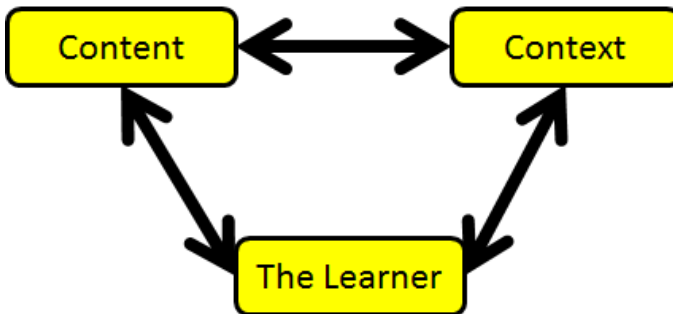


Figure 2: Adams and Morgan's Communicative skills Learning Triangle

Each component of the model is inter-dependent. The learner – content relationship refers to the content relevancy where the user must get the right materials for the interactions. The learner – context and content – context relationships are also important because it shows the learner’s commitment in comprehending and reconstructing content and learning to be applied to the correct context or situations (Morgan and Adams, 2009; Vahdany & Gerivani, 2016). According to Taylor (2008), this transformative learning theory is also known as the continuous change of personalized knowledge. The learner reconstructs learning from prior experiences to construct newer experiences or interpretations. Reflective learning process happens with the simultaneous existence of content, context and the learner components. Another related theory of knowledge building for enculturation of communicative skills the connectivism theory as proposed by (Siemens, 2004). Siemens (2004) states that the oscillation of learning begins with the learner; oscillating to the learning community back and forth; thus allowing growth, modification and construction of knowledge from the initial information block (refer Figure 3).

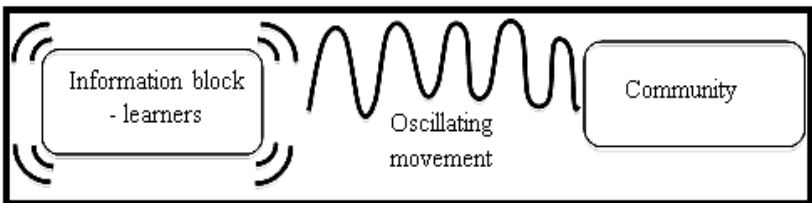


Figure 3: The oscillation of learning theory by Siemens (2004)

The connectivism theory explains that a student must know the objectives of the learning objectives or process, the output of the impending learning activities or content and his impending successful responses to the situations or context. Interactions among teachers via collaborative negotiations by questioning and learning from each other allow active learning to happen (Stahl et al., 2006).

4. METHODOLOGY

4.1. The Respondents

The research involved 59 students- teachers (N = 59) from Universiti Malaysia Sabah who is from the Faculty of Psychology and Education. They took Computer and Multimedia (TT00703) course – a faculty compulsory course for a Bachelor in Education degree in Semester 2 of Year 2016/2017 (n = 26) and Year 2017/2018 (n = 35 but 2 subjects did not complete the study). They were required to complete a multimedia project as part of the course requirements. The project required them to create multimedia materials for teaching and learning.

4.2. Instruments

Two main instruments were used to elicit data in this research namely questionnaire and a semi-structured interview. The research

uses a questionnaire adopting some affordances from (Resta and Laferriere, 2007). A 5-point Likert scale is used to gauge the respondents' perception of the affordances. It ranges from 5 (strongly agree) (SA) to 1 (strongly disagree) (SD). The questionnaire has 2 sections. The first section consists of 12 items designed to measure how effective Padlet.com (an online Web 2.0 collaborative learning tool) is used for collaboration by the student teachers. The second section consists of 12 items which measure student teachers' behaviour in using communicative skills in thinking critically, solving problems and working as a team. The questionnaire is quite reliable with Cronbach's alpha showing a value of 0.84. According to George and Mallery (2003), the questionnaire can be reliably accepted. The semi-structured interview was conducted with the student teachers after they have completed their multimedia project. 10 out of 59 student teachers from the sample voluntarily participated in the interviews. They were interviewed mainly on their experiences using Padlet.com as a collaborative knowledge building tool. Additional qualitative data was gathered on their involvement in communicative soft skills as mentioned earlier.

4.3. Research Procedures

The course lecturer gave the student teachers 6 weeks to complete the multimedia project. They work in groups of at least three members but not more than five. Each group would develop multimedia materials for online learning based on a general school

subject topic. The student teachers were briefed on the functions of Padlet.com. They must discuss their ideas or share problems while developing multimedia learning materials using Padlet.com. Communicative skills for collaborative efforts among student teachers were given emphasis throughout the briefing session.

5. ANALYSIS OF DATA

The collected quantitative data from both sections of the questionnaire would be analysed descriptively using mean for reporting central tendency of the distribution. The qualitative data from the semi-structured interview was analysed using discourse analysis method.

6. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

Research Question 1: Effectiveness of Padlet.com in supporting collaborative efforts of the student teachers in promoting the cultivation of communicative skills. Table 1 shows the mean scores from the questionnaire. The quantitative data showed that Padlet.com functions effectively as a collaborative knowledge building support tool.

Table 1: Findings from the questionnaire

Affordances	N	SD	Mean
Learners' preparedness in learning.	59	0.779	3.91
Improving learner's deep understanding and cognitive performance.	59	0.899	3.46
Flexibility of learning time and space.	59	0.821	3.78
Tracking of learner's engagement, discussion and work.	59	0.792	3.89

Affordance 1: Learners' Preparedness in Learning

The mean of 3.91 indicates that Padlet.com allow the student teachers to manipulate and improve all information on a single platform. Improvement of the ability to think happens because of the student teachers' active participation in the exchange of ideas and discussion on Padlet.com (Wegerif, 2006). Information that they post such as ideas, images and discussions that are related to the topic of the study allow feedbacks among student teachers. This proves that they possess a high level of preparedness in learning.

Affordance 2: Improving Learner's Deep Understanding and Cognitive Performance

This affordance of 3.46, although was slightly lower than other affordances again demonstrates that Malaysian learners are able to incorporate Web 2.0 tools for cognitive development. Improvement of the cognitive discipline is difficult because the student teachers seldom show find faults with their friends' ideas. They show passive behaviour

in learning. Yong and Yuen (2008) offer two possible reasons. Firstly, the lack of critical behaviour in challenging ideas and secondly, heavy workload especially on assignments cause them to manage time badly. This is also supported by some explanations from the semi-structured interview. Some of the comments from student teachers are:

Simply too much work. No time to explore Padlet.com lah
(Respondent 2)

Other courses also got many assignments. Pening kepala...
(Respondent 5)

It is not that I cannot edit but not nice to my friend's lah...
(Respondent 8)

Affordance 3: Flexibility of Learning Time and Space

The mean of 3.78 indicates that student teachers enjoy the flexibility of learning time and space. Once they are connected, they are able to work independently on the multimedia project. According to Resta and Laferriere (2007), Padlet.com allows student teachers to reconstruct new ideas among each other easily. The interactions bring together their prior experiences via online collaborations to create new experiences or ideas. For example, student teachers have the following comments:

After starting to use Padlet.com, there is no need to move anymore. I no need to go to my friend's place for discussion. Not so stressful lah... (Respondent 3)

Affordance 4: Tracking of Learner's Engagement, Discussion and Work

This mean 3.89 was the highest among the affordances. Student teachers agreed that Padlet.com was user-friendly, attractive and can track changes throughout the duration of the six-week duration. The learners' anxiety level would increase if an online platform is less user-friendly and reduces the precious time for effective collaboration (Resta and Laferriere, 2007). This finding is also supported by (Yong and Yuen's, 2008). Some interesting comments coming through the interview are:

Looks like there is little chance Padlet.com will crash...I feel safe. (Respondent 2)

Good lah. It AutoSaves my work – saves trouble for remembering it (Respondent 10)

Research Question 2: Improving communication (CS), critical thinking and problem solving (CTPS) and teamwork skills (TS) of student teachers via Padlet.com

The results on the student teachers' communicative collaboration using communication soft skills are shown in Table 2.

Table 2: The findings on student teachers' communicative skills

Communicative skills	N	SD	Mean
Communicative collaboration	59	0.796	3.95
Critical method for solving problems	59	0.827	3.90
Working in a team	59	0.838	3.89

Soft Skill 1: Communicative Collaboration

The mean score for communication skills was 3.95 proves that the student teachers have the ability in delivering and conveying their ideas well using Padlet.com. This finding is supported by Soeller (2001) who states that Padlet.com can improve the communicative skills of learners by actively interacting with each other on the platform. Figure 4 shows a screenshot of student teachers' participation in communicative skills on Padlet.com.

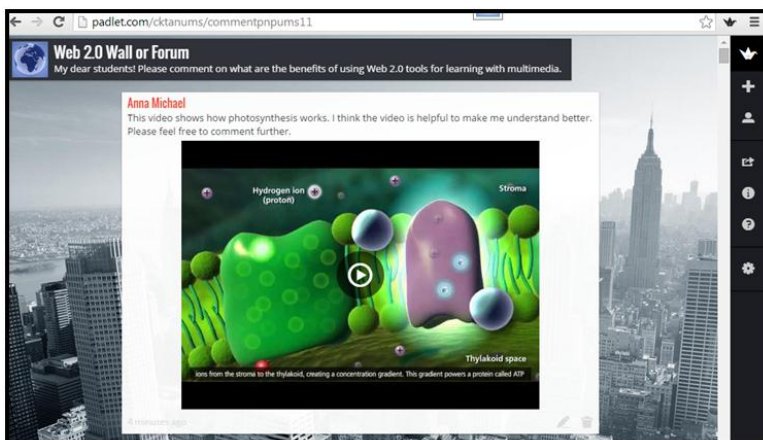


Figure 4: A screen shot on students' communicative skills

Soft Skill 2: Critical Method for Problem Solving

A mean of 3.90 suggests that the student teachers can communicate effectively and successfully. However, it is noticed that they do not respond at once to all postings by their counterparts. They

need some time for critical thinking and solve problems. The communication skills are mostly transferred through utterances. This is proved to be true as student teachers mostly ask questions on related issues and even express agreements with certain opinions. Some examples of utterances are:

What is your opinion on... (Respondent 8)

...actually we agree with your ideas. It is included in the video (i think)... (Respondent 9)

The display of cooperation and communication among group members as observed by the author showed that all problems could be solved amicably in a critical way as illustrated in the connectivism theory (Siemens, 2004).

Soft Skill 3: Working in a Team

Working in a team resulted in the mean score of 3.89. It shows that the student teachers display great teamwork skill for raising issues, helping and motivating each other in completing the given task of completing the project. They work well with each other and able to adjust well to each's a precious time in completing the work for grading purpose. Observations and interviews with a few of the members of the group show that they enjoy working with each other so as not to disrupt the project deadline. According to Stahl et al. (2006),

interactions among group members played the crucial role in ensuring group success.

7. CONCLUSION

The research manages to prove that student teachers use Padlet.com effectively to cultivate communication skills. Padlet.com provides important support structures to promote collaborations among student teachers to improve their communicative skills, the critical method for problem-solving and crucial skills for working in a team. The findings show that student teachers perceived positively on the use of Padlet.com to improve their communication skills. They are able to demonstrate the use of Padlet.com in communication successfully. Nevertheless, according to Thompson (2008), lessons must be designed carefully to ensure that the Web 2.0 tool such as Padlet.com provides positive implications to the student teachers.

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