

INSTRUCTIONAL DESIGN FOR A "SOCIAL" CLASSROOM: EDMODO AND TWITTER IN THE FOREIGN LANGUAGE CLASSROOM

Evriklea Dogoriti, Jenny Pange
University of Ioannina
Greece

Abstract

This paper presents the first step of an ongoing study that is conducted in order to determine the impact of social media on a learning community of university students of English for Specific Purposes (ESP). Edmodo is used with the participants in this study as a vehicle to promote language learning in a semester-long experimental study. Twitter is used as an ongoing public channel of communication for academic and co-curricular discussions. This case study aims at exploring the classroom dynamics when using these tools. Within this report, the details about the field study setup are provided, as well as the difficulties that occurred and the provided solutions. Finally, the following steps of the study are sketched and the data collected are reported.

Keywords: Social networks, English for Specific Purposes, Instructional Design, online classroom, Edmodo, Twitter

Technology Use in ESP

English for Specific Purposes (ESP) can be defined as the teaching of English used in academic studies or the teaching of English for vocational or professional purposes (Arnó-Macià, Soler Cervera, & Rueda Ramo, 2006). Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) have changed the teaching and learning of languages by providing ways of immersing in the target language and community. Educational technology has long been used in ESP by teachers to fulfill their students' needs (Arnó-Macià, 2012). The Internet has also had a particularly strong influence on ESP as it puts emphasis on the needs of learners and authentic materials and tasks. It comprises a collection of tools that promote the sharing of ideas, knowledge, and student- or teacher-created materials. Examples of tools that have become established are blogging platforms, podcasting services, sharing platforms like Flickr, YouTube and Slideshare, collaborative publishing tools such as wikis, learning management systems such as Moodle, social networking tools such as Twitter and Facebook, or educational social networks like Edmodo. The use of the Web2 can provide opportunities for collaboration, authentic communication in a discourse community and provide what Warschauer and Kern (2000) termed as *networked-based language teaching*. Some of the general benefits of using technology in ESP are the use of authentic tasks, tools, and context (Bremner, 2010; Evans, 2012). It provides interaction and communication among learners, uses collaborative learning, focuses on socio-

cultural aspects of the language, is student-centred and enhances students' motivation, self-esteem and autonomy (Butler-Pascoe, 2009,).

Social Networks and LMS in English Language Teaching

The rise of the social media has brought about an increasing formation of learning communities in higher education. This trend has not left the ESP classroom unaffected, as learners and teachers alike have adapted social networks like Facebook, Twitter or Edmodo. Distance education courses offered by various disciplines are mostly backed up through learning management systems (LMSs), such as Blackboard and Moodle, because these systems provide organization, efficiency, and security (McLoughlin & Lee, 2010). Nonetheless, researchers claim that these platforms have generally been used as static sources of content with no social appeal like social networks, such as Facebook or YouTube (Brady, Holcomb, & Smith, 2010; Schroeder, Minocha, & Schneider, 2010; Whitworth & Benson, 2010). Other studies have also been critical of LMS or CMS in that they do not provide motivation, enthusiasm or personalization (Naveh, Tubin, & Pliskin, 2010), while also impeding general pedagogical support with their default settings and familiar features (Lane, 2009). On the other hand, social networking platforms have been acclaimed to provide learners social communication, autonomy, fluid online discussions, and identity management (Brady et al., 2010; McLoughlin & Lee, 2010). Social networking sites (SNSs) have the potential to ease interaction, e-discussions by focusing on the use of technology to support education (Greenhow, Robelia, & Hughes, 2009). Social networks create an informal and relaxing atmosphere and make learning effective (Dalton, 2009). Social networking allows students and teachers to build a rapport and overcome inhibitions (Bosch, 2009). While learning management systems (LMS) are the traditional approach to e-learning, which is structured as courses, social networking sites are adopted by many scholars to meet their developing needs in education. Integrating social software with LMS aims at active participation, interaction and collaboration between the members of an academic community (Lu, Cai, Liu, & Xing, 2012).

Literature Review

Web 2.0 has been established as a teaching medium in many fields of education. Web 2.0 tools consist of blogs, microblogs, wikis, podcasts, virtual worlds and social networks (Shih & Waugh, 2011). The benefits of using Web 2.0 in education are the new interaction styles between students and teachers, immediacy of information, access to authentic learning environments, content sharing, collaboration and enhancement of learning experience (Schuck, Aubusson, & Kearney, 2010). Social networks provide various benefits to educational settings. They facilitate social interaction, make possible collaboration, promote communication, facilitate community building and enhance social presence (Hew, 2011; Dogoriti, 2013). The most dominant social network tool among university students and scholars is undoubtedly Facebook as it had initially been designed to cover the needs of college students for networking and communication (Clark & Gruba, 2010). Its use was not so

extensive in education as much as in other fields partly due to privacy concerns (Duncan & Chandler, 2011; Nentwich & König, 2012). Other SNS have also emerged and been applied in teaching and learning such as Twitter, Edmodo, and Ning (Motteram, 2013). Studies have also recorded that a key element to students' achievement in online courses is interaction among peers and teachers as it promotes critical thinking and motivates students to engage with course material (Moore, 2005). The effectiveness of the learning environment is reflected on the rapport between learning goals and student expectations (Moore, 2005). Course structure is also an essential element of an effective online learning environment (Clark-Ibáñez & Scott, 2008). What is more, students' engagement in their studies and in co-curricular activities is hypothesized as having a direct link with desired learning outcomes (Kuh, 2009). Regarding the evaluation of student achievement in online courses, the efficacy of exams and course grades are the most common and easily accessible indicators on how well students are achieving course objectives. However, evaluations may vary depending on students' ability to capture authentic learning experience (Lombardi, 2008). Student satisfaction is another factor indicative of successful learning (York, 2008). Additionally, interaction between students and instructor may also indicate that the teaching approach being used reflects learning goals and student expectations (Moore, 2005). Student satisfaction can designate motivation and attitude, which in turn may influence student achievement. (McFarland & Hamilton, 2005).

Edmodo

Edmodo is an educational social network that is considered to provide a secure learning platform for learners and educators. Instructors can post grades, assignments, quizzes, create polls and post topics for discussion among the students. They can also form sub-groups within a course to customize learning for certain students and close out the groups after the course is finished. Students submit homework, view their grades and teachers' comments, receive alerts, connect and collaborate (Halm et al., 2012). Its interface looks familiar to students, as it resembles that of Facebook (Haefner & Hanor, 2012). On the whole, the reasons language instructors may opt to choose Edmodo in class are that teachers and students connect, assignments, back channeling, a paperless learning environment, its backpack feature, the library feature, Apps, homework, badges, learning continues outside the classroom, assessments, interface, sharing, and its private and safe learning environment (Malespina & Butler, 2013). Research on the usage of Edmodo in teaching is still rather limited. Holland and Muilenburg (2011) studied students' participation in literature discussions, using Edmodo discussion boards. Student participation, student engagement, complexity of discussion, and the effectiveness of Edmodo platform are discussed. Another study by Kongchan (2013) explored the possibilities of a non-digital-native teacher to use Edmodo and set up and run her online classes, including a workshop on Edmodo for other teachers. The results of this study revealed that Edmodo is perceived to be a user-friendly social learning network. Another study by Thongmak (2013) explored the use of Edmodo as a classroom

collaboration tool and the university students' views about Edmodo. The results of this study showed that Edmodo could support both distance teaching and fulfil physical classroom learning. Similarly, Sanders (2012) examined the effect of Edmodo on student engagement and responsible learning. The results of the study showed that incorporating Edmodo encourages both student engagement and responsible learning when particular Edmodo features are employed. Nevas (2010) in his action research also examined the effects of the Edmodo microblog on student engagement and performance. He found that as communication increased between students they performed progressively more challenging tasks.

Twitter

Twitter is a free social networking microblogging service that allows registered members to broadcast short posts called tweets. Its key feature is information sharing. Twitter members can post tweets and follow other users' tweets by using multiple platforms and devices. As it is a tool that puts emphasis on social presence, it is popular among members of the academic community (CrunchBase, 2011). Despite its massive uptake, research on the usage of Twitter as a learning tool within higher education is rather restricted (Meyer, 2010). Research papers have identified Twitter as particularly appropriate for language learning (Dickens, 2008), and a service offering language learning quizzes via Twitter has been established (TwitterLearn, 2008). Borau, Ullrich, Feng, and Shen (2009) studied the use of Twitter in language teaching. They analysed student tweets for patterns and development in language use and used a questionnaire to probe into usage behaviours as well as its impact on students' perceptions of their ability to communicate. Twitter has been studied in context with other social media and has proven to have a significant influence on academic activity (Stiege & Burger, 2010; Hepburn, 2011; Cunnane, 2011). Similarly, McWilliams, Hickey, Hines, Conner, and Bishop (2011) developed a new teaching approach for an English Literature course by employing microblogging and inferred that it enhanced students' achievement, motivation and participation in class. Corbeil and Corbeil (2011) also pointed out that the use of Twitter facilitated collaboration, communication and data exchange among students in real time. The role of the instructor is underscored as she/he acts as a mediator, supporting the content, organizing the activities, and clarifying the use of the educational tool. Nevertheless, Rankin (2009) described the use of twitter to facilitate in class discussions for a large group of students as awkward. For that reason, there are numerous guides and tips available to help educators with good practice (e.g., Edudemic, 2012).

The Scope of the Study

This ongoing study aims to examine the effect of social networks usage in an ESP classroom. It analyses (both quantitative and qualitative analysis) the impact of two social networks on the learning process and seeks to propose best practices, based on data collected. The majority of this research will offer quantitative evidence of the impact on outcomes and will also focus on qualitative analysis of tweet and forum content as well as the responses to the experience by participants

gathered in a survey. The two social platforms used to support a language course are Edmodo and Twitter. The reason for adopting these two social media is that the former is more of an educational social network whereas the latter is a social communication platform. Different platforms suit different sorts of interactions and appeal to students and educators in a diverse manner. It is also mentioned that the current study is part of an ongoing field research regarding the use of SNSs in higher education, the results of which have indicated the important role of such technologies in the foreign language classroom (Dogoriti & Pange, 2010). Drawing from the argument above, the current research describes an approach to integrating the use of two social media platforms to support the course. Edmodo has been selected as a representative SNS in the educational arena while Twitter belongs to a category of more “loose” social networks in the sense of users’ connectivity and information exchange. Thus, this study will supplement data concerning the usage of three commonly used social networks in language teaching (Statistic Brain, 2014). The study also provides a presentation that illustrates typical educator and student uses of twitter and Edmodo with annotated screenshots from applications at a University ESP course in Greece.

Materials and Methods

Study Design

The research is being conducted within an undergraduate course offered at a technological university in Greece. The course is offered online and is open to all students who have been attending an ESP course throughout the winter semester 2013 and spring semester 2014. The 150 students who participate in the course had to take a placement test first to ensure the homogeneity of the sample. The ESP classroom is divided into two groups, the control group and the target group. The control group, which is following the ESP course, is utilizing an online learning platform (Moodle, please see Figure 1), while the target group is using either Twitter (phase 1 of the study) or Edmodo (phase 2 of the study) to enhance the learning process, utilizing of course the Moodle platform, which provides the main volume of the teaching material.



Figure 1. The online learning platform (Moodle).

More specifically, during phase 1 of the study, the target group is prompted to follow through their Twitter account, the account #espteaching#. For follow-up purposes, each tweet includes the hashtag #espteaching#. Through this account, the educator performs several actions, all in order to enhance the engagement and the motivation of the students. These actions include, among others, coordination

of assignments, question answering, poll making, etc. During the deployment of the study, the main learning tool, as far as exercises and assignments are concerned, is the Moodle platform mentioned described above. The students are prompted to communicate and make their questions using their twitter account (see Figure 2).

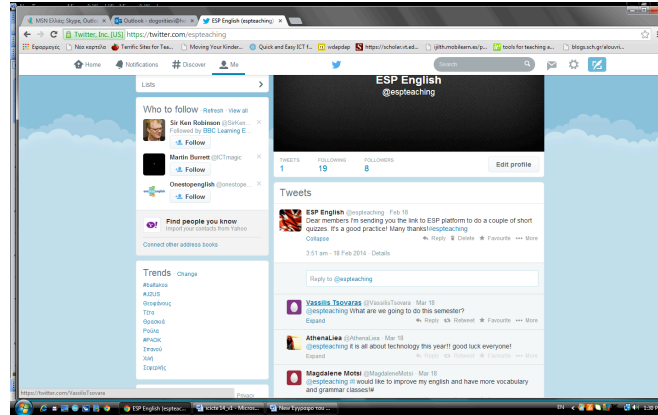


Figure 2. Students' communication through Twitter.

During phase 2 of the study, the classroom is once more divided into two sections, the control group and the target group. The control group is utilizing the Moodle platform as a supportive tool during the learning process, while the students in the target group are prompted to register in Edmodo group (see Figure 3).

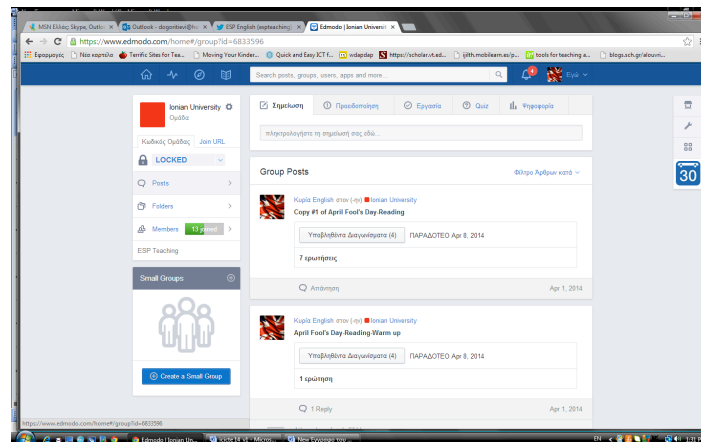


Figure 3. The Edmodo group.

From the Edmodo platform, two main features are utilized. First, the Edmodo forum is used for both teacher-to-student communication and student-to-student communication. The communication topics include subjects such as assignments, questions, announcements, etc. Second, the Edmodo Assignment Center is used for testing the students on each learning topic and easily collecting their answers. The main purpose of this phase is to measure the engagement of the students on the course, in terms of communication and assignment delivery.

In order to measure and quantify the influence of the social networks on the learning process, several parameters are being collected from both the target and the control groups in order to assess the:

- Engagement
- Intrinsic motivation (students' intentions to use Twitter/perceived enjoyment)
- Communication (Teacher-Student/Student-Student)
- Performance (as a trend)
- Attitude

Additionally, at the end of each phase, a self-administered questionnaire was deployed in order to assess the students' attitude towards the use of social media in context with another online tool. Despite the fact that the analysis of the results is not yet complete, some indicative results from the selection of the questionnaires show that social media can indeed improve the educational process, at least from a behavioural point of view. Table 1 below presents and summarizes the study design. Figure 1 displays indicative questionnaire results.

Table 1

Study Design

	Moodle	Twitter	Edmodo
Phase 1	Yes	Yes	No
Phase 2	Yes	No	Yes

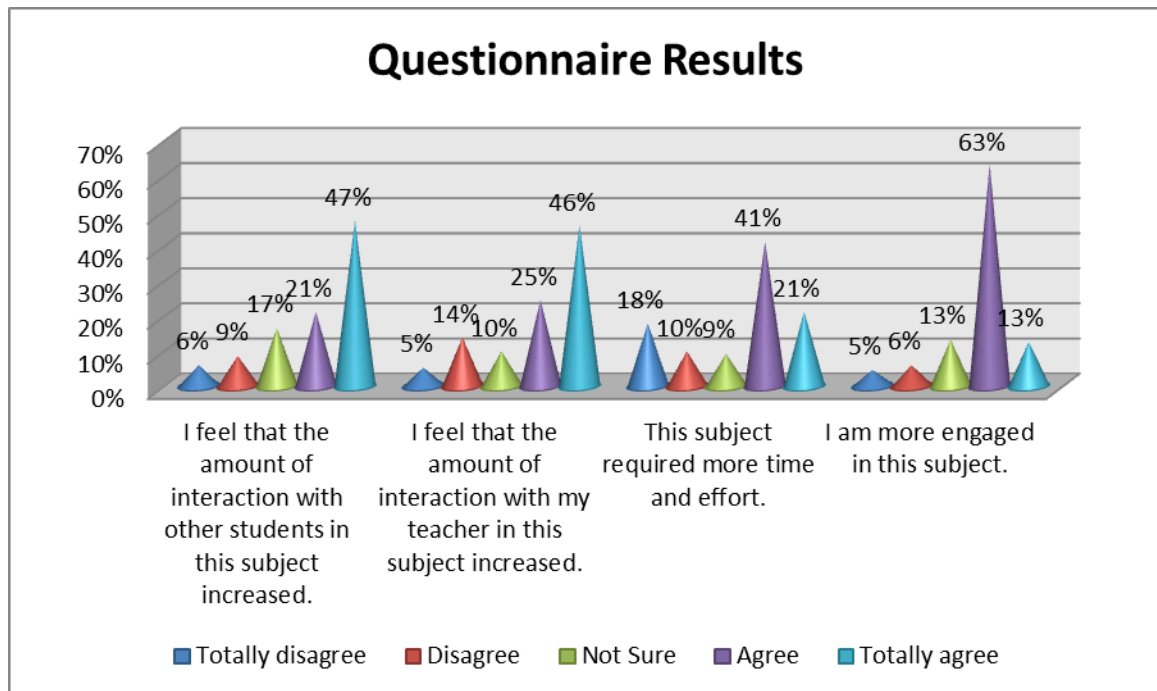


Figure 4. Indicative questionnaire results.

Discussion

Both previous and current research seems to suggest that appropriate use of social networks may offer significant potential for improving educational outcomes. There are many different ways Twitter and Edmodo can be used in language teaching (Edudemic, 2012) as seen in literature. However, the present study seeks to make a useful contribution to the adoption of social networks for educational purposes within higher education by investigating it in an ESP Greek higher education context. Despite the fact that this is an ongoing study, the first results that phase one has produced indicate that Twitter can play an important role during the learning process in an ESP classroom. The empirical evaluation of the research highlights the dominance of intrinsic motivation (students' intentions to use Twitter/perceived enjoyment) over extrinsic motivation in explaining the adoption of social media in the class. Enjoyment builds positive relationships and is directly linked to students' engagement; the more the students enjoy using Twitter and Edmodo and display social influence the more likely it is that they will adopt them. As far as the assessment of students' performance goes, the conventional assessment through graded assignments is backed up by students' social learning activities. Network building and self-regulated learning can be indicative of students' progress throughout the course. Ongoing assessment or formative assessment strategies (integration of performance and feedback and reflection) can facilitate learning and review students' performance (Stevens & Levi, 2013). Students post and can get feedback from not just the instructor but also their peers. The feedback information is not evaluative, but diagnostic. It might supplement, agree, or clash with the student's ideas and consequently facilitate learning. This implies that in order to provide assessment, instructors could evaluate students' learning progress by reviewing their reflections. Communication (teacher-student/student-student) throughout the learning process can also provide feedback information that may aid assessment. Engagement is a variable that may highlight and explain the adoption of Web2 social tools in the teaching and learning of ESP in higher education settings (Saeed & Sinnappan, 2011). Finally, attitude is measured by means of a survey conducted with the purpose of getting feedback from the specific group of students and/or learn about their wants and needs, which could enhance learning outcomes. The questions about attitude include degree of attractiveness (like/dislike, favor/oppose), satisfaction, intensity (a little, somewhat, or very much), importance of the integration of adoption of the two web tools that draw statistically significant conclusions about the target group. Eventually, instructors could evaluate students' learning progress by reviewing their reflections on what they have gained through networked learning (Dillman, Smyth, & Christian, 2009). Finally, after the second phase has been completed, data collected from the study and the questionnaires will be statistically analyzed with the aim of extracting results as to the level educational (Edmodo) and non-educational (Twitter) social networks can affect the learning process in an ESP classroom. A key limitation of the current study is the small sample size. Similar studies in larger samples may strengthen findings.

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Author Details

Evriklea Dogoriti
dogoritievi@hotmail.com

Jenny Pange
jennypage@yahoo.gr