Promoting Self-Directed Learning Via Edmodo: Moulay Ismail University as a Case Study

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Abstract

The objective of this quasi-experimental study was to scrutinize the role of Edmodo as a new Web 2.0 Application in promoting self-directed learning (SDL). It thus highlighted the extent to which EFL learners are willing to engage, take initiate, diagnose learning needs, and evaluate their learning outcomes. The study targeted 250 undergraduate students of English Department at Moulay Ismail University in Meknes. 121 students accepted to take part in the study, yet 97 who filled in the questionnaires exhaustively. The informants were exposed to Edmodo, and the project lasted seven weeks. Analyses of the questionnaires' responses prior to and after the exposure to Edmodo, which were administered to a convenient sampling, revealed that the latter played a crucial role in promoting SDL.

Keywords: Edmodo, Web 2.0, self-directed learning, EFL

Introduction

The body of literature displays that most scholars agree on the idea that SDL develops when students take the initiative for their learning, identify learning needs, design learning objectives, pinpoint learning sites, put down fitting learning tactics, and assess learning outcomes. This cannot be grasped without a trustful partnership between the instructor and the learner.

To begin with, in the late 1960's Rogers (1969) insisted on the role of the teacher as facilitator rather than an authoritative tutor. He recommends that the students' learning autonomy should be enhanced. His belief is that the learners should realize their own potential while given appropriate opportunities.

Few years later, in his famous book, *Self-Directed Learning: A Guide for Learners and Teachers*, Knowles (1975) first coined SDL and describes it as

> The process by which individuals take the initiative, with or without the help of others, in diagnosing their learning needs, formulating learning goals, identifying human and material resources for learning, choosing and implementing appropriate learning strategies, and evaluating learning outcomes (p. 18).

Within the same framework, Okabayashi & Torrance (1984) claim that SDL requires some basic features of learners who are involved in the process of learning. Such characteristics comprise competencies to "sense the relevant and important information in a task; access source information; think independently and follow instructions and rules; recognize and accept responsibility for one's learning; and self-start a task." Thus, the SDL learner is "one who has arrived at a self-concept of being responsible for one's own life, of being self-directing" (Knowles, 1984, p. 9).

Two years later, SDL was suggested to compromise elements of "independence, dependence, and interdependence," (Boud, 1988, p. 25) and conceptualizes these positions on a learning scale of student beginning from a position of being dependent on the teacher and moving through independence to interdependence. Boud (ibid) elucidates that SDL refers not only to a learner's goal facilitated by the teacher, but also to an educational curriculum. He praises the idea that students who are dependent on their teachers are by no means less productive than those who have developed autonomous learning which empower them to discern and make use of their own resources for learning.

Later, Confessore (1992) announces that "Self-directed learning, as with any human endeavor, becomes a matter of drive, initiative, resourcefulness, and persistence to see ourselves through to some level of learning that is personally satisfying" (p. 3).

Two years later, SDL was considered as "an approach where learners are motivated to assume personal responsibility and collaborative control of the cognitive (self-monitoring) and contextual (self-management) processes in construction and confirming meaningful and worthwhile learning outcomes" (Garrison, 1997, p. 19).

The latter belives that the readiness to be SDL learner is strongminded by both the 'entering motivation' and the 'maintenance of intention' (ibid).

Other scholars describe SDL as the prospect where the learner becomes in full charge of the "planning, carrying out, and evaluating their own learning experiences" (Ellinger, 2004, p. 159), so the learner "will take responsibility for his or her own learning and more often chooses or influences the learning objectives, activities, resources, priorities, and levels of energy expenditure than does the other-directed learning" (Gugliemino et al. 2004, p. 1).

Like Moodle and MOOCs, Edmodo is a free social learning platform where instructors can create groups and subgroups to assign content, share schedules, provide quizzes, and lead surveys in just a few steps. Educators can initiate learner discussions and collaborations with posts. Edmodo Snapshots provide instructors with the opportunity to post quizzes from a test bank of over 1,000 questions (Laure, 2013; Carlson & Raphael, 2015;Taylor, 2015). The Snapshots provide quick assessment data to determine student progress, and links to free online resources to reteach missed standards. Teachers can acknowledge

achievement with custom badges. Edmodo is accessible with a personal computer and Apple, Android, and Windows devices (Crane, 2012).

Edmodo is a micro blog that is similar in appearance to Facebook though Holland and Muilenburg (2011) claim students perceive it as a clearly academic platform, which is not the case with Facebook. Edmodo lacks the distractions that can occur with using Facebook, which is mostly that it is used for non-educational purposes. Edmodo allows for bi-directional teacher-learner interaction. The teacher can communicate to the class or to any individual student.

Likewise, a student can communicate to the class or send a private message to the teacher. Learner-learner interaction is limited, as students cannot communicate directly to one another. Learner content can be made very interactional as hypertext links and documents can be dynamically uploaded and downloaded easily by both teachers and students (Kongchan, 2012).

The fact that Edmodo is similar to Facebook, the most popular social networking site, helps students and teachers adapt to this new educational platform. Moodle and Blackboard, on the other hand, have unique features that need to be learned by both teachers and students (Al-Kathiri, 2014).

In short, learners' active engagement in self-initiated, self-constructed, and self-monitored learning experiences has long been held to be essential to human development, including language learning (Benson & Reinders, 2011; Kormos & Csizer, 2013). Thus, Edmodo, as Web 2.0 tool, can provide interesting spaces and venues in the flied of EFL learning and promotes SDL, yet it is necessary that EFL learners possess the basic competencies to engage in SDL successfully (Benson, 2011; Lai, 2013; Reinders & Darasawang, 2012).

Theoretical background

The theoretical framework of the present study is grounded mainly on three key authorities. Piaget's constructivism and Vygotsky's social constructivism as well as that of Zimmerman's social theory of learning. Interestingly, constructivism is a new approach in education that claims humans are better able to understand the information they have constructed by themselves. Rice (2007) claims that according to socio-constructivist theories, learning is a social advancement that involves language, real world situations, and interaction and collaboration among learners. The learners are considered central in the learning process. In addition, social learning theory posits that learning is a cognitive process that takes place in a social context

and can occur purely through observation or direct instruction, even in the absence of motor reproduction or direct reinforcement.

The study

121 learners of English as a foreign language at Moulay Ismail University in Meknes were exposed to Edmodo, a Web 2.0 Application, for 7 weeks. The learners were administered online questionnaires in two different phases: before they were exposed to Edmodo and by the end of the seventh week of the exposure. The aim of the questionnaire was to enlist the learners' readiness to SDL and their attitudes to technological contribution in the enhancement of SDL.

Method

Participants

One hundred and one undergraduate second semester EFL learners at Moulay Ismail University in Meknes accepted to participate in the study. I announced the study in the two classes I was teaching and recruited participants. After discarding the responses that were incomplete or did not have identifiers to allow the matching of the pre-survey and post-survey, ninety-seven participants' responses were included in this study. Of the 97 participants, 59 were female and 38

were male. Their average age at the beginning of the semester was 21. The participants were studying Oral Communication (S2).

The exposure to Edmodo

A PowerPoint presentation about Edmodo was introduced to the participants in a face-to-face classroom, and the synchronous and asynchronous interaction Edmodo was hosted online. The Oral Communication Subject was taught face-to-face (in class) and online (via Edmodo). The participants were invited to upload their personal activities such as videos (public speaking, stage performance, debating, etc.), audios (recording their talk), and documents (short stories, essay writings, idioms, etc.) through their Edmodo accounts which they had created in advance. They were also allowed to add their feedback and comments on other participants' contributions. The participation was relevant to course of Oral Communication.

The course of English Oral Communication is a collection of lessons and exercises designed for intermediate and advanced learners of English as foreign language. It offers materials for drills and practice in the general area of phonetics and phonology; the individual sounds, stress, intonation, etc. Within the framework of emphasizing the skills of English speaking, the focus of this course is to consolidate and improve oral communication skills in English through practical

activities. In addition to some useful phrasal verbs, proverbs and idiomatic expressions are introduced

Prior to each session, the learners were sent a link of a new activity among the required elements of the course design in addition to a variety of exercises and quizzes. The feedback was online, but an exhaustive correction was in class.

Research instruments and procedure

The participants filled out a pre-exposure (to Edmodo) questionnaire at the second week of the semester. The incorporation of Edmodo was then introduced to the participants. The exposure to Edmodo, in the form of synchronous and asynchronous Edmodo interaction like as weekly assignments and face-to-face collaborative debriefing, lasted 7 weeks. Then, an equivalent post-exposure (to Edmodo) questionnaire was administered at the end of the study. The questionnaires were administered online applying google docs.

The questionnaires drew informants' demographic data, their views to Web 2.0 and Edmodo in particular as well as their actual readiness to SDL. Besides, various factors that are associated with SDL element such as motivation, initiation, responsibility, detecting learning needs, and outcome evaluation were included.

Frequency of Edmodo log in (7 items)

The informants were asked to report how much time they were using Edmodo per day and to what extent they used it for Oral Communication. They were also asked to report how many hours they stayed up doing homework on Edmodo, and how much time thy were just discovering the usage of Edmodo (with no purpose).

Perceived usefulness of Edmodo for Oral Communication (7 items)

The participants were asked to rate on a Likert scale of 1–5 (strongly agree – strongly disagree) the usefulness of Edmodo for the course of Oral Communication. For instance, the participants were asked to report whether Edmodo helped them practice more activities of Oral Communication and whether they grasp them better.

Awareness and attitude to Edmodo for SDL (10 items)

The informants' perceptions were measured by three items that tapped into their enjoyment in using Edmodo for Oral Communication, for example: "I find Edmodo useful in supporting my understanding of Oral Communication." The participants rated the five items on a Likert scale of 1–5 (strongly agree and strongly disagree).

Situated understanding of the requirement for Edmodo use (8 items)

The subjects were asked to rate their perceptions of the institutional requirement for the incorporating of Edmodo by indicating the degree to which they agreed or disagreed with statements like: "It is absolutely necessary to use Edmodo if I want to obtain high grades in final exams"

Edmodo and EFL learners' SDL (10 items)

The participants were asked to report the rate of their SDL readiness by indicating the degree to which they agreed or disagreed with statements like: "Edmodo helped me to manage my time", "Edmodo helped me to take initiative", and "Edmodo helped me to prioritize my work."

In the post-questionnaire, the participants were also asked to report their frequency of accessing Edmodo, their evaluation of the experience with Edmodo, and the changes Edmodo had brought to their learning styles and SDL in general.

Data analysis

A paired t-test was used to compare the participants' pre-survey and post-survey responses to see whether there were any positive significance of the incorporation of Edmodo. In-depth comparative analysis of the frequent user and infrequent user of Edmodo during the

7 weeks was also conducted through an independent t-test to identify whether frequency of accessing Edmodo produced different results. In addition, a chi-square test was conducted to examine whether there was a correlation between the frequency of Edmodo Logging in and reported changes of SDL.

Results
Effects of Edmodo

A comparison of the informants' answers in the two questionnaires before the exposure to Edmodo and after experiencing Edmodo reported a significantly greater frequency of SDL orientation in the post-test. They also reported significantly greater confidence in their knowledge and skills related to SDL readiness.

Other elements related to the participants' SDL, positive attitudes were reported towards Edmodo, positive attitudes of the compatibility of Edmodo with their learning needs' diagnosis and outcomes' evaluation, and positive perceptions of the subjects' expectations of Edmodo use for Oral Communication and SDL in the post-survey than in the pre-survey.

Additionally, 64 out of the 97 participants (67%) reported improving their SDL. The chi-square test between self-reported frequency of Edmodo and Oral Communication was significant

indicating that the frequency of accessing Edmodo was correlated with the change in Mastering Oral Communication. A closer examination of the data showed that the majority of the frequent users (81%) reported promoting their SDL and thus developing their Oral Communication skills after experiencing Edmodo interaction. This finding confirms that Edmodo was reported to have a positive effect on the informants' SDL especially among the participants who frequented Edmodo.

Discussion

This study examined the effectiveness of Edmodo on EFL learners' SDL. The project lasted 7 weeks to elicit the participants' responses from pre-questionnaire and post-questionnaire (before and after their being exposed to Edmodo). As an outcome the informant reported that they had frequented Edmodo several times, and they had spent more than two hours per day scrolling down on Edmodo. What is favorable is that Edmodo was reported to have contributed to promoting SDL. The participants in general reported a significant increase in the frequency of their SDL. Hence, Edmodo was successful, as intended, in prompting a better use of most of the required elements of Oral Communication and improving key components of SDL.

Conclusion

This project explored the role of the incorporation of Edmodo as a Web 2.0 Application on EFL learners' SDL and the extent to which Edmodo contributed to learners' responsibility and the initiative they take to diagnose their learning needs and objectives, and evaluate their learning outcomes. The survey targeted the association of Edmodo and the participants' learning process and accomplishment. The result revealed that Edmodo was fruitful in making a deeper understanding of Oral Communication individually, which implied a significant enhancement of SDL.

Enhancing SDL through Edmodo and Web 2.0 in general beyond the 'brick and mortar' classroom becomes mandatory if educators aspire to boost the incorporation of Web 2.0 (Benson, 2011; Kormos & Csizer, 2013; Lai & Gu, 2011; Reinders & Darasawang, 2012). This quasi-experiment study aims at highlighting an insight how to empower a spirit of SDL among learners and instructors. The density of learners' online SDL process requires more research endeavors with the purpose of deepening an understanding of such important research area (Hubbard & Romeo, 2012; Lai & Morrison, 2013).

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