How a Non-Digital-Native Teacher Makes Use of Edmodo

Chada Kongchan
King Mongkut's University of Technology (Thailand)
chada.kon@kmutt.ac.th

Abstract

Edmodo is a free and secure learning platform available at www.edmodo.com. This website looks similar to Facebook, but is much more private and safe for a learning environment. This study aims to investigate how a non-digital-native teacher can make use of Edmodo to set up and run an online classroom community for her students to work online concurrently with their physical classes, and to run a workshop on Edmodo for other teachers. The study also shows the teacher's, students' and other teachers' perceptions towards Edmodo. The subjects of this study were a 57-year-old teacher of English, 81 freshmen at King Mongkut's University of Technology Thonburi, and 17 teachers of the Royal Thai Air Force Language Centre, Thailand. The three research instruments used were a diary, a questionnaire, and Edmodo. A diary was kept to find out how the teacher used Edmodo and to record her perceptions towards using it, while a questionnaire was employed to investigate the 17 teachers' and the students' opinions and suggestions regarding Edmodo. The data automatically recorded by Edmodo were also collected to examine the use of Edmodo. The crucial result of this study reveals that Edmodo is perceived to be a wonderful and user-friendly social learning network that enables even a non-digital-native teacher to take charge of her own exploring and making use of the site to set up and run her online classes, including a workshop on Edmodo for other teachers. Students also strongly agreed that they liked and enjoyed working in an online class via Edmodo. In order to encourage other non-digital-native teachers throughout Thailand to make use of Edmodo, at the end of the study, the implications of disseminating the results of the study and the demonstration plan of using Edmodo will be explained.

1. Introduction and literature review

The rise of the Internet and online communication technologies has changed the way people work, communicate, socialize, and learn as a 'network society' [1]. Research conducted by the British Council in 2007 revealed that 69% of learners around the world said that they learned most effectively when socializing informally, and students with strong social networks performed well academically. Moreover, on-line social networks are an excellent communication tool for knowledge construction based on social relations, conversation, collaboration, and shared work [2]. Miller [3] explains one of the benefits of virtual communities that these communities can compensate for the lack of community in the real world. So, students who are shy and do not participate in class can communicate with their teachers and classmates in the Internet-based communities. Accordingly, effective teachers should become network administrators to find out what social networking sites students like to use and introduce them to free learning opportunities through helpful sites [4]. Unfortunately, Lipsett [5] reveals an important finding of the research conducted by the National Foundation for Educational Research (NFER), the UK's largest independent provider of research for education, that a third of 1,000 teachers struggled to use the technology which schools were equipped with because they lacked necessary skills to make the best use of the technology available to them. Therefore, it is a challenging idea to encourage non-digital-native teachers to be able to start socializing and interacting on learning issues online with their students happily and successfully, using a website such as Edmodo. This website is a free and secure learning platform designed by Jeff O'Hara and Nick Borg in 2008 for teachers, students, parents, schools, and districts, and is available at *www.edmodo.com*. This site looks similar to Facebook, but is much more private and safe because it allows only teachers to create and manage accounts, and only their students, who receive a group code and register in the group, can access and join the group. Hence, Witherspoon [6] concludes that Edmodo can be seen as a Learning Management System *(LMS)* which can facilitate teachers to set up and manage their online classes easily. The site provides a simple way for teachers and students in a virtual class to connect and collaborate. For example, teachers can send out quizzes and assignments, give feedback, receive completed assignments, assign grades, store and share content in the form of both files and links, maintain a class calendar, and conduct polls, as well as send notes and text (SMS) alerts to individual students or the entire class. Students can also share content, submit homework, assignments, and quizzes, receive their teacher's feedback, notes, and alerts, as well as vote on polls [7]. Moreover,

Edmodo was recognized by the American Association of School Librarians in 2011 as one of the top 25 websites that foster the qualities of innovation, creativity, active participation, and collaboration in the category entitled *'Social Networking and Communication'* [8] .

2. Research methodology

This study aims to investigate how a non-digital-native teacher can make use of Edmodo as an online classroom community for her students and to run a workshop on Edmodo for other teachers. It also aims at examining the teacher's, students' , and other teachers' perceptions towards Edmodo. The subjects in this study were a 57-year-old teacher of English at King Mongkut's University of Technology Thonburi in Thailand, 81 students of the university, and 17 teachers of English of the Royal Thai Air Force Language Centre. The 57-year-old subject was a non-digital-native teacher and a teacher-researcher in the study, and the 17 teachers were also non-digital-native teachers. The 81 student subjects were three groups of freshmen who were, at that time, studying LNG 102: English Skills and Strategies with the teacher-researcher. Neither the teachers nor the students had ever used Edmodo before this study. The teacher set up 3 online classes via Edmodo for her student subjects to work online concurrently with their physical classes for one semester. After the courses were over, the teacher also ran a workshop on how to use Edmodo for the 17 teachers. Three research instruments were employed in the study: a diary, a questionnaire, and Edmodo. The teacher had kept a diary from July 2011- July 2012 to investigate how she learned and used Edmodo, including her perceptions towards using it. The questionnaire, with a five-point Likert-type scale asking for opinions about Edmodo and two open-ended questions asking about problems and suggestions, was given to all the students at the end of the course, and to the 17 teachers at the end of the workshop. The data recorded automatically by Edmodo were also collected to examine the use of Edmodo. The data from the teacher's diary was analyzed and categorized into three groups: dates, activities in Edmodo, and reasons/opinions, while the data collected from Edmodo were grouped in terms of activities the teacher did during the semester. Finally, the data from the five-point Likert-type scale were analyzed by using a rating guide as follows: 4.21-5 = strongly agree, 3.41-4.2 = agree, 2.61-3.4 = neutral, 1.81-2.6 = disagree, and 1-1.8 = strongly disagree, and the data from the open-ended questions were grouped to see salient points of problems and suggestions.

3. Results of the study

3.1 Making use of Edmodo

Table 1: Learning and Using Edmodo

Learning how to use Edmodo			Using Edmodo		
Time	Functions	Items	Activities	Times	
Before using Jul – Nov, 2011	Register, Create group, Note	3	Sending 'Note' + attached file	127	
While using Dec 11 - May 8, 2012	Alert, Poll, Quiz	3	Sending 'Reply'	15	
	Delete post, Edit post, Sending a quiz to individual student, etc.	15	Sending 'Alert'	10	
After using May 9-Jul 31, 2012	Assignment, small group, archive and delete group, calendar, library, and grades	6	Designing and posting 'Quiz'	3	
			Setting 'Poll'	1	

The data analyzed from the teacher's diary, shown in Table 1, indicate that the teacher did not study how to use all of the functions of Edmodo before using it, but only necessary functions such as 'Register', 'Create group', and 'Note' because of lacking digital skills and being afraid of taking a risk as shown in the extract from the diary below:

"Today, one team did not get my feedback via Edmodo because the leader of their team, who submitted the work and got my feedback, did not come to class. So, I started sending feedback to all members of each team. I thought of using a 'small group' function, but I couldn't do it then because I didn't know what would happen to the organization of the whole class. I can't do anything that I am not sure about." (April 10, 2012)

While working with the students in online classes, interesting functions like 'Alert', 'Poll', and 'Quiz' inspired her to study and make use of them. In addition, problems that the teacher faced during using Edmodo encouraged her to learn how to use other functions to solve those problems. After the course

was over, the teacher kept on learning 6 new functions for future use. The data from Edmodo also emphasized that the teacher used only some functions related to the physical classes she taught. As shown in Table 1, the function that she used most (127 times) is 'Note' which was used for receiving students' work, checking and giving feedback, and sending it back as an attached file to her students. However, the teacher also sent 'Alert', 'Reply', 'Quiz' as well as 'Poll' to her students.

3.2 Teacher's perception
The extract from the teacher's diary below reveals that she likes Edmodo very much owing to its simple and user-friendly functions, and its teaching and learning support.
"I was very happy that I could design my first quiz, set a due date and time for the quiz, and assign students to do it. All steps were very easy like a DIY process. Adding a link to a quiz is excellent because I don't have to write a passage for the quiz myself." (February 16, 2012)

3.3 Students' perceptions and suggestions

Table 2: Opinions towards using Edmodo

Technical aspects	$\bar{x}$	SD	Features	$\bar{x}$	SD	Level
1. log in and log out quickly	4.36	0.65	1. like using Edmodo	4.46	0.63	Strongly agree
2. register easily	4.28	0.72	2. enjoy using Edmodo	4.35	0.70	
3. easy steps of doing quizzes	4.28	0.76	3. pleased with doing quizzes	4.35	0.74	
4. load any page quickly	4.31	0.68	4. like submitting work and getting feedback	4.30	0.66	
5. never fail	4.42	0.66	5. like reviewing lessons posted by the teacher	4.33	0.67	
6. attach a file easily	4.36	0.65	6. pleased with posting their work to class	4.33	0.68	
7. submit/post easily	4.38	0.71	7. pleased with studying their classmates' s work	4.23	0.69	
8. post messages/files quickly	4.30	0.67	8. enjoy voting	4.33	0.70	
9. vote easily	4.14	0.77	9. happy with consulting the teacher personally	4.20	0.82	Agree
10.download quickly	4.16	0.64	10. like having an online class via Edmodo	3.94	0.82	

The data from the questionnaire shown in Table 2 indicate that the students strongly agreed that they could use 7 functions of Edmodo quickly and easily. They also strongly agreed that the website never failed. In addition, the students strongly agreed that they liked and enjoyed using Edmodo features such as doing quizzes, submitting their work, getting feedback from the teacher, reviewing the lessons posted by the teacher, posting their work to class, studying the work posted by their classmates, and voting for the best work of their classmates. According to the answers to the open-ended questions of the questionnaire, the students revealed that there should be a function for students to send a message, file, or link to their individual classmates. The students also suggested an excellent idea of expanding the use of Edmodo to other English courses and adding more quizzes for practicing English outside class.
The data collected from the 17 teachers who attended the Edmodo workshop reveal that they strongly agreed that they liked all functions of Edmodo and the site was so user-friendly that they would use it for running their online classes.

4. Discussion and conclusion
The most important finding of this study is that Edmodo appears to be a wonderful learning network which is so simple that observations and data show a high level of acceptance and response by the non-digital-native teachers. Furthermore, the teacher-researcher could utilize the programme successfully without any need for help or support from a computer technician. Moreover, the very positive perceptions of the teacher-researcher, her students, and the 17 teacher participants in the Edmodo workshop have motivated the researcher to believe that all non-digital-native teachers should

be able to use Edmodo as a tool to create an additional online classroom community for their students. Therefore, after finishing the research, she has started thinking of encouraging other non-digital-native teachers throughout Thailand to make use of Edmodo. She has planned to exhibit the ease of use and the functionality of Edmodo through a demonstration and a workshop. During the three months after finishing the research, she has already presented and demonstrated Edmodo twice for 30 teachers at the International E-learning Conference 2012, and 30 teachers at the Office of Vocational Education Commission. She has also run three workshops for 15 teachers of the Royal Thai Navy Language Centre, 40 teachers of secondary schools, and 30 teachers of the School of Liberal Arts, KMUTT. In addition, the researcher is planning to present Edmodo at the 33rd Thailand TESOL International Conference "E"novation and Communities in ELT in January, 2013. Above all, as a coordinator of an English language course at her university, she has already expanded the use of Edmodo by setting up a teacher community for 30 teachers of this English course and encouraged other coordinators of other English language courses to do so. Addtionally, there were some teachers who have already set up their online classes via Edmodo for their students after attending the teacher-researcher's workshop. The study and the follow-up actions by the workshop attendees reveal that non-digital-native teachers are capable of using Edmodo, and that Edmodo is not only very useful for a student community, but can also benefit the teacher community.

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