



## Evaluating Deviant Art as an Educational Tool for Collaborative Learning

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### Abstract

*The widespread use of technology has reshaped the field of language teaching and has transformed the learning experience for language learners. The implementation of multimedia tools has nurtured opportunities for more student-centred, real-world-like learning environments where students can become more autonomous and collaborate with their peers. Pedagogically, the collaborative nature of these tools is founded under the social constructivist theory according to which learning takes place through social interactions and language use, and knowledge is shared and becomes more meaningful. The multimedia tool involved in the present study is Deviant Art, an international online community for art enthusiasts, featuring artwork, photography and videography. Within this social community, artists can connect through their art, share their work, engage in constructive feedback and keep their own journal about their work. The present pilot study focuses on the evaluation of Deviant Art as an educational tool, as it was used in the course English for Specific Academic Purposes (ESAP) in the Fall Semester of 2019, at the Cyprus University of Technology (CUT). The evaluation was based on the experience of 11 first-year students of the Department of Fine Arts. The aim of the paper was to investigate students' perceptions on Deviant Art as an educational tool for creating collaborative learning opportunities and to examine up to what extent they intended to continue with the Social Networking (SN) tool after the termination of the course. Data was collected through the students' reflection journals, the instructor's field notes and through an online questionnaire, submitted at the end of the semester.*

**Keywords:** *Deviant Art, ICT, collaborative learning, ESAP, Higher Education.*

### 1. Introduction

In a collaborative learning environment, participants work together on a task simultaneously [3] while collaboration skills and knowledge creation among students are seen as an instructional motive for using technology in the lesson. Higher Education (HE) has attracted a number of studies on using technology as a supportive tool for language learning. Some of the major characteristics of collaborative learning are a) promoting active learning, b) the teacher having a facilitator's role, c) students sharing their experiences in small groups and d) students reflecting on their processes [4]. The theoretical underpinnings of integrating collaborative tools in HE courses lie on the social constructivist theory according to which learning is co-constructed, emphasising the dynamic interplay among learners, teachers and the various educational tasks they are asked to perform [5]. Lomicka and Lord (2016) point out that academic studies on the use of SN tools are often criticised for their lack of empirical analysis. However, they do introduce new technological tools and change traditional forms of language learning. For the purposes of the study, Deviant Art, a SN tool for artists and art enthusiasts, aimed to initiate opportunities for community building and learning with like-minded students and artists while using English as a Foreign Language (EFL). Pedagogically, it enabled the students to use their applied knowledge on art into practice through constructive comments and feedback. The purpose of the study was to connect art students and artists in the widespread art community, to build a sense of community among them and to provide opportunities for constructive feedback based on theories of art and art movements taught in the English language. Moreover, it aimed to examine up to what extent the students' activity with the tool would continue after the termination of the ESAP course. Results showed that students were positive in their responses towards the collaborative nature and community-building features of Deviant Art but were reluctant about using it after the course finished.

### 2. Deviant Art

Deviant Art is a SN platform that features artists' work in photography, general artwork and videography. It was first launched in August 2000 and it is still active. Users, which are called



DeviantArt, can choose their own username while registering for the first time and connect with as many DeviantArters as they like. Even though registration to the community is free, harnessing the capabilities and features of the platform like remuneration of one's art sales requires a paid membership [1]. Moreover, DeviantArters can navigate through an abundance of topics ranging from 3D Art to Literature, peruse on their fellow users' work and keep their own journal.

### 3. The Study

#### 3.1 Context and Participants

The use of Deviant Art was part of the Fine Arts ESAP course in the Fall Semester 2019. The course curriculum was designed by the author and all lessons took place in an interactive computer lab at CUT. The choice of lesson content and the tools for the course aimed to familiarise students with topics related to their field of study and to develop their hard and soft skills.

The 11 participants were all first-year students at the Department of Fine Arts of CUT. Their age varied between the ages of 18 to 40 and were 4 males and 7 females. All the participants spoke English as a foreign language (FL) and were frequent Internet users. They all retained their own social media profiles but had not used any multimedia tools for educational purposes before. Only one participant had an account with Deviant Art prior to the commencement of the semester but was not active.

#### 3.2 Data Collection and Analysis

The data for the study were collected through the students' reflective diary which probed for information about their progressive engagement with the tool. The reflective diary was put into effect on the end of Week 3 and lasted until Week 13, the final week of the semester. The instructor's field notes also provided for a more reflective and personal point of view of the students' experience with Deviant Art and helped the instructor gain more insight into the students' process. The data were, manually, analysed and coded by the instructor. Finally, a questionnaire, submitted to the students at the end of the semester, enhanced the reflective content from the students' perceptions and intentions. The questionnaire was created on Google Forms and included closed-ended questions.

### 4. Results and Discussion

#### 4.1 Analysis of the students' reflective journals and instructor's field notes

As stated in the previous section, the students' reflective journals enabled them to engage in an ongoing process of development and familiarisation with Deviant Art as a collaborative and multimedia tool. As for the instructor's field notes, they strengthened the students' reflections and, personally, helped the instructor understand the process through which the students went through throughout the semester.

Table 1. Students' perceptions of Deviant Art as an educational tool for creating collaborative learning opportunities

	Total Responses	Total Responses (percentage)
Positive	8/11	72,7%
Negative	1/11	9,1%
Neutral	2/11	18,1%

Table 1 shows the students' perceptions of Deviant Art as a tool which can create opportunities of collaboration. A significant percentage of the students (72,7%) expressed positive perceptions about the tool and its collaborative opportunities. Regarding constructive comments, feedback and connecting with other artists, some of the comments that validated the students' positive perceptions were:

"It was great to exchange comments on art and thoughts with another person or artist in English" (Student 1)



“Comments helped me evaluate my work, improve my level and find a solution to improve my account’s image” (Student 6)

“They helped me get to know new things and get tips to improve my work...yes, it helped me because I could connect with other artists worldwide who made some comments on my work and helped me...we chatted for a while, that’s the truth” (Student 7)

“It’s definitely interesting and it helps my work. Getting to know other artists, for them to see our work and for us to see their work and establish communication and dialogue among universities concerning our drawings and our work” (Student 4)

“Well, some of them responded to my comments. To be honest, it was only comments with positive messages.... we used English to talk about art, that helped me” (Student 2)

In contrast, Student 3 had a negative perception: “No, actually, I didn’t really like Deviant Art. I prefer traditional ways of learning about art, like galleries, newspapers, magazines, etc.”.

Students also believed the tool enhanced their online presence as future artists among the artistic circle: “My online presence is automatically a worldwide presence. The spectrum is bigger” (Student 5), “Whether we like it or not, this is the new way of communication... it’s a daily thing for everyone... we need to survive as artists so this platform can help us” (Student 2) and “With this platform I can have the master key to open helpful doors in my way to the top” (Student 1).

Table 2. Students’ intention of continuance with Deviant Art after the termination of the course

	Total Responses	Total Responses (percentage)
To a great extent	5/11	45,5%
Not at all	1/11	9,1%
To a moderate extent	5/11	45,5%

Table 2 reveals up to what extent students intend on continuing their activity with the SN tool after the course finishes. Analysis revealed positive intention for almost half of the students (45,5%), “It’s something I will continue working on. It helps enormously in the artistic department” (Student 7) and “Yes, I want to attract more people and to become better at my work” (Student 6). An equal percentage revealed they would remain active to a moderate extent after the termination of the course. 4 Students considered it time-consuming which could contribute to their reluctance: “It requires a lot of quality time...making comments, too” (Student 4), “I’d like to find more time to get to know it because it’s very useful. I have other priorities now and Deviant Art takes time” (Student 5). However, only 1 student (9,1%) maintained a negative intention, “I made little progress with Deviant Art since the beginning of the semester... it’s not a friendly platform for me to continue” (Student 3).

#### 4.2 Analysis of the questionnaire

The consolidation of the questionnaire corroborated the data derived from the students’ reflections. As seen in Figure 1, 6 out of 11 students (54,5%) consider success in the tool as “moderately easy” which reflects the uncertainty levels of Table 2 as to whether they would continue using it.

19. Is it easy to become successful in the Deviant Art platform?

11 responses

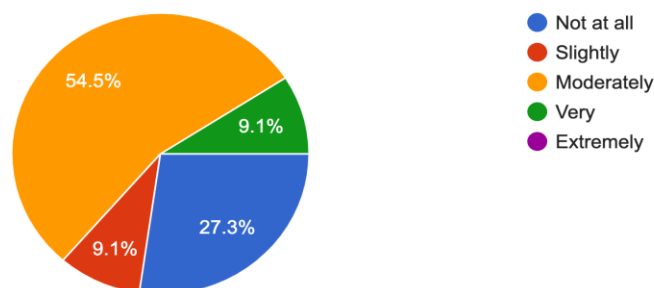




Figure 1. Students' responses concerning whether it is easy to become successful in the Deviant Art platform

20. What are the drawbacks of the Deviant Art platform? Tick the three most important answers for you.

11 responses

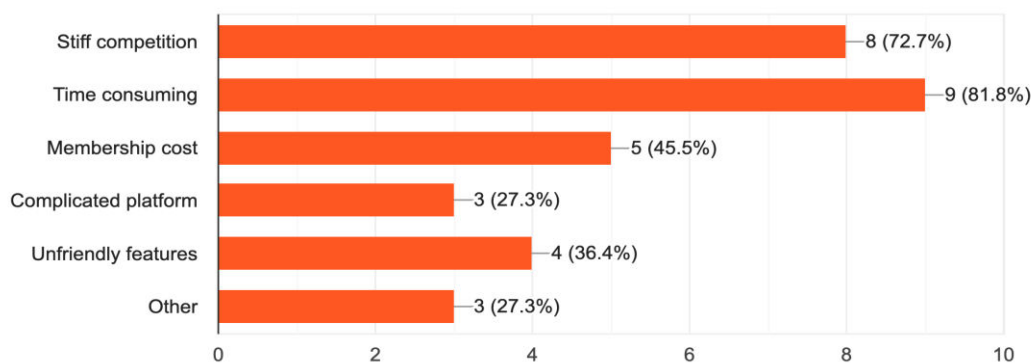


Figure 2. The 3 most important drawbacks of the Deviant Art platform according to the students

Similarly, Figure. 2 sheds some light on the students' negative perceptions of the tool. Its time-consuming character, stiff competition and membership cost are among the 3 most important drawbacks for the students. Again, this validates the students' reflections of the tool and the time requirements it poses.

21. Would you like to remain active in Deviant Art after the completion of English for Academic Purposes?

11 responses

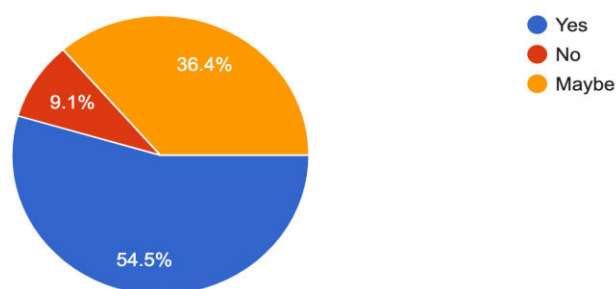


Figure 3. Students' answers on whether they would like to continue their activity after the termination of their course

Finally, 6 students (54,5%) would like to remain active in Deviant Art while 4 (36,4%) answered "maybe". This reinforces the qualitative analysis (Table 2) and the students' moderate intention of future Deviant Art activity.

## Conclusions

This paper describes Fine Arts students' positive evaluation of Deviant Art as an educational tool for creating collaborative learning opportunities whereas additional quantitative analysis substantiates their moderate intention of remaining active after the termination of the course. Despite being a pilot study, the small number of participants constitutes a limitation. Finally, more extensive research on the



features could enlighten our knowledge of the tool and could further determine its pedagogical character.

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