

DEVELOPING LEARNER AUTONOMY ONLINE THROUGH MICRO BLOGGING EDMODO

Pryla Rochmahwati
STAIN Ponorogo, East Java
rpryla@yahoo.com

Abstract: Social changes and development of technology force EFL teachers' struggle to utilize potentially useful technology and promote learner autonomy. Edmodo as a highly versatile micro blogging platform is needed to develop learner autonomy in virtual learning environments. Keeping this need in mind, this paper reports on the attempt to develop learner autonomy online of 65 EFL learners in the fifth semester of English Department in STAIN Ponorogo through Edmodo. Data were collected through observations and the analyses of the observations light on the overall experience of learning with Edmodo especially through the lens of learner autonomy. The results showed that Edmodo afforded students the opportunity to take responsibility for their own learning and involve them in taking ownership (partial or total) of many learning processes. However, lack of access to internet and the ambiguous task instruction also contributed to a limited level of social interaction in virtual learning environments. Finally, it can be concluded that well-designed tasks and accessibility to internet are essential to maximize the potentials of Edmodo for learner autonomy.

Keyword: *Edmodo, learner autonomy*

Globalization, shrinking resources, the proliferation of information and communication technologies, increased demands for quality assurance and increasing competition among higher education institutions has all contributed towards changing the traditional role of academics (Mostert & Quinn, 2009). It has been influencing Indonesian Higher Education like other education systems in the world. Education should offer conditions needed to optimize learning and encourage the transfer of knowledge and skills. Furthermore, in globalization era, we notice the world changes rapidly due to the development of technology. Rapid evolution of technologies has changed language pedagogy and language use, enabling new forms of discourse, new forms of authorship, and new ways to create and participate in communities (Kern, 2006). In such a fast changing world, an educated individual needs to have the ability to continue learning in order to cope with the changing situation. It also gained a new dimension when new technologies provided language teachers with new tools to develop autonomy in virtual settings.

Facing these changes, Edmodo as a highly versatile micro blogging platform is alleged useful to develop learner autonomy in virtual learning environments. Edmodo is as generally well known as Facebook for learning. Simply put, Edmodo is a micro blogging platform for education. It is primarily a tool for within-class communication, but it also provides several ways for teachers to connect with other teachers. Using Edmodo, students and teachers can reach out to one another and connect by sharing ideas, problems, and helpful tips. Through Edmodo, students are empowered to take ownership of their learning, and become more autonomous.

This paper reports on the attempt to develop learner autonomy online of 65 EFL learners in the fifth semester of English Department in STAIN Ponorogo through Edmodo. Data were collected through observations on English Curriculum and Material Development Course and the analyses of the observations light on the overall experience of learning with Edmodo especially through the lens of learner autonomy.

LEARNER AUTONOMY

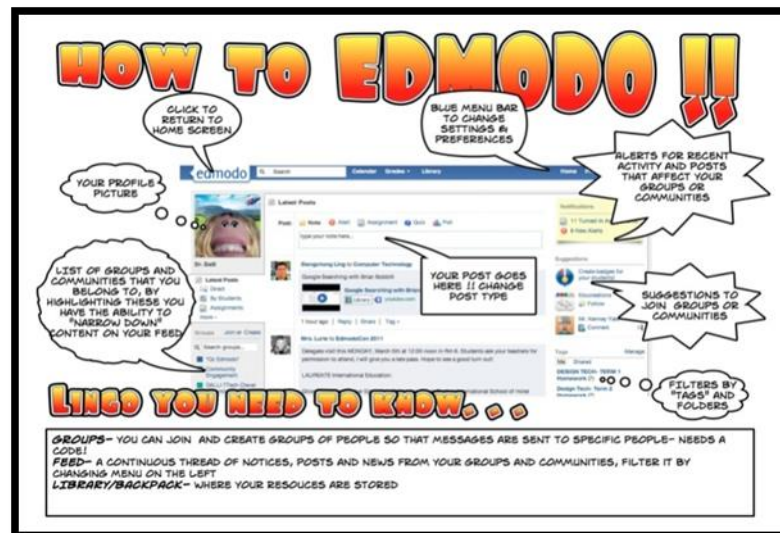
The concept of learner autonomy has gained much attention (Benson, 2001) along with many other concepts which have affected the theory and practice of foreign language teaching. The concept has been argued to be very complex (Little, 2003). Despite the lack of a single, universal theory of learner autonomy, there is agreement on the educational importance of developing learner autonomy and that learner autonomy can take a variety of forms, depending on learning context and learner characteristics.

According to Little (1991: 4), autonomy involve capacity for detachment, critical reflection, decision-making and independent action. Autonomous learners are responsible for their own learning and are actively involved in the learning process by setting personal goals, planning and executing tasks, and reviewing their progress (Dam et. al, 1990).

From those two definitions above, it can be summed up that the features of learner autonomy consist of (1) Students should take responsibility for their own learning., (2) Taking responsibility involves learners in taking ownership (partial or total) of many processes which have traditional belonged to the teacher, such as deciding on learning objectives, selecting learning methods and evaluating process.

MICRO BLOGGING EDMODO

Micro blogging Edmodo is an online networking application for teachers and students. It is quite the same as Facebook, but in a safe and controlled environment appropriate for school. Edmodo is an educational tool that enables students and teachers to share ideas, files, and assignments as well as resources (<https://suweb20.wikispaces.com/Edmodo>). Edmodo is primarily a tool for within-class communication, but it also provides several ways for teachers to connect with other teachers. The features of Edmodo can be seen in the following picture.



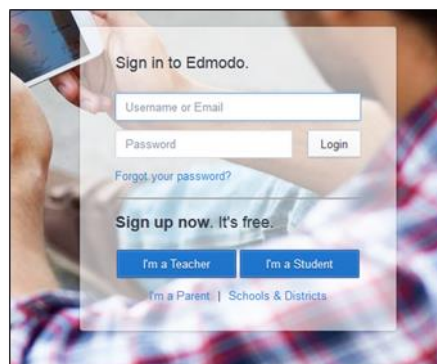
Picture 1. Edmodo's Feature

By using Edmodo, students and teachers can reach out to one another and connect by sharing ideas, problems, and helpful tips. A teacher can assign and grade work on Edmodo; students can get help from the entire class on Edmodo. It is a safe environment. There is no bullying or inappropriate content, because the teacher can see everything that is posted on Edmodo (Suwarna, 2006: 128). Edmodo as a part of e-learning tool for classroom's instruction can be functioned as (1) supplementary – the students have authority to use the material uploaded in Edmodo or not, (2) complementary - the material uploaded in Edmodo is used as additional material that has discussed in the classroom, and (3) substitute - Edmodo is used to substitute the classroom's teaching (Sutanta, 2009: 34).

EDMODO AS TOOL TO DEVELOP LEARNER AUTONOMY

This paper reported the experiences in the context of Edmodo to involve learners in online activities. The study was organized into a series of steps:

1. Signing Up - simply click I'm a Teacher and a new dialogue box will open up. Simply fill out that information and click Sign up.

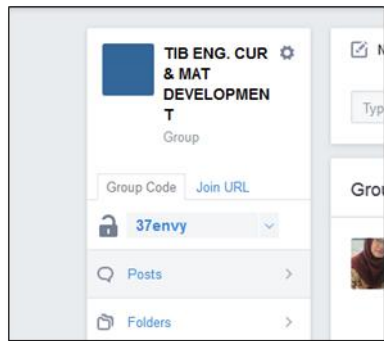


Picture 2. Sign in to

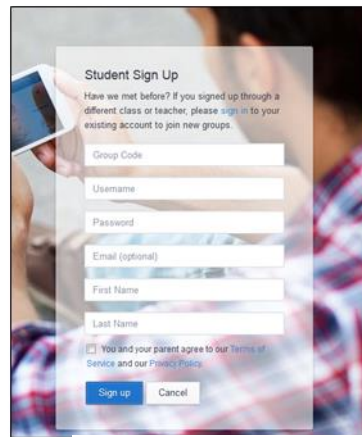


Picture 3. Teacher Sign up

2. Give the students brief explanation about how to register to Edmodo by giving “**Group Code**”.



Picture 4. Group Code

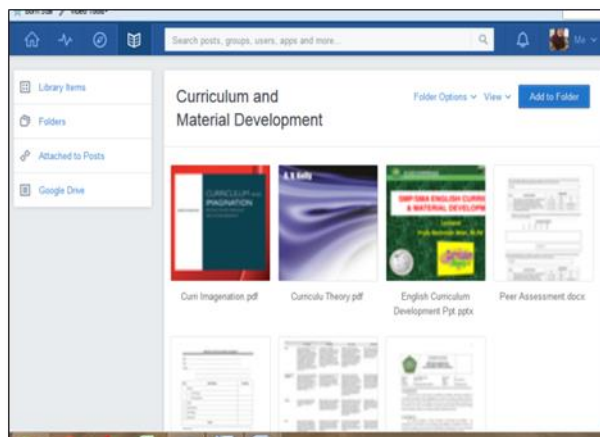


Picture 5. Student Sign Up

3. Start giving some deadlines for particular tasks to accustom learners to visit Edmodo on a regular basis. The tasks that can be assigned in order to develop learner autonomy are in the following:

a. Self Study Task

Self Study Task involves students' need for making decision in regard to the initiation, inhibition, and redirection of activities in the classroom (Connell, 1990: 65). The students are assigned to do online self study ask through Edmodo in terms of (1) downloading the materials for the course on the Library feature on Edmodo in accordance with the topic discussed during the course. The activity can be illustrated by the following picture.



Picture 6: Library Features in Edmodo

Picture 6 showed Library features in Edmodo in which the teacher uploaded e-books, course outline and assessment rubrics that could be freely downloaded by the students.

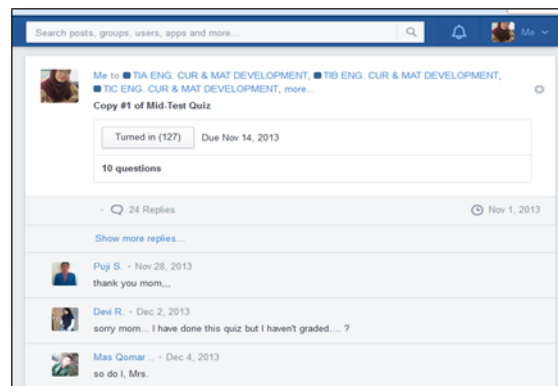
The next task is (2) assigning students to make a summary on the topic discussed for the next meeting based on the supplement textbook provided in their “**Library Folder**” in Edmodo, then upload it in the “**Turn in**” place. See the following picture.



Picture 7: Assignment Features in Edmodo

Picture 7 illustrated the teacher asked the students to make summary individually dealing with the topic discussed in the classroom for the next meeting in Assignment Feature in Edmodo in which the students can complete them in advance before the due date or later review them.

The following task is (3) assigning the students to have online quiz. Edmodo offers a way to create and give online quizzes. Simply, give the quiz a title, add a time limit and start to add questions. There are many types of questions you can add such as multiple choices, true false, short answer and fill in the blank. The activity can be seen in the following picture,



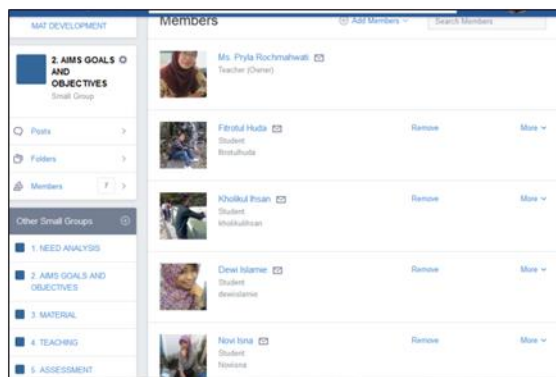
Picture 8: Online Quiz Features in

Picture 8 described the task given on mid-test. The students must do the quiz online. If they leave the page for whatever reason, the quiz still continues. All their answers will be saved by Edmodo. If there is time remaining, they can log back into Edmodo and resume the quiz. If they do not finish the quiz in the appropriate amount of time, Edmodo will automatically submit the quiz for the student.

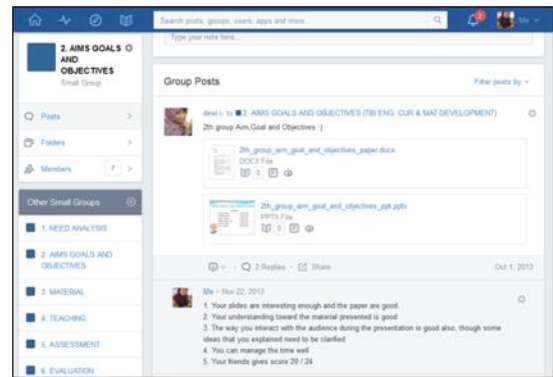
For online shelf study tasks submitted on Edmodo, the students have responsibility to complete them in advance before the due date. Also being accessible to students' grade system, they can check their performance results on line and motivate (Dörnye, 2001:35) themselves to get better final grades. All activities in shelf study tasks provide students the opportunity to take responsibility for their own learning.

b. Online Group Work

Group work is an important part of the learner autonomy. Students take responsibility for working with others. This helps the students make the association between the goals they set collaboratively in the start, the strategies used to achieve them and set them into words. Successful group work can improve learner autonomy and help implement a different atmosphere in the classroom (Turloiu and Stefánsdóttir, 2011). “**Small Group**” is one of features offered by Edmodo. In this room, the lecturer can select the member of the students in each group by dragging the name of the students in a new group created in order vary students' competences in one group. It can be seen from the following pictures:



Picture 9: Small Group Features



Picture 10: Small Group Work

Picture 9 informed the small group set up by the teacher. This group discussed about the component of Curriculum: Aims, Goals and Objectives. They had to work together for writing a paper and slide then presenting it in front of the class. The paper and the slide could be uploaded on Edmodo (Picture 10) before the due date of presentation. At the end of its task, the teacher gave the feedback on “**comment box**”. The feedback should be realistic and positive to encourage learners

forward, and redirect them if necessary (Yang, 1998: 128). Therefore, this helps the learners make reflection whether the goals they set collaboratively in the beginning had achieved or not.

SOME BARRIERS IN PRACTICE

There are many barriers that hinder on the developing on learner autonomy through Edmodo in terms of (1) Lack of access to the internet contributed to a limited level of participation. Consequently, some students were frustrated by not being able to post the duty on time. Some students could not finish the quiz in the appropriate amount of time due to the lack of internet access; as a result, Edmodo automatically submitted the quiz and all unanswered questions will be marked incorrect. The next barrier is (2) the ignorance of the Edmodo features due to misinterpretation of teacher's justification. For example, in the assignment's feature in which the students are expected to turn in the assignment in provided place in order to get feedback individually, they tend to misplace the assignment on the teacher's posting wall,

CONCLUDING REMARKS

Although the findings have shed light on the effect and the challenges of the use of Edmodo can afford students the opportunity to take responsibility for their own learning and involve them in taking ownership (partial or total) of many learning processes, , much more research is still needed. However, lack of access to internet and the ambiguous task instruction also contributed to a limited level of social interaction in virtual learning environments. Finally, it can be concluded that well-designed tasks and accessibility to internet are essential to maximize the potentials of Edmodo for learner autonomy.

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