

E-portfolio in Social Media for Facilitating Language Learning

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Abstract

This article examines the effect of social network based e-portfolios on improving EFL, and ESL learners. The study also suggest that if social based e-portfolios are integrated into EFL, or ESL curriculum, it might create a learner-centered environment because posting in blogs , websites, Facebook , wikis and making digital portfolios creates feeling of ownership and responsibility for learners who try to collaborate as well as share ideas and learn in a new e-learning environment. It is argued that portfolios lead students to think critically and become active, independent and self-regulated students (Abrami et al, 2008). Furthermore, argues that such features of blended-learning environment which is not similar traditional or conventional classrooms is much more stimulating and encouraging for learners due to that fact that learners may find e-portfolios as part of their daily lives which facilitates long life, meaningful learning.

Keywords: E-portfolio, social networking, autonomy, self-assessment, self-regulation

Introduction

Johnson (1996) defines portfolios as a cumulative collection of work learners have done from beginning of the semester to the end. Portfolio assessment is an ongoing process which does not evaluate progress and performance of the students through an impromptu paper and pencil test or enable instructors evaluating their student's performances within a very short and limited period of time (Tabatabaei & Assefi, 2012). Learners' reflection about their learning and growth is a key in the use of portfolios within a course (Holtzman & Dagavarian , 2007) One of the added benefits of an electronic portfolio is leading learners' creative thinking to reflect on many ways in which their experiences have helped deep learning created by critical analysis of ideas and linking them to and real-world experiences which can result in fostering students' ability to retain information longer so that the knowledge can be used in solving problems within different contexts (Holtzman & Dagavarian , 2007). When portfolios are used for learning process and outcomes, students become more invested in their work and become empowered to take ownership for the presentation of their best projects and assignments (Courts & Mcinerney , 1993).

Integration of technology and education, thinking of innovative teaching methods in recent years stimulated educators to teach in a much more enjoyable, motivating, and practical learning environment. That is why traditional paper-based portfolios has shifted to electronic or digital ones to enhance meaningful learning due to the fact that students can relate these new strategies to their real lives experiences like using Facebook, wikis or blogs. Another benefit of e-portfolios is that it facilitates collaboration, team work, and peer assessment under supervision of teachers, and peer assessment may result in deep, rather than surface, teaching (Williams, 1992).

Autonomy, self-regulation and reflection in E-portfolios

Students who are owner of their portfolio try to manage their own portfolios, and they decide on its objective, content and format; in addition, they consider the intention of presenting it to people connected with them and the instructor, consequently students may make right or wrong decisions while making their portfolios .As a result, portfolio facilitates student-centred educational formats, and students enjoys autonomy in putting together their portfolio (Meeus& Questier & Derks , 2006). The basic idea is that students must learn to reflect on their functioning so that after they have completed

the course they able to continue working on their own development in a conscious manner (Van Looy & Goegebeur & Vrijnsen, 2000). Another added benefit of e-portfolios is facilitating self-regulated learning environment. Self-regulated learning is considered as an active, constructive process whereby learners set goals for their learning and then attempt to “monitor, regulate, and control their cognition, motivation, and behaviour as guided and constrained by their goals and the contextual features in the environment” (Pintrich, 1999, p. 453). In essence, highly self-regulated learners approach the learning tasks in a “mindful and confident manner, set goals provocatively, and develop a plan for attaining those goals” (Alexioua & Fotini, 2010, p. 3050). Students who use e-portfolios draws up a personal learning plan (PLP) containing a series of activities and competences presented in e-portfolio that can be practised ;in addition, Those students using e-portfolios encounter competencies not having been fully mastered, and due to strengths/weaknesses analysis before starting e-portfolio strategy, they acknowledges that the competencies concerned require further practice and that working on these competencies is a worthwhile activity(Meeus & Questier & Derks ,2006).

Learners can see their progress better by comparing their works with their peers and the previous works, for instance, previous writing tasks they posted in their portfolios as a result they learn how to evaluate and assess their work and enjoy self-assessment. Kavaliauskiene (2004) argues that through self-assessment, learners get an opportunity to think of their own progress and find ways to change adapt or improve, so especially the successful students regularly engage in self-assessment in the process of their learning. According to Oscarsson (1989) self- assessment promotes learning; also it gives learners training in evaluation which has beneficial consequences for language learning. Awareness rising for both learner and instructor is great help to facilitate learning. Through self-assessment students may look at course content more carefully, and develop evaluative attitudes toward what and how they learn. Self-assessment is highly motivating with regard to goal-orientation. Learners gain knowledge of learning goals through reflection; Furthermore, the involvement of learners in the assessment process results in the learner's broader perspective within the area of assessment, also students take part in their own evaluation by practicing self-assessment. Finally, self-assessment may have long-term benefits, as one of the main aspects of autonomous language learning.

Social networks and E-Portfolio development

Those students who demonstrate their competence via the e-portfolio can use a wide variety of forms. Integration of technology and education has been one of the newest trends in teaching languages; therefore, traditional paper-based portfolios turn to digital portfolios which are much more users friendly and appealing to students, particularly those who are engrossed and attracted to use social networks in their daily lives. The past few years have seen a rapid increase in the use of social media sites, such as Twitter, face book, u tube, link in (Hockly, 2011). Social Medias can be used in education and teaching to achieve meaning full learning due to the fact that Facebook, web sites, blogs are parts of learner's everyday lives, hence connection of daily experiences with education and learning can foster and progress learning. As a result, Social networking for academic purpose, (SNAP), in various ways including commenting on blog posts, asking and answering questions, and sharing ideas on the threaded discussion forum is really helpful (Kirkwood, 2010). Another outstanding merit of SNAP is that it facilitates peer feedback and peer-assisted learning approaches. “Peer-assisted learning approaches have been receiving increasing attention, and Online peer-assisted learning has become much more possible with the advent of Web 2.0 technologies and services”(Kirkwood, 2010,p.120). Callaghan & Bower (2012) firmly believe that SNSs (social networking sites) in an educational context may bring both opportunities for self-directed learning, as well as supporting all levels of cognitive abilities, peer-based learning and the development of new media literacy. That is why many researchers attempt to find out why today's students flock to these sites. Some, such as Boyd (2008), suggest that it provides teenagers with opportunities to make a desired profile of them .DeSchryver et al. (2008), Shaheen (2008) and Vie (2008) have found that SNSs provide teenagers a ‘sense of worth’. This implies that teenagers can make a personal profile that may not best represent them in real life, but presents them as a unique and ‘cool’ individual online; therefore, others should befriend them. SNSs also offers them a voice that is ‘heard’ by others as well as providing the opportunity to be ‘innovative’, where in traditional cases this may be difficult for a teenager to do (Ellison, 2006). Boyd (2008) states that many teenagers have turned to these tools to simply replace traditional ways of keeping a journal (Leung, 2003).E-portfolios provide facilities of making online journal which can be read by large number of individuals, and students can check peers and teachers feedback online, anytime, anywhere. Learners can choose a specific work from the collection which presents a special outcome, goal or standard. Teng (2012) remarked that some researchers have found that the process

of hyperlinking may lead to higher levels of thinking about learning, or meta-cognition, also the process of reflection helps the learner construct meaning from the work they have selected, and technology creates new models to help with that meaning-making. He believes Social networks involve connecting or "friending", listening or reading posts, responding or commenting and sharing through linking or tagging Social networking can help, even if we don't have the expertise or temperament to set up our own online systems.

Pebble Pad based E-portfolio

According to Welsh (2012) one of the tools which can be used to create an e-portfolio is PebblePad. It is an e-portfolio system which is used most commonly as a personal digital repository in which students store evidence of performance-based competencies, in addition; PebblePad supports reflection, and acted as a personal and communal learning environment in which students, amongst other activities, created evidence of attainment through collaboration with others. He believes that Pebble Pad is an online electronic -portfolio system and was a tool which enabled the students to participate in the peer assessment process in an innovative manner.

"Previously individual students had their own personal e-portfolio in which they could store online evidence of achievement. Each piece of evidence was called an 'asset' and could be shared only with individuals chosen by the student. Today, the system is modified, and it is possible to store individual portfolios as well as subgroup e-portfolios which contain four labelled core task folders, one for each core task except the final one which students prepares partially in subgroups and completes individually under exam conditions. Subgroup responses to core tasks are uploaded into the relevant folder that tutor accesses it. Access to each subgroup folder is controlled by a 'gateway' that is opened two weeks after instructions for the core task are issued and remained" Welsh (2012,p.65).

This provides a sustainable learning environment which is constantly being updated and refreshed; furthermore, skills such as (a) reflection, (b) self-regulation and (c) formative assessment implementation, are supported by engagement in the process Welsh (2012).

Web- based Portfolio

The most important benefit of web-based, or webfolio is solving storage problem associated with traditional paper-based portfolios, additionally instructors can easily comment on learners work by tap into the web folio, also anyone in the world can be granted access to the web folio, and students can have perfect control on what artifacts can be presented and who can see them (Gathercole, Love, Bryde, McKean , 2002).According to Gathercole, Love, Bryde, McKean (2002) web based portfolio lets collaboration and creative thinking ,because learners access Internet and they can collaborate with anyone else in the world, also they van present graphics ,digital videos, sound, text and other presentation media. Moreover, teacher can provide qualitative and quantitative feedbacks on comment log. Participation in peer assessment by using use web-based learning environments can encourage the formation of positive attitudes towards lifelong learning (Nevgi, Virtanen, & Niemi, 2006).Peer assessment, self –regulated learning, self-assessment, creative thinking, and autonomy are other qualities of using web-based e-portfolio.

Facebook based E-portfolio

According to Cerdà (2010) "Facebook is an example of a Web 2.0 social networking site, which has enormous potential in the field of education despite the fact that it was not designed as an environment for constructing and managing learning experiences. It operates as an open platform, unlike other systems organised around courses or formally structured content. In fact, while Facebook is not a learning environment, either in its underlying concept or the design of its tools, it can serve as a very valuable support for the new social orientations now prevailing in approaches to educational processes" (P. 199). He also believes that Facebook a suitable platform for promoting learning, and it lets learners to move towards the lifelong-learning ideal, user-managed open learning and collaborative learning, for instance, it can be of great help for professional refresher training through collaboration among peers because When using a network, users negotiate ideas; furthermore, the core nature of interactions requires students to develop the necessary competencies for group working.

Online discussion is preferred for students who hesitate to participate in class activities and face to face discussions. Other helpful features of Facebook are likening and tagging and sharing possibilities. For instance, the best writing can be shared by the instructor as a standard model for other learners in the class. An added benefit is that students can write on their wall rather than updating e-portfolios".

Wiki and Weblog based E-portfolio

A website allows users to add content, as on an Internet forum, but also allows anyone to edit the content. In other words, instead of being a page built only by one person or by a team, it's open to the public. Anyone can edit any page of a Wiki. All they have to do is sign in, so this is a good opportunity for the teacher to edit students works. Wikis have greatly enhanced many of the standard methods for teaching that we had already been implementing, including collaboration. Wikis are more effective when learners can be more autonomous. Autonomy gives students both freedom and, feeling of ownership and responsibility for their own learning and the members of their wiki group as well as changing the traditional role of students and teacher (Albert and Kussmaul, 2008).

A weblog is a web application which contains periodic posts on a common webpage, and these posts are often but not necessarily in reverse chronological order." Weblogs or blogs, may be defined as a kind of spontaneous online journal, are an extremely popular communication tool on the internet a sort of hybrid diary, a descendant of the personal homepage, a dynamic, or a personal diary of events and thoughts (Bhattacharya & Chauhan, 2012). The benefits of blogs for language learning activities has been well attested (Ward 2004). Blogs have also been found to improve communication skills (Sauer, Bialek, Efimova, Schwartlander, Pless, and Neuhaus 2005). Blogging can help students to take decisions on their own Campbell (2005). Traditional classroom tools like diaries and journals which help autonomy (Dam 1995; Warschauer, Turbee, and Roberts 1996; Oxbrow, 2000) could be effectively combined within the space of a blog (Bhattacharya & Chauhan, 2012). According to Simsek, (2010), weblogs have shown a great effect on learning environment, and have supported learners' self-reflection and self-evaluation of their learning. Particularly, weblogs can also be employed for developing and reforming web-based portfolios in education. Yang (2008) distinguishes weblog from a typical web-based portfolio; he calls the weblog-based portfolio a "blog folio" (p180). "In such a weblog-based e-portfolio context, learners are involved in posting their assignment to the blog and the instructor can provide them with fast online feedback as well as comments. Posting to a weblog would encourage the learners to produce better writing and be more interested in accuracy due to the fact that the whole world can be the readers of their written pieces"(Motallebzadeh & Babaee, 2010).

There are some reasons why the weblog technology has integrated with education. Firstly, weblogs are considered to be a means of "significantly reducing the technical barriers to effective web publishing" (Yang, 2008, p. 179). Another chief reason is the ease of using the technology. In comparison with the production of personal websites, a weblog does not need specific software (Montero-Flota & Pérez-Sabaterb, 2010). Therefore, ease of posting writing assignment can cause more confidence, enthusiasm and interest among learners. Furthermore, blogging enables the creation of social networks and learning communities where users can easily interact and communicate their ideas and thoughts (Motallebzadeh & Babaee, 2010).

The use of media requires a great deal of time and organization because learners have to select the media, prepare them, use them and then tidy up afterwards; furthermore, processing multimedia materials requires many more skills than processing text does. This is therefore a good opportunity to promote the student's media competence (Kommer & Meeus, 2001), but the course must take this into account when allocating study time due to the fact that many students underestimate the time investment which is required when using media (Meeus *et al.*, 2004b). Wetzel and Strudler (2005, 2006) also discovered that some of the problems related to using e-portfolios were programme performance, access to and reliability of the technology, and the amount of time and effort expended. Another challenge in using e-portfolios is that the requirement for reflection has to be approached with great care because there is something potentially counterproductive about asking students to reflect on the weak points in their functioning for the purposes of later evaluating them on this aspect. The risk of insincere reflections in this situation is very high. One should only ask for student reflections if the portfolio system can guarantee their authenticity. Where this is not the case one will have to be content with a description or contextualization of the activities by the student without any very penetrating analysis of the quality of their execution (Meeus, Questier & Derks, 2006). Teachers' supervision and feedbacks can be helpful, also It is the responsibility of the course teachers to use an evaluation system which prevents students to be attracted to packaging of e-portfolio because Holtzman & Dagavarian (2007) argued that Students who possess a high level of media competence may gain an unfair advantage from an attractive packaging.

Conclusion

Electronic portfolio can facilitate long-life, meaningful learning; In other words, the social media based digital portfolios can positively affect EFL or ESL learners' performance. Besides, students developed more self-monitoring and self-regulation and self –assessment by producing more reflective works. In this recent mode of instruction, the educator can keep in touch with learners and provide editing, fast online feedback as a guide and stimulator, and facilitator rather than providing the correct answers. Taking participants' reflection into consideration, the teacher can promote learners' responsibility and feeling of ownership toward their portfolio .Consequently, it would support students to use e-portfolio as a tool in order to promote their learning process. Lopez-Fernandez & Rodriguez-Illera (2009) and Yang & XU (2008) claimed that portfolios in any form potentially enhance learners' self-assessment and autonomy; furthermore, shortage of interaction has been claimed as a major downside in internet-based L2 classroom activities, but e-portfolios provide a learner-centred environment in which feedback from the instructor and peers can develop a more interactive context in web-enhanced language learning modes.

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