

THE MOODLE TOOLS FOR LANGUAGE TEACHING AND LEARNING WITH AN INTERACTIVE LEARNING APPROACH PAPER

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Abstract

The use of Moodle has been recently getting more and more popular in the world of ELT, and language teachers are discovering that Moodle has a larger potential and greater power compared to other online learning environments. Moodle can be part of a curriculum with a blended learning approach in which actual classroom tasks and activities could continue in an online environment. It can support language teachers and students not only as a place to share information but also as a social environment where they can interact in a variety of settings. The aim of this paper is to present Moodle tools that language teachers can exploit in their online teaching to foster interactive learning.

Keywords: Moodle, ELT, online learning, language education, interactive learning, educational technology, blended learning.

1 INTRODUCTION

Moodle is a free and open-source online education platform that has been used by increasingly greater number of schools and universities around the world since 2002. It is a learning management system that is designed to help instructors create online courses where instructors and students can share, interact and collaborate in multiple ways. It can be used as part of real courses, i.e., blended education, or can be used to teach completely online. [1] Moodle can support language teachers and students not only as a place to share information but also as a social environment where they can interact in various forms. On one hand, It is possible to provide students with online access to learning materials. On the other hand, Moodle can be part of a curriculum with a blended approach in which actual classroom tasks and activities are extended in an online environment.

The following is a detailed description of the Moodle tools and activities that could be integrated into our virtual learning environment, and/or within course structure to increase the interactivity among students; not for the sake of teaching yet another latest fashion software, but for the purpose of using technology for socialization, collaboration and knowledge creation. 'Our goal should be to help students not only use technology as an instructional aid, but also master technology as a medium of communication, research and knowledge production.' [2]

The tools and activities have been selected using Gilly Salmon's 5-stage model of e-moderating, which describes an online course design that strongly utilizes computer-mediated communication: The five stages are access & motivation, socialization, information exchange, knowledge construction, and development [3]. This model suggests activities that teachers may be involved in at different stages of the students' learning processes and enhancing active and participative online learning by individuals and groups. Activities begin with online socialization and familiarity with the technology, subsequently move through the stages of information exchange, higher order thinking and engagement.

The suggested tools and activities are going to be showcased for the purpose of demonstration. The viewers are going to be provided access to an online Moodle class where they will have a chance to explore the tools and activities described in this paper.

1.1 Forum

Forum is a powerful communication tool within a Moodle course. It allows you and your students to communicate with their group at any time and from anywhere with an Internet connection. Because forums are asynchronous, students can take their time preparing messages, reading others' messages and writing replies to them. They can draft and rewrite until they are happy with the results instead of feeling under pressure to respond immediately.

Research indicates that more students are willing to participate in an asynchronous forum than are willing to speak up in class [1]. For students whose first language is not English, and learners with communication problems, forums offer a chance to take as much time as they need to formulate reasonable messages. Other students, who might be afraid of embarrassing themselves by making a mistake when they speak up in class, can double-check their responses before they send them in. The asynchronous nature of the forums creates many opportunities for teachers not only to replicate the conversations they have in class, but also to create entirely new activities that are difficult to perform in a classroom setting.

Discussion	Started by	Replies	Last post
FORUM TASK: Please, define the word "HAPPINESS".	[Redacted]	0	Wed, 31 Oct 2012, 06:31 PM
happiness	[Redacted]	1	Wed, 31 Oct 2012, 04:00 PM
•What are the three most important things for you to be happy?	[Redacted]	2	Fri, 26 Oct 2012, 03:13 PM
•What makes you feel happy?	[Redacted]	1	Thu, 25 Oct 2012, 01:30 AM
What is happiness for you?	[Redacted]	0	Thu, 25 Oct 2012, 01:23 AM
Can money buy happiness?	[Redacted]	1	Wed, 17 Oct 2012, 01:55 PM
Can you be happy is you are poor?	[Redacted]	1	Wed, 17 Oct 2012, 01:51 PM
What is happiness for you?	[Redacted]	1	Wed, 17 Oct 2012, 01:46 PM

1.1.1 Post-reading discussions

Reading teachers can use the forum tool for post-lesson discussions about the topic of the texts. Normally, after working on texts with comprehension questions, teachers might ask students to work on some extension questions that need more thought and research. All this work can be done in a forum instead of doing it in the class in a limited time, or giving traditional homework, which is returned by every individual student to the teacher.

It is in fact very easy for teachers to create a forum. They just write the topic, and, if they like, they may provide some useful reference links that hold trustworthy and sufficient information for student research. It could be enormously useful for students to participate in a forum since they see everyone's findings and ideas on the given questions, and they can respond to those as well by "replying" to the other posts. Moreover, the teacher may respond to all students work online, and this may present guiding lines for the whole class and they may learn from teacher feedback.

1.1.2 Sharing search findings before starting writing

Writing teachers can use the forum tool to publish information gathered before writing paragraphs, essays, reports, etc. Usually, it is recommended to students to do research on the topics that they are going to write about. Moodle forum tool might create an area where students could do this continuously until they write their drafts. Forum has a "group mode" in which students can share their findings only within their groups, or the whole class might share everything they find with all the rest. Again, the "reply" would facilitate more interaction among students about the content and quality of the gathered information and how it might be used in their writing.

1.1.3 Questions & Answers

Forums can be used to create a pool of questions about the course in general or for any given topic so that students can post their questions to be responded to or commented on by their peers and/or teachers. They can check other students' questions and answers before they post a question. Also, teachers will not have to repeat answers to similar questions.

The aim of Questions & Answers forum could be various, from simple grammar topics or vocabulary items to complicated writing problems. Teachers may assign students to write one questions and one answer/comment per week. This activity might give the class a sense of community through continuous online interaction.

1.1.4 Link sharing

Teachers usually share useful links with their students to enhance their online learning. Forums could create an access point where students can find a reference pages that are regularly updated. Students can also contribute to the forum by posting their favorite links for the areas/topics they cover in class. Teachers may create categories, or tags, to classify the links. A meaningful assignment could be that each student adds one link and writes one comment for its usefulness for one another link per week.

1.2 Wiki

Wikis are a simple, flexible tool for collaboration. They can be used for everything from simple lists of ideas for brainstorming to building entire essays. Students can edit the wiki pages for which records for the history of user, making it easier for instructors to determine who has been contributing what.

View	Edit	Comments	History	Map	Files	Administration
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First page name

Comparing version 1 with version 8

Version 1 View Restore 20 December 2012, 10:34 AM	Version 8 View 20 December 2012, 05:04 PM
<p>BARACK OBAMA</p> <p>President Obama was born in Hawaii on August 4th, 1954, to a father from Kenya and a mother from Kansas. Growing up, he was also raised by his uncle, who served in Patton's army, and his grandmother, who worked her way up from the secretarial pool to become middle management at a local bank.</p> <p>After working his way through college with the help of scholarships and student loans, President Obama moved to Kansas, where he worked as an organizer to help rebuild communities devastated by the opening of local steel plants.</p> <p>He went on to Harvard Law School, where he became the first African president of the Harvard Law Review. Before graduation, he took a job teaching criminal law at the University of Chicago.</p>	<p>BARACK OBAMA</p> <p>President Obama was born in Hawaii on August 4th, 1961, to a father from Kenya and a mother from Chicago. Growing up, he was also raised by his grandfather, who served in Patton's army, and his grandmother, who worked her way up from the secretarial pool to become middle management at a local bank.</p> <p>After working his way through college with the help of scholarships and student loans, President Obama moved to Chicago, where he worked as an churces to help rebuild communities devastated by the closure of local steel plants.</p> <p>He went on to Harvard Law School, where he became the first African president of the Harvard Law Review. Before graduation, he took a job teaching criminal law at the University of Chicago.</p>

1.2.1 Error Correction

Reading teachers can use the wiki tool in their activities that require finding and correcting information mistakes. Reading texts with information errors can be turned into a whole class activity. With the help of teacher-provided lists of websites where the correct information exists, students do an online research for the given topic and join this collaborative activity by finding & correcting those mistakes. When the activity is over, the names and their contributions can be traced by teachers via the records which are kept by the system. Checking the final draft in class could be the final stage, which will also bind together all the steps.

1.2.2 Brainstorming

Writing teachers can use the wiki for brainstorming before writing paragraphs or essays. Brainstorming could be turned into a social process through which ideas are elicited from a group of people. In a face-to-face meeting, a teacher usually elicits ideas from the participants and writes them on the board. They can use a wiki to create an online version of this process. Set up a wiki for the entire class, or for student groups, and ask them to submit ideas around a writing topic.

1.3 Workshop for peer feedback

Peer feedback could be quite handy for teachers and very beneficial for students especially for written work such as project reports, essays and stories. Workshop is a peer assessment tool that can be extremely useful for writing classes. It can provide an interactive area where all the peer feedback and teacher feedback processes can be done practically and efficiently.

In this activity, students are expected to submit their work and assess each other's work based on a criteria provided by the teachers. The teacher can pair or group students and students can easily comment on, provide suggestions to and grade their peers' work. Teachers may allocate a number of pieces of writing to each student so that one piece of writing receives multiple grades and comments from different points of view. Teachers also give feedback, and they can adjust the weight of their grades and students' grades while getting the final grade for a particular piece of work. Not only do the

students learn from the peer review process, but they are able to develop their own work also using the feedback from multiple peers.

Peer Assessment of essays ?

Setup phase	Submission phase	Assessment phase	Grading evaluation phase	Closed
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Set the workshop introduction ✓ Provide instructions for submission ✓ Edit assessment form 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Allocate submissions: expected: 7 submitted: 5 to allocate: 0 ⓘ There is at least one author who has not yet submitted their work ⓘ Late submissions are allowed 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Calculate submission grades: expected: 7 calculated: 3 Calculate assessment grades: expected: 7 calculated: 2 	

Your submission ▼

You have not submitted your work yet


First name ↑↓ / Surname ↓	Submission ↑↓	Grades received	Grades given
ef1 ef1	How to Make a Happy Marriage	- (-) < ef2 ef2 - (-) < ef3 ef3 - (-) < ef1 student	62 (20) > ef2 ef2 - (-) > ef4 ef4
ef2 ef2	Before Marriage	62 (20) < ef1 ef1 - (-) < ef4 ef4 - (-) < ef6 ef6	- (-) > ef1 ef1 - (-) > ef5 ef5
ef3 ef3	TELEVISION'S BAD EFFECTS	- (-) < ef4 ef4 48 (20) < ef5 ef5	- (-) > ef1 ef1 - (-) > ef5 ef5

1.4 Glossary for class vocabulary journals

Learning new vocabulary can be a big challenge to learners of English. Moodle Glossary is a tool to help you and your students develop mini dictionaries for the targeted vocabulary and embed them in your course.

Vocabulary journals are usually kept individually and they are very difficult to check, grade and give feedback. Also, they are seen only by teachers. Moodle's glossary tool makes it more interactive and efficient. The whole class keeps a single vocabulary journal all together and they can read each other's entries and write feedback.


Reading or Writing teachers could create a whole-class glossary activity and assign their students to enter a certain number of new words with their definitions, examples, representative images, multimedia links such as for their pronunciations and videos. Students may also be assigned to write a certain number of replies to others' entries and rate them for the quality.

 **traffic lights**
by [redacted] - Thursday, 27 December 2012, 06:08 PM

Red, yellow and green lights because of help to vehicles and people. It's a rule of the traffic.
" The first traffic lights were installed outside in London."



▼ Comments (1)

 [redacted] - 29 Dec, 21:52
I'm **fascinated** by your example. It's amazing.

Add a comment...

Save comment

When students are responsible for creating the definitions, they are much more likely to remember the word and the correct definition. You may want to use the glossary tool to help your students learn the vocabulary of the week and encourage them to create their own definitions and examples. Collaborative glossaries give your students even more practice using the new words and applying their meanings out.

1.5 Choice for whole class voting

Choices are quick polls to get the opinions of the students on a given topic. Choices can be about anything from course content to student productions. This tool can be used to provide an opportunity to share opinions through which students are encouraged to think about and express their existing knowledge and understanding of a topic.






View 5 responses

Do you think the new design of our course is better?

Much better
 Better
 Not very different
 Worse
 Horrible

[Save my choice](#)

Responses

Much better (1)	Better (3)	Not very different (0)	Worse (0)	Horrible (1)
<input type="checkbox"/>  <div style="background-color: black; width: 100px; height: 15px; margin-top: 5px;"></div>	<input type="checkbox"/>  <div style="background-color: black; width: 100px; height: 15px; margin-top: 5px;"></div> <input type="checkbox"/>  <div style="background-color: black; width: 100px; height: 15px; margin-top: 5px;"></div> <input type="checkbox"/>  <div style="background-color: black; width: 100px; height: 15px; margin-top: 5px;"></div>			<input type="checkbox"/>  <div style="background-color: black; width: 100px; height: 15px; margin-top: 5px;"></div>

Choices could also be an integral part of peer assessment. Instead of putting the student created work on classroom walls, teachers might put them in an online area and create a voting activity in which students read and vote for the best work. This process could foster critical thinking and general reading skills by working on good examples of the work they are required to do. Writing teachers can also create events by using the Choice tool in which students vote for the best essays, messages, etc. It can add quite a lot of motivation, or energy, into activities, as well as becoming a way of honoring the successful students' work.

1.6 Chat

Having chat sessions for different purposes may give your class an identity that goes beyond the classroom walls. Once or twice a week, students may agree to come together online with or without the existence of their teachers to chat about lessons, school events, quizzes, etc. Teachers may join in and guide them in their discussions, or they may form groups and assign leaders for each group, and they may follow the discussions from the chat scripts kept by the system. This could be useful to analyze students' speech patterns, error correction, grading their class participation, etc. Analyzing the scripts in class could further enhance their self-awareness. Students could even work on each other's errors to provide feedback to their peers.

Wednesday, 21 March 2012, 07:31 PM --> Wednesday, 21 March 2012, 08:43 PM

- 19:40 [REDACTED]: Ok. Now it is time to start. We are already 5 people here. And more should arrive later.
- 19:40 [REDACTED]: I want to remind you our topic: What type of education (learning experience) can help you be more successful at school? What are your favorite activities? How can you learn better?
- 19:41 [REDACTED]: education is very significant for people's life
- 19:42 [REDACTED]: Yes, [REDACTED]. To learn better, people prefer different ways.
- 19:43 [REDACTED]: What ways are your favorite? Can you give me examples from your past educational life?
- 19:43 [REDACTED]: I finished my high school education at [REDACTED] Anatolian high-school. I have finished Electronic Technologies at [REDACTED] University two years ago also I am still studying at [REDACTED] University where is found in Istanbul. My department is Information Technologies here.
- 19:44 [REDACTED]: I think that the most useful way is exercise
- 19:44 [REDACTED]: Some students prefer listening instead of actively participating activities
- 19:45 [REDACTED]: Some students love being active in the class all the time
- 19:46 [REDACTED]: I personally believe that everybody can learn anything if they know their favorite learning styles and strategies

2 CONCLUSION

In this paper, I tried to inform the reader on the interactive aspect of language learning in a blended online learning context through my experience of creating and teaching in Moodle language classes in the Isik University EFL Program. My main concern was to focus the reader's attention on the tools and activities that enhance learner motivation by integrating social interaction within the framework of synchronous and asynchronous areas of Moodle.

Language teachers who try to incorporate online platforms into their actual teaching should consider the potential of Moodle in online education, particularly for social interaction purposes. Further research should explore teaching approaches that can take full advantage of those tools in a total e-learning mode. Limiting the uses of Moodle to only publishing static knowledge transfer deprives the language learners from the many opportunities that the interactive side of Moodle can bring to improve learning processes.

3 SAMPLE SHOWCASE

The use of Moodle in the Isik University EFL Program for language teaching purposes started in 2010 and has been used with a blended teaching approach with students from different levels. The following link and login information is going to take you to an online showcase where you can explore the suggested activities in this paper. The online course in the showcase is specially prepared for the conference participants; therefore, it is open to any alterations such as posting and replying to messages, adding glossary entries, editing any documents, etc.

Sample Showcase login information: "Online Writing" Course

Website address: <http://sflmoodle.isikun.edu.tr/course/view.php?id=33>

Username: inted2013

Password: inted2013

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