

Edmodo as an Assessment Tool in the Foreign Language Learning Process

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Submitted: 2025-08-28 · Accepted: 2025-11-28 · Published: 2025-12-28

DOI: 10.26417/f8wqqp18

Abstract

Due to the rapid developments in educational technology, today's professors are exploring innovative techniques in order to promote the involvement of students in the learning process in general and in the foreign language learning process in particular. This is because today's students are seen as digital natives, and motivating them in the learning process is very difficult if the modern technology they are familiar with is not utilized effectively in the classroom. When it comes to the assessment aspect of this process, the situation may worsen, as most students feel reluctant due to anxiety in general and foreign language anxiety in particular. This study presents an innovative way of assessing students' skills gained during the foreign language learning process by introducing Edmodo, which is an educational social network that provides a secure learning platform for students and educators. This study is descriptive, based on the analyses, surveys, and opinions of different researchers who have implemented this platform in their teaching process. The main objective is to introduce the implementation of various assessment applications through Edmodo.

Keywords: assessment, Edmodo, Learning management system, foreign language learning process, foreign language anxiety, test anxiety

Introduction

Nowadays, due to recent developments in information and communication technologies, professors are trying more and more to create a contemporary learning environment, modernizing current teaching techniques, materials, new methods and tools. Today's students, labelled as "digital natives", need more than what traditional classrooms can give. Motivating and engaging today's students in the learning process is very difficult if the learning environment does not "call" them.

For these reasons, technological devices have become essential and crucial for these students, facilitating access to information anywhere and anytime.

In the foreign language learning process, assessment is regarded as an essential component, and many studies have shown that language learners confront much more assessment activity than other subject learners. Many students have reported the existence of foreign language anxiety. It seems quite natural for them to be anxious, as they are assessed during almost the whole process.

That is why a great amount of attention has been paid to foreign language anxiety and language test anxiety, which have been reported by many researchers. For example, Horwitz et al. (1986) stated that language anxiety is mostly grounded in the skills of speaking and listening. They also stated that language anxiety appears when an individual is evaluated in an academic and social context. Therefore, they have identified three related performance anxieties: communication apprehension, test anxiety and fear of negative evaluation.

To put it in other words, an individual experiencing communication apprehension finds it difficult to speak in a group or in public, or even to listen to a spoken message. Communication apprehension can also be caused by the necessity to produce language structures in a language which is not yet fully mastered. The inability to express themselves in a desired manner or to understand others can lead to frustration and can make otherwise talkative people silent in a foreign language class (Horwitz et al. 1986).

Performance evaluation is an ongoing feature of most foreign language classes, so tests are a common measurement of progress (Horwitz et al. 1986).

Many researchers have found that there are differences in the anxiety produced by different testing forms.

Among the most anxiety-provoking tests are those involving translation, while dictations and true-false forms of tests are the least anxiety-provoking (as cited in Piechurska-Kuciel, 2008).

The third element of anxiety that also occurs in the foreign language process is the fear of negative evaluation. According to Horwitz et. al. (1986), there is a moderate correlation between the fear of negative evaluation and language anxiety. Students are afraid of making mistakes, especially in pronunciation and oral communication, because they fear negative evaluation from their peers or professors. If the students are anxious, they will try to avoid any form of communication, or reduce it to a minimum, in order to avoid negative evaluations.

For these reasons, motivating students has become more difficult and challenging. That is why researchers and professors are constantly searching for innovative techniques to promote today's students' involvement in learning activities and, in particular, in the foreign language learning process.

For example, Lee and Lee (2015) examine the effects of audio-visual aids on anxiety, retention in reading, and comprehension test scores in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classrooms. During their study, reading and listening tests, general and test anxiety, and retention were measured in English-major college students in an experimental group with audio-visual aids ($n = 83$) and a control group without audio-visual aids ($n = 94$) with similar general English proficiency. As a result, lower reading test anxiety, unchanged reading comprehension scores, and better reading short-term and long-term retention after four weeks were evident in the audiovisual group relative to the control group. In addition, lower listening test anxiety, higher listening comprehension scores, and unchanged short-term and long-term retention were found in the audiovisual group relative to the control group after the intervention. They conclude that employing audio-visual aids can help students reduce reading and listening test anxiety.

Therefore, foreign language professors should know how to cope with anxiety problems in the classroom, especially during the testing of their students, since anxiety has the potential to decrease students' motivation, integration, and involvement in learning.

Therefore, researchers recommend that foreign language professors create a more innovative, helpful, and supportive atmosphere in their classes in order to decrease students' anxiety levels and encourage their involvement in the learning process. As is clear from many studies conducted in different contexts on foreign language anxiety in general and test anxiety in particular, reducing students' anxiety in the foreign language learning process is crucial for success.

This study suggests an alternative way of evaluating students' different language skills by encouraging the use of modern technology with which almost all students are familiar.

This evaluation tool is embedded in a learning management system (LMS) called EDMODO, which is a user-friendly and popular platform.

Learning Management System

Learning Management Systems (LMS), also called Virtual Learning Environments (VLE) or Course Management Systems (CMS), are mainly used in e-learning environments to control and arrange learning and teaching activities. They are employed by professors and students as well for posting content, sharing materials and presentations, assigning students, performing assessments, creating quizzes, conducting polls, etc.

They provide learners with both synchronous communication facilities like chat rooms, whiteboards, and video conferencing, and asynchronous communication facilities like quizzes, polls, surveys, forums, etc.

Irene Govender and Desmond W. Govender, in their study “An Exploratory Study: The effectiveness of a Learning Management System (LMS) in the delivery of a face-to-face programming course”, stated that using an LMS to manage administrative and organizational matters and to make more course resources available is effective and useful in large classes; the discussion forums brought the greatest satisfaction among students; and the increased communication, via the forums, helped lecturers respond to problem areas quickly and be more sensitive to student learning needs.

Dalton (2009) suggests to professors of English that young people feel connected to people and global knowledge. In contrast, in the classroom setting, they may feel disconnected and isolated because it seems to them that school is irrelevant to their lives.

He further addresses these implications. Firstly, professors might try to use learning technologies in the classroom whenever they can so that they make the learning experience relevant to their students. Secondly, professors might take on the role of trainer instead of engineer. Finally, they might find out which social networking sites their students are using the most. Thus, he suggests that LMSs can create an informal and relaxing atmosphere by making the learning process effective.

Edmodo - The Facebook for Education

Recently the use of Information Communication Technologie (ICT) has spread in education all over the world. Specifically, in language education, the use of computer assisted language learning (CALL) has been broadly acknowledged as a positive contribution. Many language professors adopt and use various application software into their classrooms so they can deliver effective lessons and develop language skills.

Many studies have shown that social network sites (SNS) like Facebook and Twitter have been emphasized as sites for interactive language learning. However, these sites are not education-oriented.

In contrast, Edmodo is an education-oriented SNS developed in the United States in 2008. Many studies that have focused on the use of Edmodo in education have shown that it is a very powerful online learning tool and have called it “Facebook for Education” (Enriquez, 2014, p.1).

Edmodo is a highly user-friendly application for educational purposes, and its access is limited to students and professors who are registered. This site is supported in various languages, so professors and students can select a preferred language to manage their accounts.

Every professor can create a different number of courses, and for every course can invite students to join it by giving them the course code created automatically by the platform.

Edmodo also allows to attach a variety of files types like Word doc, PPT, Excel, JPEG, MP3 etc. The users can share web sites links, embed flash objects like Google forms, You Tube videos, games, etc. Sharing different types of games (creating by other softwares) can help to learn and improve new vocabulary items and grammar rules. When the game is then uploaded students receive notifications and are required to complete it within the given amount of time.

Video sharing is also useful for the foreign language learning process and helps train listening skills.

Each file is supported by useful links to assignments or notes, such as online dictionaries, forums, etc.

This platform enables professors to create quizzes, tests, assignments, and assessments, analyse the results, and estimate whether the learning goals have been accomplished. The analysis allows tutors to make appropriate changes to the learning program, types of activities, etc.

Evidently, Edmodo makes the learning environment more flexible and adaptive to students' needs.

In fact, incorporating technology into teaching, especially platforms like Edmodo, is not a popular option in Albania, particularly in our Faculty, due to several issues such as a lack of infrastructure or teachers' preferences for an old-fashioned way of teaching.

My study stems from the curiosity of discovering views and concerns regarding conventional teaching which consequently triggered an interest in exploring an intervention scheme for foreign language learning showing potenciales aspects of implementing Edmodo and I prefer to focus shortly in two aspects that I thought are important for the foreign language learning process:

1. Using Edmodo as a channel to conduct assessments (supporting foreign language learners with anxiety problems), and 2. Using Edmodo to develop language learning autonomy.

Edmodo as a Channel for Assessments

Many studies have shown mismatched teaching and learning styles, whereby the focus of conventional teaching is to prepare students for examinations, while students of the digital age need different learning strategies in order to retain information longer.

In her study "Rethinking Conventional Teaching in Language Learning and Proposing Edmodo as Intervention: a Qualitative Analysis" Farha Alia Mokhtar ¹ focuses on perceptions of future teachers selecting as participants of the study pertaining to conventional teaching and potenciales of implementing Edmodo to a foreign language classroom.

She explains that regarding the new ways for assessments using Edmodo the participants think that "Quizzes created and shared in Edmodo make learning interactive. The professor gave us the fill-in-the-blank task and such form of assessment gives an exiting new experience while and the end of the task they'll also know about thier overall performance ... Quizzes added new experince to the learning curve and the "poll" feature is also noteworthy because you cen get quick opinions just by voting".

In the introduction to my study, I mentioned three forms of foreign language anxiety: the problem of communication apprehension, which is caused when a student has difficulty speaking in a group or in public, or even listening to a spoken message; fear of negative evaluation; and test anxiety. By implementing Edmodo in the learning process and using it as a tool for assessment, these problems are avoided. Different studies based on interviews and surveys have reported some students' reflections on this new tool, for example: "before I answer the questions professor posted on Edmodo, I read others' replies to see how they write their responses, how they use grammar items and finally I try to apply what I've read in my reply. In a way, I am learning grammar and vocabularies by looking at other comments...I think the fact that everyone will be able to see my answer/response make me more cautious and give extra attention to it, for example I don't want to commit grammar mistakes so it makes me more careful of my replies. You will want to write the best that you can because of the competitive situation. My vocabulary can also be improved as I get to read other comments and learn new words from them. I can learn from peers at the same time."²

In his article "Integrating Edmodo into Foreign Language Classes as an Assessment Tool", Emrah Ekmekci³ has reported some results from semi-structured interviews conducted by him with 62 students attending English preparatory classes at a state university in Turkey who participated in various assessment activities through Edmodo during the 2014-2015 academic year.

In response to the question "Which assessment type would you prefer if you had a chance? Pen and paper quizzes or online quizzes?", a great number of students (n: 53) reported that they would prefer online quizzes to pen and paper quizzes. Only 9 students stated that they would prefer pen and paper quizzes if they had a chance.

In response to this question, students also stated that they felt less test anxiety in online quizzes compared with pen and paper ones. Some students' comments are as follows:

S1: "I prefer online quizzes, because I feel more relaxed and secure during online quizzes".

S2: "Normally I get excited in all exams. However, I really feel comfortable in online quizzes".

S3: "I don't like pen and paper quizzes. I feel nervous and I forget everything, but I believe that online quizzes help me reduce my test anxiety".

Implementing Edmodo to Develop Language Learning Autonomy

Phil Benson, in his book "Teaching and Researching: Autonomy in language learning", writes that as the theory and practice of language teaching enters a new century, the importance of helping students become more autonomous in their learning has become one of its more prominent themes.

He also adds that when learners succeed in developing autonomy, they not only become better language learners but they also develop into more responsible and critical members of the communities in which they live. Autonomy can be broadly defined as the capacity to take control over one's own learning; but we have to note that autonomy is not a method of learning, but an attribute of the learner's approach to the learning process. As a teacher and researcher who has been involved with the promotion of the idea of autonomy for a number of years, he takes the position that autonomy is a legitimate and desirable goal of language education. He states that autonomous learning is more effective than non-autonomous learning. In other words, the development of autonomy implies better language learning.

On Edmodo, the students have to answer questions given by the professor or they will not be given marks. In this way, students are more responsible for their own learning process.

By using Edmodo, the learning process becomes more attractive to students because it is student-centered while teachers only facilitate, observe and assess.

Edmodo provides a plausible solution by enhancing learners' learning curve and offering diverse options in assigning tasks, always maintaining the focus and aims of the lessons through content analysis, grammar and vocabulary improvement, and, most importantly, students' self-efficacy.

One of the features of Edmodo is the use of 'backpack/library' that allows extended storage on the site (i.e., documents, files, images and others). Besides storage, there are some other applications such as quizzes, polls, assessments and quick buttons that are useful in enhancing students' learning experience. Students can find information or links and keep them in the 'backpack', and when it is time to submit or when they are done with the assessment/task, they can post the link or whatever they have found as a reference. They can store their assignments in the "backpack" as backup files to consult them further individually.

Edmodo as an intervention has the potential to produce promising results on students' self-efficacy.

Limitations and Relevant Issues

Edmodo has been designed for mobile devices and PCs. Its main objective is to provide remote access to the discussion section, materials, and assignments. But its effectiveness is significantly decreased if students are unable to download this platform to their mobile devices. The insufficient memory of smartphones makes it impossible to download Edmodo and join the learning process, so students have difficulty passing tests successfully due to limited access to learning materials.

Another limitation is associated with the battery charge of the device on which Edmodo is downloaded. Low battery voltage may prevent a student from passing the quiz or doing the assignment on time.

Finally, the use of Edmodo requires the users to have the Internet connection, otherwise they cannot access the information, participate in the discussion. So it limits the working process, making it less convenient than face to face interaction. To ensure adequate systematic learning, the schools and universities, where Edmodo is used, are expected to provide every student and professor with the updated PCs, tablets or smartphones. Moreover, it is necessary to create the areas with uninterrupted Internet connection so to enable every student to join the educational process and the learning materials quickly. It's very important that equality in learning, access to information, and participation in quizzes or discussions will be guaranteed.

Conclusions

It is necessary to say that LMSs have recently become one of the most progressive tools for the foreign language learning process. Tools like Edmodo can be used both as a primary and as a supportive tool for professors. It enables them to share useful learning materials with students and monitor their interest and progress in acquiring the four skills, which are reading, writing, listening, and speaking. The use of Edmodo increases the effectiveness of the learning process.

Different studies introduce Edmodo as an alternative assessment tool to traditional pen-and-paper assessment techniques. Being a free-of-charge learning platform, Edmodo can provide all professors in general and foreign language professors in particular with various assessment facilities. Edmodo can be used as an effective assessment technique as well as a learning platform through which professors can share course materials, notes, links, and documents.

Some studies conducted with pre-service professors have suggested that the Edmodo application should be carried out with international participation. Thus, it is possible to create virtual classrooms with the international participation of professors and students who are teaching and studying in the same departments and at the same grade level in different countries, so that professors and students

can see and recognise different experiences from the educational systems of these countries.

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