ENGLISH FOR MEDICAL PURPOSES WITH EDMODO (EDMODO-EMP) – STUDENTS’ FEEDBACK ON A TWO-YEAR PROJECT

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Abstract: Diagnostic feedback was used for teaching/learning evaluation with a group of Medical English students who were exposed to a blended learning approach for four semesters. Edmodo (edmodo.com) served as the platform for course delivery in order to offer them customized, higher quality learning experiences. The paper will present several skills-integrated activities carried out in Edmodo, results obtained but also challenges in designing authentic assignments while meeting the students’ particular needs and keeping them genuinely involved. If students’ grades reflected a superior learning experience, in order to evaluate their attitudes and satisfaction with Edmodo-EMP, which are equally important elements for providing quality language services, a ten-item questionnaire was designed and administered as part of their final assignment. Students reflected on how much and what they felt they had learnt, if the materials raised up to their expectations, and if they perceived Edmodo-based learning as a positive, important experience for their progress.

Key words: Edmodo, Medical English, student satisfaction

Edmodo – a simple and safe social media Learning Management System (LMS)

Edmodo (edmodo.com) is a simple and safe educational platform with widely acknowledged strengths [1, 3, 6, 7] in complementing traditional learning successfully by supporting student engagement through communication, cooperation, and presentation of information. It has over 50 million users and has been used in successive editions of the online personal development international courses conducted by TESOL. EVO.

Designed on the pattern of other social communication media sites such as Facebook and Twitter, Edmodo has more educational features than these, but since it is a free platform, it is simpler than paid LMS versions such as Blackboard and Quia. Edmodo e-learning system allows teachers to create groups and subgroups for differentiated instruction and facilitates informal communication outside the classroom as students can connect with the group from anywhere, anytime, and asynchronously. Its learning features include:

- sending materials to students and groups,
- formative evaluation: testing learning through setting different tasks and quizzes with the possibility of establishing submission deadlines,
- receiving evidence of learning: assignments as either written or recorded files, links, embedded productions, and images,
- library for storing materials, links, and videos,
- access from computer and mobile app,
- monitoring students’ achievement: late submissions, notifications, an automatically generated gradebook.

Edmodo is designed to accommodate a constructive feedback on student learning and provide continuous monitoring of class (Fig. 1) versus personal achievements, which may represent an option of choice in case of student-centered learning and formative assessment.

![Medical English]

**Fig. 1.** Formative assessment and grading during the semester – class monitoring.

Although Edmodo has international recognition for enhanced results in English learning and academic writing, our exploitation of the platform in Medical English (ME) remains a pioneering endeavour.

The aim of the current paper is:
- to analyse the experience of using Edmodo with a group of Medical English students for two years as part of a blended learning approach in order to meet more faithfully the learners’ needs and provide optional activities likely to support their ME learning,
- to investigate the learners’ achievements, attitudes and satisfaction with Edmodo-based learning.

**Medical English Group – Overview of activities and progress**
The Medical English group was established with a number of 124 students in the first year, with a drastic reduction in membership to a half in the second, due to group redistribution among teachers. Students were invited to join the group by e-mail/join url, and group code. For safety reasons, the group was eventually
locked. Students were familiarized with the platform: sending messages to the group, to the teacher or to a group member, receiving e-mail notifications on new discussions, comments or files. Students were, likewise, encouraged to ask questions, should they encounter any difficulties. Lest students should be overwhelmed by the platform novelty, initial posts focussed on informal communication and sending and receiving files for class use, continuous communication and feedback remaining a major tenet for their whole Edmodo learning period.

Activities and assignments were designed in a progressive manner of complexity and they addressed different levels of proficiency so as to meet the needs of a mixed ability group of learners. Apart from this, the pedagogy of activity/assessment design sought harmonization with the syllabus and integration of both receptive and productive skills.

In what follows, we will illustrate the differentiation of instruction and integration of skills in several assignments, which can serve as models to be adopted and adapted in any ME context.

1. Introductory reflection on A Doctor’s Personal Qualities with Padlet. The task simplicity is paired by ease of use and evaluation: all the students’ contributions are in one place but they can also be viewed individually (Fig. 2).

![Fig. 2. Embedding Padlet for simple writing assignments.](image-url)

The downside to using links or embedded assignments in Edmodo is the impossibility to track the number of revisions, to offer feedback, and to set a submission deadline. Writing on the Wall was, however, attractive for the students as they could read all the contributions, which does not happen in Edmodo where assignments are private unless they are made public by the teacher. Writing opinion
paragraphs on medical topics is fit for both lower and higher proficiency students, bearing in mind the challenge that the higher the number of assignments, the more difficult it becomes for students to express original ideas.

2. *Learning from professionals* – the task integrated *listening with writing* and was based on TedTalks. Students had to listen to a native speaker, filter information and formulate their own opinions. For transparency of the grading criteria, the assignment was accompanied by a Rubric. There were 71 handed in assignments for this activity.

Providing students with a visual mapping of the expectations as to the lowest and highest levels of attainment in listening, represented a good motivation for the quality of their contributions. What is extremely beneficial for students and convenient for the teacher is the Edmodo tracking of the number of revisions students have made, which is also evidence that improvement and learning have taken place.

Moreover, online listening is appropriate for both higher and lower level students due to the affordance inherent in each e-learning tool, that of re-winding and listening again versus the once-only format of class listening, which may be frustrating for the latter category of students.

3. *Clown care* – the assignment integrated *watching* a movie clip (*Patch Adams*) with *reading* a Wiki page on *Clown care and speaking* – students had to record their answers on describing the scene and possible treatments children were undergoing, but also on other such stress-relieving therapies that can make a difference in the sick children’s lives. It was one of the most complex assignments targeting higher proficiency students, with a total of 36 uploaded assignments. Students recorded their answers on the mobile phone and then submitted the audio files for evaluation. A weaker part to students’ oral comments and the teacher’s feedback is that Edmodo does not allow direct streaming of audio files, only downloading.

4. *Survey on local health* – was one of the second year’s advanced *writing* tasks. Students had to administer a questionnaire on health aspects to at least 10 patients in their area in order to find out their degree of general health knowledge (e.g. blood group, normal vs personal blood pressure, glycaemia, use of OTC, etc.). Students had to interpret the obtained survey results and write a short research paper including abstract, illustration of one result in graph form, discussions, and conclusions. The task was meant to familiarize students with the requirements of formal paper writing so as to prepare them for conducting small-size research in the following years and presenting/writing the results of their research. There were 68 handed in assignments with successive revisions after timely, individualized feedback from the teacher.

Besides customization of mono and multi-skill assignments, Edmodo offers advantages that pertain, among others, to maintaining contact and supporting students on a regular basis both individually and as a group, timely delivery of materials, formative quiz-based assessment, and instant polls.
Survey of student satisfaction and attitude

At the end of the two years, students’ satisfaction and attitude to working on Edmodo was measured with the help of a ten-item questionnaire with both numerical and verbal data. The questionnaire was administered online through SurveyMonkey as final Edmodo assignment and responses collected for a period of two weeks. Students reflected on how much and what they felt they had learnt, if the materials raised up to their expectations, and if they perceived Edmodo-based learning as a positive, important experience for their progress in Medical English.

Fig. 3. Usefulness of Edmodo-based learning.

Most students found involvement in Edmodo-ME useful and extremely useful (51.43% + 22.86%), 17.14% were neutral and 5.71% found it useful to a certain extent, whereas 2.86% considered it had not helped them at all (Fig. 3). There was a strong positive correlation between the degree of involvement in Edmodo activities and its perceived usefulness, obviously students who participated in activities to a larger extent, being by far more able to rate the quality of materials and their own outcomes and progress. Qualitative data referring to usefulness, which provide deeper insight into the students’ reasons for their answers, were content analyzed and coded as:

- **ME communication**: vocabulary acquisition, communication in English in writing and speaking, poster creation, writing a scientific paper,
- **General communication**: with the teacher and colleagues on a continuous basis, timely support, access to materials and their availability all the time, continuous feedback on grades and assignment completion, learning new interesting things, freedom in choosing what to do:
"It is a modern, flexible way of e-learning, I enjoyed that I had the possibility to work on the platform whenever I felt like, at 2 a.m. in the morning or at 9 p.m. We also had the chance to change or to improve our work. It was a good connection with the teacher also, because we got a real-time feedback and we adjusted our writing and speaking as we “grew” (A.M).

"Medical English with Edmodo was more than doing grammar and vocabulary exercises. These assignments helped us to improve our imagination, creative thinking, for example in the poster creation or the survey of the local population we learnt how to make a virtual poster and how to write a scientific paper. Although it was difficult, it helped me use the new terms in conversation” (V. A.)

- Weaknesses: lack of time, some assignments difficult to carry out:

"While I agree that in some cases it is easier to submit assignments to this platform, I find that a very common problem is remembering to check them regularly, which leads to finishing some of the work after the deadline (A.C).

It is remarkable that 80% of the respondents had a positive attitude and they would recommend working on Edmodo to the others, and only 20% were neuter (Fig.4).

![Fig. 4 Attitude.](image)

Conclusion

Using social media networking sites such as Edmodo as a learning tool can be a successful enterprise with a positive impact on the students’ learning, satisfaction, and attitude. Edmodo-EMP can represent a model of reference to be adopted by higher education institutions such as ours, who embrace the curricular reform in order to boost student engagement and explore a continuous formative and more comprehensive feedback rather than a summative assessment.
This study has brought experimental evidence on how Edmodo can be customized to Medical English learning in order to engage students in informal learning and thus boost their results, with good and excellent satisfaction and attitude levels.

References:


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