

Title: Virtual communities in an online english language learning forum

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Abstract: This study aims to shed light on the prospect of MyLinE (Malaysia Online Resources for Learning in English) as a platform for development of virtual communities of practice. Students discussion threads (DTs) in Lounge were explored to answer the following questions: (1) Are the discussion threads task-oriented? What are the tasks?; (2) What social structure patterns can be found from the discussion threads?; and (3) What are the shared resources that emerge from the interaction between participants? This study adopted a descriptive approach of document analysis whereby its main goal is to provide a detailed description of the patterns that emerged from the data. Specifically, interactional analysis was conducted to provide answers on the emergence of community. In addition, depth thread measure of 6-levels was also adopted to determine the quality of interaction. The findings of this study accentuated three features: (1) task-orientedness, (2) social structure patterns and (3) shared resources. Based on the interactional analysis done on DTs, six speech acts were also identified which indicated conversational exchanges between the participants. From the data, two types of discussion patterns were identified. The first was an intensive discussion that took place in a short period, and the second pattern identified was a discussion that stretched over a long period with long gaps between posts. From the data, participants were found to share three resources, which are (1) a shared idea of politeness, (2) a shared manner of expressing opinion and (3) shared manner of supporting opinion by using personal experience.