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Ellis, D.

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Using Padlet to Increase Student Engagement in Lectures

David Ellis

Coventry Business School, Faculty of Business, Environment and Society, Coventry University, UK

david.ellis@coventry.ac.uk

Abstract: One of Coventry University's core aims for Teaching and Learning is "to ensure that teaching is designed to inspire and engage students…through a range of techniques which encourage lively, interactive learning". Traditional lectures tend to be primarily focused on conveying information to students, providing insufficient opportunity for interaction and engagement. Feedback given by final year Business undergraduates revealed that some students considered lectures to be "boring". In an attempt to address this, a social media tool called Padlet (an online "wall" onto which students can post comments) was trialled in lectures. The aim of introducing Padlet was three-fold: to reduce the barriers to students contributing to class discussions to make lectures more interesting by introducing student generated content. to determine if Padlet helped increase participation amongst international students whose mother tongue is not English The trial was evaluated following a goal-orientated approach using a paper-based questionnaire. An analysis of the 43 completed questionnaires revealed that using Padlet made lectures more interesting (83%), reading suggestions posted by other students enhanced students' learning experience (79%) and students were more likely to contribute to a class discussion via Padlet than verbally (43%). However, the findings revealed no significant difference in students' preferences for using Padlet according to their English language proficiency.

1. Introduction

One of Coventry University's core aims for Teaching and Learning is "to ensure that teaching is designed to inspire and engage students…through a range of techniques which encourage lively, interactive learning" (Coventry University 2013). Traditional lectures tend to be primarily focused on conveying information to students, providing insufficient opportunity for interaction and engagement. This can lead to reduced motivation amongst some students, particularly those lacking an intrinsic interest in the subject, resulting in students adopting surface learning strategies (Biggs and Tang 2011). Any large class will contain students with a variety of learning styles and preferences, and hence a traditional "chalk and talk" approach can hinder students with preferences for a more "active" style of learning (Kolb and Fry 1975). Failing to motivate and engage students within a lecture series can impact upon their levels of attendance, their engagement with the entire module and ultimately their overall achievement.

1.1 Background to the study

Feedback from an evaluation of the Contemporary Business Strategy module taken by final year BA Business Administration students, revealed that some students considered lectures to be "boring". Only 61% of the 43 students surveyed thought that the staff teaching on the module made the subject interesting, and only 66% viewed the module to be intellectually stimulating and engaging. Qualitative feedback on ways of improving the module included *"use videos to make lectures more interesting"*, *"make lectures more lively"* and to design *"lectures that don't make me sleep"*.

While improvements in lecture design through providing regular changes in activity can help improve learner concentration levels (Bligh 1972), the lecture theatre setting still presents barriers to effective learning. As Saunders and Gale (2012) point out, in a large lecture theatre "most students are unwilling to ask questions to test their understanding".

2. Using Padlet to improving engagement

With increasing numbers of students bringing a smartphone or other internet-enabled mobile device to lectures, and a willingness and acceptance amongst students to use such devices for class-related activities (Brown et al. 2014), Web 2.0 technologies present opportunities to overcome barriers to interaction and improve learner engagement. Of the many different tools which can be used, some are more suited to support learning outside the classroom (i.e. asynchronous interaction). However, Dembo and Bellow (2013) suggest tools such as Padlet give opportunities to support classroom-based collaborative activities.

Padlet (Padlet 2015), is an online "wall" onto which students can post comments rather like virtual post-it notes. The online "wall" can be displayed during the lecture enabling comments, images or hyperlinks posted by individual students to be shared in real-time with the whole class. Access is via a standard web-browser, making the tool relatively easy to use without any prior preparation (such as downloading an App).

Research conducted by DeWitt et al. (2015) evaluated the use of Padlet as a tool to support teaching and learning amongst students with a hearing impairment, but there appears to be little research into the role that Padlet could play in promoting engagement amongst able-bodied students. With an increasing proportion of international students studying Business at Coventry, the role of Web 2.0 technologies such as Padlet in supporting those less confident in speaking English is also of interest.

It was therefore decided to trial Padlet in Contemporary Business Strategy lectures over a period of six weeks, with the aim of:

- reducing the barriers faced by students in contributing to class discussions

- making lectures more interesting by introducing student generated content

- increasing participation amongst international students whose mother tongue is not English

3. Methodology

A dedicated Padlet "wall" was created prior to each lecture containing a question appropriate to the current week's topic (such as "*Why are some industries more profitable than others?*"). A link to the current week's "wall" was included in the lecture slides and a Padlet "widget" was embedded on the module's Moodle page. During the lecture, students were invited to respond to the question using their smartphones or tablet, either by going to the Padlet webpage or by clicking in the Padlet area on Moodle. Students could choose to post comments anonymously or to include their name, with comments appearing on the "wall" immediately and visible to the whole class via the lecture theatre screen. Typically, one interactive Padlet activity was used per lecture with approximately 25% of students making a contribution to the Padlet "wall".

With over 70 students enrolled on the module, a goal-orientated evaluation following the principles set out by Moore (2009) was considered most appropriate. Students were asked to complete a questionnaire containing quantitative questions about their experience of using Padlet and its contribution to their learning experience. Eight of the thirteen questions used a 5-point Likert scale. A paper-based questionnaire was chosen over an online one to ensure that the views of students who had not brought their own devices to the lecture and those with lower levels of digital literacy were captured.

4. Results

An analysis of the 43 completed questionnaires revealed that 56% of students had posted at least one comment via Padlet during the six week trial. 83% of students (those indicating they agreed or strongly agreed) felt that using Padlet made lectures more interesting. 79% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that reading suggestions posted by other students enhanced their own learning experience.

While a significant minority (19%) of respondents felt that Padlet was pointless, 43% of respondents felt that they were more likely to contribute to a class discussion via Padlet than verbally. In keeping with views identified in studies by Brown et al. (2014) and those cited by Welch and Bonnan-White (2012), students valued the ability to share their views anonymously, particularly when in a large classroom environment.

The mean and standard deviation of the responses to the Likert scale questions addressing the students' perception of Padlet are shown in Table 1.

Table 1: Descriptive statistics for the Likert-scale questions

Construct	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neither agree or disagree	Agree	Strongly agree	Mean	Standard deviation
I feel confident about asking a question verbally in a lecture	11.9%	9.5%	38.1%	31.0%	9.5%	3.17	1.12
The use of Padlet makes the lecture more interesting	2.4%	2.4%	11.9%	57.1%	26.2%	4.02	0.84

Construct	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neither agree or disagree	Agree	Strongly agree	Mean	Standard deviation
Using Padlet is pointless as students can reply out loud	14.3%	45.2%	21.4%	16.7%	2.4%	2.48	1.02
When the lecturer asks a question in class, I am more likely to share my views using Padlet than to reply our loud	2.4%	16.7%	38.1%	19.0%	23.8%	3.45	1.11
Reading suggestions posted on Padlet by other students enhances my learning experience	0%	4.7%	16.3%	46.5%	32.6%	4.07	0.83
Accessing Padlet to post a comment in class is too complicated	21.4%	28.6%	33.3%	14.3%	2.4%	2.48	1.06
I like using Padlet because I can share my views without giving my name	0%	7.1%	38.1%	42.9%	11.9%	3.60	0.8
I regularly use social media apps on my smartphone/tablet	2.4%	7.1%	14.3%	28.6%	47.6%	4.12	1.06

4.1 An aid to non-native English speakers?

One potential barrier to contributing to verbal discussions in lectures is the student's language ability and their confidence in speaking English. With 71% of respondents indicating that English was not their first language, could commenting anonymously and in writing through Padlet be perceived as less of a risk for these students? This would appear not to be the case – while only 35% of non-native English speakers said they felt confident about asking a question out loud in a lecture (compared with 64% of students whose first language is English), the proportion of students who would rather use Padlet to ask a question showed no significant difference across native /non-native English speaker groups.

A comparison of the mean responses to six of the Likert-scale questions given by native English speakers and students who have learnt English as a second language is shown in Figure 1.
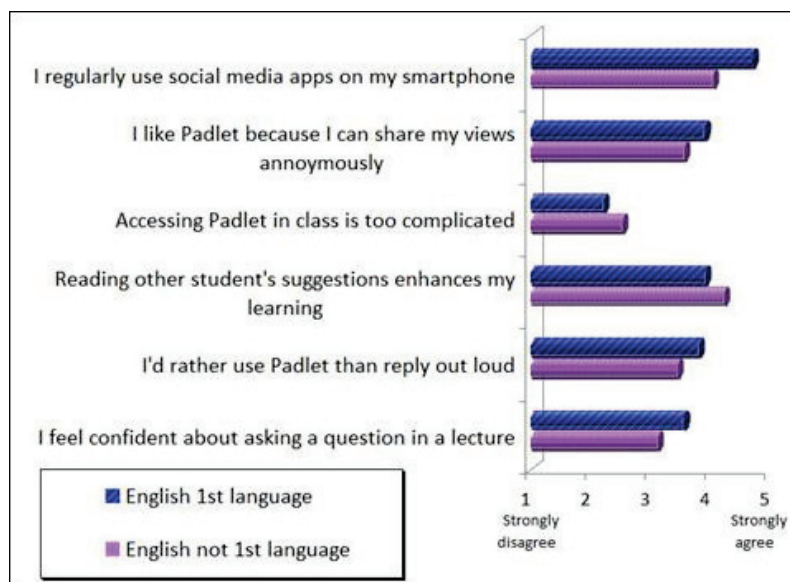

Figure 1: Comparison of views between students with differing English language ability

One possible explanation for the lower propensity to contribute to class discussions via Padlet, indicated by non-native English speakers in this study, is their level of confidence in using the technology. Only 78% of respondents who speak English as a second language reported using social media apps regularly compared to 90% of respondents whose mother tongue is English, while a higher proportion of non-native English speakers

(18%) considered Padlet too complicated to access in class (against 10% of native English speakers). Given the small size of the research sample, this area requires further study before any firm conclusions can be drawn.

5. Conclusions

This pilot study has shown that Padlet can help reduce the barriers that students feel in contributing to discussions within lectures and can enhance the overall learning experience through providing opportunities for students to engage with the subject material and views posted by fellow students.

The preference for making contributions in lectures via Padlet rather than verbally appeared to be equally expressed by native and non-native English speakers alike.

Further research involving a mixed-methods approach amongst a larger sample of students is recommended to strengthen these findings and explore in more detail Padlet's value in supporting students with lower English language proficiency.

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