

USING PICTURE-BASED CHAT IN EDMODO SOCIAL LEARNING PLATFORM AS A VOCABULARY LEARNING STRATEGY

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Abstract

The development of information and communication technologies has increased the opportunities for teachers to present learning experience which go beyond the classic face-to-face classroom interaction. By using appropriate technology, like a smartphone and an appropriate educational application, teachers can interact with their students and deliver text-based or multimedia learning activities. Edmodo is an example of such technology and has been gaining popularity among teachers and students. In English learning environment, Edmodo can be used to offer various learning activities and one of them is picture-based chat. In this chat, students are involved in conversation which is based on a selected picture posted by the students in turns. This strategy is expected to offer not only better retention of the vocabulary but also high level of interaction and participation among students. To provide more information about this strategy, this article is going to explore the advantages of picture-based chat in vocabulary learning and how to design the picture-based chat instruction so that it can promote effective vocabulary learning.

Keywords: Edmodo, picture-based chat, vocabulary

I. INTRODUCTION

Technology has played important roles in education. The Internet, personal computers, Wi-Fi, and LCD projectors, are few examples of technology which are widely present in schools and universities. With the technology, teachers and students become familiar with various digital contents which can help them perform better. Teachers can bring multimedia contents they prepare and display them during classroom meetings. They can also directly access the Internet to present the latest news for classroom discussion. Students are now involved in the classroom interactions because they can use interactive media while making their class presentations. Many of them even create their own multimedia contents, like video or animation, to support the presentations.

Despite the increasing use of technology in the classroom and the familiarity of the teachers and students with digital contents, it seems that there is still much technological potential which has not been optimally used to support student learning. The first of such potential is the students' mobile devices, like smartphones and tablets. Many students bring their smartphones and tablets but they use them mostly for making calls, texting, or

accessing the Internet. The use of such devices was even regarded as learning distraction because students have often used them for non-academic purposes, like using mobile messaging service or viewing entertainment videos, while classes are in progress. The second potential is the students' high interest in communicating through social media. Currently, Indonesia is one of the top five countries in the world in term of social media use, with 140 million Facebook users and 56 million Instagram users (Kurnia, 2018). The high interest in using social media is in part due to the students' ownership of mobile devices and the availability of free Internet access in many universities. Besides, there are also some teachers who share information and learning materials through social media.

Students nowadays, like other Net Generation, have the technology as their way of life (Oblinger & Oblinger, 2005). Therefore, teachers should embrace the use of technology more optimally. The use of classroom devices like LCD projectors and laptops is not sufficient anymore and it will be more advantageous if teachers can find ways to incorporate the use of popular technologies, especially students' devices and social media, to enhance student learning.

An example of technology that can support learning is Edmodo, a platform that has been gaining popularity among teachers and students. In English learning environment, Edmodo can be used to offer various learning activities and one of them is picture-based chat. This article aims to propose a strategy to use pictures as the basis for conversation or chat in Edmodo to help students improve their vocabulary effectively. More specifically, this article tries to investigate the advantages of picture-based chat in vocabulary learning and the strategies to use picture-based chat to promote effective vocabulary learning. As the use of picture-based chat which is designed specifically for vocabulary learning can be new for many teachers and students, a guideline in using this strategy will be presented so that teachers can engage the students in effective and meaningful learning situation.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Edmodo

Edmodo was founded by Nic Borg, Jeff O'Hara, and Crystal Hutter in 2008 (Wikipedia, 2018). Edmodo is used in various educational levels, including schools and universities, in many countries in the world. Edmodo is a social learning platform, a social platform or network designed specifically for educational purposes. Within Edmodo, teachers and students can securely connect and collaborate, share content and educational applications, and access homework, grades, class discussions and notifications (Edmodo, 2018). For Neal and Xiao (2011), Edmodo is a microblogging site which enables students and instructors to exchange information via notes, links, files, alerts, assignments, and events.

Although it is not the social media that students may have used, Edmodo has all the social networking features most major social media have, like status update, chatting, adding friends, mobile access, and so on. Besides, Edmodo does have many other educational features that the social media do not have, like quizzing, class grouping, assignment posting, grading, and adding learning materials to the class virtual library. Above all, Edmodo is more secure, as it is invitation based (with invite code), and intentionally developed to enable teachers communicate and engage with their students (Edmodo, 2018).

Since Edmodo is designed for education in general, it can also be applied to language learning, including the improvement of vocabulary. One possible way to use Edmodo to improve students'

vocabulary is by using the chat function to encourage students to communicate with one another. The most common practice of using this feature is for sending text-based information to other users. However, the information that can be shared in the chat is not limited to texts. In fact, users can share pictures, videos, documents, and many other types of files.

Although Edmodo is not as popular as the social media, students usually feel that the interface is quite familiar. In fact, the interface is very similar to Facebook and this eases the students from learning a new information system (Neal & Xiao, 2011). This familiar interface makes the implementation of Edmodo in educational setting easier and should not pose significant technical hindrances. At the initial stage of implementation, teachers and students can even simply use the chat function to communicate with one another while, at the same time, learn to use many other features which are specifically intended to support learning activity.

Vocabulary in language learning

Although vocabulary is not the only factor affecting the use of language in communication, it is considered to be an important element within the language (López Campillo, 1995). If students do not have sufficient vocabulary, they have to struggle to find ways to express their ideas or understand what others mean. It is true that sometimes students can use visual clues to understand incoming messages and to express their thoughts. In a face to face communication, for instance, they can use gestures or object references to help convey the ideas they mean or seek clarification and explanation whenever there are unknown expressions. However, these techniques are not always available all the time because some ideas are abstract and cannot be explained using the gestures or references. Besides, in some situation, they have to rely on their own to understand written texts or spoken expressions, like when reading or listening to announcements. On the other hand, when having sufficient vocabulary, students will be able to communicate better. They are always ready with words or expressions they want to use to communicate their ideas or to grasp meaning others make. They don't have to be worried with various source information they encounter. They can watch TV or listen to the radio comfortably, they can read information in the Internet confidently, and are capable of being understood easily by people with whom they speak.

The importance of vocabulary in language learning has drawn attempts to find effective

strategies to help students master more vocabularies and build better retention. Nam (2010) summarize that vocabulary teaching can be done by applying vocabulary-teaching strategies to authentic texts, pictorial vocabulary teaching, fill-in tasks, post-reading composition tasks, and vocabulary exercises. Despite the many strategies in teaching vocabulary to students, there are general agreement that the strategies should provide direct instruction of vocabulary words, encourage repetition and multiple exposures to vocabulary items, present usefulness and contexts, requires task restructuring, involve engagement beyond word definition, may incorporate computer technology, involve incidental learning, and use more than one vocabulary instruction method (Butler et al., 2010). Those summaries suggest that there are many strategies that can be used to promote vocabulary learning and combination among several strategies can be more advantageous for students.

Using pictures in vocabulary learning

In general, students process information in three stages: sensory memory, working memory, and long-term memory (Mayer, 2008). The incoming information comes in two possible formats, verbal and visual materials, which are received by students' senses briefly in sensory memory and is prepared for further processing in the working memory. If the information can be retained before it decays, it will go into the learners' working memory, which is limited in terms of capacity and retention length. The learners, after selecting the verbal and pictorial information from the sensory memory, organize it by connecting the pieces of the verbal and pictorial information. The learners also try to construct connection between the new information and the existing knowledge so that it can be stored in long-term memory. Long-term memory is a permanent storage for information and has unlimited capacity.

From the overview of how students process information above, it should be clear that learning materials, including those for vocabulary learning, are not always textual. Students can also be given pictorial resources because they can process both textual and pictorial sources of information in their sensory memory to construct knowledge. It should be noted, however, that information that comes into sensory memory is not automatically transferred into the working memory and long-term memory. When students receive vocabulary inputs, whether textual or pictorial, it cannot be guaranteed that those inputs will be finally stored in their long term memory. For

successful transfer, students need to find ways to develop connection between the new information they receive with their existing knowledge.

In terms of retention in vocabulary learning, pictorial resources such as pictures and drawings can promote better results (Nam, 2010). When students learn a new vocabulary by seeing the written word and its pictorial representation, for instance, they build the concept of the target vocabulary by combining the two information sources into a single meaningful word understanding. This combination makes them able to form more connections with their existing knowledge and thus results in better vocabulary retention. Carpenter and Olson (2011) suggests that using pictures can effectively facilitate foreign language vocabulary learning. However, teachers are advised to avoid the situations in which students become overconfident in the power of pictures in vocabulary learning. This overconfidence may make the students neglect the effort to really know the meaning of the words.

Picture-based Chat and Vocabulary learning

The chat or conversation in Edmodo is available in the Note menu. When teachers or students want to send new information to one another, they can select the Note menu and write the intended information (see Fig. 1 for the screenshot of Note menu and its submenu). After that they choose the target recipients, whether individuals or groups, and click the Send button. The information is then available for everybody within the target groups or the groups where the individuals belong to. To respond to a chat, teachers or students can select the chat and click on the reply button, write the reply, and hit the Send button.

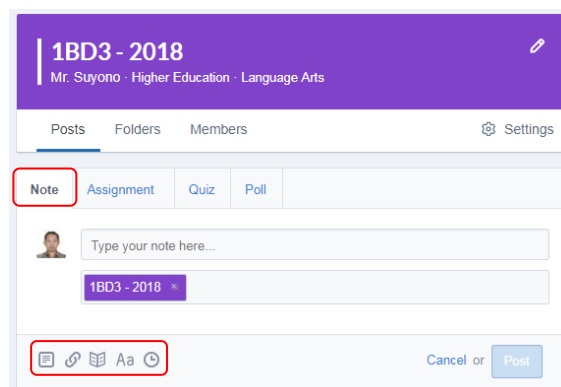


Fig. 1 Note menu and submenu

When having chat sessions, students and teachers can attach various types of documents, like pictures, videos, textual documents, and so on, to

accompany their message. Pictures, as they are the focus of this article, can be attached in two different ways. The first one is by uploading a picture file from the local device and the second one is by adding a hyperlink referring to a particular online document in the Internet. Both methods will result in the same display, a thumbnail of the picture (see Fig. 2). Clicking on the thumbnail will enable the students to view the picture in its full size.



Fig. 2 A picture posted in chat

As a vocabulary learning strategy, the picture-based chat offers several advantages. First of all, as stated in the earlier discussion, the use of pictures in vocabulary learning provides option for information processing sources besides those textual (Mayer, 2008). Students will be able to use both of their textual and pictorial channels to process new vocabularies. This strategy, when used appropriately, also offers better retention (Nam, 2010; Carpenter & Olson, 2011). Since the combination of texts and pictures bring more connection to the students' prior knowledge, it can be expected that the students can retain the new vocabularies in their long term memory.

Another important aspect of picture-based chat is that it is a form of social learning in which students learn through collaboration and participation to build information and knowledge resources (Brown & Adler, 2008). Students nowadays, like any other people who belong to the Net Generation, prefer learning by doing and through interaction (McNeely, 2005). When students are involved in the chat to learn English vocabularies, they become actively involved in a form of interaction. They can communicate and share ideas with their friends to build their knowledge. They can learn while participating in a learning community to which they can build connection and make contribution.

The use of picture-based chat as a vocabulary learning strategy also encourages the students to become active learners. This strategy can be the implementation of a learning

environment where, as Hartman, Moskal, and Dziuban (2006) stated, faculty facilitate instruction and students become active and interactive learners. Vocabulary learning with this strategy is expected to continually occur without relying on the traditional pattern where an expert or a teacher will dominate the information and knowledge presentation. Students become more independent and take more responsibility towards the success of their successful learning.

III. DESIGNING PICTURE-BASED CHAT INSTRUCTION

In order to design this picture-based chat vocabulary learning instruction effectively and efficiently, an instructional design procedure should be followed. For this purpose, the generic model ADDIE (Analyze, Design, Develop, Implement and Evaluate) can be used (Branch & Merrill, 2012).

As the first step suggests, the teacher should start by making proper analysis, including needs assessment, performance problem identification and learning goal statement. This step is very crucial because it will influence the success of the instruction. Besides making a new analysis, previous data regarding students existing English competence, expectations, and learning standard which is available at the Business Administration department database, can be used.

The second step, design, is the phase where measurable learning objectives are stated, types of learning are categorized, and pedagogical activities and media are determined (Branch & Merrill, 2012). Although the picture-based chat offers many advantages for the students' vocabulary improvement, the teacher should make it clear what students are expected to be able to perform by the end of the program. Therefore, the number of the vocabulary the students should master, for instance, must be made explicit. Also, since students are going to be involved in posting pictures for discussion starter, the teacher should prepare some guideline so that pedagogical activities and media are still within the planned design.

In the third step, development, printed or non-printed materials for teachers and students are made (Branch & Merrill, 2012). The teacher should post the guideline to use Edmodo in Edmodo Library and make printed copies available for quick reference by the teacher and the students. The structure of the class inside Edmodo should also be created so that all students are enrolled in their respective classes before students are invited to participate.

The fourth step to do is the implementation. It is the phase where the picture-based chat vocabulary learning is implemented to the students in the target environment. Although using the chat feature in Edmodo is like that in Facebook, which many students are familiar with, the teacher should make sure that students really know how to use it in practice. Before starting using this Picture-based Chat strategy, the teacher can show the interface of Edmodo to the class and provide explanation about the functions of the tools that the students will need use. The teacher should also demonstrate how to start a chat, attach a picture, and reply to a chat and then provide practice opportunities for the students. Some of the students or, if possible, each of the student is assigned to try to use the features on their own smartphone or on the classroom computer.

At this introductory session, the teacher should also demonstrate how a real chat is managed among the students. The teacher can start the chat by writing, for example, "I wish we were like the people in this picture?" and then attach a picture of a group of Japanese people queuing in a train station. After that each of the students is asked to make a reply, whether to the original chat or a reply another student has made. The teacher can give hints to the students that a reply can be in the form of a question or a statement. If a student seems to have no idea to write, the teacher can help by giving an example or asking other students to offer possible replies.

The picture-based chat is a form of social learning and students are involved in learning through collaboration and active participation. This type of learning can be achieved not only by the nature of interaction in the chat but also by the responsibility delegation to start a new chat. The students are informed to make their own arrangement about the schedule of each student to start a chat based on their agreed theme. While the students are active in this activity, the teacher should act as facilitator who will participate only when something needs his intervention, like when a student post inappropriate picture. However, the intervention should not discourage the students in making active participation in the future.

The selection of the picture theme is essential since most of the English learning materials for Business Administration Department are designed to reflect business activities. While in the first semester students may have general topics like introduction, hobbies, and places of interests, in the later semesters they learn more specific contents like marketing, business meeting, office automation, event organizing, and customer

service. To accommodate this requirement, the teacher should provide list of themes which students should follow for a target semester. The selection of the themes, however, can involve students. At the beginning of the semester, the teacher can inform the students about the themes available (as the guideline has been made during the design phase) and, together with the students, he or she brainstorms what available sub themes are relevant. In this way, students will feel more involved and have more options about the topic for the chat.

The last step is to evaluate whether this vocabulary learning instruction is effective and efficient. Before further application of this strategy and to see its impact on students' learning outcome, the teacher should conduct formative evaluation and summative evaluation. The evaluation can be integrated in the regular classroom tests since what students learn in Edmodo chat is in line with what they learn in the class. Another possibility is by using the Assessment and Poll features in Edmodo where students will be evaluated based on the material they cover after a few weeks. If the evaluation is conducted inside Edmodo, it should be presented in such a way so that students can maintain positive attitude towards the vocabulary learning activity. Based on the result of the evaluations, the teacher then can make revision on the design and prepare a better implementation in the next semester.

IV. CONCLUSION

The use of picture-based chat in Edmodo can promote effective and efficient English vocabulary learning for the students in Business Administration department. There are two main reasons for this; the first one is the use of pictures which can promote better vocabulary retention and the social learning environment in Edmodo which can involve students in more active learning through participation and collaboration. To ensure that picture-based chat in Edmodo can be effective and efficient it is important to design it using an instructional design procedure, especially the ADDIE model.

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