

Chapter 43

Microblogging as an Assisted Learning Tool in Problem-Based Learning (PBL) in Bahrain: The Edmodo Case

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ABSTRACT

This chapter is part of a series of studies related to the use of social media tools in higher education. In particular, the authors investigate the students' level of familiarity, engagement, and frequency of use of social media technologies. They analyze the experiences of using the Edmodo tool to support PBL, and they relate participants' opinions regarding the use of the tool. The data was collected using two questionnaires and a focus group interview at the end of the course. The main findings of this study are comparable and somehow familiar to their previous study (Paliktzoglou & Suhonen, 2014). Moreover, with regards to the adoption of Edmodo as a learning tool to support PBL, although literature argues that cultural differences play an important role in the acceptance of learning tools (i.e., Cheung, Chiu, & Lee, 2011), the results indicate that Edmodo has a positive reception as learning tool in blended learning to support PBL.

INTRODUCTION AND AIMS

Social media tools are used in many higher education institutions for educational purposes in numerous new and innovative ways. However, because this method is new, especially in a *PBL* context, there is a lack of research on the topic. This study forms part of a series of studies related to the use of social media tools in higher education. In order to investigate and gain additional insight into this situation, we carefully studied the experiences of students during a blended learning course at Bahrain Polytechnic.

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The aims of this study are to assess students' level of familiarity, engagement and frequency of use with social media. We also wanted to discover Web Media students' opinions regarding their experience of using the Edmodo microblogging tool in a *Problem-based Learning* (PBL) context. Finally, we wanted to compare the results of this study to our previous study (Paliktzoglou et. al., in press) which was conducted in an online learning course among Computer Science students in Finland and where the main findings were that the students' engagement with social media is low and that Edmodo, as a learning tool used in a online course, had a positive impact on the students.

The participants in this study were a cohort of Web Media students from the Content Management course at Bahrain Polytechnic. During the course the students used Edmodo as a supporting tool in developing a fictional eMagazine for their *PBL* teamwork assignment. Following the *PBL* structure four teams of four to five students worked together to solve problems and apply concepts learned during the course. The microblogging tool, Edmodo, was used to promote and extend the team interactions online and outside the physical classroom space. The motivation for this study stems from the researcher's opinion that there is a lack of empirical studies on the specific use of Edmodo as a microblogging instructional tool, particularly in higher education. The study aimed to answer the following research questions:

1. What is the Web Media students' engagement with social media tools in higher education in Bahrain?
2. In which degree do the students accept microblogging, and more specifically Edmodo, in a blended learning course to facilitate *PBL*?

In the study we collected data from two questionnaires and a focus group interview at the end of the course. The first questionnaire evaluates the students' level of familiarity, engagement and frequency of use of social media and the second one assesses the adoption of Edmodo as an assisted learning tool in a *PBL* context. We also discuss the experiences and challenges faced by the authors in designing a teaching and learning project which integrates the use of microblogging, and more specifically Edmodo, in a *PBL* context. Finally, we will outline the potential implications and recommendations of this study for future implementations.

BACKGROUND

Learning Framework: Social Media as Learning Tools

The integration of technology in the daily lives of millions of people around the world has resulted in the rapid growth of social media tools over recent years. As such, the social media phenomenon has attracted researchers who wish to study both the positive and negative aspects of using social media tools in various settings. Social media tools offer new and various different ways of communication, using computers and other mobile devices. Users can communicate privately or in a more public way, such as a comment posted for public viewing. However, the fundamental idea behind social media is not novel. In the late 1990s several sites, with functions similar to today's social media tools, had already appeared. From the very beginning of the internet, communicating with others through interfaces such as chat rooms, Internet forums, message boards, web communities and blogs was introduced (Albion, 2008).

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