

A Case Study of Tertiary Students' Experiences Using Edmodo in Language Learning

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Abstract

The past decade has seen the rapid development of technology in online learning. Its development has led many researchers to investigate the use of Web 2.0, where learning is present not only in the four-walls of the classroom. This paper, therefore, reports on students' experiences using a Web 2.0 tool, namely Edmodo. In particular, the study aims at identifying their perceptions of using the platform in language learning and their views on the possibility of using it to supplement face-to-face discussions in English language classes. The study involved 24 samples who undergone focus group interview as the method of collecting data. In general, results of the study revealed mixed reviews, where some students agreed with the use of Edmodo while others expressed negative opinions towards its use. In addition, two broad themes emerged from analysis of the data. These findings have significant implications in that the teacher, in the first place, needs to be equipped with the knowledge of using the platform to benefit the students. Nevertheless, this research extends our knowledge for the understanding of how to integrate Web 2.0 technologies in language classes.

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Keywords: Edmodo; Language learning; Web 2.0 tool

INTRODUCTION

It appears that a generally accepted definition of Web 2.0 seems to be lacking. Governor, Hinchcliffe and Nickull (2009) argue that there is no single definition of Web 2.0, and this may disappoint researchers in their effort to discover the definition of the term. In fact, it seems that one will never find the likelihood of establishing accepted definition of the term since the Internet is changing rapidly. This is because understanding Web 2.0 requires more than knowing how technology works, how it is used and what real-effects it brings to its users. Similarly, Kitsantas and Dabbagh (2009) state that defining the term Web 2.0 is a difficult task for there are 95.2 million results for the term on Google search. However, for the purpose of this study, Web 2.0 can be generally defined "...as a dynamic collection or integration of Web tools, software applications and mobile technologies that integrate technological and pedagogical features and affordances of the Internet and World Wide Web to facilitate the design, development, delivery and management of online and distributed learning" (Kitsantas & Dabbagh, 2009, p.161).

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1.1 What is Edmodo?

Edmodo is a platform for social networking (Trust, 2012). Its layout and design are akin to the features use in Facebook. It is one of the websites that has more than 6.5 million users worldwide (Flanigan, 2011). Students who register into Edmodo may have a profile page where they can see latest posts of the communities they engage with and groups they join. Edmodo has a number of features and functions. When uploading into Resources, Edmodo allows users to upload profile pictures, documents, links and videos, which can be stored in the Library, to be further shared with other members. Moreover, items in the Library can be viewed at any time or place.

Subject community and Publisher community are other features of Edmodo. Users who join Subject communities include those, who are interested and share similar teaching and learning interests in subject areas such as Math, Science, Language Arts, Social Studies, Health and Physical Education, World Languages, Computer Technology, Career and Technology Education, College Readiness, Creative Arts, Special Education, and Professional Development (Thompson, Lindstrom & Schmidt-Crawford, 2015). Using this community, users are able to share resources, ask questions, and obtain ideas on the community wall, for their not only teaching and learning, but also research works. When users become member of any communities, every post from a particular community is sent via Really Simple Syndication (RSS) feed directly to members' personal account page. This ensures members to be updated with current information about the community they are associated with. Publisher Community, on the other hand, allows users to connect directly with educators asking for feedback and answers as well as post instructional content.

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Web 2.0 Tools and Online Collaboration

Central in the entire discipline of Web 2.0 is the concept of collaborative learning between individual students and their peers, and between students and teachers. Many platforms can be utilized to collaborate when Web 2.0 is used for learning, among others are social-networking sites, blogs, wikis, video-sharing, hosted services, web applications, mashups and folksonomies (O'reilly, 2007). As one of the educational tools of Web 2.0 applications, Edmodo is an educative social-networking site that may be used for the purpose of conducting informal education (Fardoun, Alghazzawi, López, Penichet, & Gallud, 2012).

Several recent studies investigating the use of Web 2.0 included a study by Ajjan and Hartshorne (2008), who assessed the awareness of faculty members in the use of Web 2.0 to support in-class learning. Findings of their study indicated that faculty members felt that the tool could improve students' learning. In addition, they viewed that Edmodo enabled them to interact with other faculty members and improve their writing skills. This indicates that other than for students, Edmodo was found to be used by scholars in their communications as well. Procter, Williams, Stewart, Poschen, Snee, Voss and Asgari-Targhi (2010) reported that the platform also enabled researchers in the United Kingdom (UK) to communicate with one another dynamically. In their study, a few factors were determined in making Web 2.0, the resources for communication for researchers. These include local support, information discovery practices and changes in practices of peer review.

Web 2.0 tools are also used to enhance library services. A study conducted by Tripathi and Kumar (2010) found that Web 2.0 tools are powerful to improve library services. Their surveys on 277 university libraries in Australia, Canada, the UK and United States of America (USA) indicated that RSS, Instant Messaging (IM) and blogs were among the most popular Web 2.0 used by these institutions. On a different note, in Malaysia, it was found that Malaysian students were reported to be passive rather than active contributors when Web 2.0 tools were used in teaching and learning (Hafiz Zakaria, Watson & Edwards, 2010). Although they were exposed to various Web 2.0 applications, it seemed that they were uncomfortable to participate in the content construction of their learning. Many of them were reported to

be more comfortable in obtaining and downloading information only. Regardless, these studies have proven that Web 2.0 tools have been used for teaching and learning at all levels, and for different types of users; students, educators and researchers.

2.2 The Use of Edmodo in Teaching and Learning

As a teaching and learning tool, studies have also been conducted to investigate the use and effectiveness of Edmodo. A survey such as the one conducted by Thien, Le Van Phan, Tho, Suhonen and Sutinen (2013) showed that Edmodo might serve as a space to collaborate between students and teachers. In fact, a single lecturer might also collaborate with other teachers. Enriquez (2014) found that the collaboration provided in Edmodo enabled students to improve their online work quality. This was so when they were able to receive feedback posted on the status of their teachers and friends. In a study which was set out to make web-based learning more open, Dowling (2011) found that Edmodo allowed students and teachers to connect with each other in the learning process to discuss specific course content. Kongchan (2012), in addition, suggested that collaboration in learning using Edmodo may be extended to parents. The researcher argued that it could be a secure learning platform for teachers, students and parents. Likewise, Monalisa and Ardi (2013) reported that parents could also take part in their children's learning using the platform as they could check the works and progress of their children. With the advancement in mobile technology, Al-Okaily (2013) investigated and found that the use of Edmodo via mobile devices could promote students to collaborate in an intensive English program.

In addition, Kongchan (2013) investigated how teachers may use Edmodo and Google Docs to change traditional English classroom. Edmodo was employed in the study to replace paper and pencil tasks whereby students were encouraged to work individually and in group. Results indicated that the combination of Edmodo and Google Docs promoted enjoyment among students in learning English compared to traditional approaches. Therefore, the introduction to these tools was necessary. It, however, required individual teachers to conduct workshop for the purpose of preparing students to use the tool. Teachers were employed as participants in Chandler and Redman's (2013) study to identify how the individuals collaborate and share workspace with one another when Edmodo was employed in teaching and learning. Teachers in their study learnt that the platform may be used for a number of tasks, which include communicating with their students. Moreover, the ability to be mobile while still able to connect with students was what made Edmodo a personalized tool for the teachers.

Nevertheless, a primary concern of using Web 2.0; a case in point - Edmodo, is the opportunity to collaborate in learning. Yet, there is increasing concern over students' learning experiences at tertiary level when the platform is used. In particular, much less is known about whether or not Edmodo may be able to replace face-to-face discussion especially in English class. Moreover, there has been little qualitative analysis of using Edmodo in learning a language. Thus, this paper attempts to investigate students' perceptions as well as the possibility of having Edmodo for activities that involve discussion in English subjects. In particular, this paper examines two research questions:

1. What are students' perceptions of their experiences when Edmodo is used in learning?
2. How would Edmodo be a platform to supplement face-to-face discussions in English language classes?

METHODOLOGY

3.1 Participants

Participants were selected based on purposive sampling, in particular, typical case (median) sample. Twenty four ($N = 24$) students studying in a technical university in Malaysia volunteered to provide their views on the use of Edmodo in learning English. Patton (2005) argues that the recommended size for a focus group is ten to 12 people. Therefore, in the current study, the students were divided into two groups having 12 members in each group. There is no such way of determining an 'ideal' number of groups as it

depends on time and financial factors researchers bear (Patton, 2005). On a different note, it seems difficult to determine the number of meetings that were appropriate for one focus group interview session. As such, in collecting data for the current study, the researcher met the respondents for only once. Arranging with them to meet for several times was not feasible since most of the time, their schedule clashed with each other since they were from different programs taking different courses. On the other hand, saturation is determined when "the new to emerge" (Straus & Corbin, 2014) was found after respondents were interviewed for almost two hours in each session.

3.2 Research Instrument

An interview protocol was used as the main instrument in the study. Three open-ended interview items were used to gauge students' perceptions of their experiences when Edmodo is used in language classes. The first question concerned with collecting students' views on their general feelings about using Edmodo. The second item required them to identify the significant use of Edmodo in their English subjects. The final item required them to suggest the possibility of having Edmodo as a platform to reinforce direct discussions among the students. To ensure validity of the data obtained, triangulation was done by conducting an indirect observation when students used Edmodo in English class facilitated by the class teacher. Meanwhile, for reliability, a peer review was conducted by asking a colleague at the English language center in the university to comment on the findings of the study (Merriam, 1998).

3.3 Research Procedure

Data were collected in November 2014. A focus group discussion was employed as the single method of collecting data in the current study. Boyce and Neale (2006) outline these procedures in collecting data employing focus group discussion.

3.3.1 Selecting and Recruiting Participants

Participants were chosen among students who were familiar with the use of Edmodo in language classes. Edmodo was used by most of the language teachers as well as subject lecturers and other university course lecturers (e.g. mathematics, engineering and entrepreneurship) at the university, so it was not difficult to identify the students. Students who gave their consents were finally chosen for the study.

Participants were recruited three weeks before the actual interview was conducted. The researcher obtained the list of students in the university's e-community website. Using the platform, students' emails and phone numbers were obtained, and e-mails were used to relay information concerning objectives of interview, time and methods of the interview sessions.

3.3.2 Choosing the Location and Conducting the Focus Group Interview

The interviews were conducted at the language labs of the university, and it was a face-to-face interview sessions. All students were required to attend the session at a convenient time to all participants of the group, and the interviews were conducted by the researcher who acted as the moderator. Each session of the interview was recorded and all sessions took approximately two hours. Throughout the session, a video recorder was also used to assist in recording the collection of data. Students were assured of the confidentiality of their personal information. In this paper, they are identified by alphanumerical codes (S1 to S24).

3.4 Data Analysis

Following the inductive process, data were analyzed manually in order to answer the research questions. Such method enables findings to be obtained based on the most frequent, dominant or

significant themes that was built-in from the raw data (Thomas, 2006). While analyzing, all transcripts were reviewed repetitively to identify the potential meanings of the raw data. Later, relevant themes were developed.

FINDINGS

The study formulates two research questions as to identify students' perceptions on the use of Web 2.0, in particular Edmodo in learning English. The first research question concerns with students' overall perceptions about using Edmodo to learn English. The second research question inquires whether or not Edmodo may serve as a platform to supplement face-to-face discussions in English classes. Two broad themes were identified based on the analyzed data.

4.1 Use of Edmodo for Learning English

In general, students' perceptions differ with regards the use of Edmodo for learning English. Some students gave positive feedback regarding the use of Edmodo as a tool to learn English. Some, however, had negative thoughts about using it. Table 1 illustrates the data obtained from focus group interview counting the frequency of students' responses in answering their perceptions of using Edmodo for learning English. In the table, the findings show majority of the respondents perceived using Edmodo makes learning English to be easier ($N = 11$). There were six ($N = 6$) students who perceived 'Edmodo as a good platform to learn English'. In addition, there were two students who felt that 'Edmodo is an interesting medium to learn English', meanwhile, eight ($N = 8$) students regarded 'Edmodo as not an insignificant medium for learning English'. Item 'Edmodo may not able to achieve understanding about a particular skill in English' had the highest score ($N = 13$). The remaining items were represented by one student respectively.

Table 1. Students' Perceptions of Using Edmodo for Learning English.

No.	Students' Perceptions	Students' Code	Frequency
1.	Edmodo is easy to be used to learn English	S6, S2, S7, S8, S9, S10, S11, S12, S14, S23, S24	11
2.	Edmodo seems to be redundant as a medium of communication	S3	1
3.	Edmodo is an interesting medium for learning English	S4, S18	2
4.	Edmodo is helpful in increasing students' level of understanding when learning English	S5	1
5.	Edmodo is fun for learning English	S6	1
6.	Edmodo enables ones to increase ones knowledge /ability / skills learning English	S16	1
7.	Edmodo is a good platform to learn English	S17, S18, S12, S10 S19, S23	6
8.	Edmodo is not a significant medium to be used for learning English	S19, S21, S22, S4, S18, S14, S23, S24	8
9.	Edmodo may not able to achieve understanding about a particular skills in English	S21, S20, S3, S8, S9, S10, S13, S6, S22, S4, S5, S6, S7	13

Data from focus group discussion will further elaborate students' responses in answering research question 1. Students felt that Edmodo eased the learning of English as proposed by S7 who remarked that the medium enabled one to find material and notes uploaded by teachers. A few other students also felt

that the tool alleviates their learning.

S1: “... it easier to get more information and can share any topics if we want”

S4: “... we can discuss any topic easier”

S6: “... it makes learning easy and fun”

S9: “I like to use Edmodo in all English subjects because can spread information easily”

In fact, S8 stated that Edmodo provides convenience for both teachers and students to access one's works. Interestingly, S8 commented that such condition seemed like the class was running around the clock. Updates on the latest learning materials could also be downloaded by students without having to get them from teachers (S11). Since Edmodo is a computer tool, S16 believed that students do not have to hassle writing works assigned by teachers, but it can actually reduce and ease the task of the teachers in evaluating their students' works. Meanwhile, three students believed that Edmodo serves as a good platform to learn English.

For S10, the idea of reducing the use of paper was what made Edmodo a good platform to learn English. S7 claimed that it required more works and time if teachers required works to be submitted in hardcopy. Moreover, students tend to make more mistakes when pen and paper were used, as S7 remarked:

“...in my opinion when we do something with papers, it requires a lot more work for us, and takes a lot more time. There are more mistakes that we can make and it takes extra time for us to check the work to try to catch such mistakes”.

Other students also commented on the benefit of using Edmodo to replace consumption of papers:

S14: “... clearly we can save the earth by not using much of papers”

S16: “... using paper will required a lot of work in terms of handwriting and using tools such as paper and pen lessen work burden’

S18: “... Yes because it lessen the use of paper”

S21: “... advantage of using Edmodo than paper is that we can save trees and I support this move”

Edmodo also provides the opportunity for students to share their works as opined by S19. Other students also had similar opinions with the student.

S16: “Everyone from the course can share the output gets from class”

S19: “... could share the works of classmates on the spot”

S22: “... can share any topics if we want”

S24: “Teachers can share articles relevant to the subject ... ”

In addition, students also agreed that the similarity between Edmodo and Facebook makes it a good learning platform. S23 pointed out, “I think that Edmodo is a good learning tool because it is like Facebook. Can discuss any topics ... what we [do] not understand”. Although S19 believed that Edmodo is akin to Facebook, he/she would rather use the latter instead, for learning. He/ she said: “It may be a good platform to share works but it is not the only choice for me. I would rather choose Facebook to share works in a group”. Likewise, S20 would prefer using Facebook than Edmodo since the former has private messenger. He/she asserted: “It's good if Edmodo have private messenger like Facebook so that we can freely discuss among the group member”.

Despite the positive experiences gained by students in using Edmodo in learning English, some were against its use. Eight students reflected that Edmodo was not a significant medium for learning English. For example, S19 argued that its use was only to get instructions about assignments from teachers. A similar opinion was voiced out by S22, who responded that Edmodo was not helpful with his/her English because the medium was used to make announcement mostly in all the English subjects he/she has taken. S21 viewed that there was no significant improvement in using Edmodo to learn English for its use is limited to information transfer and notes sharing only. Similarly, S24 found it difficult to learn English using Edmodo as it appeared to only be a site to convey messages, hand-in assignments and share study materials.

In another regard, there were also views about Edmodo in that it might not be able to achieve ones'

understanding about a particular skill in English. For example, S20 claimed that not all contents of a particular English subject could be learned via the platform. The student further clarified that on certain occasions, students need detailed explanation about certain topics; for instance in presentation skills. Moreover, the use of Edmodo as a platform to learn English depended on the kind of activity the teachers carried out with the students (S3). Unless available resources were obtained, only then Edmodo could be a medium to help students understand a particular content in English subject (S21). Therefore, S21 claimed that students would comprehend one subject matter if more resources were provided by the teachers. In fact, teachers should not be using only one Web 2.0 application to assist students in acquiring the knowledge (S24). Other social networking sites should also be used by the teachers to maximize learning outcomes.

4.2 Use of Edmodo for Virtual Forum

The theme as described above provides the answer to Research Question 2 concerning the possibility of using Edmodo in augmenting face-to-face discussions in English classes. For S8, face-to-face interaction was more appropriate rather than using Edmodo to obtain his/her peers' opinions as this may satisfy all group members. S20 elaborated the inappropriateness of using Edmodo as a platform for discussions as he/she commented:

I personally don't like to have discussion through Edmodo because if we are doing a group discussion, we don't have privacy to discuss our task or project since all members in the group can read our conversation.

For S2, using Edmodo for virtual discussion is relative to the kind of discussion students need to engage. To him/her, Edmodo is an appropriate choice if the topic required the entire classmates to participate in the discussion. Yet, if it were to involve only his/her group members, the platform then, should not be used. He/she reported: *"Depends on what kind of discussion. If it involves the whole class than it should be okay ... but if it involves only the group members, than it is no"*. S24 also felt that Edmodo was not suitable for virtual discussion. Instead of exchanging ideas, it might make students felt uninterested in discussion, and therefore, they can deceive by appearing offline. He/she explained:

We are not adapted to sticking onto Edmodo all the time so instead of discussion, it may prompt apathy. We always have the choice of pretending to be offline or not available and the risk of misconduct by people other than the account holder.

In addition, some students felt that sitting and facing one another makes a real platform for discussion. For S8, such condition could not be replaced by any technological tool i.e. Edmodo. He/ she believed that group members should listen and communicate with each other in discussion to ensure everyone was satisfied with decisions made. He/she said:

No. I don't think using Edmodo for group discussion will be a good practice. I prefer a group discussion which requires us to sit together in a place, face to face and discuss about all the idea. This way will give satisfaction to the group member and the discussion will be successful.

In this situation, it was likely that members of the group would be misinterpreting their friends' ideas as claimed by S21. If they seek opinions from lecturers using Edmodo, the responses would be delayed. Therefore, using Edmodo as a platform seems to be difficult of getting the gist of a particular discussion. Indirectly, it delays time for discussion. S12 commented:

It is hard to get the end point of discussion. It is also drag the time of discussion.

The concern made by S12 corroborated with S14 when he/she claimed that having Edmodo as a platform for discussion was difficult in terms of obtaining conclusion of a particular discussion. He/ she reported that members in the discussion needed to scroll down the entry/ posting to know the final decision made by their others. He/she remarked:

No. when we have some delayed discussion, we strongly want the explanation to be cleared as soon as possible. Edmodo need us to wait for the answer rather than discussion

in class which we can get the solution directly.

For S19, he/she was strongly against the use of Edmodo in English classes entirely. In fact, he/she felt that it was not convenient to be used for other university subjects as well. However, his/ her concerns relate to the technical difficulty of using the platform but not the features it offered. Since Edmodo required a good internet access, he/she could not enter or write anything if the Wi-Fi was poor.

DISCUSSION

On the question of students' experiences in learning English through the use of Edmodo, it seemed that they were on the fence of whether the tool is advantageous or not. Some students opined positively while others were slightly against its adoption in the language class. Those who preferred the use of Edmodo perceived it as easy to use, good and interesting. The findings observed in this study mirror Dowling's (2011) study that examined the effect of using Edmodo in the course; *web2english*. His participants found that Edmodo is both easy to use and interesting. In fact, they believed that having to learn via online was a good experience as they could improve their English as well as computing skills. Moreover, Edmodo seems to be easy for students who were assigned to take online quizzes. Kongchan's (2012) participants viewed that the platform provided easy steps for students to answer tests online. Moreover, having online quizzes could help them to practice English outside classes. The finding on the ease of using Edmodo is also consistent with Balasubramanian, Jaykumar and Fukey (2014) who found that the platform enabled students to obtain study materials. In their study, students argued that Edmodo could be a resource sharing platform to upload lecture notes, videos, files and folders. Moreover, the features; user-friendly and inviting, makes Edmodo a learning platform that can be accessed at any time and place (Hammonds, Matherson, Wilson, & Wright, 2013). Its features which are similar to other management systems namely Blackboard and Moodle serves an easy way for classes to connect and collaborate.

Contrary to expectations, there were also a number of students who had unpleasant experiences using Edmodo when learning English. A few students believed that it was pointless to use the platform as its main function was to obtain instructions and announcements posted by teachers. Results of this study are consistent with data obtained in Enriquez's (2014) study. The study showed that students did not prefer to have online instructions since they have already obtained face-to-face instructions from their teachers. Therefore, they were not pleased when teachers assigned online quizzes or assignments. Both, the current and Enriquez's findings differ from Monalisa and Ardi's (2013) findings. It was found that obtaining instructions and announcements could make students become active in their learning. Using the platform, students in their study felt that they could be more alert in receiving and submitting their assignments.

Some students also argued that Edmodo was not able to assist them in learning English skills, particularly presentation skills. Though previous studies did not support the ability to acquire presentation skills using Edmodo, Al-Okaily (2013), however, discovered that the platform could facilitate students in developing reading and listening skills. Nevertheless, she commented that students need to be autonomous in picking up the two skills when learning in an online environment. Similarly, it seemed that Edmodo improved students' performances in writing skills (Shams-Abadi, Ahmadi & Mehrdad, 2015). In their study, it was reported that Edmodo had a significant effect on students' tertiary level writing performance. Colors were used to correct students' works, helped learners be aware of their writing errors. They were also interested to use Edmodo as an e-learning platform for writing since they could collaborate with others.

It is interesting to note that the result of the second research question in the current study showed that students rejected the idea of having Edmodo to supplement face-to-face discussion in English class. They were skeptical of conducting a virtual discussion as it might not satisfy all group members, and thereby might misinterpret one another opinions. Enriquez (2014) argues that face-to-face discussion that is featured in Edmodo may assist students in their academic achievement and learning. However, it is the students themselves who need to optimize its use. With regards to this, Monalisa and Ardi (2013) opine that the teacher needs to take the role in controlling the discussion. The former needs to remind students

that they should not judge their friends' opinions as true or false. Yet, members in the forum should observe open direct discussion. Nonetheless, face-to-face discussion involving all students in one session of class may still need to be conducted after it is done virtually.

Evans and Kilinc (2013) argued that should Edmodo be used for virtual discussion, both, teachers and students need to be engaged in the discussion. Edmodo creates a social networking structure, and having these individuals to use the platform reinforces student centered learning opportunities for the latter. Such may also make teachers meet their curricular goals when they can assess students' works and academic progresses online. Moreover, Trust (2012) argues that the ability for teachers to create groups makes Edmodo a unique and beneficial platform for online discussion. This can be done when a teacher creates a group page. Then, a special code is created where he/she is able to share it with his/her students. When students use this code, they are able to participate in online discussions with other students and their class teachers. In fact, these features encourage students' engagement and responsibility for their learning since incorporating Information and Technology (ICT) as in using Edmodo may establish academic networking among teachers and students (Sanders, 2012).

CONCLUSION

This study has shown that students had varied feelings concerning the use of Edmodo in language classes. The students felt that learning with Edmodo was easy. Yet, it would be difficult if the teacher assigned presentation skills to be performed via the platform. On a different note, the major question that the paper tried to determine concerning the possibility of having Edmodo to replace face-to-face discussion has been answered. The study found that face-to-face discussion could never be substituted by online platform. Such is due to critical points can easily be highlighted when face-to-face discussion is employed in exchanging ideas among group members. Moreover, face-to-face discussion enables group members to evaluate their peers' suggestions (Zuraina, 2009). Last but not least, the findings of this research provide insights for teachers who intend to use Edmodo in the language classes. Since Gen 2 students are techno savvy, it demands teachers to be equipped with the knowledge of using the platform in order to benefit their learners. Therefore, teachers need to relate learners' skills with theirs to ensure positive learning attitudes towards using the medium in language learning can be occurred (Ali, Mukundan, Baki & Ayub, 2012).

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