

Tech for the Modern EFL Student: Collaborate and Motivate with Padlet

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ABSTRACT

Contemporary students are connected to the Internet and thrive on high visual stimulation. Padlet is an online application which replicates the feeling of a virtual bulletin board for sharing ideas, videos, web-based text, and more. Educators have turned Padlet into an online space for posting project information, mind-mapping, or displaying supplementary materials for access outside of the learning environment. This article will introduce and examine support for the use of Padlet in education, briefly explain how to use Padlet, and offer practical applications for those in English-as-a-second/English-as-a-foreign-language (ESL/EFL) learning settings.

INTRODUCTION

Today's students -- the "Net Generation" (Harasim, 2013, p.2) -- socialize and communicate online; therefore, it should be natural for ESL/EFL educators to integrate online applications in the language classroom as an extension of current collaborative preferences among classmates. Padlet (<https://padlet.com/>) is a web 2.0, bulletin board-like platform where digital content is placed by anyone, for anyone, from anywhere (Padlet, n.d.; in Baida, 2014). This paper will explore support for Padlet in language learning classrooms as a means of motivation and increased learning potential.

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Using Padlet in language learning sessions has been proven to be beneficial in enhancing student interest and may increase learner motivation. Richardson (2009) states web applications may enhance learning in language settings as today's students are naturally attracted to technology (in Jabar & Ali, 2016, p.160). Attwell (2010) noted, "technology-enhanced...learning can help foster learner-centeredness and collaboration" (as cited in Jabar & Ali, 2016, p.158), and Benson and Chick (2010) cited students were more autonomous and creative when learning

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and sharing via YouTube and Facebook (in An, Aworuwa, Ballard & Williams, 2009).

A video project assignment (VPA) study by Jabar and Ali (2016) focused on 30, grade five elementary-level pupils in Malaysia, divided into groups of six participants each. The six groups were exposed to “vocabulary items in reading passages on Malaysian culture” and were “asked...to discuss [the items] on Padlet” (Jabar & Ali, 2016, p.163). While students used a variety of digital tools to complete the project (e.g. Google search engine, Wikipedia, Movie Maker 6.0, YouTube), the researchers found Padlet was the main tool on which students collaborated, conflated, and shared feedback between both peers and the instructor (Jabar & Ali, 2016). The results from the study were promising. Student motivation for language learning increased as the video projects were completed “collaboratively and creatively in a highly enjoyable and stimulating environment” (Jabar & Ali, 2016, p.167). Groups felt especially proud when padlets were viewed by all classmates. In addition, students' post-treatment vocabulary test scores increased by 46 points (Jabar & Ali, 2016, p.165). However, caution is advised with regards to the test scores, as the study does not fully explain vocabulary test content, test length and testing conditions, nor the degree of time between the pre- and post-test. For this reason, readers may assume the correlation between Padlet use and increased vocabulary proficiency requires further study.

Gasmi and Thomas (2017) utilized Padlet within a flipped, academic, EFL writing course and observed its effects on learning. The authors posted digital course content pertinent to “theoretical aspects of academic writing” on a padlet (Gasmi & Thomas, 2017, p.239). Results cited students were more “cognitively engaged” with the learning material, and both participants and instructors “utilized several deep learning strategies to cope with the demands of this teaching approach” (Gasmi & Thomas, 2017, p.245). These two studies indicate the potential of Padlet for promoting peer-collaboration and ameliorating interest among students in the ESL/EFL classroom.

METHOD

This section will describe how to access Padlet and understand its settings and features.

Step 1

Visit the Padlet homepage at < <https://padlet.com/> >. In the upper right corner, click “Log In” (Padlet, n.d.). Users may sign in via a Facebook or Google account. Next, click “+ NEW PADLET” in the upper-right corner. A welcome screen will appear and guides new users through creating a padlet. Padlets are highly customizable, allowing for selection of wallpaper, layout, tags, addresses, privacy settings and more.

Step 2

FIGURE 1

Screenshot of the Padlet starting page (Padlet.com, n.d.)



Next, users will be prompted to add things to the padlet. To add material, click the pink circular [+] button at the bottom right of the screen. A box will appear with icons representing audio, video, photo, other and text. Click on the icon appropriate for the material you wish to add.

Step 3

When the cursor is moved to the right side of the padlet screen, a sidebar will appear which allows for a variety of functions to occur: edit, send invites, share or embed the padlet in a blog or website, export and/or print. Padlet can be downloaded as an app or plugin on various platforms: iPad, Android, Chrome and Wordpress, making it highly adaptable for students who are permitted to use smartphones in the classroom.

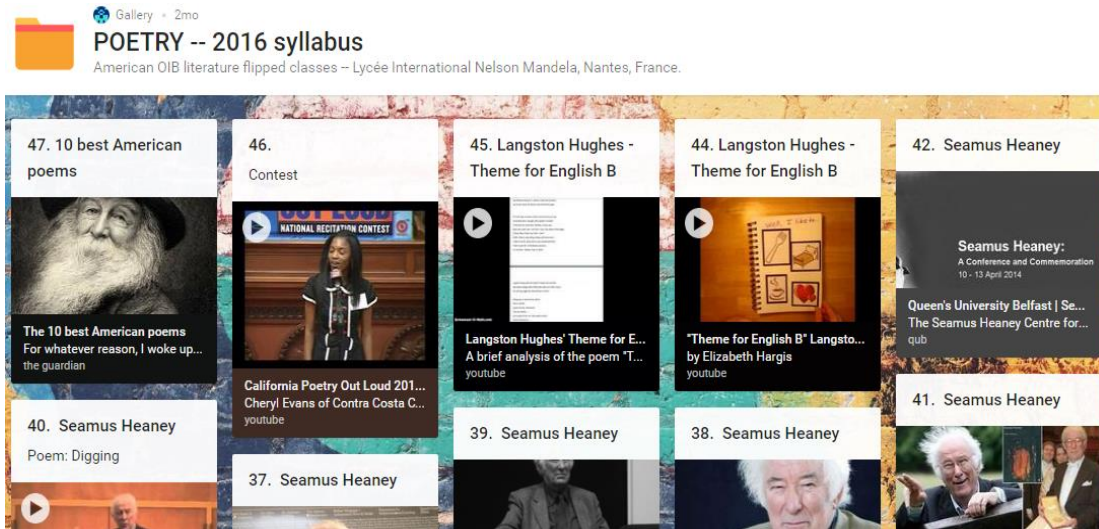
DISCUSSION

This section will discuss the practical applications of utilizing Padlet in ESL/EFL environments. The creators of Padlet recognized its usefulness in education, and therefore, created a website showcasing over 40 unique padlets submitted by teachers at < <https://padlet.com/gallery/edu> > (Padlet, n.d.). Marshall, Basilio, et al. (n.d.) have compiled a large resource of teacher-created, publically shared padlets which highlight additional technology for classroom and/or teacher use at < <https://padlet.com/edtechpad/megapadlet> >.

Padlet may also be an effective way to incorporate the Flipped Learning model. Flipped learning is a pedagogical approach in which instruction shifts to outside the learning space and classroom time is spent on collaboration and guidance (Flipped Learning.org, 2014). By posting video, text and linked material on Padlet, a school in France created a highly accessible, week-by-week English for Academic Purposes (EAP) course syllabus for its participants (see Figure 2).

FIGURE 2

Screenshot of the *Poetry – 2016 syllabus* padlet (Padlet.com, n.d.).



Additional uses for padlet in the ESL/EFL classroom may include:

- a course question-and-answer or discussion board, monitored by the instructor, to address students' issues regarding content or grammar-related topics;
- a way of posting extensive reading book reviews. The reviews may be read by peers and thus, encourage book swapping.

Padlet's features and how these are applied in the language learning classroom, may be endless.

CAVEATS & CONCLUSION

While Padlet appears to be an axiomatic resource in the ESL/EFL environment, there are caveats. As with any new technology, students, parents, teachers and administrators may need time learning and accepting Padlet. Instructors must consider student access to devices and internet connectivity. Furthermore, students will need to be monitored so inappropriate materials, bullying, or unwelcome messages are not posted on peer-shared padlets. Administrators and parents may be concerned with privacy; it is prudent to solicit permission via ethical means (e.g. forms for consent of use) before incorporating Padlet into one's classroom.

Whenever educators employ technology in the classroom, an e-learning environment is created "where users can easily access the [needed] learning products...when and where they need them" (Rosenberg, 2001, p.173; as cited in Lynn & Tuzi, 2006, p.49). The accessibility and mobility of language learning materials posted on Padlet may motivate and enhance student language learning.

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