

COLLABORATIVE TECHNOLOGY PROJECT
IDE 611: TECHNOLOGIES FOR INSTRUCTIONAL SETTING

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Schoology.com for ESL (English as a Second Language) Adult Learners

Introduction

This project aimed to support Adult ESL learners in their English language continuing education during and after classroom instruction using technology as the platform learning tool. With this focus, we proposed to use www.schoology.com, a free Learning Management System (LMS) tool that uncovers a set of new-preconceived learning experiences, to be used as an extension of the classroom instructions. Schoology allows adult learners, in a user-friendly way, to practice English, assess their learnings, and keeping a direct connection with classmates and teachers from any computer, tablet, or smartphone with Internet access. On the other hand, Schoology enables instructors to create, manage, and share content and resources with their students and colleagues. Teachers can follow their adult learners progress synchronously or asynchronously by using their smart devices as well. We also proposed that the adoption of this LMS project could enhance any adult ESL education classroom by increasing the number of time students could spend practicing English on their self-pace and increase of students' technology skills. For this end, learning outcomes can be reflected in students' English level advancement, job placement, and continuing education in the long run.

The project team is composed by Abubakr Abdelrasoul who is an electronics and computer systems engineer with over eight years of experience in electronics, software, and management fields. Coming from a third world country, Abubakr is interested in applying technology in educational contexts to increase access to quality education, reduce costs, and promote open source tools. The other team member is Kennia Delafe, an Adult ESL teacher with more than fifteen years of experience working in different areas in the adult ESL education field. Her

primary focus is to help adult learners to learn English and get acquaintance in their new learning and living community, but also, to close technology knowledge and skills gap to become self-sufficient in this rapid-advancing technological era. Both team members are currently students in the IDE:611 Technology for Instructional Settings course at Syracuse University.

The implementation and evaluation process was done by the collaboration of Kennia Delafe, Adult ESL Teacher, and Soon Young Kong, also Adult Education Teacher. Both teachers worked in setting up the logistics of including English Butterfly LMS within the hours of instruction and as part of the students' homework.

Needs assessment

The needs assessment revealed the definite need for such tool in the adult ESL education model. From experience in adult education and from asking other professionals' opinion, English as a Second Language adult learners have insufficient time to learn and practice English in a classroom setting which is restricted by time and place as well. As a result, learning takes longer than it should and achieved results are not as high as teachers will like it to be. Besides, education gets interrupted by many other adult responsibilities, and it is not always easy to find ways to continue study. Schoology gives learners the chance to learn, practice, and access learning material without any time or geographical restrictions. To stimulate their interest in pursuing their education outside of the classroom, the adoption of this new technology may motivate students to keep improving their English skills by practicing its four domains, writing, reading, listening, and speaking.

Goals and objectives of the project

The purpose of this project was to implement an accessible learning management system in an ESL learning context to overcome limitations of traditional ESL adult classrooms and to extend the opportunities for learning.

Objectives

This project, the development of the Schoology learning management system, enabled ESL adult learners and teachers to:

- Learn English with no time or place restrictions
- Develop technological skill for both learners and instructors
- Create meaningful online lessons and assessments focusing on significant learning problems
- Monitor and follow their student's progress and take corrective actions when needed
- Provide user-friendly learning tools in one place
- Provide instructors with an easy to use tracking and reporting tool

Target audience

The students, who are participating in the testing of the LMS, are refugees who come from different countries. This group of students in the English Level 2 class came from Central America and the Caribbean Islands, Asia, and Africa. This course is composed of twenty-five students, all from different knowledge background, their English level fluctuates in the beginning English range, and their technology skills also varies from limited to advanced.

The project also targeted ESL teachers that will like to promote continuing ESL education outside of the classrooms and the use of technology as an instrument of learning.

Technology or technologies to be used

This project engaged the targeted audience in using a variety of techniques. Personal computers, tablets, smartphones, and virtual technology with the use of the www.schoology.com site or "online classroom" can be accessed from any school computer lab, library computers, from home or by using other smart devices. Because of the nature of the ESL adult learners, it is essential to clarify that all hardware used to access to the English practices must have internet access.

The use of these technologies made the perfect combination to create a system that adult ESL students are using to improve their English by accessing and using teacher-created resources at no additional cost. Participating students are now able to own and manage their English skills and knowledge acquisition at their speed and can expand their technical skills as an accidental learning. Students have the opportunity to improve their listening, reading, speaking, and writing skills in English with the use of hands-on exercises, videos, vocabulary drills, flashcards, and more. Besides, having access to an online classroom on-site, students can bring it home. Therefore, learning is reaching out those, that for various reasons cannot go to school to learn or improve their English, to become part of our distance English-learning community.

Teachers, on the other hand, Kennia Delafe and Soon Young Kong, had the opportunity to design their own-private online classroom by using their limited or advanced technology skills for free. The opportunities to expand their creativity and knowledge while creating meaningful lessons that students can use to review concepts learned while away from the classroom, are endless. It's worth mentioning that teachers organized content by creating folders, upload previous-created lessons, linking outside sources into the courses, and developing quizzes and activities. Teachers are also able to communicate news quickly, have students chat about specific topics adding discussion sessions, create photo albums from classroom pictures, download useful apps into courses, connect with other teachers for resources within the same platform, and much more.

Challenges faced

Schoology is an excellent LMS platform with many features and possesses a user-friendly environment. However, Schoology is a tool at the end of the day, facilitates learning and makes it easier, but a significant component is its content and quality. Deciding on the right material, with our students' low English and computer skills in mind was difficult and time-consuming. Ideally, the content must cover all four-English-language skills in reading, writing, listen, and speaking. Fortunately, we managed to organize and prepare suitable material for the first three skills, that is Reading, Writing, and Listening. We relied on free and open-source content from

the Internet rather than developing it from scratch. The resources we used were YouTube, Quizlet, Mindmeister, and Azar Grammar to compile and create some more study materials samplers.

For the Speaking acquisition skill, Schoology might not be of great help as this ability requires synchronous interaction whether face-to-face or online. Therefore, having in mind that the primary goal of English Butterfly LMS is to expand English learning outside of the classroom and not to replace it, we decided to address more of the speaking during class sessions instead of online. However, due to many petitions from students, we included some YouTube videos that target some of the most common pronunciation issues among students as a pronunciation model for them to practice by repeating/ mimicking each of the given practices.

Another problem that we encounter was the amount of time that training in the use of Schoology took for this group of students due to their limited technology skills. As it was explained before, our audience is a group of a multi-English level and multi-technology skills student. This problem had impacted the way training had been delivered. Instead of teacher-centered instruction with the use of visuals and step by step materials, it was more of a peer-to-peer teaching and cooperation. Skilled students in the technology area helped others to register, sign in and out, sign in again, and explore content following visual/written direction in a handout. Still, even though it took a long time, it was and continue being a success.

The lack of proper hardware at home for students to use our online classroom was another issue. As students started to engage in this project, always remembering that their English is limited and we cannot give them too much information at a time, we started asking for resources that they could use at home to continue practicing. Around 40 % of the class has a computer or a tablet ready to use with internet access. The other 60% or so, do not have the proper hardware to practice. Therefore, we asked if they have a smartphone with an active internet connection and this was successful. Consequently, we added another step to this process; to download the Schoology app into their phone while on school grounds WiFi was active and taught them using hands-on practice how to use their mobile so they could continue studying English using English Butterfly LMS while at home.

Results

The objective of this project was to implement an online learning management system (LMS) to overcome limitations of traditional ESL adult classrooms and extend the opportunities for learning with no time or place restrictions. We also wanted to conceive this MLS to help adult learners and teachers in the development of technology skills to have access to meaningful lessons and assessments, to monitor students' progress and learning engagement, to learn new user-friendly learning tools, and to provide instructors with an effortless way of tracking and reporting students' learning exposure outside of the classroom hours. We are happy to say that these objectives were met promptly (see Appendix A) and the English Butterfly Management Learning System is up and successfully running (see Appendix B).

At this point, twenty out of twenty-five students in Kennia's ESL classroom are registered in the English Butterfly online classroom and fourteen are often engaged in many of the learning activities that the site provides. Therefore, we got to the conclusion that the structure and content we developed are meaningful and easy to navigate for our adult learners. The structure that we arranged for students to manage has been successfully understood and is being used. And the given training and classroom support with technology have reinforced our adult learners abilities efficiently to lead their new way of learning.

The responses we obtained from our students are above expectations, and they have shown motivation to begin and continue learning by actively interacting with the content during evening hours and weekends (see Appendix C). Also, many adult learners have expressed that their computer skills seem better than before and this shown by their participation in the online classroom and the questions they bring to class after practice. Overall, we are delighted with the product and its outcomes. We think that the continued used of this LMS will help adult learners to overcome many of their English language barriers in the near future.

Things to have in mind for future implementation of a LMS or while training of other professionals in the creation, implementation, and evaluation of a similar learning platform, is to assess the needs and skills of the targeted audience better to be able to plan the implementation

phase in a way that the time used will be more realistic. For our project, we designed the implementation phase way too far from the reality and in our way we encounter difficulties that delay the proposed schedule. However, it did not slow the expected outcomes. A possible solution we thought about, was to overlap content preparation and training. Therefore, by the time students are fully trained in the use of the LMS, the content is already created for them to use. In this way, possible delays in students' fully engagement and practice will be eliminated.

Reflection on the Experience

During the development of this project we didn't encounter too many challenges, although agreeing on and finding content that could be used as a self-paced study, bearing in mind the level of English and technology skills of the target audience, yet, was crucial and challenging. On the other hand, the way the team cooperated and worked together was satisfactory helping to move on through the different phases of the project in a smooth direction.

We have learned, from the responses we have seen and the number of hours that learners are putting into studying English outside of the limited three-hour-classes, that technology has tremendous power in education if it is finely developed. We also found out how motivated students were to learn and enhance their language with the use of this user-friendly tool accessible everywhere they have an internet connection. Also, teachers in the implementation and evaluation phase were very motivated to use this new addition to their class because of all this new window of learning opportunities for their students. Motivation, in general, has been one of the fundamental keys to the success of this project. Besides, proper planning, management, and flexibility throughout the process of development and design of the LMS project played a fundamental role in getting outstanding outcomes as well. At this time it is essential to bring up that the team agrees on the fact that the use of technology in the adult ESL classroom enhances students' learning and gives them a whole new set of skills that they need to survive in this digital era. Furthermore, our approach to collaboration and implementation of our LMS project assisted educators and students involved in the understanding of the importance of

learning and using technology in the ESL adult education. The results we obtained are very encouraging to continue promoting the use of LMS in the adult ESL education system.

We believe that our future jobs can be enhanced with the skills and knowledge we have acquired as result of this project. Kennia has mentioned that she will continue using and developing the English Butterfly LMS and train future students in its use in her next teachings. Besides, Kennia already raised the learning performance gap due to the lack of technology knowledge among other teachers to the facilitator in the school she works. Her goal is to present this project and its outcomes to support a possible solution idea to close the learning gap between teachers and students. She also mentioned that next year, she would present English Butterfly LMS and its results in the NYACCE (New York Association for Continuing/ Community Education) as an example of how technology can help adult ESL students in improving their English skills to promote its use among education professionals in the area of adult education.

Abubakr mentioned that this could bring a new spectrum of teaching and learning opportunities in his county's schools. Furthermore, upon his return, he will be looking into possibilities of implementing this idea in his hometown schools.

APPENDICES

Appendix A

Time Management Plan for the project

October 9th- Initial Proposal, Done!

10/16 - www.schoolology.com online classroom setup (Course Name and Section), selection of ESL materials to be use in the course, **Done!**

10/23 - Course folders set up, grading system period setup, and instructional materials for registration and use of the site done, **Done!**

10/30 - **11/6** ESL course instructional materials, exercises and quizzes done, work on progress report and start recruiting students and teachers for online classroom testing, **Done!**

November 11th - Progress Report, Done!

11/20 - Initial online classroom testing, continue working on instructional materials and learning assessment, record online classroom challenges and needs for changes, **Done!**

11/27 - Work on online classroom, use data analysis, ultimate changes, complete online classroom details, record online classroom user's' input, continue working on final submission paper, **Done!**

12/4 - www.schoolology.com LMS ready to be adopted, work on final project paper details, **Done!**

December 8th - Final submission, Done!

Appendix B

Final Product

Site link: <https://www.schoolology.com>

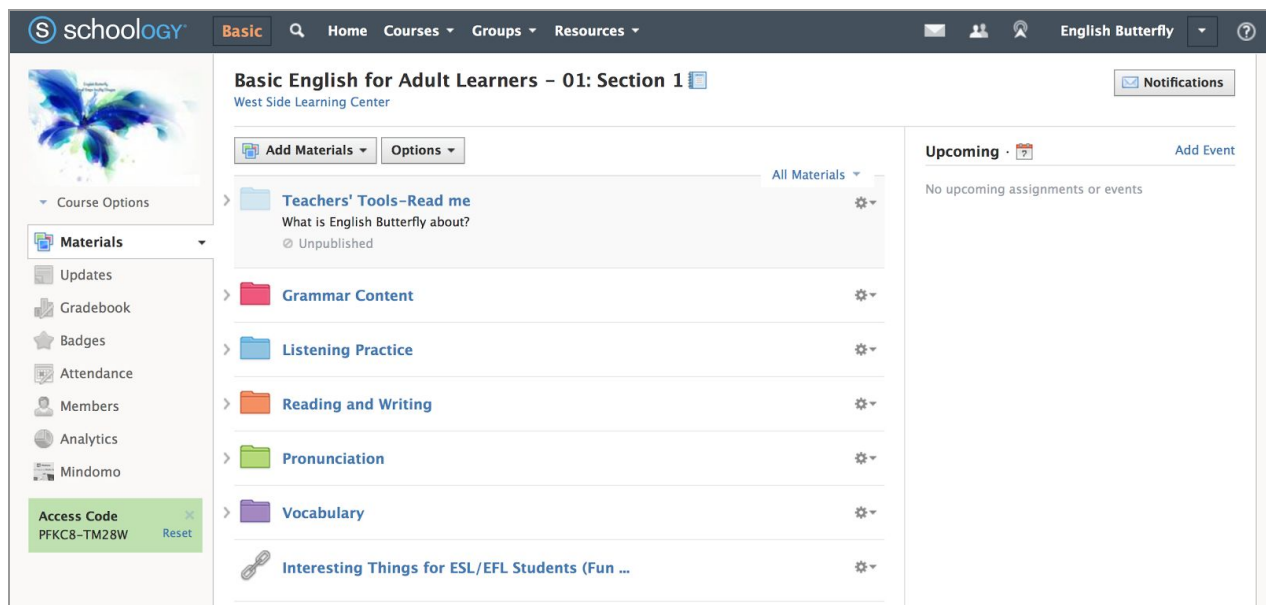
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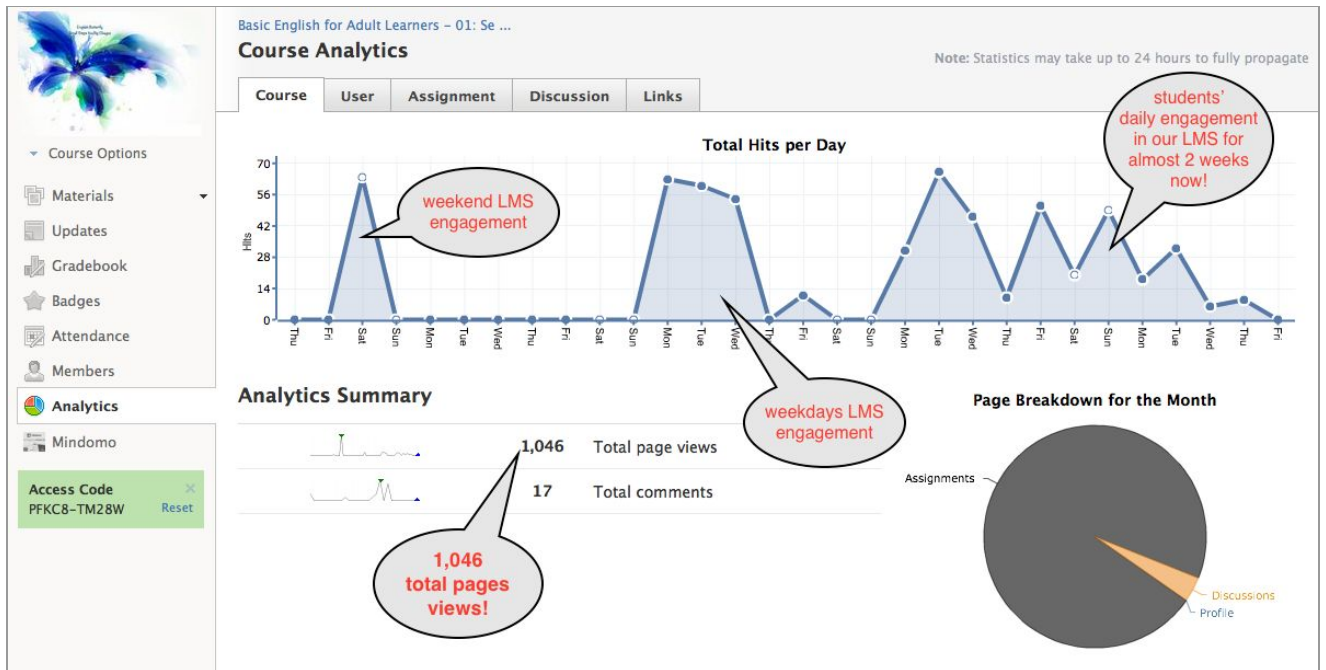
Home Page



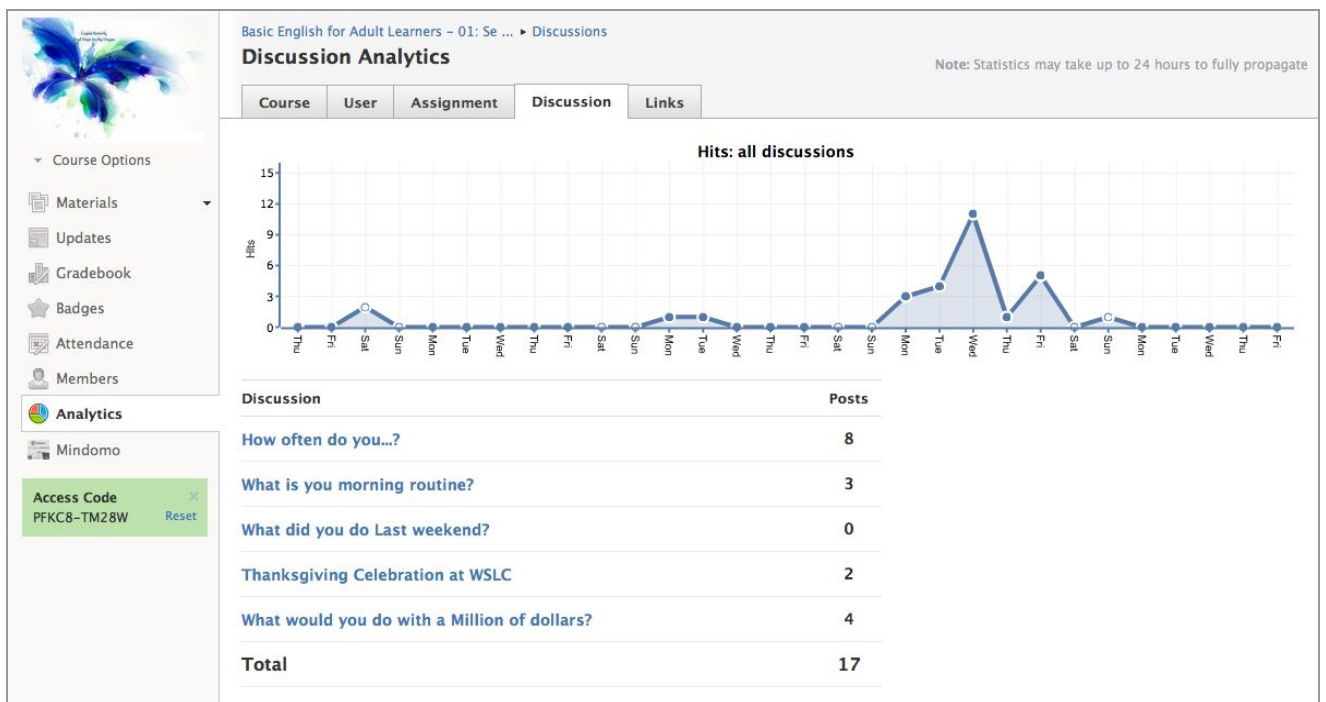
The screenshot displays the Schoolology interface for a course. The top navigation bar includes 'Basic', 'Home', 'Courses', 'Groups', and 'Resources'. The course title is 'Basic English for Adult Learners - 01: Section 1' at 'West Side Learning Center'. A left sidebar contains navigation options: Course Options, Materials, Updates, Gradebook, Badges, Attendance, Members, Analytics, and Mindomo. The main area shows a list of materials with expandable folders: Teachers' Tools-Read me (What is English Butterfly about?), Grammar Content, Listening Practice, Reading and Writing, Pronunciation, and Vocabulary. An 'Upcoming' section on the right shows 'No upcoming assignments or events'.

Appendix C

Overall course analytics for the past thirty days (November 8th - December 7th, 2017)



Course analytics by discussion assignments (November 8th - December 7th, 2017)



Sample of course analytics by links used (November 8th - December 7th, 2017)

