

INVESTIGATING UNIVERSITY STUDENTS' PERCEPTION OF ONLINE FORUM DISCUSSIONS TO IMPROVE LANGUAGE PROFICIENCY

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ABSTRACT

Online forum discussions are a growing importance in higher education as the sector seeks new teaching-learning-assessment methods which can promote students' autonomy as managers of their own virtual learning environment. It is also a growing concern for second language learners as a means to improve their proficiency of the target language. The purpose of this study is to analyse descriptively the tertiary students' perceptions, attitudes and behaviour when using online forum discussions to support their language learning and assessment in an English course at a university college of hospitality in Malaysia. The participants are 76 students who are studying English through a blended learning mode at both diploma and degree levels. Data was collected through questionnaires and content analysis of the students' online forum postings. A mixed method analysis was applied in order to study the impact of this technological innovation on students and their satisfaction which show students' perception of using Online Forums is mostly inconclusive in order to improve their English language proficiency.

Keywords: *computer-mediated communication, online forums, blended learning, tertiary education, English proficiency.*

INTRODUCTION

The American Society for Training and Development has identified "blended learning" as one of the top ten trends to emerge in the knowledge delivery industry in 2003 (Rooney, 2003 in Graham, 2006). Singh and Reed (2001) in Akkoyunlu and Soylu (2008) describes blended learning as a learning programme where more than one delivery mode is being used with the objective of optimizing the learning outcome and cost of programme delivery. Now, twelve years later, blended learning which essentially comprises of classroom face-to-face (FTF) interaction and online computer-mediated communication (CMC) is gaining popularity in tertiary institutions because of the new technologies which have integrated both classroom and online learning into a more productive teaching and learning environment (Xu, 2009). While face-to-face interaction is still widely sought after in the pursuit of education, online learning through CMC is pervading higher (or tertiary) education, compelling educators to confront existing assumptions of teaching and learning (Garrison and Kanuka, 2004).

Computer-mediated communication emerges from a long line of mediated communication technologies such as the printing press, the telegraph, radio, the telephone, and television (Thorne, 2008). With the advent of the Internet, the quality of everyday communication activities in the professional, educational and interpersonal sectors has been globally transformed (Castells, 2004). The population of Internet users are expanding across the globe despite the unequally distributed access to it across the social classes and geopolitical regions (van Djik, 2005). As life increasingly becomes mediated by computers, more attention is given to issues in language and education in the CMC realm.

In Malaysia, the need to learn and master the English language is demanded at every level of education, from primary to secondary and finally tertiary education, due to the importance of the language in the business sector and for knowledge dissemination (Kabilan et al. 2010). The teaching and learning of English in Malaysia is a highly debated and scrutinised matter, due to students' poor performance in the subject at public examinations in Malaysia such as the *Sijil Pelajaran Malaysia* (SPM), which also often results in poorer performance at university level (Kabilan 2007 in Kabilan et al. 2010). As a result, new and innovative teaching and learning techniques and methodology have been put into practice to assist instructors and facilitate as well as encourage learners to improve in the subject.

The purpose of this study is to investigate if students at a tertiary education institution find it beneficial to use Online Forums to facilitate English usage through the implementation of online discussions. The study will attempt to answer two research questions which are:

1. How much do students' favour Online Forum as a tool for learning English?
2. How effective are Online Forums in improving students' English proficiency?

The findings of this study will hopefully enable other researchers, but mainly educators, in identifying whether Online Forums can improve English as a second/foreign language learners' language ability, and the ways in which to achieve that. With the knowledge of 'how' through this study, practitioners and researchers can develop the appropriate guidelines in utilising Online Forums effectively in facilitating English language learning.

LITERATURE AND RELATED STUDIES

Computer-mediated communication (CMC) refers to human or natural language which is produced and displayed through text-based systems (Herring, 2014). Therefore, it is observed that in certain genres of CMC, the texts bear similarities to speech, for example in mobile text messages and chats or instant messages. According to Crystal (2006), CMC is prone to its own usage of lexicon and grammar. The lexicon in a computer-mediated communication may include abbreviations and acronyms, which are often used to save space, and to reply to messages in a speedy or instant manner. These conventions are more widely utilised in synchronous communication using CMC in which the interacting users are both signed in to their online accounts simultaneously, and the communication process is live and bear resemblance to face-to-face communication. Examples of synchronous CMC communication are chats and instant messages. Asynchronous communication using CMC are, for example, email messages, where the senders and recipients are given more flexibility and composing their responses or replies to the message.

Using both asynchronous and synchronous forms of online communications, online forums are considered an important feature of computer conferencing (Murphy and Collins, 2003). Computer conferencing is defined by Harasim (1997) in Wu and Hiltz (2004) as “a group communications medium enabling groups of people to exchange ideas and opinions and to share information and resources.” Online forums, a branch of computer conferencing, share some of the spontaneity of and flexibility of spoken conversation, and can successfully transfer the face-to-face conversation into a virtual space.

Many studies have been conducted to examine the use of online applications or CMC methods for second or foreign language teaching and learning. Particularly, these studies focus on reading and writing, and were done to clarify the reasons for certain learning patterns and behaviours, and focus on the differences between CMC and FTF which are motivation, learner autonomy, self-awareness and feedback.

Motivation

An early study have been conducted by Warschauer (1996) discover that one of the benefits of computer-mediated communication is that it can result in more equal participation among students. It is mentioned that as early as 1978, Hiltz and Turoff implied that computerised conferencing which involves online interaction among many users would eventually “have dramatic psychological and sociological impacts on various group communication objects and processes. One of the aforementioned study’s findings was the “equalizing effect” of CMC. Although face-to-face communication or discussion can be relatively unbalanced – as usually one or two participants tend to dominate the floor or determine the topic of discussion, CMC offers a more balance participation among the users within an interaction, with speakers getting the share of the floor more equally (Warschauer, 2013).

Warschauer’s 1996 study also outlines several motivating factors of using computers for writing and communication in the English language. It discovers that students want to communicate with other speakers in other parts of the world as well as with their classmates and their teachers. This type of communication which is easily attainable through online interactions has several benefits: learners feel like they are part of a community, are able to develop their thoughts and ideas, can learn about different people and cultures, and students are able to learn from each other. This further benefit online participants through empowering them by enhancing their personal power, overcoming isolation and it is made less threatening for them to contact other people.

Learner Autonomy

Studies also find that computers help users become better and more independent learners. Participants of Warschauer’s 1996 study feel that they can learn faster, they are more creative and are able to write better essays. This is through having more control of their learning through the “individualised” aspect of CMC which allow students to communicate with whom they want, when they want and about whatever they want, thus giving them more control of their learning and more opportunities to practice English in their own time and according to their convenience.

A study by Northcote and Kendle (2001) suggests that students are given the opportunity to obtain numerous practical online skills in a more incidental and informal manner by participating in online learning activities such as discussing in online forums as well as searching for information online. A study by Fitze (2006) which compared the effectiveness of face-to-face (FTF) and online instruction focusing on forum use in English as a Second Language (ESL) instruction discovered among other findings that online writing exhibits a larger lexical range, it exhibited more interaction among the participants and led to greater equality in participation compared to FTF interaction.

Self-awareness

During interaction using CMC, it is not possible to see the physical and facial reaction with whom one is communicating which makes CMC quite different from FTF communication. According to Sproull and Kiesler (1986), there is an absence of social context cues in CMC, in which aspects of the physical environment, for example the location, size of the space, noise, environmental distractions, and non-verbal behaviours of the communicators, for example facial expressions, tone of voice and body posture, are the only available in FTF communication (Dietz-Uhler and Bishop-Clark, 2001). This reduction of social context cues leads to feelings of “deindividuation” – the loss of self-awareness in groups, which can result in communication which is more impersonal and “free” and that contains less inhibition during interactions, and consequently, leads to more equal participation among users in a CMC domain. However, this can also produce a negative outcome in which CMC can contain more hostile comments and insults as a result of un-inhibition and depersonalisation which can impede on the interactions among members.

Feedback

The term ‘feedback’ and ‘assessment’ are sometimes used interchangeably, particularly when referring to modes of assessment. In this study however, the term feedback is used to describe comments received from peers and instructors which contribute to the participants’ learning and are not associated with formal marking or assessment. According to Dippold (2009) feedback refers to comments which assist learners to identify the strengths and weaknesses which can be identified in their performance and the improvement that can be derived from the experience, especially when there is a need to perform in assessments.

Hyland and Hyland (2006) outline several effects concerning peer and tutor (instructor) feedback. Specifically, surveys of students’ preferences in feedback on foreign language tasks, for students learning a second or foreign language, suggest that ESL/EFL students generally value teacher feedback more highly than peer feedback. This could be the result of students resisting having power over their learning peers or their peers having power over them, stemming from their perception that their expertise is insufficient to provide their peers with feedback, causing many to still see it as the tutor’s role to provide meaningful feedback (Hanrahan and Isaacs, 2001; Liu and Carless, 2006).

Furthermore, in a study by Prins et al. (2005) in Ware and Warschauer (2006), it was discovered that in a peer feedback exercise through the VLE Blackboard – a learning management system (LMS) platform, using a virtual seminar of participants from five different countries, the quality of peer feedback given was found to be low and consisted of

mostly negative rather than positive statements. This was thought to be due to students' misinterpretation of feedback to mean criticism, and their lack of expertise in constructing feedback which may lead learners to be discouraged in further giving and receiving peer feedback. Additionally, the authors of the study also suggests that tutors must then have the skills to moderate the online environment which can lead to vital outcomes that can encourage students to participate in online group discussions.

METHODOLOGY

This study was carried out in a private tertiary education institution in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, specializing in the hospitality industry. Most of the students in this institution are studying in various courses to serve the service industry, mostly focusing in the hotel and tourism as well as events industries.

The institution applies a blended learning method in almost all of its formally taught courses by using an LMS (learning management system) platform called The Course Networking (www.thecn.com). The Course Networking (CN) is a "social networking environment for academic services", which was "developed by educators, for educators" (Bhanushe, 2013). It offers cloud based learning tools – which means resources and stored in a virtual environment (Boiros, 2014), and services for online courses which are administered by the instructors and participated by the students. The CN offers a feature called "Posts" which is available to both the instructors and learners on the LMS platform. It allows users to share their thoughts through texts, images and videos, as well as share links and files by attaching them in various formats inside their posts. There are also actions to "Like" other users' posts, and "Reflect" which allows the users to respond by replying to each others' posts and continuing on a discussion.

A mixed method of quantitative and qualitative study was utilised to identify students' perception of using Course Networking's online forum or online discussion through the "Post" function on the CN in improving their English proficiency. For this purpose, 76 students from the private education institution mentioned above were randomly chosen to participate in answering a questionnaire to generate the quantitative data for this research. Furthermore, one random class of students were observed in terms of their participation as well as their usage of the English language in the classroom and their usage of English language while participating in online discussions via Course Networking (CN). The students' online posts in the CN forum will provide the qualitative data in which the content of the students' post will be analysed and compared against the literature presented above.

The instrument used in this study was a questionnaire that consisted of three sections. Section A provided the participants' study background information, namely which programme they were enrolled in at the institution, as well as the semester of study they were in and the courses which they have taken which utilised the online forum discussions as part of their subject coursework. Section B consists of a five point Likert scale questionnaire comprising of ten statements related to the students' participation in online forum discussions. The statements were constructed from core aspects of computer-mediated communication (CMC) which are noted as different from face-to-face (FTF) interactions, namely motivation, learner autonomy, self-awareness and feedback.

Lastly, Section C includes three open ended questions that require the students to give feedback on whether participation in online forum discussions via the CN in the institution has had any significant impact on their usage of the English language. For the analysis of the data in Section A and Section B, frequency and percentages were used, and for the open-ended items, the students' responses were categorised into emerging themes and analysed against the findings from the classroom observations.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

Statement 1: I like using English when participating in Online Forums.

I like using English when participating in Online Forums.	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Strongly Agree	13	17
Agree	47	62
Not Sure	9	12
Disagree	6	8
Strongly Disagree	1	1
Total	76	100

Of the 76 students who responded, 17 percent of them strongly agreed and a further 62 percent agreed with the statement. This is a strong indication that the students appreciate the opportunity to use English for real world discussions online. A total of 12 percent of the students are unsure of the statement while 9 percent disagreed with the statement.

Statement 2: Online Forums are a fun way to interact with other people using English.

Online Forums are a fun way to interact with other people using English.	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Strongly Agree	1	1
Agree	38	50
Not Sure	28	37
Disagree	6	8
Strongly Disagree	3	4
Total	76	100

While students like to use English in Online Forums, only 51 percent of the students think that Online Forums are a fun avenue for interaction. The remaining 37 percent of the respondents are unsure about this statement while 12 percent of them disagreed. To almost half of the total respondents, the fun element is not felt though the activities of Online Forums.

Statement 3: I feel more confident using English on Online Forums.

I feel more confident using English on Online Forums.	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Strongly Agree	5	7
Agree	33	43
Not Sure	27	36
Disagree	9	12
Strongly Disagree	2	2
Total	76	100

Half of the population of respondents discover that they are more confident using English on Online Forums. Of this total, 7 percent of the respondents strongly agree and 43 percent agree with the statement. However, it is important to note that a significant portion of the respondents, 36 percent of them, reported that they were unsure of this statement. The remaining 14 percent either strongly disagree or disagree.

Statement 4: I can express myself better in English when I am not talking face to face.

I can express myself better in English when I am not talking face to face.	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Strongly Agree	6	6
Agree	40	40
Not Sure	17	17
Disagree	10	10
Strongly Disagree	3	3
Total	76	100

Compared to Statement 3 (I feel more confident using English on Online Forums), the percentage of students who agree with this statement rise from 7 percent to 8 percent for those who strongly agree. The percentage for those who agree also increases by 10 percent and the percentage of those who are unsure decreases from 36 percent for Statement 3 to 22 percent for this statement. The remaining 17 percent do not agree with this statement. The increase in percentage shows that the students generally feel they have more confidence when they are not put on the spot to respond in a face to face interaction. Although almost half of them feel confident in using English in online forum, some of those who are unsure or disagree with this statement have shifted to agree with the statement that in non-threatening situations, they are able to freely put forth their intended meaning.

Statement 5: I like being able to access the Online Forum any time I want.

I like being able to access the Online Forum any time I want.	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Strongly Agree	8	11
Agree	35	46
Not Sure	24	32
Disagree	7	9
Strongly Disagree	2	2
Total	76	100

More than half of the respondents either strongly agree, 11 percent, or agree, 46 percent, with this statement. A substantial proportion of the students, 32 percent, are unsure of this statement. The remaining 11 percent either disagree or strongly disagree with this statement.

Statement 6: It is important that I have time to prepare before I post my comments on online forums.

It is important that I have time to prepare before I post my comments on Online Forums.	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Strongly Agree	13	17
Agree	40	53
Not Sure	16	21
Disagree	5	7
Strongly Disagree	2	2
Total	76	100

A significant 70 percent of the respondents strongly agree (17 percent) and agree (53 percent) with this statement. 21 percent of the respondents remain unsure while 7 percent disagree and 2 percent strongly disagree with the statement.

Statement 7: I learn by observing how other people use the English language on Online Forums.

I learn by observing how other people use the English language on Online Forums.	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Strongly Agree	10	13
Agree	41	54
Not Sure	16	21
Disagree	8	11
Strongly Disagree	1	1
Total	76	100

For this statement, a high percentage of 67 percent of the respondents strongly agree (13 percent) and agree (54 percent). The percentage of respondents who are unsure stands at 21 percent while a further 11 percent disagree and 1 percent strong disagree with this statement.

Statement 8: I can easily find information to contribute to discussion on Online Forums.

I can easily find information to contribute to discussions on Online Forum.	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Strongly Agree	7	9
Agree	33	44
Not Sure	24	32
Disagree	9	12
Strongly Disagree	2	3
Total	75	100

More than 50 percent of the respondents agree with this statement: 9 percent strongly agree and 44 percent agree. A high percentage of 32 percent are unsure while 15 percent disagree with this statement: 12 percent disagree and 3 percent strongly disagree.

Statement 9: I value my peers' feedback on my post in Online Forums.

I value my peers' feedback on my post in Online Forums.	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Strongly Agree	5	7
Agree	37	49
Not Sure	25	33
Disagree	7	9
Strongly Disagree	1	2
Total	75	100

For this statement, 7 percent of the respondents strongly agree while 49 percent agree. 33 percent are unsure about this statement. Out of the remaining 11 percent – 9 percent disagree while 2 percent strongly disagree with the statement.

Statement 10: I value the instructor's feedback on my post in Online Forums.

I value the instructor's feedback on my post in Online Forums.	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Strongly Agree	9	12
Agree	38	51
Not Sure	20	27
Disagree	7	10
Strongly Disagree	0	0
Total	74	100

Compared with statement 9 above, the respondents favour the instructor’s feedback over their peers’ feedback. For respondents who strongly agree with this statement, the percentage of those who strongly agree is 12 percent compared to 7 percent for statement 9. The percentage of those who agree is 51 percent, which is 2 percent higher than that of statement 9. The percentage of those who are unsure about this statement is also lower than that of statement 9 at 27 percent. 10 percent of the respondents disagree but none of them strongly disagree with the statement.

Question 1: Has your English improved after participating in Online Forums?

Has your English improved after participating in Online Forums?	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Yes	55	73
No	20	26
Did not respond	1	1
Total	76	100

From a total of 76 respondents, a significant percentage of 73 percent agree that their English has improved through their participation in Online Forums. A categorisation of the themes emerging from the respondents’ reasons to improved proficiency is depicted in the table below:

Emerging Themes for Reasons to ‘Yes’ Responses to Question 1

Emerging Themes for Reasons to ‘Yes’ Responses to Question 1	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Opportunities to learn through observation of other participants’ English usage	17	31
Platform to practise expressing ideas in English	8	14.5
Opportunities to improve one’s store of vocabulary	8	14.5
Convenience of having the internet at hand for reference	6	11
Opportunities to gain additional knowledge	5	9
Opportunities to learn through collaborative discussions	5	9
Time for thinking and preparation before posting responses	4	7
Opportunities for more exposure to English usage	1	2
Did not respond	1	2
Total	55	100

The majority of the respondents (31 percent) acknowledge that the best method to improve English in Online Forums is through the observation and analysis of their peers' and instructors' English usage in postings. Respondents find that through the observations, they can gain varied forms of English expressions as stated in one of the comments given, *'I find my English level of proficiency satisfactory for myself but I also sometimes do find new and interesting sentence structures on the Online Forums.'* Respondents show self-awareness in what they can gain from the observation of others' postings to maximise on what they can learn from the other participants; these are reflected in comments such as *'I can improve my English by learning and reflect on my peers comment as well as gain more external resources'*, *'I am able to learn more on how English can be written formally and informally, and observe on how people can communicate by using English language'*, and *'Observe how other's way of using English to communicate and know and correct the own mistake'*. The respondents also acknowledge that Online Forums are a good platform to use English as it is the common language used in class. Because there is no other option, they see this opportunity as a form of practice for their English usage to discuss a real world issue. Among the comments that support this notion are *'Because I can express my English skill more through the online section'*, and *'because all the students and the lecturer use English for communication'*.

Equally important to respondents in Online Forums are the opportunities to expand their vocabulary. Through the reading of the comments on posting, the respondents show that they have taken their learning autonomously to learn the meaning of the new words they encounter in Online Forums. Because the words are used in context of the discussion, the respondents get a better grasp of the meaning of the words. The following comment aptly sums this point up: *'Most of the online forum user using English, from their post, I will go and check those word that I not understand, in order to enhance my vocabulary'*. The internet and technology have a role to play in promoting Online Forums as a learning tool as it provides the convenience of having information at one's fingertips. Again, this feature in Online Forums complements the autonomous learners well. The 11 percent of the respondents who say 'yes' aptly give a lot of examples of their usage of the internet and computers to facilitate their acquisition of the language: *'easy to google translate and understand the word'*, and *'computer auto correct spelling'*. Moreover, the internet also offers the chance to gain additional knowledge which 9 percent of the total respondents value: *'due to the Course Network websites consist of international community, I am able to learn new knowledge that I have no idea before'*, *'reading extra notes or information and watching some videos that shown how to interact with people in a proper ways'* and *'lecture will updated the lecture's note and coursemate will share a lot of online article which help in my English language'*.

A further 9 percent of the respondents who agreed that Online Forums have played a part in increasing their English proficiency cite that they are motivated by the collaborative learning which are inherent in their discussions online. This fact is evident in comments like *'I can learn English from each other on CN'* and *'can learn more (from) different suggestion'*.

A number of respondents (7 percent) find that the luxury of having the time to respond in asynchronous discussions provide them some respite from the pressure of having to respond immediately and face more risks of making mistakes in front of their peers. This also allows for more thinking time which results in a more confident user of the language: *'have enough time for me to think on it and answer about it'*, *'I can think before posting my*

comment into the online forums’, ‘because before posting, I always check my grammer’ and ‘will double check my grammar or tense before I post my comment’.

Lastly, one respondent found that the Online Forums provide opportunities for more exposure to the English language, as is aptly stated in the comment: *‘because the more you read things written in English, you can improve you English’.*

Emerging Themes for Reasons to ‘No’ Responses to Question 1

Emerging Themes for Reasons to ‘No’ Responses to Question 1	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Online Forums are not the preferred platform for learning English	11	55
Learning English in Online Forums is very limited in its scope	4	20
Accuracy of grammatical usage is lacking in Online Forum among participants	3	15
Limited access to Online Forums	2	10
Total	20	100

To the respondents who do not find relevance between engagement in Online Forums and increase in their level of English proficiency, the main reason lies in their preference of not being in favour of Online Forums (55 percent). First among the reasons given is that the respondents have no confidence in Online Forums to raise their level of proficiency in the language: *‘It’s just like the Facebook website which can’t learn or improved English’, ‘Because not only Online Forums to improve my English’, and ‘Because I still speak and write the same way’.* For some, it is a matter of personal preference to avoid public forums: *‘I don’t want to show my ideas or opinions to others’, ‘I think study face to face is more better’, and ‘Because I don’t like online forum’.* There are some respondents who found checking into Online Forums a hassle and they do not do it regularly.

For 20 percent of the respondents, they find that Online Forums are restrictive in the scope of improving English proficiency. This is evident in the comments given such as: *‘In the Online Forum, it only a very small area of language which can learn on’, ‘Because I think communication in English can learn more English’, ‘My ‘no’ is mean that CN Forum Online just improve my writing skills but not my English communication skills’, and ‘There are other pathways which more efficient. Such as song lyrics, movies subtitles and other American TV show’.* In the comments, the reference to English ‘communication’ is targeted at speaking and listening skills that the respondents find missing in Online Forums.

As many as 15 percent of the respondents perceive that acquiring a language requires learning the language accurately and thus, there is a concern for learning the wrong forms of the language. Among the comments given are: *‘As sometime English on Online Forums are not correct as there still will be grammar error’, ‘Because most of the member in CN use broken language with grammar error’ and ‘There’s very little interaction and there isn’t anyone there to correct my grammar’.* These comments indicate that the respondents are concerned with the lack of instructor feedback in terms of grammatical error correction. They also place more importance on accuracy over fluency in English language acquisition.

Finally, 10 percent of the respondents do not subscribe to Online Forums due to a lack of access to the internet.

CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS

There has been more than a decade of research on computer-mediated communication in education. However, research has been mostly unclear as to whether CMC is an effective replacement for FTF interaction and collaboration. This study was done to add on to this research area by investigating students' perception on the usage of Online Forums to facilitate improvement in learning the English language. Both quantitative and qualitative methods of study were employed in this research.

In this study, the results of how much students favour Online Forums and how effective Online Forums are in improving language proficiency have been inconclusive. This is because a high number of students are unsure of their responses and most statements in the questionnaire resulted in almost even distribution of agreement and disagreement. Notably, students do like using English when participating in Online Forums and they can express themselves better in English when they are not talking face to face. Furthermore, it is important for them to have the time to prepare before posting comments online. Students also learn through observation on how other people use the English language in the forums, and they value the instructors' feedback on their posts in the forums.

However, several statements from the questionnaire show a high level of uncertainty with many students responding "Not Sure". Firstly, it is not certain whether they think Online Forums are a fun way to interact with other people using English. They are also unsure whether they feel more confident using English in Online Forums, and being able to access the Online Forums anytime they want do not pose a strong relation to the benefit of using Online Forums since finding information is also not a major impact on using Online Forums and lastly it is not certain whether they really value feedback from their peers on Online Forums.

Students comments derived from the open-ended questions in the instrument used in this study are valuable for improving the teaching quality of online discussions because these responses identify some of the weaknesses of current practice of teaching using Online Forums. It is suggested that instructors devise more structured and purpose-oriented online discussions to avoid or decrease inefficient online activities. Hence, future research on the effectiveness of Online Forums for learning can provide more beneficial insights into the practice of using this function as well as other features on computer-mediated communication in the education field in order to encourage students to become managers of their learning of English with the help of technology, other learners and their teachers.

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