

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

A Collaborative Technology Project

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IDE 611: Technology for Instructional Settings

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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 keep 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 also follow their adult learners' progress synchronously or asynchronously by using their smart devices. We also proposed that adopting this LMS project could enhance any adult ESL education classroom by increasing students' time practicing English at their own pace and growing students' technology skills. To this end, learning outcomes can be reflected in students' English-level advancement, job placement, and continuing education in the long run.

The project team comprises Abubakr Abdelrasoul, an electronics and computer systems engineer with over eight years of experience in the 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 of adult ESL education. Her primary focus is to help adult learners learn English, become acquainted with their new learning and living community, and close the technology knowledge and skills gap to become self-sufficient in this rapidly 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, an Adult ESL Teacher, and Soon Young Kong, an Adult Education Teacher. Both teachers worked on setting up the logistics of including English Butterfly LMS within the hours of instruction and as part of the student's homework.

Needs assessment

The needs assessment revealed the need for such a tool in the adult ESL education model. From experience in adult education and from asking other professionals' opinions, adult English as a Second Language learners have insufficient time to learn and practice English in a classroom setting, which is also restricted by time and place. As a result, learning takes longer than expected, and the results are not as high as teachers would like. Besides, education gets interrupted by many other adult responsibilities, and it is not always easy to find ways to continue studying. Schoology allows learners 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, adopting 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, overcome the limitations of traditional ESL adult classrooms, and extend learning opportunities.

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 skills 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 participating in the LMS testing are refugees from different countries. This English Level 2 class group came from Central America and the Caribbean Islands, Asia, and Africa. This course comprises twenty-five students from different knowledge backgrounds; their English level fluctuates in the beginning range, and their technology skills also vary from limited to advanced.

The project also targeted ESL teachers who would like to promote continuing ESL education outside of the classroom and the use of technology as an instrument of learning.

Technology or technologies to be used

This project engaged the targeted audience by using a variety of techniques. Personal computers, tablets, smartphones, and virtual technology using the www.schoology.com site or “online classroom” can be accessed from any school computer lab, library computers, home, or other smart devices. Because of the nature of the ESL adult learners, it is essential to clarify that

all hardware used to access the English practices must have internet access.

These technologies made the perfect combination to create a system for adult ESL students to improve their English by accessing and using teacher-created resources at no additional cost. Participating students can now own and manage their English skills and knowledge acquisition at their speed and can expand their technical skills as 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 to those who, 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 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, uploading previously created lessons, linking outside sources into the courses, and developing quizzes and activities. Teachers can also communicate news quickly, have students chat about specific topics, add discussion sessions, create photo albums from classroom pictures, download valuable 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 a user-friendly environment. However, Schoology is a tool that facilitates learning and makes it easier, but a

significant component is its content and quality. With our students' low English and computer skills in mind, deciding on the suitable material was difficult and time-consuming. Ideally, the content must cover all four English-language skills: reading, writing, listening, and speaking. Fortunately, we managed to organize and prepare suitable material for the first three skills: reading, writing, and listening. We relied on free and open-source content from the Internet rather than developing it from scratch. The resources used were YouTube, Quizlet, MindMeister, and Azar Grammar to compile and create more study materials samplers.

Schoology might be of little help for the speaking acquisition skill as this ability requires synchronous face-to-face or online interaction. Therefore, considering 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 speaking during class sessions instead of online. However, due to many petitions from students, we included some YouTube videos targeting some of the most common pronunciation issues among students as a model for them to practice by repeating/ mimicking each of the given practices.

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

Another issue was the need for proper hardware at home for students to use our online classroom. As students started to engage in this project, always remembering that their English was limited and we could not give them too much information, we started asking for resources 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 need the proper hardware to practice. Therefore, we asked if they had a smartphone with an active internet connection, which was successful. Consequently, we added another step to this process: downloading the Schoology app onto 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 the 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 running (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 concluded 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. The training and classroom support with technology has 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 is 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. The continued use of this LMS will help adult learners overcome many of their English language barriers soon.

Things to keep in mind for future implementation of an LMS or while training other professionals in the creation, implementation, and evaluation of a similar learning platform are to better assess the needs and skills of the targeted audience 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 reality, and in our way, we encountered difficulties that delayed the proposed schedule. However, it did not slow the expected outcomes. A possible solution was to overlap content preparation and training. Therefore, when students are fully trained in using the LMS, the content is already created for them to use. In this way, possible delays in students' full 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, 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 smoothly.

From the responses we have seen and the number of hours learners put into studying English outside of the limited three-hour classes, we have learned 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 using 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 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 that technology in the adult ESL classroom enhances students' learning and gives them a whole new set of skills they need to survive in this digital era. Furthermore, our approach to collaboration and implementation of our LMS project assisted educators and students in understanding the importance of learning and using technology in ESL adult education. The results we obtained are very encouraging, and we plan to continue promoting the use of LMS in the adult ESL education system.

Our future jobs can be enhanced by the skills and knowledge we have acquired from 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 subsequent teachings. Besides, Kennia has already raised the learning performance gap due to the need for more technology knowledge among other teachers to be the facilitators in the school where she works. She aims to present this project and its outcomes to support a possible solution 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 improve their English skills to promote its use among education professionals in the area of adult education.

Abubakr mentioned that this could open up a new spectrum of teaching and learning opportunities in his county's schools. Upon his return, he will investigate the possibility of implementing this idea in his hometown schools.

APPENDICES

Appendix A

Time Management Plan for the project

October 9th- Initial Proposal, Done!

10/16— Set up the www.schoolology.com online classroom (Course Name and Section), select the ESL materials for the course, and it's done!

10/23— Course folders, the setup of the grading system period, and instructional materials for registration and site use are done!

10/30 - 11/6 — ESL course instructional materials, exercises,, and quizzes are done. We are working on a progress report and starting to recruit students and teachers for online classroom testing. **Done!**

November 11th — Progress Report is 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, make ultimate changes, complete online classroom details, record online classroom users' input, and 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

FinalProduct

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

Username: kdelafe@syr.edu

Password: Kabu611

Logo:

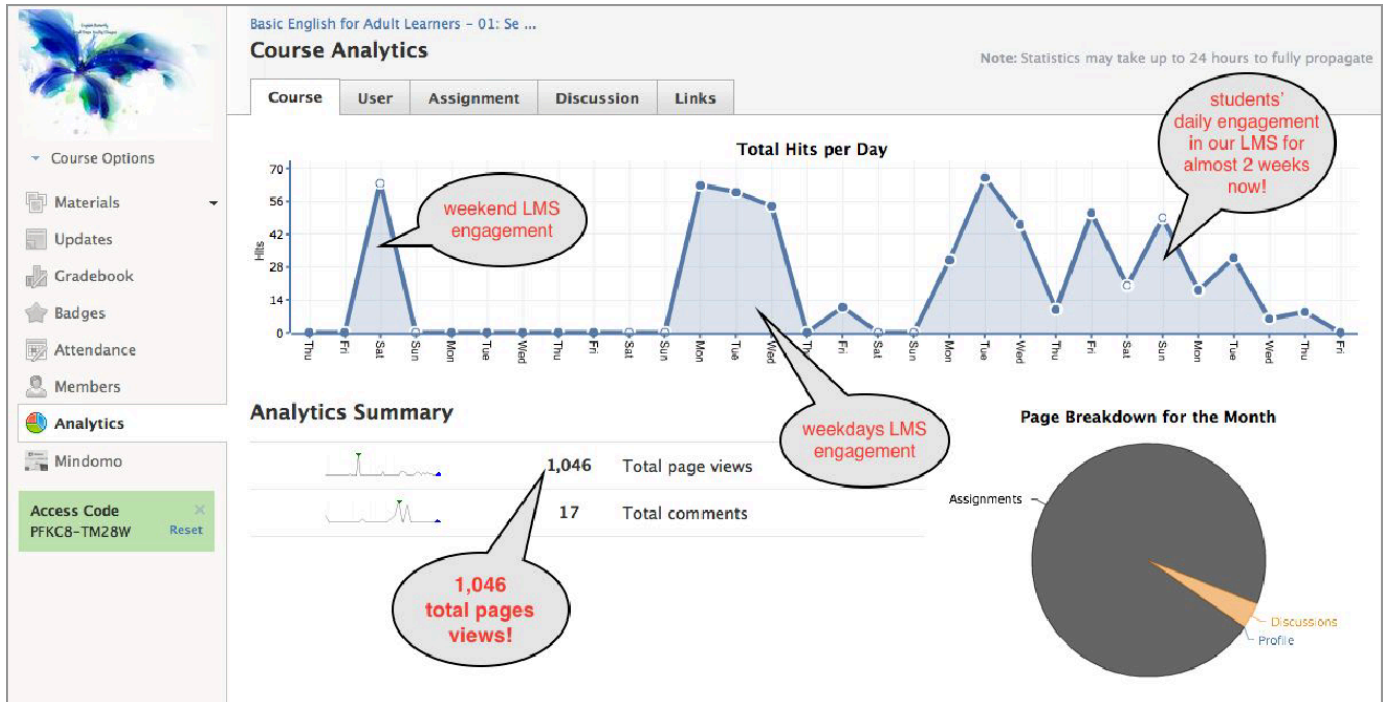


Home Page

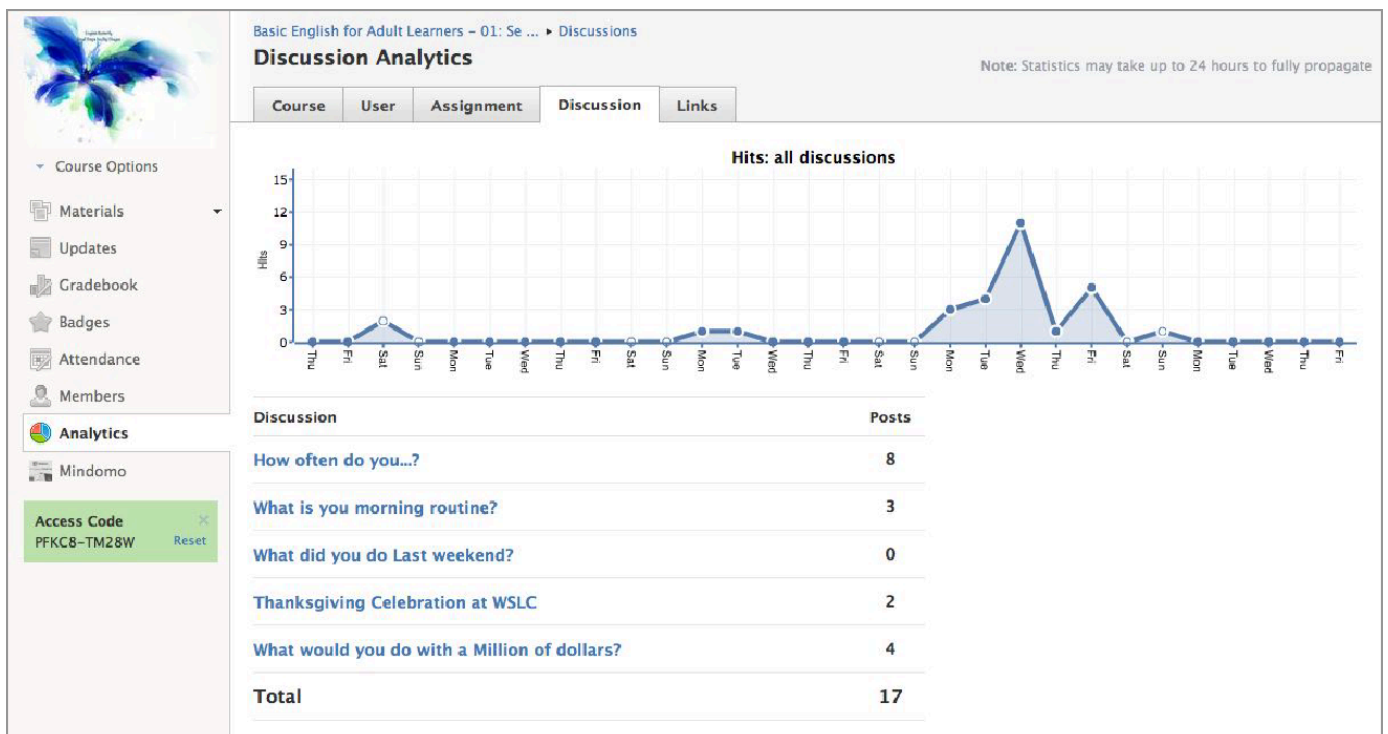
A screenshot of the Schoolology website interface. The top navigation bar includes the Schoolology logo, a search bar, and links for Home, Courses, Groups, and Resources. The user is logged in as "English Butterfly". The main content area is titled "Basic English for Adult Learners – 01: Section 1" and is associated with the "West Side Learning Center". On the left, there is a sidebar with "Course Options" and "Materials" (Updates, Gradebook, Badges, Attendance, Members, Analytics, Mindomo). Below the sidebar is an "Access Code" box showing "PFKC8-TM28W" with a "Reset" button. The main content area has "Add Materials" and "Options" buttons. A list of materials is shown, including "Teachers' Tools-Read me", "Grammar Content", "Listening Practice", "Reading and Writing", "Pronunciation", "Vocabulary", and "Interesting Things for ESL/EFL Students (Fun ...)". On the right, there is a "Notifications" button and an "Upcoming" section stating "No upcoming assignments or events" with an "Add Event" link.

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)



Instructions for Assignment 3, Task #3: Final Report

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December 8, 2017

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

