

EFFECTIVENESS OF ONLINE FORUM AS A PLATFORM TO EXCHANGE
THOUGHTS AMONG UNIVERSITY STUDENTS

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DEDICATION

Dedicated to my beloved grandparents, parents and sister

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ABSTRACT

Higher education institutions such as UTM have developed elearning related website that has online forums to enhance teaching and learning. However, research has argued that online forums provided in the elearning@utm official website was not well utilized in classroom. Research on online forum has been neglected in the language classroom. Thus, this study investigated the effectiveness of using online forum to help tertiary level students exchange thoughts. The research has two stages firstly, whether the online forum help students to exchange their thoughts, and secondly, whether the shared thoughts can fulfill the task given in the online forum. The study was carried out using qualitative methods which included analyzing texts from the online forum postings by 27 students, and online reflections from 24 students who participated in the online forum using prescribed online questions. Analysis of students' postings showed that majority of the students failed to fulfill the given task due to referring and copying of each other's postings. However, analysis of the reflections showed that online forum indeed did help students to share their thoughts because it was convenient to use and provided more opportunities for them to share thoughts. Based on the findings, although the students stated that online forum can positively help them to exchange thoughts, they have failed to fulfill the given tasks which indicated that online forum used for this study was not effective. In the future, it is recommended that online forum can be used to encourage exchange of thoughts but, it requires involvement from lecturers to monitor students' discussion to ensure the effectiveness of using this platform for learning.

ABSTRAK

Institusi pendidikan tinggi seperti UTM telah mengembangkan laman web elearning yang memiliki forum dalam talian untuk meningkatkan pengajaran dan pembelajaran. Walau bagaimanapun, penyelidikan telah menegaskan bahawa forum dalam talian yang disediakan di laman web rasmi elearning @ utm tidak digunakan dengan baik di dalam bilik darjah. Penyelidikan forum dalam talian telah diabaikan dalam kelas bahasa. Oleh itu, kajian ini mengkaji keberkesanan penggunaan forum dalam talian untuk membantu pelajar meningkatkan pemikiran. Kajian ini mempunyai dua peringkat, pertama, sama ada forum dalam talian membantu pelajar untuk bertukar pendapat, dan kedua, sama ada perbincangan bersama dapat memenuhi tugas yang diberi menerusi forum dalam talian. Kajian ini dilakukan menggunakan kaedah kualitatif termasuk menganalisis teks dari posting forum dalam talian oleh 27 pelajar, dan maklum balas secara maya dari 24 pelajar yang menyertai forum dalam talian yang menggunakan soalan yang telah ditetapkan. Analisis posting pelajar menunjukkan bahawa majoriti pelajar gagal memenuhi tugas yang diberi disebabkan oleh rujukan dan peniruan dari pernyataan masing-masing. Walau bagaimanapun, analisis maklum balas menunjukkan bahawa forum dalam talian memang membantu pelajar untuk berkongsi pendapat mereka kerana ia mudah digunakan dan memberi lebih banyak peluang bagi mereka untuk berkongsi pendapat. Berdasarkan dapatan ini, walaupun pelajar menyatakan bahawa forum dalam talian secara positif dapat membantu mereka untuk bertukar pendapat, mereka gagal memenuhi tugas yang diberikan yang menunjukkan bahawa forum dalam talian yang digunakan untuk kajian ini tidak berkesan. Pada masa akan datang, adalah dicadangkan agar forum dalam talian boleh digunakan untuk menggalakkan pertukaran pendapat tetapi, ia memerlukan penglibatan daripada pensyarah untuk memantau perbincangan pelajar bagi memastikan keberkesanan penggunaan platform ini dalam pembelajaran.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER	TITLE	PAGE
	DECLARATION	ii
	DEDICATION	iii
	ACKNOWLEDGEMENT	iv
	ABSTRACT	v
	ABSTRAK	vi
	TABLE OF CONTENTS	vii
	LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS	xi
	LIST OF TABLES	xii
	LIST OF FIGURES	xv
	LIST OF APPENDICES	xvii
I	INTRODUCTION	
1.0	Introduction	1
1.1	Background of Study	3
	1.1.1 Learning Approach in Universiti Teknologi Malaysia (UTM)	3
	1.1.2 elearning in UTM	5
	1.1.3 Online Forum in UTM	6
	1.1.4 ULAB 3162 English For Professional Purpose	7
1.2	Problem Statement	8
1.3	Purpose of the Study	12
1.4	Objectives of the Study	12
1.5	Research Questions	12
1.6	Conceptual Framework	13
1.7	Scope of the Study	15
1.8	Significance of the Study	16

1.9	Definitions of the terms	17
	1.9.1 Online Forum	17
	1.9.2 Affordance	17
	1.9.3 Task Fulfillment	18
1.10	Conclusion	18
II	LITERATURE REVIEW	
2.0	Introduction	19
2.1	Philosophical Background of the Theories	20
2.2	What is Online Forum?	22
	2.2.1 Theory behind Online Forum – CMC (Computer-Mediated Communication)	22
	2.2.2 The Definition of Online Forum	24
2.3	Why Use Digitalized Online Tools in Teaching and Learning?	26
2.4	The Affordances of Using Online Forum to Share Thoughts	28
	2.4.1 Enables Skills Development	30
	2.4.2 Timing (Asynchronous Tool)	34
	2.4.3 Virtual Presence	37
	2.4.4 Metavoice	41
2.5	Factors that Prevent Students to Share Their Thoughts Face-to-Face	43
	2.5.1 Lack of Knowledge	44
	2.5.2 Communication Environment	47
	2.5.2.1 Performance Conditions	48
	2.5.2.2 Affective Factors	49
	2.5.3 Lack of Communication Opportunity	53
2.6	Task Fulfillment	55
2.7	Conclusion	58

III RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.0	Introduction	59
3.1	Research Design	59
3.2	Sample of the Population	62
3.3	Research Instrument	63
	3.3.1 Online Forum	64
	3.3.1.1 The Mode of Two Online Forums	68
	3.3.2 Students' Reflection	72
	3.3.3 Online Forum Evaluation Criteria (Checklist)	73
3.4	Research Procedure	75
	3.4.1 Pilot Study	75
	3.4.2 Collecting Online Forum Postings	76
	3.4.3 Collecting Students' Reflection	77
3.5	Data Analysis	78
	3.5.1 Inductive Approach	78
	3.5.2 Coding System	79
	3.5.3 Content Analysis	79
3.6	Conclusion	81

IV FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

4.0	Introduction	83
4.1	To What Extent has the Online Forum Help Students to Share Thoughts?	84
	4.1.1 Online Forum Can Help in Sharing Thoughts Process	84
	4.1.2 Suggested Improvement for Online Forum as a Platform to Share Thoughts	92

4.2	To What Extent Do the Thoughts Shared by Students Via Online Forum Fulfill the Task Given?	99
4.2.1	Task Fulfillment	99
4.2.2	Why Students of this Research Failed to Fulfill the Given Tasks?	103
4.3	Conclusion	115
V	CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATION	
5.0	Introduction	117
5.1	Overview of the Study	118
5.2	Summary of the Findings	119
5.3	The Implication of the Study	123
5.3.1	Implications for the Administration	121
5.3.2	Implication for the Educators	122
5.3.3	Implication for the Students	123
5.4	The Limitation of the Study	124
5.5	Recommendations for Future Research	125
5.6	Conclusion	127
	REFERENCES	128
	APPENDICE	148

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

UTM	: Universiti Teknologi Malaysia
TESL	: Teaching English as Second Language
Q and A	: Question and Answer
SMS	: Short Message Service
ULAB 3162	: English for Professional Purposes
CMC	: Computer Mediated Communication
L2	: Second Language
ICTs	: Information and Communication Technologies
F2F	: Face-to-Face
KS	: Knowledge Sharing

LIST OF TABLES

TABLE NO	TITLE	PAGE
1.1	The Percentage of Knowledge Sharing (KS) Using Different Features among UTM students	7
3.1	Online Forum postings' assessment criteria	73
4.1	To what extent has online forum help students to share ideas	80
4.2	Frequency of the reasons given why online forum was helpful	81
4.3	The relationship bwtween using online forum and FtF communication	92
4.4	Students' participation in the classroom speaking activities	93
4.5	Task Fulfillment in Online Forum 1	95
4.6	Task Fulfillment in Online Forum 2	96
4.7	Error distribution in online forum 1	99
4.8	Similarities in respondents' answers for online forum 1 (Q1)	101
4.9	Similarities in respondents' answers for online forum 1 (Q2)	103
4.10	Similarities in respondents' answers for online forum 1 (Q3)	104
4.11	Respondents answered the listed questions partially or not answer at all	107
4.12	Respondents answered the listed questions with similar answers	108

LIST OF FIGURES

FIGURE NO	TITLE	PAGE
1.1	Conceptual Framework	13
3.1	Online Forum Requirements	65
3.2	Main Page of a Forum in elearning@utm.my website	66
3.3	Main Page of Student's Post on e-learning@utm	67
3.4	Online Forum Task 1	69
3.5	Online Forum Task 2	71

LIST OF APPENDICES

APPENDICES	TITLE	PAGE
A	Online forum Reflection Questions	149
B	Content Analysis Checklist	150
C	Enlarged Figures (Chapter 3)	152
D	Sample of the Collected Data (respondents' reflections)	155
E	Sample of the Collected Data (online forum postings)	166

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.0 Introduction

With the rapid development of technologies, people's life and life styles are constantly changing. In the field of education, technology always plays an important role in enhancing teaching and learning especially in language classrooms. The younger generations are now starting to learn language using electronic technologies such as smartphones, and learning software such as elearning. Electronic learning is going through revolutionary changes due to the invention of Internet (Othman et al., 2012). Mahmood, Dahlan and Hussin (2013) defined elearning as electronic learning that use computer and internet-based courseware to disseminate knowledge. Transfer of knowledge and skills are two main purposes that can be achieved using elearning. As a result of rapid development of technologies, teaching and learning in classroom can no longer be satisfied with one-fold traditional tool like blackboard, teacher-oriented lecture, textbooks and monochrome word text materials.

Oye et al. (2012) state that elearning is mainly used to enable learners to access educational materials easily and at the same time minimizing the costs and time as well as enhancing learners' academic performance. This particular method allows

multiple students from different countries to enroll in certain classes almost within the same time (Oye et al., 2012). Today's students like to express their own thoughts during the learning process and support their thoughts with colorful pictures, videos and real life authentic examples. However, all the demands desired by modern-day students cannot be achieved with the lack of newer technologies and Internet. Hence, the social media like Facebook, WhatsApp, Twitter and Myspace which are using the technology of web 2.0 like forum, blog, pictures sharing, video and website (Othman et al., 2012) are more preferred by young generations.

Rodgers (2008) postulated that using highly interactive elearning tools can directly enhance students' overall performance. Therefore, based on Rodgers's (2008) theory, the elearning tool such as online forum has the potential to enhance students' performance and encourage them to learn better. Similarly, Holley (2002) also states that better result can be achieved by participants of an elearning than participants of traditional approach. Today, elearning or virtual learning system is developing rapidly and being used widely among many higher educational institutions (Oye et al., 2012). To be specific, elearning tools such as learning software or online forum or chatting tools are as well widely used to enhance teaching and learning. However, the effectiveness of tools such as online forum is not yet guaranteed. Therefore, it should be further investigated and this research aims to do so.

This chapter will cover the general information of this study which includes the background of study, problem statement, purposes and objectives of the study, research questions, scope of the study, conceptual framework and finally, definition of key terms.

1.1 Background of Study

In this section, the discussion covers a brief description of the learning approach in UTM, followed by an explanation of the elearning in UTM, the online forum or online forum in UTM and lastly the nature of the course ULAB 3162 (English For Professional Purpose).

1.1.1 Learning Approach in Universiti Teknologi Malaysia (UTM)

The traditional teaching and learning approach is still being utilized at the tertiary level institutions in Malaysia (Li, Mai and Tse-Kian, 2014). Likewise, in UTM, the face-to-face teaching and learning approach are still being practiced in classroom just like in other universities worldwide. It was found that some English lecturers in universities in Malaysia still prefer to use the traditional face-to-face approach to teach (*ibid*) due to varying reasons, even though they are impelled to use elearning in their teaching. Face-to-face teaching which is also known as the conventional teaching usually refers to the teaching approach where teachers deliver lectures in front of the class while the students listen to the lecture (Li, Mai and Tse-Kian, 2014). With such teaching approach, students rarely have the chance to speak in a classroom. Li, Mai and Tse-Kian (2014) also state that the use of face-to-face teaching approach limit the interaction between lecturer and students, whereas more discussion activities should be conducted more frequently. In line with this, in a research about students' perception toward the teaching in UTM, the findings also revealed that students were lacking activities like group discussions, public speaking and presentation in classroom (Kamsah, 2004).

Decades ago, the teaching approach used in UTM was typical lecturer-centered class where students were not answering question, felt uncomfortable to ask questions, avoided eye contact or even slept when the lecture was not interesting (Yusof et al., 2005). However as time goes by, along the development of the technology, the

Malaysia government started to promote technology in the education system for both schools and institutions of higher learning (Thang et al., 2016). The Malaysian Ministry of Education has recognized elearning as one of the Critical Agenda Projects (CAPs) for the future of higher education in the development of quality human and intellectual capital (Mohamed Amin, 2012). Therefore, the teaching methods used by UTM lecturers have shifted diversely to using different teaching tools such as power point slides, and videos, the center of the learning has yet to shift from teachers to students completely. In UTM, lecturers are trying to make their class enjoyable and effective for every student with the help of multiple teaching tools using computers and Internet. English language courses are university compulsory courses for every undergraduate student in UTM. The English courses were designed to prepare UTM students with English communication and writing skills such as ability to produce an academic writing, doing oral presentation, and oral communication skills for both workplace and academic life. In order to achieve the reaching goals and to prepare students with different skills, the English language courses are designed with in-class activities such as writing academic paper, debate, oral presentation. Besides that, UTM students' ability to participate in a discussion in classroom is always assessed by the lecturer as a criterion for students to get higher carry mark. However, how to satisfy students' individuality is still a problem faced by the lecturers in classroom. Therefore, the lecturers faced problems to ensure students with different learning styles including passive learners or slow learners are learning.

All the teaching approaches and methods discussed above can actually affect knowledge sharing among students. Even with the latest teaching method, the focus of a class could not be conveyed, knowledge could not be shared from the lecturer to the learners or from learners to learners, the sharing of knowledge will certainly be limited due to time and distance. The lacking of updated technology will further lead to the lecturer dominating most of the classroom time to explain the knowledge to the learners so as to achieve the teaching goal. As a result, knowledge sharing among learners will be limited within a given period of lecture time only.

1.1.2 elearning in UTM

In this particular research, the use of elearning especially online forum in UTM will be focused. First of all, UTM has published an elearning site that can be used by both lecturers and students for teaching and learning using a module software package although it is yet to be fully used by both students and lecturers (Oye et al., 2012). According to Olokunde and Misra (2015), the Modular Object-Oriented Dynamic Learning Environment (Moodle) system was developed based on basic pedagogy and social constructivist learning theory. This open source software chosen by UTM can be separated into four angles which are: construction, collaboration, creation and share (Olokunde and Misra, 2015). With the learning environment and activities provided by the system, the same researchers also argued that students will have more chances to gain better understanding of the lesson or even create new thoughts, and at the same time, share their thoughts and information with others.

In UTM, elearning is understood as “the application of ICT” which is used to enhance the effectiveness of both teaching and learning (Oye et al., 2012). The website designed by UTM is called elearning@utm.my and it involves 17 different departments and more than 2000 different subjects that can be used by both undergraduate and postgraduate students (Sulaiman et al., 2009). The elearning system constitutes functions of uploading course related materials and lecture notes, communicating using provided forum or conducting quizzes, tests that can be accessed via the university’s network. Sulaiman et al. (2009) also argue that with the use of Moodle, modules like assignment, blog, choices, course, forum, quiz, resource, and uploads can all be achieved in an elearning website. Each user can use different modules at the same time. Besides, Olokunde and Misra (2015) point out that the elearning@utm.my has the functions like forum for news, announcements, course management and multimedia files uploading. In general, elearning@utm.my provides excellent services for all lecturers and learners in UTM to enhance teaching and learning process (Sulaiman et al., 2009).

1.1.3 Online Forum in UTM

Cyprus (2010) defines online forum, which is also called the message board, online discussion group, bulletin board or web forum, as a place in a website which allows users to post discussions, read and reply to the posts written by other forum users. Liu et al. (2013), on the other hand, defines online discussion forum or online forum as one of the Internet Mediated Communication (IMC) modes that is frequently being utilized in education (*ibid*). In other words, online forum is an Internet-based communication tool which can be accessed by anyone, anywhere and anytime. Liu et al. (2013) further added that online forum is a type of asynchronous CMC that allows users to interact with others at different time. In the education field, online forum is used as an online discussion platform, a medium that creates a space for users or students to share their thoughts and interact with their peers or other participants in a learning environment that is less threatening (Liu et al., 2013) as it reduces any pressure students might feel while communicating face-to-face. The online forum is also one of the online communication tools that can be highly utilized in various different fields. Almost every online social medium like Facebook, Whatsapp, blog, and YouTube are using online forum asynchronously as it allows users to communicate with each other at any time without having a stressful moment.

Online discussion is made available since the readily Internet access is available for all lecturers and students in the entire campus of Malaysian universities, including UTM (Liu et al., 2013). As discussed earlier, UTM official elearning website; i.e. elearning@utm.my, provides the 'forum' feature to enhance teaching and learning (Sulaiman et al., 2009; Olokunde and Misra, 2015). However, not every lecturer is using elearning as teaching aids in their teaching. To be specific, the following Table 1.1 presents the percentage of online forum usage for knowledge sharing (KS) among students in UTM.

Table 1.1 Percentage of Knowledge Sharing (KS) Using Different Features among UTM students

KS Features	Yes	No
Forum	24%	76%
Message	34%	66%
Course Section	74%	26%
Blog	20%	80%

Mahmood, Mohamed Dahlan and Che Hussin (2013) found in their research on knowledge sharing that 76% of the respondents in UTM were not using forums which is provided in the elearning@utm.my. Based on the results in Table 1.1, the reason why students are not utilizing the online could also be due to the lecturers not using the provided platforms in the UTM elearning site. The lecturers are actually responsible to open the online forum in elearning@utm.my for students to be involved actively in discussing or posting thoughts and information in an elearning@utm forum (Mahmood, Mohamed Dahlan and Che Hussin, 2013). Hence, this has encouraged this study to be carried out as it is believed that the online forum in elearning@utm.my could promote active usage among UTM lecturers and students.

1.1.4 ULAB 3162 English For Professional Purpose

The ULAB 3162 English for Professional Purpose is one of the courses offered to UTM students. Based on the course outline, this course was designed to equip students with effective communication skills for workplace so as to help them function effectively. This course focuses more on oral communication skills used in students' future workplace. In this course, authentic workplace materials and activities are utilized to let students to negotiate and present information via group discussion and presentations. The aim of the course is to help students to communicate appropriately as individual or as team members in their future workplace. The course requires students to participate in activities like presentation, group discussion, balloon debate, negotiation and written tasks such as personal write-up and response paper. Based on the course outline, the online forum was not required. Nevertheless, the lecturer

of the selected ULAB 3162 section for this research had decided to use online forum as part of the course activities to encourage students to communicate their thoughts on topics given. To be more specific, according to the teacher's note given to the lecturer, students are required to respond to a given topic critically in writing. In the response paper, the students are expected to evaluate and contribute their opinions related to social issues that are affecting the society or issues related to workplace situations. Although it was the lecturer's personal decision, the use of online forum did meet one of the course learning outcomes mentioned in the course outline which is: students should be able to write responses using appropriate language effectively. The lecturer of this particular section thought that using online forum as a medium instead of using a piece of paper for students to write their response paper would make the written task more meaningful because it encourages a two-way interactive communication among the students. The lecturer of the selected ULAB 3162 section wanted students to not only respond to the given topic critically, but it was also hoped that students can have interaction and give feedback to each other. The lecturer's teaching innovation has prompted this study to be carried out so as to find out if the use of online forum as part of the course assessments for ULAB 3162 would be appropriate and suitable for the course, especially in enhancing students to communicate actively; i.e. in sharing their thoughts.

1.2 Problem Statement

The English language, being the second official language in Malaysia, is used at all communication levels including the education system beginning from the primary level up to tertiary level (Abdullah and Rahman, 2010). Thus, the graduates in UTM should not only be equipped with sturdy education but they should also be able to communicate in English to stay competitive in the modern globalized environment.

Since the English language is extensively used to teach almost all the subjects in UTM and since many reference books are written in English, students need to equip themselves with a good mastery of the English language (Abdullah and Rahman, 2010). Abdullah and Rahman (2010) also postulate that in order to use English as an instructional tool in class, students in the class should have good English language proficiency. However, although Malaysian students have learned English for 11 years in schools, they are still facing challenges to use the English language effectively in class (Abdullah and Rahman, 2010). The tertiary level students' ability to write in English has yet to reach the most satisfactory level despite the English language being the country's second language (Shamsudin and Mahady, 2010). As such, the lack of ability to express oneself makes the process of sharing thoughts somewhat difficult. From the researcher's own observation within the five and half years as an international student participating in different types of class with diverse groups of undergraduates in UTM, it was observed that the undergraduates were comparatively passive in terms of sharing their thoughts in class or when doing a speaking task with others. It was also observed that students barely put up their hands to ask questions or even answer the questions asked by teachers, not to mention to actively share their thoughts. The passive participations from the students sometimes leaves lecturers no choice but force students to speak by calling names or giving reward in exchange for active participation. An example (based on the researcher's observation) is during the Q and A session where no one volunteered to answer the question. The Canadian lecture that was teaching a group of Teaching English as Second Language (TESL) students had to take out a paper currency and called the number on it, and made the students with the corresponding number to stand up and answer the question. Surprisingly, although the UTM TESL students are considered as a group that is comparatively talkative and good at communicating and sharing, they were found not willing to stand up to share their thoughts in an open public place.

It was also observed that some of the UTM students were voluntarily giving up the chance to share their thoughts with others due to their unwillingness to speak in public. For instance, in an English language group presentation, only one member would do the presentation while the rest of the group members would sit acting as audiences instead of being co-presenters. It was also observed that the presenter is

usually the best speaker from the group, and the rest of the group members are either not good in English or they lack the presentation skills. The examples given have, indeed, indicate that students are facing problems speaking in English. Abdullah and Rahman (2010) state that this was because they usually felt stressed when asked to speak in English, especially when they have not accomplished the appropriate level of English language proficiency. Hence, if they are still asked to perform, they sometimes perform poorly than their true ability in an English language speaking task.

In addition, in terms of the UTM students' speaking anxiety, Abdullah and Rahman (2010) argue that speaking will most likely be avoided if a student believes that he/she should not speak in English unless the correctness of his/her speaking is ensured. They also found some students would rather remain reticent during English language lesson because they are not willing to speak in English. Besides that, Abdullah and Rahman (2010) state that anxious learners tend to be more concerned about the negative evaluations given by others, and at times, they failed to control their anxiety which make the situation becomes worse.

With all the potential anxieties students might have, it is believed that a backup or extended method besides classroom activities should be utilized to help students to communicate as well as share thoughts in English. In a research about UTM students' oral communication needs, Kamarudin and Yasmin (2008) found that there were 84.51% of the respondents stated that they practiced their English language through classroom presentation which is the most frequently used method to practice English. Nevertheless, they also found that 63.38% of the students practice their English language and learn how to communicate through socializing, which is the second frequently used method. Therefore, if the students fail to use the English language to communicate during classroom activities, how can they make up the absent of communicating in daily socializing? Since we are now in the era where people socialize or communicate at anytime and anywhere using Internet via different social apps in their digital devices, students might be willing to use a tool that can complement the absent of their communication in classroom if the tool enables them

to feel comparatively free and less stressful to discuss academic matter outside the classroom.

Therefore, in order to minimize the problem students are facing in traditional classes and to provide them with a platform that would motivate students to share thoughts with each other not only during class time but also outside the class, lecturers should create a less stressful teaching tool and environment such as online forum to help student minimize their anxiety learning English in second language classroom and feel welcomed to contribute their thoughts.

In reality, although the forum's function in the elearning@utm.my website is neglected by many lecturers in UTM, there are some lecturers who are using online forum as part of their students' coursework assignment and the students are expected to contribute to the online forum (each contribution will be assessed by the lecturer). Hypothetically, if the lecturers actually use online forum as part of their teaching aids to boost students' willingness and opportunities to share thoughts, it is believed that the online forum will encourage students to share more thoughts about a pre-set topic. But, does that mean that the thoughts shared in the online forum are meaningful or relevant to the given topic? There is no guarantee that the massive thoughts shared in an online forum can fulfill the task. Hence, the online forum would not be an effective tool for task fulfillment although it encourages active sharing of thoughts among students. In other words, the students might just participate in an online forum to get their marks yet neglect the quality of their contributions. In line with that, according to Lin (2014), although students are regularly posting long messages in an online forum, whether the content of the messages can fulfill the given task is not ensured; this could mean that the actual effectiveness of online forum to help students not only share more thoughts but also share it effectively with meaningful and relevant content is undeterminable. Students might be willing to share thoughts via online forum but to learn new knowledge from the sharing process would not be achievable unless the contents are meaningful and relevant to a specific topic or issues raised. Therefore, in this particular research, whether the students' contributions in an online forum can fulfill the given task will be focused as well.

1.3 Purpose of Study

The purpose of this study is, firstly, to investigate if the use of online forum can actually help students share their thoughts. Secondly, it is to find out whether the thoughts shared in online forum fulfill the given task.

1.4 Objectives of the Study

1. To identify if the use of online forum can help students share their thoughts.
2. To determine whether the thoughts shared by students fulfill the given task.

1.5 Research Questions

1. To what extent has the online forum helped students to share their thoughts?
2. To what extent do the thoughts shared by students via online forum fulfill the given task?

1.6 Conceptual Framework

The undergoing research combines the relevant factors into a study framework which can be tested and validated. The integration of factors in one framework as shown in Figure 1.1 has never been found in any other literature. First of all, the researcher believes that the use of online forum can help to achieve the goal of helping students to share thoughts effectively when it might not be achievable in the traditional F2F classroom. Based on the theory of affordance postulated by Gibson in 1986, the affordance of online forum for this research refers to the environment or characteristics that leads to the behavior of using online forum to share thoughts among the students (Aronin and Singleton, 2012).

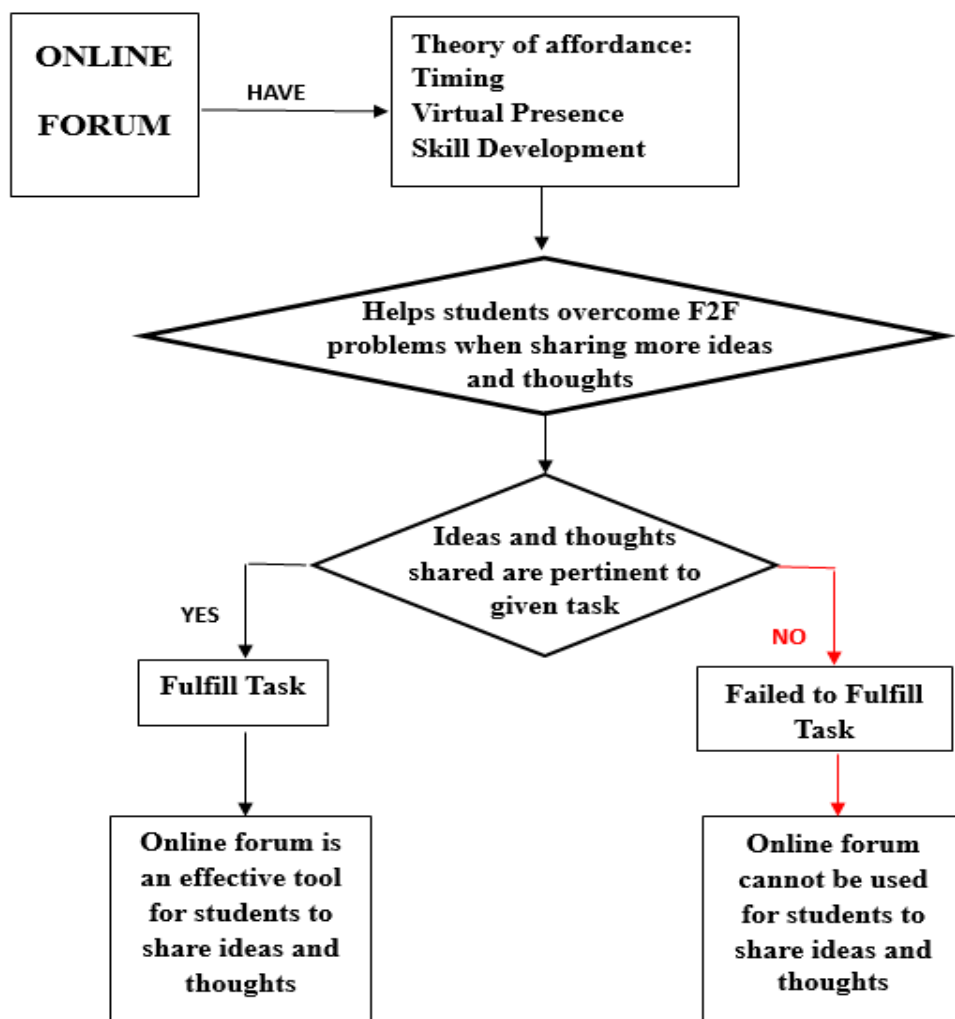


Figure 1.1 Conceptual Framework

According to Ghodrati and Gruba (2011), online forum has some elements such as timing, virtual presence and skill development that can afford students to use online forum to share thoughts. Timing affordance in online forum means time for more chance, time to structure writings and the time for interactive communication (Ghodrati and Gruba, 2011). Since online forum is an asynchronous tool build online, students are allowed to post and give feedback at different timeline; therefore they can have more time to prepare their postings like checking the content and the language and then only, they will post or read other's postings anytime they want (Karsenti, 2007). This allows students, who did not get the opportunity to share thoughts in class, to have another option and chance to share thoughts anytime at their own preferred pace. Next, virtual presence affordance means distance and chance to communicate with fellow classmates of different personalities (Ghodrati and Gruba, 2011). The users of online forum are allowed to communicate without the limitation of distance and with less interference of personalities such as shyness. For instance, researchers found that some students commented that although they go to the same class with their classmates, they did not receive chance to talk or have discussion with each other within the limited class time (Ghodrati and Gruba, 2011). Even if they want to have discussion with each other after the class time, they have to overcome the problems related to distance, timing and locations. However, with the use of online forum, the researcher believe that students can have a new medium to communicate without the limitations mentioned. Finally, online forum has the skill development element as discussed by Ghodrati and Gruba (2011). These researchers stated that with the use of online forum, students will able to not only have more chances to practice certain skills but they will also have more opportunities to use different tools to enhance learning. For instance, the students can have more chances to practice their writing skills, spelling skills, grammar skills and information gathering skills when using online forum. And along the processes, different skills can be developed through the period of practices.

Therefore, with the varying affordances that online forum has, it is believed that the use of online forum can help students to avoid or minimize problems they are facing in F2F communication problems such as lack of knowledge (Ur, 1996), shyness (Mandel and Shrauger, 1977; Pilkonis, 1977) and the anxiety (Scovel, 1978; Horwitz

and Horwitz and cope, 1986; Park and Lee, 2005). Through the online forum, students will also be able to have more chances (Thomas, 2002 and Karsenti, 2007; Ghodrati., and Gruba, 2011), more comfortable environment and more time (Karsenti, 2007; Jacobson, 1999 and Roberts et al., 2000; Ghodrati, and Gruba, 2011) to share thoughts. As a result, students will be able to share their thoughts with numerous audiences with flexible time, better understanding of the issue, more related literature, in-depth knowledge and even reference-based thoughts when communicating using online forum.

Although the previous researchers believe that with the affordances, online forum can help students to share more thoughts with less interference of communication problems, it does not mean that the increase of the chances to practice communicating would ensure the quality of the thoughts shared online by students. With all the supports that online forum can potentially provide, the students cannot be assumed to be able to make their post meaningful and argumentative that will show the skill of critical thinking with sufficient reading and understanding of a given topic. If the postings posted by students fulfill the criteria mentioned, then only the students can be considered to be able to share thoughts effectively. Otherwise, if the content of the postings are meaningless or off-topic, students will be considered as failed to share thoughts effectively.

1.7 Scope of the Study

Twenty-seven UTM undergraduates from the Faculty of Biomedical Engineering and Health Science who completed the academic online forum as part of the course assessment for the English course ULAB3162 English for Professional Purposes participated in this study. Nevertheless, the study only investigated the undergraduates' perception of their participation in the online forum and evaluated the students' postings in order to determine their ability to fulfill the given task.

1.8 Significance of the Study

Firstly, it is hoped that the findings of this study can be used to evoke the awareness of using online forum as a teaching and learning tool among educators. By sharing the findings from this research, English language educators are hoped to realize the benefits and effectiveness of using online forum in the process of teaching and learning especially for students to share their thoughts. It is also hoped that the findings would prove the importance of using online forum in both teaching and learning. Eventually, if online forum is positively accepted as a teaching tool for students to share their thoughts, it is hoped that some problems related to students' unwillingness to share their thoughts can be reduced.

Secondly, it is hoped that this research's findings could be used to address questions about the effectiveness of online forum to help students share their thoughts. If it hoped that once proven that online forum can help students to reduce or avoid the communication problems they might have in the classroom, online forum would be extensively used to encourage students to share their thoughts in other online platforms frequently used by today's younger generations.

Lastly, it is hoped that the findings of this research would encourage language learners, educators and education departments to be actively share their thoughts using the online forum or similar platform in the future. This is because sharing thoughts can not only help improve the knowledge level of oneself and others, but the exchange of thoughts could also avoid potential mistakes and open up our mind. Therefore, with the findings from this research, the importance of sharing thoughts would hopefully encourage people from different fields to share their thoughts actively via various online platforms.

1.9 Definition of the terms

In this section, some terminologies used in this research will be further explained.

1.9.1 Online Forum

Cyprus (2010) defined online forum as a discussion area on a website whereby members can post discussions, read and respond to posts by other forum members. An online forum can revolve around any subject in an online community. Nelson (2010), meanwhile, defined online forum as an accessible group communication space. For this study, the term online forum is referred to an online learning and communicating platform that allows students to interact and share information freely and asynchronously.

1.9.2 Affordance

The term “affordance” does not exist in the dictionary until it was made up by Gibson in 1986 in his researches. He defined the term as: “The affordances of the environment is what it offers the animal, what it provides or furnishes, either for good or ill” (p127). For this specific research, the term affordance refers to the environment or characteristics which afford the behavior of using online forum to share thoughts among the students.

1.9.3 Task Fulfilment

Oxford Dictionary (2017) defines task as: “A piece of work to be done or undertaken”. The term fulfilment is defined as: “The achievement of something desired, promised, or predicted”. Based on the definition, task fulfilment means the desired, promised or predicted achievement of an undertaken work. In this research, the given task is to respond to the topic given in the online forum with correct, relevant meaningful content. Task fulfilment, therefore, means students’ ability to complete the given task and at the same time, satisfy the task requirements.

1.10 Conclusion

In this chapter, the background of the study, problem statement, research objectives and questions, scope of this research and significance of this research were discussed. The next chapter presents the review of literature related to this study, followed by Chapter 3; a brief description of the methodology used, Chapter 4; a discussion on the findings and finally Chapter 5; the conclusion and recommendation.

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