

## STUDENTS' PERSPECTIVE ON THE EFFECTIVE USE OF MOODLE IN ENHANCING THEIR SOFT SKILL

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### ABSTRACT

Making the students fit to face the challenges of twenty first century requires enhancing their soft skills by taking them beyond the traditional classroom teaching and incorporating virtual learning (Meyer, 2014). Moodle is a virtual learning platform which works as a course contents and activities repository can serve the purpose of teaching soft skills. This paper intends to explore a private university students' perspective on the question: How can Moodle be used effectively in 34 enhancing students' soft skills? For this qualitative research, the responses of around 34 undergraduate students enrolled to some literature and language courses taught through Moodle at the Department of English in a Private university are studied. Their interviews, responses through questionnaires are analyzed to ascertain the students' understanding and suggestions on the effective use of Moodle to enhance soft skills. The research finds that majority of the students agree that soft skills can be taught through Moodle and while some are found skeptical about Moodle's capacity to engage students. Some important suggestions like: creating speaking-based activities, collaboration with other students research work on Moodle came from the students.

**Keywords:** Moodle, soft skills, English language, literature.

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### Introduction

According to functional education theorist Talcott Parsons, education prepares people for the work environment in later life and teaches important skills (2008). These skills are now segmented into hard skills and soft skills of which the latter is frequently coming into focus recently by both the academics and the corporate personnel. The soft skill is defined as "people's abilities to communicate with each other and work well together"(The Cambridge Online Dictionary). It incorporates behavioral skill-sets including interpersonal skills, negotiation skills, communication skills (verbal and written), problem solving skills, team working skills etc. along with some more intangible skills such as sense of humour, diligence, optimism, allegiance, common sense and good manner. In 20th century, soft skills are major differentiator for employability and success in life (Heckman and Kautz 2012). Integrating soft skills in curriculum is a recent focus of the academia. Researchers are trying to incorporate soft skills in a particular academic program, for example, developing soft skills while teaching English language and literature has also been focused by many.

As the web-based language and literature learning or Virtual learning Environment (VLE) has become popular, ever growing and effective. It can also create the opportunities to face the challenges of education in the 21<sup>st</sup> century by incorporating soft skills in it. There are many online platforms; such as Talent LMS, Docebo, Blackboard, Moodle and many more. Moodle, an acronym for "Modular Object-Oriented Dynamic Learning Environment" is a Virtual Learning Environment (VLE) which provides online support for teaching and learning. This paper will focus on the scope of enhancing students' soft skill by using Moodle.

The students who submitted their responses through google form questionnaire, interviews and focus group discussion are accustomed to use google classroom and are recently using Moodle. The researcher focuses on students centered learning, where students' suggestions, trepidation and opinions are taken

into consideration while designing lesson plans. By analyzing the data, the researcher found many innovative ideas generated from students which can really help the students to develop their soft skills. At the end of the paper based on the suggestions some recommendations are mentioned.

### **Objective**

The objective of this research article is to investigate a private university students' perspectives and attitudes towards the use of Moodle in learning soft skills. Based on the students' opinion, this paper also aims at providing some suggestion regarding how to use Moodle successfully to teach language and literature, incorporating soft skills, to a large number of students in a Bangladeshi classroom with full facilities of multimedia projector and PC with internet connectivity etc.

### **Methodology and Data Collection Process**

For this qualitative study, the responses of around 34 undergraduate students enrolled to some literature and language courses taught through Moodle at the Department of English at a private university are studied as sample. This research participants' perspectives are accumulated after introducing them with the concept of soft skills. These students are already used to use Moodle as part of their course requirements. Students were first asked, if they understand the importance of soft skills, and then asked how do, they think, the soft skills can be incorporated to their learning. Their responses through questionnaire are analyzed to ascertain the students' opinion, understanding and suggestions on the effective use of Moodle to enhance their soft skills. Therefore, a thorough investigation was done with an objective to explore and examine the responses, issues and challenges regarding the importance of Moodle in developing soft skills among students through language and literature courses.

### **Literature Review**

The Moodle is an open-source e-learning platform, that enables the creation of a course website, ensuring access only to enrolled students. (Cole, 2008) Moodle was first released on 20 August 2002 developed by Martin Dougiamas to help educators create online courses with a focus on interaction and collaborative construction of content There are now 51 Moodle registered sites in Bangladesh (Moodle.net) These sites cater the need of learning different subject contents as well as developing soft skills. As language is the medium for communication, which is a vital soft skill, Moodle is useful in such language learning environments (Jones and Lau, 2010). Through Moodle students can upload assignments, chat with other participants in real-time, create database, participate in forum discussion, maintain a glossary, take quizzes, assess peers in group work. Moodle facilitates everyone to streamline their routine tasks. Moodle can also use as classroom management, online course development reports, checking task and submissions.

In the stiff competition of the job market having soft skills are extremely important criteria (Abdullah, 2012). According to Paajanen (1992), soft skills are 'EQ', emotional Intelligence, and clusters of positive attitude, optimism, friendliness which define relationship with other employees. Hard skills alone cannot provide success in workplace. Hard skills combined with 'EQ' work effectively to create a better employee. Jain (2009) in his vast research tried to specify the particular soft skills sought by the employer. He concluded that communicative skills, critical thinking and problem solving skills, lifelong learning and information management skills, having moral and ethics and leadership skills are the basic soft skills asked by the executives.

### **Research question:**

Do the students find Moodle important for developing soft skills?

How do the students think that Moodle can incorporate soft skills in their lessons?

### **Findings:**

Majority of the students (58.8%) agreed that Moodle can enhance their soft skills. Moodle facilitates everyone to streamline their routine tasks.

## Can Moodle help to enhance your soft skills?

34 responses

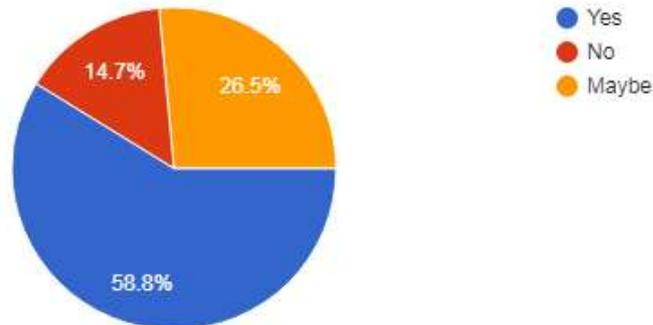


Fig. 1 Whether Moodle can help enhance your soft skills.

### Feedback on time management:

Students were asked: how do they think can Moodle teach them time management? The summary of their responses is:

- Prepare quick, five-minute activities for transition periods between lunch, any break, and in-between lessons.
- By completing task, assignments, quizzes in time.
- There can be a fixed time to submit anyone's answers.

### Feedback on interpersonal Skills:

Four responses came as, they do not know how. Only two responses mentioned almost the similar thing, that is: by taking us out of our comfort zone where we must collaborate with others. Most other responses were not direct and shows respondents were not certain about the answer. One respondent said that Moodle cannot help in this matter. In the focus group discussion students suggested some great ideas for collaborative learning but in the questionnaire, we have found that, students are confused about the term interpersonal skill.

### Feedback on Communicative Skills:

There were 24 responses on the question: how Moodle can help to increase communicative skills? Some of the responses are given below:

- Posting our own video recording.
- In Moodle we can connect with our classmates that's how our communicative skills.
- As all the students are in Moodle, we can communicate with each other and give feedback
- We can share our opinion on it and other can comment on it. So we can increase communicative skills.
- By speaking and recording group talk
- By searching in google and contacting with other students/people

- Moodle can help to increase communicative skills by commenting, posting and correcting other's mistakes.
- There can be an option where anyone can ask questions.
- From Moodle we can have distance education.

### **Is there any negative aspects of using Moodle?**

Among the 24 responses 15 respondents found no negative aspects of Moodle. Other negative aspects mentioned are:

- Not user friendly.
- Too critical to use, take time, slow
- Lack of training on using Moodle.
- Harder than google classroom.
- It has too many options, so it makes a student confused about what to do. As there's too many options so it takes time to find out the needed option. In that case students hardly forget their ideas when they are in stress of searching something. So, it is an obstacle to increase our soft skills.

### **Focused group discussion**

The following ideas were generated from the students:

1. Recording students own voice to deliver some task
2. Lively real-time chatting with friends on interesting topics.
3. Students will teach in the classes which will be recorded.
4. Group speaking activities or individual speaking.
5. A forum to ask new type of questions on any text/task and giving unique answers to those questions. (It can be a group work too)
6. Routinely watching movie, which will be related to the course, and discussing about it.
7. By setting timer to complete some tasks students will learn time management.
8. The senior students suggested involving them into any research, workshop and conference for developing their soft skills.

### **Analysis**

Most of the students emphasized on speaking skill as the best medium to improve soft skills. Students self-understanding of the importance of speaking skill will reduce teacher's effort to motivate students to speak and will increase time of the lesson plan in practicing speaking activities. Students eagerness for live, impromptu, real-time or recorded presentation on different task shows that the twenty first century students' interests have shifted from the boundary of classroom to virtual world where they reside every day. So, without the shift of teaching style and strategy no skill specially soft skills would be possible to easily transfer to the students. Group chatting in any forum on any topic is very popular to them. Students wants to have scope to ask critical questions in suitable platform and want to solve the questions by themselves. So, the teachers must ascertain scopes for the students: how and where, in their study-materials, the students can have this scope to ask questions. Students want to interact with other students and people online who are closely linked to their study. Collaborating with other students outside their own campus will certainly increase the students communication skills and will give them to scope to mix with people of other culture broadening their cultural understanding, which is an essential for multinational jobs. Teachers must prefigure the outcome and in which part of the study or lesson the students will interact with other students. Teachers' meticulous speculation, course design and feedback are very important in this case. Students do not have any clear idea about interpersonal skill where the teachers have to put their effort to make the students enhance this soft skill.

The last finding is that lack of training on: how to use Moodle, can easily demotivate the students from using it and distancing them from gaining soft skills. User friendliness of any software is a must to make it useful and popular. There were some comments by the students that by the time the students figure out how to use the tools in Moodle, they almost forget the task they are assigned to do. Technology can sometime create problems if the sound use of it is not ensured.

**Recommendation:**

- For, successfully implementing all the ideas suggested by students, teachers must have all the training necessary to train his/her students to do the critical tasks.
- For collaborating with other students around the world Big Blue Button, SCORM package can be used.
- Moodle Workshop option can be used for peer review.
- For group chatting the Moodle Forum can be used or it can be linked to other popular platforms like Whatsapp, Messenger, Viber etc. for any live presentation.
- Over all, technical supports and expertise should always be ready to help the students while using Moodle.

**Conclusion:**

From the responses of the students it is evident that the students think Moodle can enhance their soft skills by assigning different tasks, basically tasks on speaking. Students also commented they sometime feel distanced from Moodle for its critical functions. So, for having better effects the Moodle software must be more user friendly. Few students emphasized instant and live presentation on Moodle. Some other students focused real-time chatting on their topics to improve their speaking skill. On the back drop of twenty first century, student centered learning necessitates comprehending students' desires, interests and dislikes to design course materials. Hence the study may help the teachers to ponder over students' perspective while preparing their lesson plans.

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