

## **Using Padlet as a Learning Space for Simulating Real-Life Business Communication**

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### **Abstract**

Due to the Covid-19 pandemic, lecturers of higher learning institutions had to pivot quickly from face-to-face classes to online classes. The new normal of online teaching and learning challenged lecturers in keeping their students engaged, especially when teaching a language course that heavily focuses on the writing component. The purpose of this study was to examine students' perception of using Padlet as a learning space to simulate real-life business communication. At the end of a 14-week semester language course, a cohort of 38 diploma students responded to a self-administered online survey with a 79% response rate. Findings from the descriptive analysis indicated high mean values for most survey items measured, implying that the students were generally favourable towards the use of Padlet and the simulation approach in learning business communication. Curriculum designers and lecturers of other courses could consider the potential of using Padlet as a learning space for simulation. Recommendations, limitations, and future research directions are also discussed in this paper.

**Keywords:** student engagement, Padlet, virtual learning space, constructivist approach, real-life business communication

Learning should occur holistically and not individually in isolation (Sabus & Macauley, 2016). However, during the Covid-19 pandemic, students were kept away from the schools, learning from home without their peers and without physical contact with their teachers, in synchronous or asynchronous online classes. Teachers also faced challenges shifting from face-to-face classroom teaching to online teaching from home (Bailey & Lee, 2020). For many, the learning curve was steep. Regardless of their technological capabilities, teachers must quickly adapt to the usage of new online learning platforms such as Google Meet, Zoom or Microsoft Teams. Despite the unprecedented teaching-learning situation, completing the syllabus and achieving good exam performance are expected of both teachers and students, respectively. Unsurprisingly, most

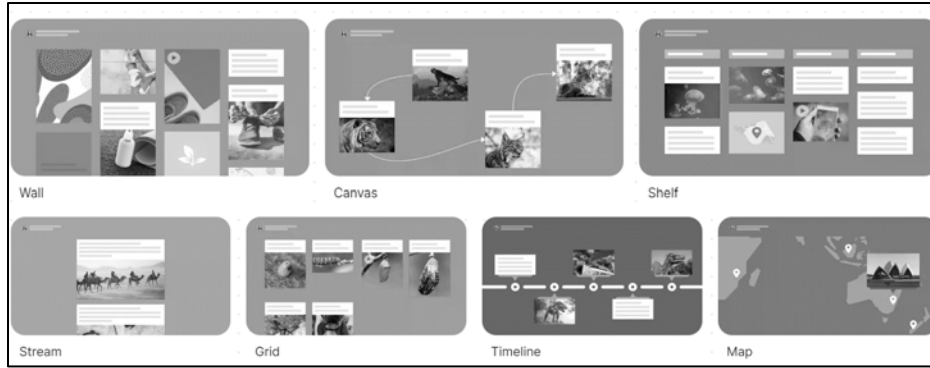
teachers complained of the difficulty in engaging and encouraging students to learn during online classes (Virto & López, 2020).

According to Hunter (2015), Web 2.0 online technologies can simulate reality and enrich students' learning experiences. Web 2.0 technologies such as YouTube, Facebook, Google Docs, Wikipedia, Blogger and Padlet are ubiquitous, and usually used for entertainment or personal communication, thus, they are familiar to many teachers and learners (Weller, 2013). Through Web 2.0, contents are interactive due to the comment function; the text, audio, or video discussion function; and the sharing function in small groups or in real-time across the world, enabling two-way communications. Web 2.0 is cloud-based; does not need any installation and usually comes with free usage versions. Although the usage of Web 2.0 in education is not new in the 21st century teaching and learning, not all teachers employ Web 2.0 approach in their classes. The pandemic, however, forced teachers to become more resourceful and creative in adopting Web 2.0 applications to make online classes engaging for their students. One such Web 2.0 application is Padlet as it is user-friendly, and can be used as a learning space for collaborative writing (Sangeetha, 2016; Rashid et al., 2019), feedback and assessments (Jong & Tan, 2021), collaborative learning (Anwar et al., 2019; Mehta et al., 2021), virtual communication (Weller, 2013), and class engagement (Fuchs, 2014; Megat et al., 2020).

Based on extant studies, research was more focused on the use of Padlet in language learning or as a class engagement tool. In a recent study, Leslie and Johnson (2022) used Padlet as a reflective tool to improve teaching and learning in business communication. Limited attention is given towards how teachers could use Padlet as a learning space to simulate similar writing tasks needed at the actual workplace. Through such experience, the students will have a better appreciation of completing authentic writing tasks that are dynamic and meaningful. According to Russ and Drury-Grogan (2013), when 51 junior level business major university students were exposed to a business communication simulation course, their pre and post test scores increased for message construction and delivery, critical analysis, collaboration, and participation. The significant impact indicates that simulation does help students learn business communication concepts better. However, the study of Russ and Drury-Grogan was conducted in a traditional face-to-face class, and not through an online class during a pandemic situation. Due to the encouraging reviews of Padlet's features and appropriateness as a language learning, collaborative, and assessment Web 2.0 tool, this study intended to examine the use of Padlet as a learning space to simulate business communications at the workplace and its positiveness as a learning experience for the students.

## **Introducing Padlet**

Imagine a whole class of students being able to collectively brainstorm ideas by writing on sticky notes and placing them on a virtual wall. Padlet, a Web 2.0 online tool accessible from <https://padlet.com/>, enables such experience for teachers and students. Padlet requires no prior technical knowledge, works on various devices, and provides a free sign-up and usage of three free Padlet walls. There are various tiered memberships offered for larger usage space (refer to <https://padlet.com/memberships>). Teachers can create a Padlet wall (see Figure 1) with modification functions for the wall appearance, web address, and privacy controls. There are also functions for embedding, exporting, subscribing, and sharing of texts, documents, images, audio, and visual files. Padlet walls can also be exported as an image, pdf, csv or excel document. Detailed description of Padlet's features can be found in <https://padlet.com/features>.



**Figure 1. Types of Padlet Walls (Source: <https://padlet.com/>)**

There are many ways of using Padlet creatively to facilitate student engagement in the teaching and learning processes. Table 1 provides further understanding of Padlet and its creative uses.

**Table 1. Useful Padlet Links for Practitioners**

Title of Webpages	Website Link
1. How do I use Padlet for teaching?	<a href="https://askus.northampton.ac.uk/Learntech/faq/186128">https://askus.northampton.ac.uk/Learntech/faq/186128</a>
2. How to Use Padlet: A Fantastic Tool for Teaching	<a href="https://www.coolcatteacher.com/how-to-use-padlet-fantastic-tool-teaching/?highlight=padlet">https://www.coolcatteacher.com/how-to-use-padlet-fantastic-tool-teaching/?highlight=padlet</a>
3. Padlet for Teachers – Step by Step Guide	<a href="https://www.educatorstechnology.com/2021/11/what-is-padlet-teachers-step-by-step.html">https://www.educatorstechnology.com/2021/11/what-is-padlet-teachers-step-by-step.html</a>
4. 30 Creative Ways to Use Padlet for Teachers and Students	<a href="https://www.bookwidgets.com/blog/2017/08/30-creative-ways-to-use-padlet-for-teachers-and-students">https://www.bookwidgets.com/blog/2017/08/30-creative-ways-to-use-padlet-for-teachers-and-students</a>

Even though Padlet (originally called Wallwisher) was introduced in 2008, there was an increase in Padlet users and research on usage of Padlet during the Covid-19 pandemic. In order to address the sudden transition from face-to-face classes to online learning, teachers turned to Padlet as it was comparatively easier to use and has more flexible feature and functions than the other web-based applications (Ali et al., 2018). This insight is further reinforced by Rashid et al. (2019) and Sangeetha (2016) who revealed that teachers generally find Padlet versatile as it enables them to gather student feedback with ease. In a recent study, Jong and Tan (2021) discovered that Padlet enabled 70 primary school teachers in Sarawak to assess their students' writing skills during online classes. Responses are generally positive towards Padlet as a potential pedagogical tool for writing assessment, but lack of IT skills and limited internet connections could be a setback for usage of Padlet. Additionally, Padlet provides a virtual classroom environment or learning space for collaborative tasks where students can anonymously contribute and learn from one another (Taufikurohman, 2018). For instance, Kostka and Lockwood (2015) asked students to compile specific academic language phrases from research articles and post them onto Padlet. Their shared contributions on Padlet could then be used in their own academic writing assignments. The use of Padlet is not limited to language teaching. Mehta et al. (2021) reinforced the positive use of Padlet for collaborative learning within different disciplines such as dentistry and bioscience. Interestingly, Renard (2017) listed 30 ways of how teachers and students could creatively use Padlet in their teaching-learning processes. However, what was missing from the list is the usage of Padlet as a learning space for simulation.

## **Engaging Students with Simulation**

Simulation is an experiential approach where the learning environment is situated in a replicated real-world context for the students to construct their understanding, and apply the learned skills and knowledge (Aebersold, 2018; Jones & Barrett, 2017; Sabus & Macauley, 2016). Simulation supports the constructivist's belief that learning should be student-centred. Through simulation, students familiarise themselves with the content knowledge learned during the class and develop new language expressions and vocabulary out of class time (Angelini & Garcia-Carbonell, 2019). The teachers' role is to facilitate the learning experience of their students.

Furthermore, simulation is also helpful when structured for students to apply and practice the 21st-century skills of collaboration, communication, critical thinking, and creativity. For example, Weidman and Coombs (2016) highlighted students' ability to apply and practise 21st-century skills in simulated group activities where hidden values of respecting and listening to other group members' viewpoints are acquired. Simulation motivates students as they have many opportunities to participate in activities that facilitate the learning process in a fun and relaxed learning environment (Ranchhod et al., 2014).

Sharifi et al. (2017) summarised simulation best; it increases students' interest and motivation in learning new topics; it makes learning materials more authentic and relevant; it enables students to experiment with new ideas and receive immediate feedback for improvements. However, according to Sabus and Macauley (2016), simulation can be time-consuming, and much effort is needed to plan effective simulated experiential learning.

## **Experimentation**

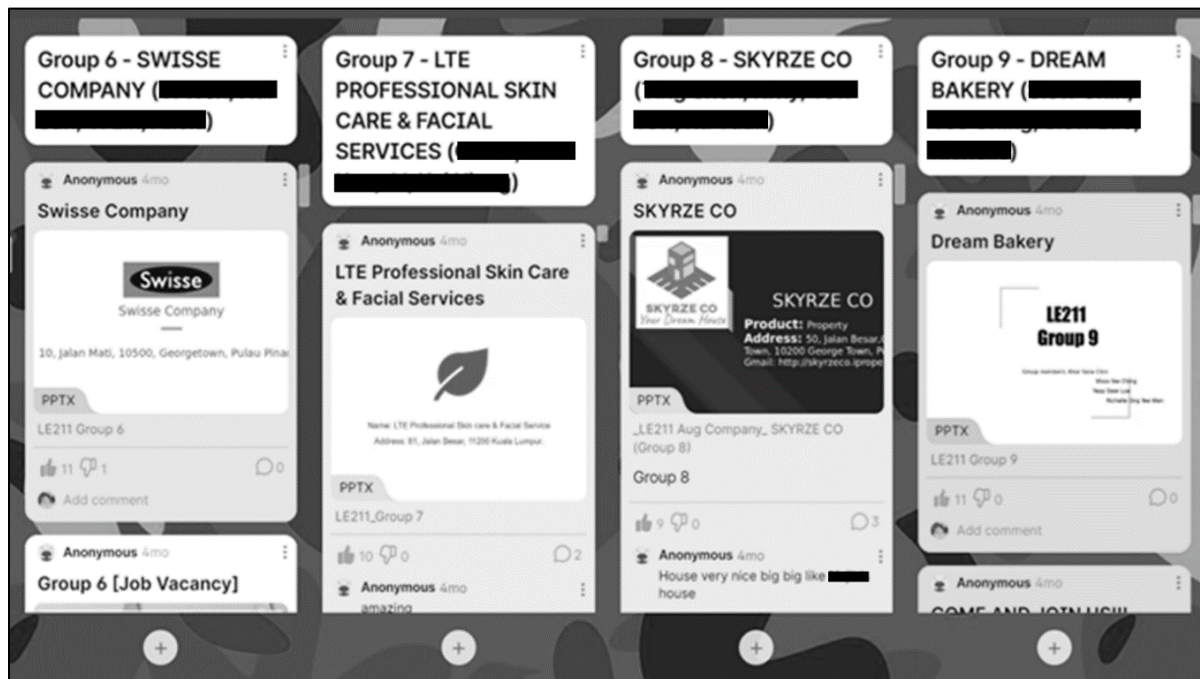
During the Covid-19 pandemic, lessons were conducted through online teaching platforms such as Google Meet, Zoom or Microsoft Teams. Lecturers relied on Web 2.0 technologies to keep their students engaged during online classes. Through Web 2.0 technologies, activities involving collaborative group work and interaction could be carried out in the online setting. As such, for this study, in order to increase student engagement in a language course that has a heavy emphasis on the writing component, Padlet was introduced as a learning space to simulate the real-life business communication experiences at the workplace.

The sample of the current study was purposefully chosen to complete a quantitative online survey. The sample involved a cohort of 38 diploma students who took the business communication course for the August-December 2021 semester at a private higher learning institution in Penang, Malaysia. Participation in the study was on a voluntary basis. The ethical procedures were followed where the students who participated in this study remained anonymous with their privacy secured: (i) numerical numbers were used for the sample student quotes; (ii) where student names appeared, they were blacked out; and (iii) their responses in the survey were aggregated during data analysis.

A Padlet wall was created and made accessible for the students through a shared link throughout the 14-week semester course. The weekly 3-hour online lessons were structured according to content knowledge which was first given by the lecturer, followed by students' group discussion and collaborative writing. Completed writing tasks were posted on the Padlet wall for feedback and comments from the lecturer or peers.

## Simulating Real-life Experience of Written Business Communication

During the first lesson, students divided themselves into ten groups. Each group established fictitious companies encompassing the company name, address, telephone number, email address, logo, organisational structure (such as CEO/president, sales & marketing manager, finance manager, and human resource manager), and products or services. Students then posted their respective company's information to the Padlet wall. Figure 2 shows a sample of four fictitious companies of Groups 6 to 9 which used Padlet's shelf layout.



**Figure 2. Screenshot Postings of Fictitious Companies Created by the Students**

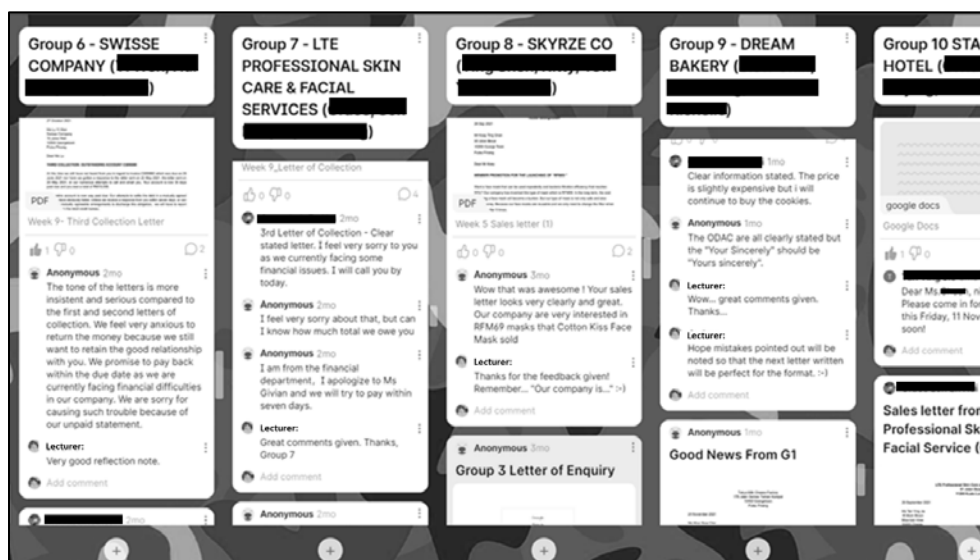
Establishing fictitious companies was the starting point of simulating business communication at the workplace throughout the semester. The business communication course included writing cover letters and resumes, conducting meetings, and writing meeting minutes, writing business reports and various formal and informal business letters. Students completed their written or spoken business communication tasks within the context of their newly formed “companies.” In the second lesson, students wrote cover letters and resumes. To make this task “real,” the students first created job advertisements seeking potential candidates for specific job positions in their new companies. After that, the job application process was simulated. The students applied for suitable jobs as advertised by the companies of other groups. The students then posted their cover letter and resume under the column of the company that they were interested in (see Figure 3).



**Figure 3. Screenshot Postings of Job Advertisements**

The HR manager of that company would then decide if the job applicant was suitable for the job position and post a call back for interviews in the comment section. This activity simulated the real-world job application process. In later group discussions, the students explained why they were interested in the job advertisement and if their resumes would fit the job requirements. As the company representatives, students justified their selection of job candidates that best fit the job position advertised. This process engaged the students, regardless of their proficiency level, to provide their observations and comments in spoken or written form.

Consecutive lessons were conducted in a similar manner depending on the topics covered. The lecturer would always encourage the students to read other groups' postings and comment on their business communication format, language style and tone (see Figure 4). Good business letters posted would be highlighted, while poorly constructed letters would be further discussed for improvements.



**Figure 4. Screenshot Postings of Student and Lecturer Comments**

## Post Experimentation

A self-administered online survey was conducted at the end of the semester. Out of 38 students, only 30 students responded with a response rate of 79%. There were no missing items as all responses were in the mandatory setting. Responses were verified for straight-lining or patterned responses. The survey items were adapted from Virto and López (2020), where a five-point Likert scale was used (1 = strongly disagree, 2 = disagree, 3 = neutral, 4 = agree, and 5 = strongly agree). The SPSS software was used to analyse the descriptive statistics. The mean value followed Selvanathan et al.'s (2020) classification of 1.00 – 2.33 as low, 2.34 – 3.66 as medium and 3.67 – 5.00 as high. Except for the single item of “intention to use,” the remaining survey items’ Cronbach’s alpha ranged from 0.704 to 0.895, thus, demonstrating reliability. Content validity was established by seeking inputs from three other lecturers on item readability and appropriateness.

## Results

The students who participated in the survey were between 19 to 21 years old. The majority of them did not have prior experience using Padlet (73%) and were female (67%). Table 2 details the students’ responses towards the ten survey items on using Padlet.

**Table 2. Students’ Perception of Padlet**

Items	SD	D	N	A	SA	M	SDEV	Mean Value
1. Using Padlet is useful to me in this course.	0%	0%	20%	50%	30%	4.10	0.70	High
2. Using Padlet helps me accomplish my learning effectively.	0%	0%	23.3%	46.7%	30%	4.07	0.73	High
3. It is easy to access Padlet.	0%	0%	13.3%	50%	36.7%	4.23	0.67	High
4. Padlet is easy to use.	0%	0%	16.6%	46.7%	36.7%	4.20	0.70	High
5. My interaction with Padlet is clear and understandable.	0%	0%	20%	56.7%	23.3%	4.03	0.66	High
6. Writing and receiving comments on Padlet posts is interesting.	0%	0%	23.3%	50%	26.7%	4.03	0.71	High
7. The Padlet design is interesting.	0%	0%	40%	36.7%	23.3%	3.83	0.78	High
8. I feel Padlet is a fun way to post and receive business correspondences.	0%	0%	26.7%	46.7%	26.7%	4.00	0.73	High
9. I enjoy being anonymous when giving comments in Padlet.	0%	0%	30%	46.7%	23.3%	3.93	0.73	High
10. I plan to use Padlet on my own in the future.	0%	6.7%	56.7%	23.3%	13.3%	3.43	0.80	Medium
<b>Overall</b>						<b>3.99</b>	<b>0.72</b>	<b>High</b>

Note: SD = Strongly Disagree (1), D = Disagree (2), N = Neutral (3), A = Agree (4), SA = Strongly Agree (5), M = Mean, SDEV = Standard Deviation

Based on the results, the students perceived that Padlet was useful (80%) and helped them learn effectively (76%). They did not face any technical difficulties using Padlet as the interaction with Padlet was clear and understandable (80%), easy to access (86.7%) and easy to use (83.4%). The students also enjoyed being anonymous when giving comments (70%) and found writing and

receiving comments interesting (76.7%). Additionally, the students affirmed that Padlet was a fun way to post and receive various business letters (73.4%). As a summary, the high overall mean score (M=3.99, SDEV=0.72) indicated that the students' experience using Padlet was positive and suitable for simulation learning. However, 73.4% of the students were unsure if they would independently use Padlet in the future (M=3.43, SDEV=0.80). An open-ended question was also posed to the students – “Do you like using Padlet in the business communication course? Why?” For easier interpretation, students' responses were transformed into a word frequency cloud, which illustrated the frequency of certain words according to the text size, generated through UsingEnglish.com (see Figure 5).



**Figure 5. Student Perceptions of Using Padlet**

All of the respondents agreed that they liked using Padlet and it added to their learning experience. The following are some quotes from the respondents:

*“I think using Padlet has increased my learning experience because it is very convenient and easy to use.” (Respondent 28)*

*“I do like that we can post our own design of company profile and also can comment on others.” (Respondent 9)*

*“I like it when I am able to read other people’s work to gain more ideas.” (Respondent 16)*

*“Interesting. It’s a way for students to interact with each other.” (Respondent 24)*

*“Yes. It provides the more excellent works as references that could help me improve my writing skills.” (Respondent 20)*

*“It is easy to refer back to the previous week’s exercise.” (Respondent 23)*

## **Conclusion**

Although the positive responses from the students are consistent with previous Padlet studies (Jong & Tan, 2021; Rashid et al., 2019; Sangeetha, 2016), the favourable responses of students have revealed the potential of Padlet as a learning space to simulate business communication at the workplace. As there is a lack of research conducted in this area, the positive experience among students is encouraging. The current study has contributed to the additional creative use of Padlet for teachers to increase classroom interaction and engagement among students when conducting online classes. The study has also demonstrated that under a simulated context, what students learnt in class could be put into practice (Aebersold, 2018; Hunter, 2015; Jones & Barrett, 2017;



Sabus & Macauley, 2016). The simulation of sending and receiving business letters supports the constructivist's belief that learning needs to be scaffolded. In this study, the scaffolding process is evident as the lecturer provides content knowledge to the students during the online classes, and subsequently, students get to practice the writing of the various types of business letters.

Aside from using Padlet in language learning courses, lecturers of other disciplines could also consider using Padlet in their courses as a learning space for students to engage and interact with one another. However, time and effort to ensure that learning takes place smoothly are critical for the success of lessons that leverage Padlet as a learning space in order to simulate real-life experiences (Sabus & Macauley, 2016). Curriculum designers and lecturers of other courses/programmes may want to consider the following pedagogical implications when doing lesson planning:

1. Take a look at the overall topics for the intended course.
2. Structure the topics into a logical sequence of events that closely resembles the real-world context.
3. Register for either the free Padlet version or subscribe to the premium paid Padlet plan for larger upload space.
4. Get acquainted with Padlet for lecturers who are first-time users. Padlet is very user friendly, with many resources on its features and functions found on their website.
5. Create a Padlet Wall for the intended course. (Note: For this study, the Padlet Wall layout used was Shelf Layout.)
6. Inform the students right from the start how the course is structured and what is expected of them.
7. Introduce Padlet to the students. (Note: Students do not need to sign up for Padlet as they can access the Padlet Wall when the lecturer shares the access link.)

This study encountered some limitations such as only involving a specific cohort of students, thus the small sample size. This was unavoidable as the study was conducted at a time where Covid-19 cases was on the rise, limiting access to more students. Different levels, disciplines, programmes, and types of students may influence students' perception of their learning experiences. Although the findings of the study cannot be generalised, it can however, inform future instructional design of other courses to provide fresher and more innovative learning activities, and improve learning experiences of students. Future research could explore the use of Padlet as a learning space for simulation in other contexts such as different levels of courses/programmes or more cohorts of students from different educational levels. Another direction for future research could be to focus on Padlet as fostering the 21st century learning skills.

## **About the Author**

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