

Mentimeter を用いた EFL 授業

Utilizing Mentimeter in the EFL Classroom

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Abstract

Mentimeter is an interactive presentation platform that allows for engaging digital activities in EFL classrooms. It has a variety of affordances, including presentation tools and quiz activities, that enhance student engagement with classes, and assist teachers with presenting content in an interesting way, as well as assessing student understanding. Tools such as Mentimeter are now particularly pertinent as classrooms in Japan return to their pre-pandemic formats. In some cases, this means teachers and students who have studied and taught using digital platforms for varying lengths of time since April 2020, are now back in classrooms with little access to digital tools, despite new or increased enthusiasm towards the use of technology in the classroom. Mentimeter is an easy-to-use platform for both teachers and students in classrooms that are both equipped with computers and those that are not. This paper will reflect upon the benefits of using Mentimeter in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classes in Japan and outline various ways it can be utilized in the classroom.

Keywords

Mentimeter, CALL, Student Engagement, Technology in the Classroom, ICT, Digital Tools

Introduction

In 2020 nearly three hundred million students worldwide had their academic studies interrupted by the COVID-19 pandemic (Afrin, 2020). During this time, as instructors hurriedly transitioned to Emergency Remote Teaching (ERT), they also searched for tools that would complement their class content and help to engage students. Of course, Computer-Assisted Language Learning (CALL) was already a well-established approach to teaching and learning languages prior to the pandemic, however, it was mostly employed by those already with an interest in utilizing technology in the classroom. With ERT, technology in the

classroom was enforced upon all educators. During this time, new or increased enthusiasm developed towards the possible benefits of utilizing digital tools in classes upon the return to regular class formats in some of those educators (Donnellan, Shiobara, & Jolley, 2022; Provenzano, 2022). However, in Japan, this possibly meant that they would be returning to classrooms ill-equipped for extensive use of digital tools. Therefore, digital tools that are easy to use for both instructors and students once back in the classroom, and require minimal technology, are useful for educators in such situations. Mentimeter is one such tool. Activities can easily be planned prior to the class and conducted as long as students have a smartphone, the instructor has a device that can connect to the Internet, and the classroom is equipped with a simple method of projecting the instructor's screen.

Mentimeter is an online interactive presentation platform. It was founded in Sweden in 2014 and has various affordances that allow for real-time feedback and interaction between the presenter and audience members, in the case of classes, that is the instructor and students. It is currently available in English, Portuguese, and Spanish. There is a free version that allows for up to two slides per presentation, and five slides for quiz activities. For unlimited access, a paid account is required. This paper will first report on previous findings regarding the utilization of Mentimeter in the classroom, and then reflect upon and explain about various activities that have been utilized at a university in Japan with English language learners.

Literature Review

Benefits of technology in the classroom

CALL is a well-established approach to assist in language learning, and for this reason there are a plethora of tools available for instructors to utilise, many of which have been found to be popular with students and yield beneficial results in learning. Perez and Jolley (2020) reported positive results from students in regards to attitudes towards activities that incorporated TED talks and writing tasks using Google Drive and Google Docs. Additionally, findings showed that students preferred online collaborative writing using Google Docs when compared with the same task completed on Microsoft Word (Jolley, 2019). Furthermore,

research has found that EFL students studying vocabulary using CALL methods outperformed those that did not study with computer assisted learning (Enayati & Gilakjani, 2020; Al Qunayeer, 2022). Importantly, Caldwell (2018) also states that Information and Communications Technology (ICT) can potentially foster a more student-centered learning environment, which is particularly advantageous when active participation from students is required, such as in the language learning classroom.

Mentimeter

Mentimeter is an online interactive presentation tool with various affordances that allow for real-time interaction and feedback between the presenter and audience members. There are various kinds of slides available for more traditional presentation of material, known as “Content Slides” in Mentimeter. Content Slides include options such as “Heading”, “Paragraph”, “Bullets”, and “Images”. Furthermore, all slides can be enhanced with uploaded images or searched for images on Mentimeter, as well as GIFs. However, and very importantly, Mentimeter also has a variety of slides that allow the instructor to ask questions and for the students to give real-time live feedback and responses. These question slides include, “Multiple Choice”, “Word Cloud”, and “Open-ended” slide options that students can respond to with their computers or smartphones. There are also competitive activity options such as “Select Answer” that allow instructors to build quizzes for students. Settings in the “Select Answer” activities allow teachers to adjust the thinking time given to students, whether to show a leader board or not, and to include response time when calculating the activity “winner”. All of these slides can be enhanced with images and GIFs for more engaging content and to aid comprehension. Activities are controlled by the teacher, and students participate by joining with a unique code provided by Mentimeter. However, to gain unlimited usage of Mentimeter, a paid account is required, though limited free access is also possible.

Mentimeter was founded in Sweden in 2014 and since then has been utilized by educators as a way to enhance student learning and engagement. Indeed, Rincon Garcia (2022) and Sari (2020) discuss how tools such as Mentimeter can be advantageous in terms of engagement and positive outcomes for the students. In particular, Rincon Garcia (2022) also

found that Mentimeter helped students improve in their written accuracy, and Mahin, Kunzwa, and Patel (2022), and Little (2016) all discuss the benefits of using Mentimeter with large classes. In particular, Mahin, Kunzwa, and Patel (2022) describe how Audience Response Systems (ARS), and Student Response Systems (SRS) such as Mentimeter, can help turn a large classroom into a more “interactive, engaging, and inclusive one”. They further report that survey data showed Mentimeter was positively viewed by students and had a similarly positive impact on their performance.

Findings also show that Mentimeter not only helps to foster engagement, but can also bolster participation. Little (2016) discusses how previous findings show that the anonymity that Mentimeter type platforms allow in certain activities can aid participation when compared to regular class discussions. This is particularly pertinent when considering language learners, some of whom may be averse to risk-taking in class. Vallely and Gibson (2018) and Sari (2020) also list this as an advantage of Mentimeter because students can feel they are contributing in a safe and non-judgemental space.

Little (2016) also states that previous findings posit that the immediate feedback that systems such as Mentimeter afford can help to inform teaching methods because the instructor is able to check upon student comprehension in real time and adjust as required, thus allowing instructors to pivot and create more appropriate content and engaging classes. This finding was also supported by Vallely and Gibson (2018), but they further explain it can also help to inform future planning and teaching. Beyond simple class engagement, Pinchardo et al. (2021) posit that Mentimeter has great inclusive potential and ability to offer equitable education to all as it allows participation from audience members from diverse backgrounds and abilities.

Though many have found Mentimeter advantageous, Vallely and Gibson (2018) also discuss some of the possible disadvantages to the utilization of Mentimeter in classes. The disadvantages they outline are:

- Anonymous responses make it impossible to identify which students have contributed to certain activities.

- Wi-Fi is required to connect and participate in Mentimeter activities.
- In large classes not all students will contribute (they estimate that 50%~75% will engage).
- There are no editing options once students have submitted their responses, this can lead to student frustration and embarrassment.
- If overused by a programme or staff, students may become disenchanted due to oversaturation.

Though Gokbulut (2020) also found positive results when using Mentimeter, specifically the Word Cloud question slide, the need for an electronic device such as a PC or smartphone and an Internet connection, as well as word limits in Mentimeter activities, were all listed as potential limitations for the use of Mentimeter in classrooms. Furthermore, Mayhew, Davies, Millmore, Thompson, and Pena (2020) outline how Mentimeter itself cannot create the engaging content, and teachers need time to create compelling and pedagogically sound materials for it to be most effective. This, of course, can be potentially time consuming when working within a platform with word limits like Mentimeter. Therefore, while Mentimeter can be an effective and engaging tool, it needs to be utilized strategically and thoughtfully. Indeed, Moorhouse and Kohnke (2020), state that when compared with other SRS platforms, they believe Mentimeter to have the greatest potential in English for Academic Purposes (EAP) and English for Specific Purposes (ESP) classrooms. This is particularly pertinent in the case of this paper, where Mentimeter was utilised in EFL classrooms in Japan.

Implementation

Vallely and Gibson (2018) found three strategies to engage students utilizing Mentimeter, namely “gauging opinion”, “engaging discussion” and “voicing concerns”. In this section, activities that meet these strategies will be discussed along with new strategies practiced in lessons at a university in Japan with students ranging from first to third year. When conducting these activities students usually used their own smartphones and the institution’s Wi-Fi. They were specifically informed not to use their own phone data. When in

computer-equipped rooms, students used the provided devices. All classes were between ten to twenty students.

Gauging Opinion

Utilizing the “Scales” or “Ranking” slides, students are able to give their opinions on a set of items. “Scales” allows for students to respond to how they feel about statements provided by the instructor, ranging from “strongly disagree to “strongly agree”. Their responses are anonymous, thus, helping to alleviate fear of risk-taking or “losing face” in front of their peers. “Ranking” allows students to rank a set of items provided by the teacher. Again, all responses are anonymous. Anecdotally, when conducting these types of activities students are thoughtful about their responses and enjoy seeing the real time contributions and results as they appear on the main screen. Furthermore, it is possible to see whether all students have responded or not, which is another Mentimeter affordance. At the bottom right of the instructor’s screen, it is possible to see the number of responses submitted, in the case of this study, all students participated by adding their responses. These kinds of activities are useful for gauging opinions about learned content or how students feel about topics prior to learning.

Engaging Discussions

“Open Ended” slides and “Word Clouds” can be useful in helping to create content for discussion and debate. “Open Ended” slides allow the instructor to post an open-ended question to students. Students can then send their response anonymously. The content created can act as a springboard to deeper discussion between the instructor and students or between the students themselves. This is particularly helpful for students who may have difficulty in language classrooms formulating a clear opinion or reason on the spot. In essence, the responses they see on the main screen can help them identify and inform their position, which can assist and support smaller group discussions in class.

“World clouds” can be used to ascertain where a class is situated on a topic, brainstorm ideas, or even gain insight into a class’s current awareness or knowledge on a topic or theme. For “Word Clouds” the instructor is able to set how many responses, between one and ten, an individual can submit. Responses are then gathered on the main screen with popular

contributions growing larger and more central. This type of activity can help support class discussions and also act as a kind of brainstorming activity where students can gather further ideas for smaller communicative tasks in class. All “Word Cloud” responses are also anonymous.

Voicing Concerns

Vallely and Gibson (2018) supported Little’s (2016) findings that students were more confident asking questions through Mentimeter than doing so verbally in front of the whole class. They assert that this is useful in improving comprehension of tasks as students are more likely to voice concerns or ask questions about assessment tasks.

“Open-ended” slides are useful for these kinds of activities. A slide simply asking, “Are there any questions?” gives students a forum where they can submit any concerns or questions anonymously. The instructor is then able to address the issue/s, which may encourage other students to expand upon their own concerns either verbally or through Mentimeter when they realise other students are having similar issues. For Vallely and Gibson (2018) this was particularly helpful due to class size, however for the EFL learners in this study it offered them a chance to gain deeper understanding into what was required for tasks. Though the initial contact through Mentimeter may be anonymous, the acquired knowledge in regards to the assignment or task can assist in students’ overall success, thus, helping to build confidence and knowledge.

Reviewing Content

The prior strategies all involve anonymous participation in Mentimeter activities. However, there are competitive type tasks that allow for students to identify themselves. This can be done through the “Select Answer” and “Type Answer” slides. The “Select Answer” option is particularly useful and engaging for review type activities. When using the “Select Answer” slides, the instructor can pose multiple-choice questions. The instructor is also able to include a “leader board” at any point in the presentation to see who is “winning” the activity. Other settings allow for teachers to set how many seconds participants have to answer and whether to add points for speed when answering. These quizzes can be enhanced with music,

pictures, and GIFs. Furthermore, students can work as individuals, in pairs, or even in small groups, quickly conferring to select the answer. The number of correct and incorrect responses are displayed on the main screen once the thinking time is up, but individual responses are not identified. This is useful in gauging learned content, and briefly addressing pertinent knowledge if students have done poorly on a particular question. At the end of the quiz, it is possible to include a “leader-board” and address the winner. This type of review activity is suitable for language-based questions as well as content type questions. In both cases it offers students and instructors alike insights into areas they may need to pay more attention to in a fun and engaging manner.

Conclusion

During the period of pandemic enforced ERT, new and increased enthusiasm toward the use of digital tools by instructors in the classroom has been found. However, as institutions, instructors, and students return to regular class formats, effective digital tools that can be simply utilized by those wishing to continue to employ them are needed. Mentimeter has been found to not only benefit students by increasing their engagement, confidence, and comprehension, but it can also assist teachers with assessing student learning, planning class content, and addressing student needs and concerns. However, there are several points to be cautious about when implementing Mentimeter activities in class, namely the need for an Internet connection, and the fact that all participants need a device, such as a smartphone, to access Mentimeter. However, with institutional Wi-Fi available and all students allowed their own smartphones in class, these were not issues for the location discussed in this paper. It is important that all that has been gained and learned during ERT not be forgotten, particularly for those returning to classrooms with minimal access to technology. Mentimeter is a tool that instructors might find useful and easy to utilise in such a case.

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