

Supporting English As a Second Language (ESL) Teachers' Professional Development Through Multi-Platforms' Online Affinity Space

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Abstract—This paper narrates the use of multi-platforms' online affinity space called Teacherfiera.com to support ESL teachers' professional development. Teacherfiera.com utilizes three online platforms which are BlogSpot, Facebook Group and Telegram Group that works in parallel with each other. Each platform is readily available to be used for free by the public and provides contextualized, personal as well as group interactions. These platforms which have been integrated into Teacherfiera.com also work as a resource bank for English Language Teaching materials which are accessible 24/7 and allows users to respond to specific materials or engage in a general topic of discussion. The creation of Teacherfiera.com started as a response towards the need for teachers' support in the Malaysia's nationwide dissemination and implementation of the new Common European Framework of References for Languages (CEFR)-aligned English Language Curriculum.

Keywords—Teachers' professional development; peer mentoring; curriculum innovation; affinity space

1 Introduction

This study aims to narrate the use of multi-platform online applications by Teacherfiera.com as the medium for affinity space among ESL teachers, as part of their professional development. Teacherfiera.com consists of a BlogSpot website, a Facebook group and a Telegram group that combined to be a unified platform that can be considered as an affinity space, a concept built by [1]. This concept explains how people interact within a space [1]. The administrator chose these social media platforms as it is the current trend and holds huge ability to accommodate the objective of Teacherfiera.com [2]. Currently, there are more than 6.8 million pageviews on their

BlogSpot, 31000 members on their Facebook group and 33000 subscribers on their Telegram group.

This platform is developed and maintained by two local ESL teachers and Master Trainers, Mdm. Wan Zhafirah and Mr. Hakim together with a Senior Lecturer from University Sultan Zainal Abidin, Associate Professor Dr. Radzuwan, in response to the need of Malaysian Primary School English Teachers to get support and guidance in implementing the new CEFR-aligned curriculum starting from January 2018. The training provided by the ministry for the new curriculum was thought to be inadequate [3] as it was evidently had the common problems of cascade training programme such as transmissive training instead of reflective, inadequate time, and most importantly, no follow up or after-training support provided [4].

The administrator of teacherfiera.com provides in-house made materials, such as printable picture cards, books, modules, audio clips as well as PowerPoint slides that are fully compatible with the new curriculum, while at the same time hosting a platform for discussion on the materials as well as other topics related to ESL teaching in Malaysia. More importantly, the administrator together with other members also provides online training for ESL teachers using videos and online chat, on how to conduct lessons and the use of different types of materials.

Despite being led by Master Trainers, Teacherfiera.com is considered as informal learning for the ESL teachers. This is because it existed in the online social network environment [5] and there is no fixed curriculum or programme to be followed [6], but rather the sharing of knowledge and experience are made personally by users while being moderated by the administrators. The different platforms within teacherfiera.com are interrelated and provide different functions that will be explained in the following sections.

2 Platforms Within Teacherfiera.com

There are three main components or platforms within teacherfiera.com which are the Blogspot, Facebook Group as well as Telegram Group.

2.1 Teacherfiera.com blogspot

Teacherfiera.com Blogspot serves as the main 'face' for Teacherfiera.com. It is used as the principal database where the users use to access all Teacherfiera.com's in house-made resources that includes printable materials, powerpoint slides, tutorial videos as well as audio clips.

It also provides tutorial videos in making teaching aids, teaching techniques and other related videos in the form of Youtube extension. The use of Youtube extension is regarded as very effective as it fast and posed very little limitations [7]. As of 4th October 2019, there are more than 800 posts made to this site.

The layout of the web page is arranged within three main columns and labelled for each one of the posts, pages or links. When a visitor reaches the main page, they will have the option to either open the posts and download the materials provided within the

post or they may also click on the links that will bring them to Teacherfiera.com Facebook Group or Telegram Group. The transition between the three platforms is seamless, as the web page is designed to integrate with the other platforms and are accessible by using either computer, smartphones or tablets.

Based on the Google Analytics report since 1st December 2017 until 4th October 2019 (Refer Appendix A), Teacherfiera.com BlogSpot received more than 6.8 million page views, and served more than 600 000 users mainly from Malaysia. As most of the materials are made to cater to the Malaysian ESL Curriculum, it is natural for most visitors to come from Malaysia. Still, since the materials are also compatible with the CEFR, which is adopted by many countries [8], [11], the website also receives visitors from other countries as mentioned above.

2.2 Teacherfiera.com Facebook group

The materials that were published in the Teacherfiera.com website will be showcased in the Teacherfiera.com's Facebook Group whereby each individual material set is being uploaded as one post. As Facebook is a very popular platform among teachers in Malaysia, it is a great platform that provides an easy way to reach more users using its Share button as well as to receive comments and questions on the specific materials on each post made. Teachers will comment with their experience of using the materials or ask questions on how to adapt the materials to their students' or classroom's specific needs. They will also share the posts to their colleague who might benefit from the posts. The discussions are always joined by administrators together with other members. As of April 2019, there are more than 500 posts and more than 23000 active members (Refer Appendix B) in this Facebook Group. [5] notes that the learning through Facebook is considered as an informal one but are part teachers' professional development.

2.3 Teacherfiera.com Telegram group

While the Facebook group is the place to discuss each material set specifically, as it appears in individual posts, there is a need for a platform to discuss and share general knowledge in teaching such as issues of pedagogy or methodology within the context of English Language Teaching as well as education as a whole. To do this, an official Teacherfiera.com Telegram Group was made to address related issues in the context mentioned before. It is not only being appreciated by English teachers, but also by parents and anyone who are interested in English Language teaching to discuss a broad area of concern, such as problematic classroom management, getting children to be interested with English Language or simple things like how to use certain grammar rules correctly.

As of May 2019, there are more than 33000 members in this group, which consist of mainly primary school English Language teachers, as well as parents, education officers and lecturers with different educational background and experience. The diversity in the members' background and experience allows for deep discussion and

complex sharing of ideas. Every question will be answered base upon each members' different opinions, leading to different ways of doing things.

3 Teacherfiera.com Users Flow

Based on the previous explanation of different platforms that are interrelated with each other, the flow of members or users of Teacherfiera.com can be visualized as Diagram 1:

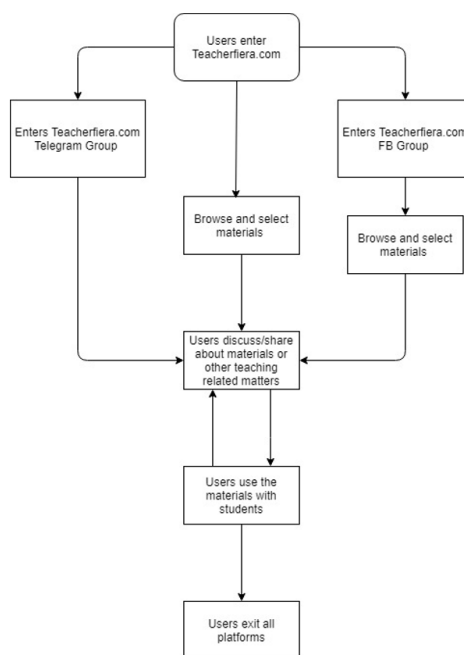


Fig. 1. Teacherfiera.com Users' Flow Chart

4 Context of Innovation

Teacherfiera.com aims mainly to assist the Malaysian English Language teachers by providing wide range of materials that cater broad range of students' and teachers' need. But, as the implementation of the new CEFR-aligned curriculum is still on-going, and the administrators are the Master Trainers for the new curriculum, there is an inclination to focus more on supporting teachers in adapting to the new curriculum. As of the year 2019, the new curriculum is being used by Standard 1, Standard 2 and Standard 3, and will continue to be used by Standard 4 in 2020 and so on. Not just that, anyone who are interested in English Language Teaching, such as parents who are interested in teaching their children at home also benefited from Teacherfiera.com. This innovative practise is not restricted to education sectors only but can also be applied to provide support for

any types of training in any field, either before training, during training or after training support.

5 Importance for the Malaysian ESL Community

Since the inception of the new CEFR-aligned curriculum in January 2018, many teachers, especially the non ESL majors, were struggling in its implementation with many still confused of how they should do things and why [3]. Teacherfiera.com solves the confusion and answer the questions by furnishing accurate information. At the same time, the platform also encourages dialogic reflection among members which is a very important part in Teachers Professional Development (TPD) [12]. It is evident that Teacherfiera.com plays an important role in helping the implementation of CEFR in Malaysia as it is not only used by more than 40000 Malaysian English Language Teachers, but also Education Officers and trainers within the Ministry of Education Malaysia. Materials from Teacherfiera.com are used by these officers and trainers during their training sessions nationwide.

6 The Future of Teacherfiera.com

In its current form, Teacherfiera.com has won several awards at international and national innovation competition. This includes a gold medal at International University Carnival on E-Learning (IUCEL) 2018, Educational Project of Innovation Competition (EPIC) 2018 and UniSZA's *Minggu Penyelidikan dan Inovasi* (Innovation and Research Competition) 2019. Even though these competitions were held in Malaysia, it is considered as an international competition as it were participated by innovators from other countries including Thailand, Singapore and Indonesia.

Based on the feedbacks given by the judges, Teacherfiera.com will be further enhanced. It is in the process of to be transformed into a single integrated and connected application that will be available to all types of mobile devices as well as computers and laptops.

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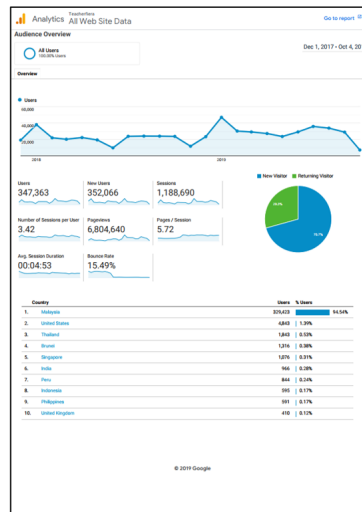
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9 Appendices

Appendix A



Appendix B

