Self-regulated Lifelong Learning in Law Using LinkedIn

Chin Chin SIA [a] *, Puteri Sofia AMIRNUDDIN [b]

[a] *Taylor's University, Faculty of Business and Law, No.1, Jalan Taylor's, Subang Jaya, Selangor 47500 ,Malaysia*

[b] *Taylor's University, Faculty of Business and Law, No.1, Jalan Taylor's, Subang Jaya, Selangor 47500 ,Malaysia*

Abstract

In tertiary legal education, self-regulated learning is demonstrated through active goal-directed, self-control of behaviour, motivation, and cognition for assessment tasks by an individual learner. Self-regulated learning involves a recursive cycle, involving three phases: forethought, performance and reflection. Through the creation of LinkedIn undergraduate e-profiles through the assessed task, the students are trained to be self-regulated learners. The effectiveness of LinkedIn in achieving the aim of self-regulated learning will be evaluated and demonstrated. In addition, professional networks help educate students who hold uninformed views of the workforce they are about to join. Networking is an essential part of building capital, and online social media tools, such as LinkedIn, is a suitable resource. This paper shows one innovative method for encouraging law students to be self-regulated learner in shaping their presence in the professional world by using LinkedIn. Their profiles with the necessary skills will be their foundation to venture into the real legal world.

1. Introduction

1.1. Core Purpose of Lifelong Learning in Legal Education

The core purpose of Taylor's University is to educate the youth of the world to take their productive place as leaders in the global community. Legal Skills is one of the core modules in the LLB programme of the Law School at Taylor's University (Sia et al, 2017). One of the module's learning outcomes is to initiate and manage independent and continuous self-learning of the law using technology based on areas already studied and not previously studied to evaluate individual progress in research, form judgments, exercise reflective practices which will result in lifetime of

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* Chin Chin SIA. Tel.: +60-3-5629-2628
  E-mail address: chinchin.sia@taylors.edu.my

personal and professional development in this area of law. The aim of this module is to inculcate the students' autonomy of independent self-regulated learning with the exposure to the necessary skills required for the effective acquiring of legal knowledge for continuous learning and practice of law. Reflective Journal / e-Portfolio (comprised of 25% of overall weightage of the grades) is one of the key assessment components in which learners are assessed on their preparation and maintenance of an online reflective journal / portfolio as a tool to manage their independence in self-learning as well as a tool to evaluate their progress via self-regulation. This journal is to be monitored by the module lecturer and evaluated at the end of the course. The assessment is designed to enable students to acquire the lifelong skills in their legal career, to build effective partnership and relationship with industry and to embed employability (Peterson, R. M., & Dover, H. F. 2014). Students are required to create their own LinkedIn as their e-portfolios from Semester 1 and is part of their assessed coursework in this module beginning from March 2017.

Prior to implementation of reflections via LinkedIn in March 2017, WIX was used as the platform. Five main problems encountered were (1) lack of standardization structure, (2) lack of connectivity with past and present peers, (3) lack of collaboration for future or prospective peers, (4) lack of visibility for prospective employer or legal firm and (5) lack of built-in Search Engine Optimization (SEO). These are obstacles in facilitating the learners in self-regulated learning as they are less involved in a recursive cycle of three phases: forethought, performance and reflection.

(i) Lack of standardization structure

For most of the law students, their strength is not in website designing and navigating through the nitty-gritties of web content development. As such, most of them are unable to create a professional looking websites which could be used as a show piece for their e-portfolio for the Legal Skills module. The structures in Wix were not customized for the e-portfolio and this leads to many unattractive e-portfolios being portrayed during creation of e-portfolio of this assessment on Legal Skills. According to a recent study on Social Recruiting by the online platform Jobvite (2018), in the U.S., the best social networks for recruiting candidates to fill job vacancies are LinkedIn (77%), Facebook (63%), Instagram (25%). 78% of employers had found at least one employee via a social network, and 93% of HR professionals were found to use social networks to verify information on the CVs of job applicants. If the learners' profiles are not portrayed favourably in the structure, this may negatively impact the impression of the prospective recruiters (Mičík, & Mičudová, 2018).

(ii) Lack of connectivity with past and present peers

The usage of Wix was only for learners to showcase their past and present portfolios. However, it is not designed to connect the past and present peers of the

learners which could be good sources of building their own professional networks. Without the peers' connectivity, the learners are less inclined to set their goals based on the peers' current standards.

(iii)   *Lack of collaboration for future or prospective peers*

As mentioned above, although Wix is suitable for showcasing learner' past and present achievements, it does not cater to the potential collaborations between the learners and current or potential peers in the same discipline. This will likely to lead to insufficiency of peer networks in their career path.

(iv) *Lack of visibility for prospective employer or legal firm*

The platform through Wix may be useful for learners' own records of achievement via digital archiving. However, its usefulness is limited as prospective employer or legal firm is unlikely to use Wix to search for potential candidates. This will likely to lead to limited online visibility of their achievements in searching for suitable posts or pupillages (Hartwell, C. J. 2018)

(v) *Lack of built-in Search Engine Optimization (SEO)*

For potential job-seekers, Wix may be less favourable as the SEO is lacking on google or other browsers. If the potential employee's profile is not searchable on the internet to the talent recruitment of the legal firms, it is rather futile for the profiles to be posted as the visibility of the career profiles are not readily searchable online.

1.2 *Relevant Stages for Self-Regulated Learning*

Self-regulated learning is encouraged through a cyclical process, wherein the student plans for a task, monitors their performance, and then reflects on the outcome (Schwartz 2003). The cycle then repeats as the student uses the reflection to adjust and prepare for the next task in self-regulated learning through e-portfolios (Alexiou & Paraskeva, 2010; Waye & Faulkner 2012). Through constant adjustments and expansion of networking, the students were also able to connect themselves to their own peers inside and outside the law school and industry legal partners.

(i) *The Forethought Phase of the Self-Regulated Learning Cycle*

This stage includes a minimum 5 components: task perception, self-efficacy, self-motivation, goal setting, and strategic planning. There is certain order to these sub-stages, even if the order is not exactly linear. Usually, the act of recognizing the task come first before the trigger of self-efficacy and self-motivation, both of which again pave the way for goal setting and the planning of learning strategies, and goal setting normally is followed by planning learning strategies.

(ii)   The Performance (Volitional Control) Phase of the Self-Regulated Learning Cycle

The performance stage is the implementation segment of the cycle. It involves not only the learning activities themselves, but also the mental processes that affect students' efforts to concentrate and otherwise implement those activities. As such, there are 3 facets to this stage: (1) attention-focusing, (2) the activity itself (including the learner's mental process for performing the activity properly), and, most importantly, (3) the self-monitoring the learner performs as he/she implements his/her strategies and begins to learn.

(iii) The Reflection Phase of the Self-Regulated Learning Cycle

The reflection stage of the cycle leads the learners as to their forthcoming learning undertakings (McNamara, J., Field, R., & Brown, C. 2009) and it is particularly significant to instill this stage right from the starting of Semester 1 Year 1 onwards. Reflection is backward-looking in the sense that the learner reflects on what he had just completed and how effective it was, and it is forward-looking in the sense that the learner deliberates the implications of his experience for upcoming learning activities. This stage includes 4 aspects: self-evaluation, attribution, self-reaction, and adaptation.

1.3 Hypotheses and Research Design

It is hypothesized that with the use of LinkedIn as e-portfolio could inculcate the spirit of lifelong self-regulated learning among leaners of Legal Skills through expansion of networking and exposure to real world of legal career platform.

2. Method

It is the first time LinkedIn since March 2017 becomes part of the summative assessment and the implementation has been successful and effective. Being Gen-Y cohort, students are versatile with the functionalities of social media. Gen-Y, also called the "Millenial Generation" or simply "Millenials," (Bohl, J. C. 2009) are the individuals born between 1977 and 2003, aged approximately 16 to 42. Although 90% of them have never used LinkedIn, they were able to set up the account and use the functions required to enhance their profiles. They are able to know what are the key skills required in a legal industry, both nationally and internationally. The feedbacks from students using reflection via LinkedIn were collected using Google Form Questionnaire. Data collection duration is 2 years from June 2017 to June 2019 completed by 114 respondents comprising of students from Semester 1 in LLB Programme (Core Subject). 3 sets of data were generated, from 3 different intakes, i.e. March 2017, August 2017 and March 2019 cohorts of semester 1 students.

19 questions in total were posed, comprising of 12 Semi Open-ended Questions (e.g. Ease of Use, Network Connections), 7 closed (Likert) questions (e.g. Duration, Usefulness to connect to legal industry).

2.1 List of Questions Posed

These 19 questions are listed below:

1. Your personal email address

2. Your LinkedIn link

3. How many days did you take to create and complete your LinkedIn account?

4. Do you think the LinkedIn features are easy for you to use to complete your tasks? Please give brief reasons for your answer.

5. How long have you used LinkedIn? (Mark only one answer)
   [ ] Less than 1 month
   [ ] Between 1 to 3 months
   [ ] Between 3 to 6 months
   [ ] More than 6 months

6. Since the creation of your LinkedIn account, approximately how many connections you have made with law students within Taylor's University?

7. Since the creation of your LinkedIn account, approximately how many connections you have made with non-law students in Taylor's University?

8. Since the creation of your LinkedIn account, approximately how many connections you have made with law students outside Taylor's University?

9. Since the creation of your LinkedIn account, approximately how many connections have you made with non-law students outside Taylor's University?

10. Since the creation of your LinkedIn account, approximately how many connections you have made with legal professionals (e.g. lawyers, academics, paralegal, etc.)?

11. Since the creation of your LinkedIn account, approximately how many connections have you made with non-legal professionals?

12. How often do you plan to update your details in LinkedIn as you progress in your undergraduate studies?
    (Mark only one answer).

[ ] Every 1 to 2 month
[ ] Every 3 to 6 months
[ ] Every 6 to 9 months
[ ] Every 9 to 12 months

13. Have you encountered any issue when using LinkedIn? If yes, please provide the details.

14. State if you agree with this statement "LinkedIn could expand my network in the legal profession once I graduate." (Mark only one answer).
    [ ] Strongly agree
    [ ] Agree
    [ ] Neutral
    [ ] Disagree
    [ ] Strongly disagree

15. State if you agree with this statement "LinkedIn and its contents could help me to understand the skills needed in a legal profession." (Mark only one answer).
    [ ] Strongly agree
    [ ] Agree
    [ ] Neutral
    [ ] Disagree
    [ ] Strongly disagree

16. State if you agree with this statement "LinkedIn could guide me to set the goals in my future legal career." (Mark only one answer).
    [ ] Strongly agree
    [ ] Agree
    [ ] Neutral
    [ ] Disagree
    [ ] Strongly disagree

17. State if you agree with this statement "LinkedIn is a great online tool to help me to find a suitable legal internship and career" (Mark only one answer).
    [ ] Strongly agree
    [ ] Agree
    [ ] Neutral
    [ ] Disagree
    [ ] Strongly disagree

18. Will you use LinkedIn to find your dream job for your legal career? (Mark only one answer).
    [ ] Yes
    [ ] No
    [ ] Maybe

19. Are you aware of any other online platform which you could use as digital portfolio and for legal networking? If yes, please provide the website

2.1. Participant characteristics and sample size

The participants are in total 114 who are first year law school students aged between 17 to 22. All are currently studying in the university in Malaysia. Males make up 1/3 of the sample while females made up 2/ 3 of the sample. Around 10% are international students who are non-Malaysians.

2.2. Sampling procedures and Human Ethics Approval

Participants are selected systematically as they are taking Legal Skills as core modules and aged between 17 to 22. All are current undergraduate students in LLB programme located in Selangor, Malaysia.

Based on Taylor's University Human Ethics Policy Doc. Ref.: TU-ACA-POLY-HE Effective Date : 24 April 2014, in clause 4.3 Research and Teaching Activities Which Do Not Require Ethical Approval, ethical approval is not required for:

a) Research conducted by Taylor's University, the students' association or other departments for the purpose of evaluating educational practices or courses with no collection of identifiable private information.

b) Exploratory research where the exact research aims have not yet been formulated and mainly in a form of preliminary interaction or discussion.

c) Research in which the investigator is the subject of their own research, and where no physically or emotionally hazardous procedure is involved

d) Some interviews which merely seek non-sensitive factual information, and interviews with public figures or professional persons in the areas of their duties or competence.

e) Research involving existing publicly available documents or information (public archival records).

f) Case studies of business organisations and institutions unless the project involves gathering personal information of a sensitive nature about or from individuals

g) Study or data collection based on data abstraction from existing medical or laboratory record with no interaction with the human subject.

h) Study based entirely on existing biological specimen; with no interaction with the human subject concerned; with no collection of identifiable private information and with no further processing of and/or testing on the specimen.

As the current study is classified as a research conducted by Taylor's University, the students' association or other departments for the purpose of evaluating educational practices or courses with no collection of identifiable private information, there is no ethics approval needed and is in compliance with the institutional policy.

3. Results

The use of LinkedIn for self-regulated learning in creation of e-portfolio for future career and networking is viewed by students to be extremely effective.

3.1 Ease of creation and completion of LinkedIn profile

On the ease of creation and completing the e-portfolio via LinkedIn, around 80% of the learners were able to create and complete their profiles within 3 days during the semester time in which lectures, tutorials and group assignments are going on concurrently for full-time students.

On the ease of features available, around 75% found them easy to navigate and user-friendly. Some issues encountered were inability to upload or save some documents. Also it takes some time for first time users to explore the options to showcase their achievements.

3.2 Expansion of connections through online networking

In a span of 1 month from the creation of LinkedIn profile, the learners have made:

Between 2 to 20 connections within the same Law School in Taylor's University;

Between 1 to 5 connections from outside the Law School in Taylor's University;

Between 0 to 7 connections from Law School from outside Taylor's University;

Between 1 to 2 connections from non-law students from other universities;

Between 0 to 6 connections from legal professionals (including lawyers, academics, paralegals)

Between 0 to 6 connections from non-legal professionals

3.3 Plan on frequency of updating profile in LinkedIn as the learners progress in undergraduate years

More than half of the respondents will be updating their profiles between 3-6 months. This coincides with the semester system in which different modules are taken during Year 1, Year 2 and Year 3 of their undergraduate years.

3.4 Perception of LinkedIn in expansion of network in the legal profession upon graduation

More than 90% of learners strongly agree and agree that LinkedIn could expand their networks in the legal profession upon graduation. Only a handful were neutral about this.

3.5 Perception of LinkedIn in professional goal setting

More than 80% of learners strongly agree and agree that LinkedIn could be used in setting their professional goals as they progress from academic stage to professional stage of legal education. Only a handful were neutral about this.

3.6 Perception of LinkedIn in seeking legal internships, posts and dream jobs

More than 85% of learners strongly agree and agree that LinkedIn could be used in seeking legal internships and posts as they progress to professional stage of legal education. Only less than 10% were neutral about this.

4. Discussion

These three sets of data collected over 2 years have yielded a few notable results. Firstly, they show that LinkedIn users have adopted self-regulated mechanism in their learning and have a fairly realistic view of their own job prospects. They are aware of how they need to present themselves in order to attract the attention of HR professionals in their life-long learning of legal career. This, however, is preliminary, and it needs to be confirmed by studies with different, larger samples.

Based on Future of Skills 2019 Report published by LinkedIn for the Asia Pacific region, the demand on professionals in compliance skills are in great demand. These professionals are needed by businesses on ensuring that a company complies with regulatory and legal requirements. Learners in the Legal Skills who are able to self-regulate in achieving their career goals in upscaling their skills will have a better opportunity to excel in the competitive legal profession. In a globalised environment, for Millennials to take their productive place as leaders in the global community, self-regulated learning lifelong learning is crucial for as certain legal jobs or roles which require a combination of two or more skills from different rising skills categories, such as compliance, human-centred design, social media marketing, workflow automation and artificial intelligence. LinkedIn is one of the viable online platforms which may facilitate the learners in Legal Skills to self-regulate their lifelong learning from academic stage to professional stage in the legal field.

This paper has some limitations, chief among them the fact that the data collected were through pilot study. This study is limited in that it is based exclusively on the self-perception and self-regulation of the users, making it impossible to draw conclusions as to their real level of competencies and employability, as determined by job selection professionals once they graduate.

Another significant limitation is that this paper is lack of examination on the risk of making selection decisions that certain candidates that do not participate the questionnaire as a result of bias and/or prejudice. Future studies should compare self-perception with professional assessments.

5. Conclusions

It is clear that LinkedIn is a fast growing global professional network that can be a useful tool as reflection and self-regulated learning for legal professionals and current students, whether or not they are actively seeking a job. With 2 new users joining the network every second and a active in more than 100 countries, and its reputation as one of the most successful startups in recent years, it makes sense that law school faculty utilize LinkedIn in their classrooms. By acquainting learners with LinkedIn and inspiring them to produce strong professional profiles, it can assist learners to self-regulate their learning based on the legal market and to grow their networks, which is essential in our competitive legal atmosphere.

Moving forward, the authors plan to create a LinkedIn group for business, hospitality and legal educators, in order to share best practices and teaching tips on incorporating social media tools and LinkedIn into other undergraduate level courses. Furthermore, extra empirical studies using survey data or outcomes-related data would be beneficial to measure the actual and perceived impacts of LinkedIn use over time for students during and following their time in university and early stage of legal profession.

Acknowledgements

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