



Learner Involvement and Motivation through Moodle

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Abstract

Learner involvement in the learning process is of utmost importance for learning. Learners construct their own knowledge on the basis of the experience earned by getting involved in the learning process and the mental makeup they possess. The challenge posed by the tasks also motivates the students. This paper tries to project ways of learner involvement through Moodle, by demonstrating how to form groups and forums which could be used for generating ideas to enhance academic writing. It will also demonstrate how students can interact amongst themselves using online chat, blogs and wikis to express their opinion and support their point of view. The way students could maintain an online journal and a glossary would be shown. Students learn better if they are motivated and the paper will reveal how to stream in live videos, upload power point slides, add audio and video content and get connected to relevant websites. Teachers maintain a crucial place in the learning process. The materials they prepare for the students are valuable hence the paper would reveal how to upload files and make data available to the students. Having free access to the files makes them autonomous. Similarly, ways of quickly making online tests using the inbuilt software and administering it to the students in the form of timed test would be demonstrated.

Keywords: Moodle.

1. Introduction

Moodle can be considered as the most widely used software in education. It is an acronym for **Modular Object-Oriented Dynamic Learning Environment**. Numerous universities have adopted it to develop e- courses and online modules for distance education. It is also being used as an adjunct to classroom teaching. Moodle is the brain child of Martin Dougiamas, who developed it as a part of his PhD Thesis at Curtin University, Australia (Robb, 2004). It can also be termed as Virtual learning environment (VLE), Course Management system (CMS) or learning Management System (LMS) (Moodle.org). Moodle has a user friendly interface and can be customized to suit various settings. What make it unique are the tremendous possibilities it can offer to teachers and students alike.

Moodle is developed taking into consideration the theoretical basis of social constructivism and social constructionism (Dougiamas and Taylor, 2003). Learners learn to cooperate in a

student centered environment where they can reflect on their own work as well as that of others and build on them. Learning is a social activity and communication is an integral part of it. Only physical activity is not enough but it should also engage their mind. According to Bruner (1960), learning is an active process and learners build up new ideas or concepts based on their past knowledge. They transform information and rely on their cognitive structure to provide meaning to experiences which is termed as learning. Students also need knowledge to learn as it is not possible to acquire new knowledge without linking it to the old one. When students collaborate, they are sharing their knowledge and building it up with the help of one another. Collaboratively they construct knowledge in groups.

Motivation is of utmost importance in foreign language learning. If students are motivated they learn faster; if not, their interest soon diminishes. Motivation is nothing more than arousing in them a desire to learn. Moodle can be exploited to capture and sustain students' attention. If the students are engaged cognitively, they perceive the relevance of the task which imparts them confidence. Moodle provides a lot of activities which could be customized and offered to the students. Students receive positive reinforcement, in the form of links or solutions when they are trying to solve a problem. This is really satisfying, hence motivating. Teachers can set cooperative goal structures where the performance of the group is more important than that of an individual. All this can be achieved through Moodle.

1.1 General Information about Moodle

Moodle can be accessed by logging on to the site and inserting your user name and password. It has the following interface, which is user friendly.

1.2 The Moodle layout

The Moodle has a middle space for the courses while on its sides are blocks for posting news, recent activities, forums, calendar etc.

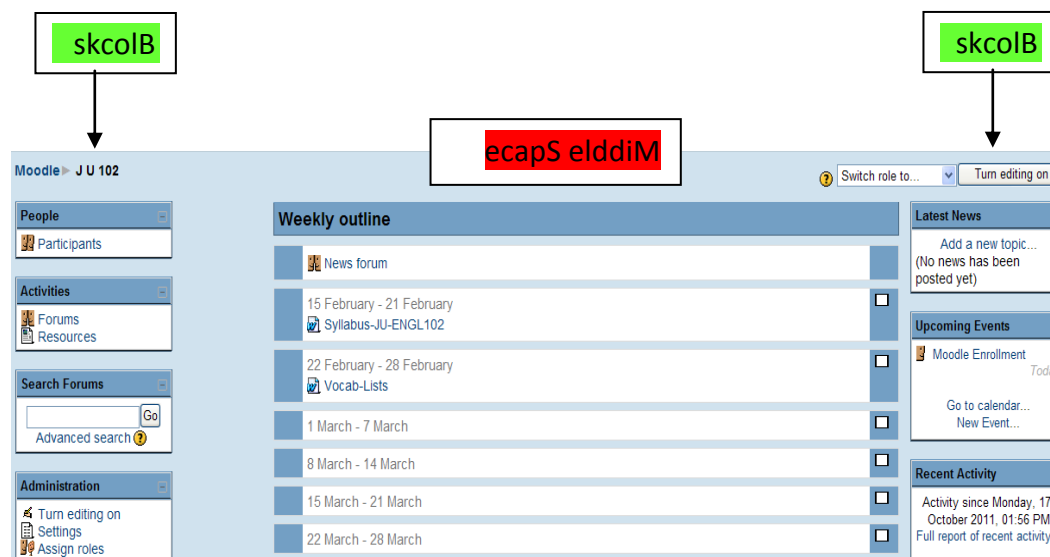


Figure 1: The Moodle Layout

1.3 The Blocks

There are in the default mode, on the left side, blocks entitled People, Activities, Search Forum, **Administration** and My Courses. On the right side are – **Latest News, Upcoming Events, Recent Activity and Blocks**. These can be shifted and moved around by using the arrows **in the turn editing off** mode.

2.2.1 The Administration Block

The most important block is the Administration block. It is important as the option of changing the settings can be operated from here. You can post your profile; manage your files and your data.

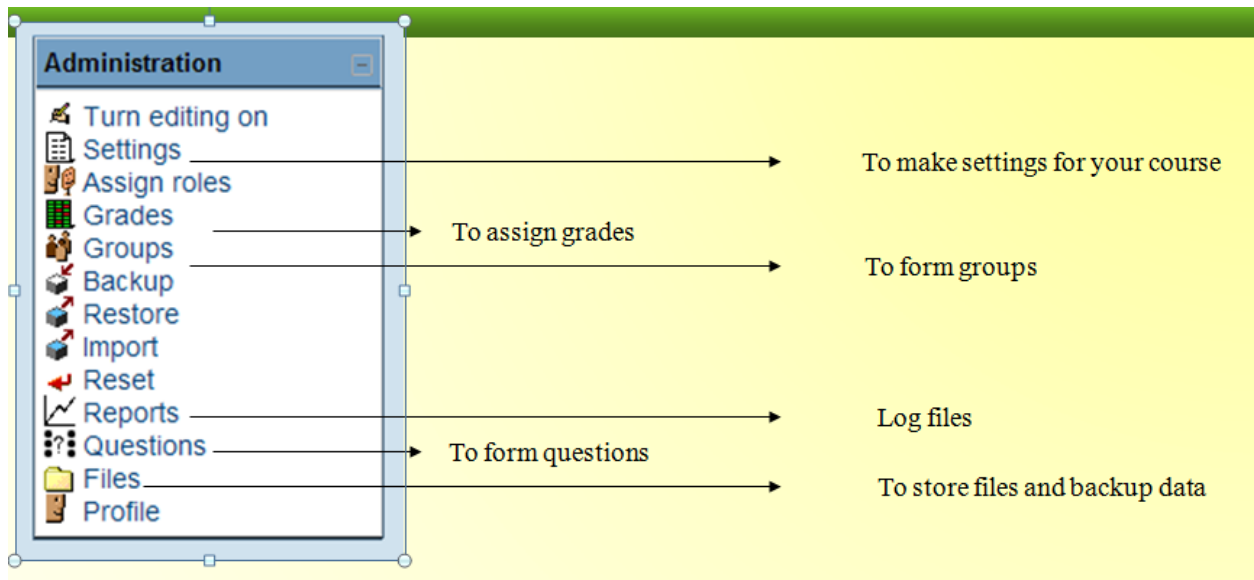


Figure 2: The Administrative Block

The administrative block has the following sections:

Table 1: The Administrative Block Sections

SN	Sections	Task
1	Turn editing on	For editing purpose (it should be turned on)
2	Settings	To setup your course for the semester
3	Assign roles	To assign roles to the participants like teacher, student or neutral
4	Grades	To see grades scored by students
5	Groups	To form groups
6	Backup, Restore	To save information and have a backup, to return back
7	Imports, Reset	To get information from other sources , to set again
8	Reports	logs
9	Questions	To form test questions
10	Files	To save uploaded files
11	Profile	Information about yourself

1.4 The Other Blocks

The other blocks are all arranged around the middle space of the course. The unwanted blocks can be deleted by clicking on the X command. They can be reinstated from the **Block** block. The names and functions are given below:

Table 2: The Other Blocks

SN	Name	Function
1	People	Displays information about your participants You can also form your blog and post notes .
2	Activities	Displays resources posted for students E.g. class notes, PP slides, video etc Displays activities for the students E.g. Assignments, quizzes, forum, chat, glossary, Wiki etc.
3	Search Forums	Searches for the forums created at the site.
4	My courses	Gives the list of the courses you are teaching this semester.
5	Latest news	Displays the latest news posted at the News forum .
6	Upcoming events	Displays homework deadline, assignment deadlines , or any other posted activity which is coming up soon.
7	Recent activity	Displays an activity which has just been completed.
8	Blocks	Helps in creating other blocks like : The Calendar, Blog menu, Blog tags, Course description , Messages, Quiz results, Site description etc.

1.5 Setting up Your Course on Moodle

Your course is organized by manipulating the middle space. In the administrative block, you could go to settings and under format click on either **weekly** or **topics**. If the mode set is weekly, you could display your course in the form of weeks. If it is topics mode you could list the topics. The following commands are used to manipulate the settings.

Table 3: The Moodle Commands

➔	move right
⤴	move up or down
✎	update or edit
✕	delete
👁	hide

When the editing is turned on, each week's block displays two pull down menus labeled **Add a resource** and **Add an activity**. They are used to add resources like teacher's notes, power point slides or prepare an interactive assignment for the students. The activities are described below.

A Table 4: The Resource Options

Add a resource		
SN	Resource	Function
1	Insert a label	To write a note or comment
2	Compose a text page	To compose online or copy paste material
3	Compose a web page	Supports more html features

These resources are generally posted by the teacher.

4	Link to a file or website	You can upload files saved in your computer. They can be office files, power point, video or music.	
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B Table 5: The Activity Options

Add an activity			These activities are designed for students to understand the subject well and sometimes for evaluation.
SN	Activity	Function	
1	Assignments	Can be in the form of project, homework etc.	
2	Forum	Discussion forum can be formed to generate ideas and discuss about the topic	
3	Quiz	Can administer an online quiz	
4	Glossary	Can keep a list of important vocabulary words	
5	Chat	Can initiate chat between groups to generate ideas etc.	
6	Wiki etc.	Its like a blog or a journal which could be started	

1.0 Learner Involvement through Moodle

Moodle is designed to have maximum students' participation to engage them as connected learners in order to establish productive educative relationships. The following activities can be designed.

1.6 Accessing Information

Students feel more at ease if all the information is available to them even outside classroom. This benefit them, even if they are absent in the class for some reason. The teacher can make the assignment or relevant papers available by posting information in the form of assignment, lessons or database by clicking on **add an activity** in the display area as shown in figure 3.

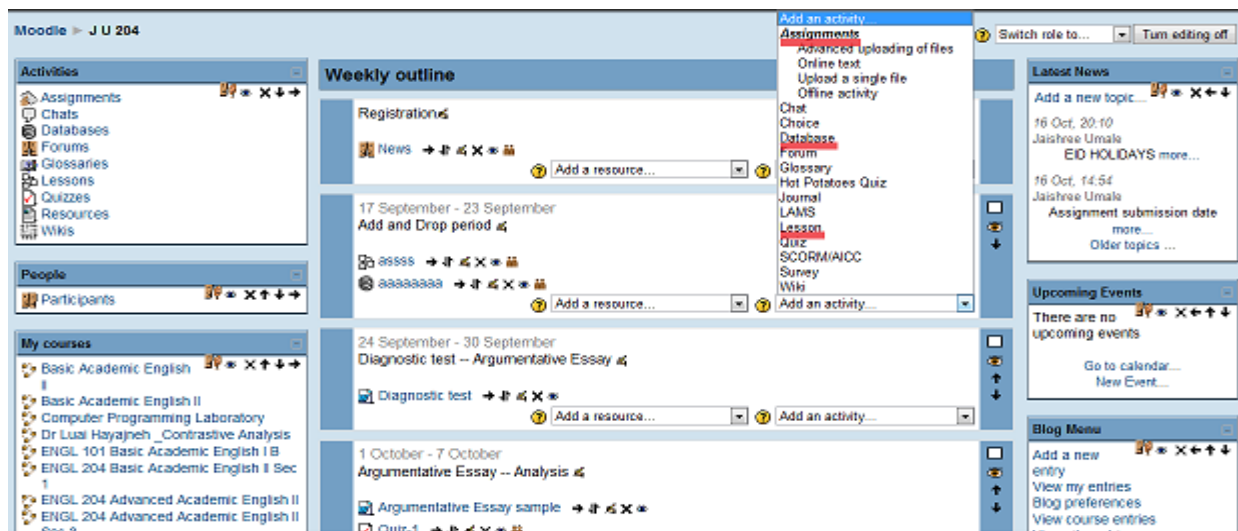


Figure 3: Posting an Assignment

A teacher can also have his own files stored by clicking on **files** in the administrative block and use **upload a file** button as shown in figure 4. This information can be in the form of power point slides, pictures, audio files etc. that could later be linked to assignments, lessons,

web pages etc. Moodle can be opened even outside the classroom which in itself is a motivating factor.

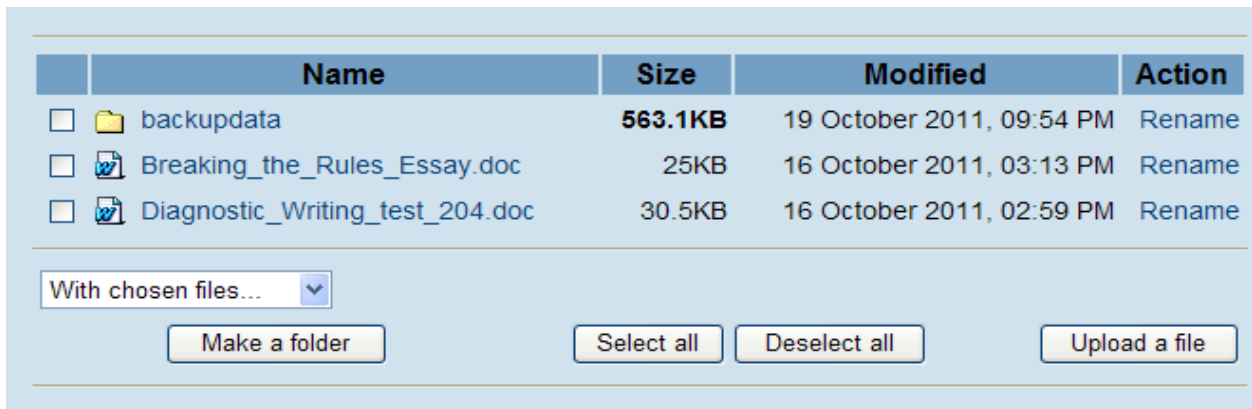


Figure 4: Uploading Files

1.7 Enhancing Academic Writing

Writing is a laborious process and EFL students take a long time to acquire this skill. Tutors apply the process approach and the students have to go through brainstorming, planning, writing the first draft, peer revision and then writing the final draft. This process involves group effort which can be achieved through Moodle in the following way.

1.8 Brainstorming and Planning

Moodle enables students to use various modes to communicate with classmates, online as well as offline to generate ideas. The following activities can be undertaken.

- **Forming groups and forums**

The class can be divided into groups for writing activities and this can be done by going to the **administrative block** and clicking on **groups**. Assign the role of students to the participants and if you would like to delegate some of your duties to a capable student, he could be assigned the role of a non editing teacher.

The students can use forums for brain storming and generating ideas. A teacher can initiate a forum using **add an activity** to which students can respond. Three options are available. A standard forum for general use allows students to initiate their own discussions. A single simple discussion forum and a question and answer forum where before viewing others' postings, the student is required to submit his views. This can be used to promote individual thinking and creativity (Suvorov, 2010). If the student has subscribed to a specific forum, messages are also sent as an e-mail to student's registered e-mail.

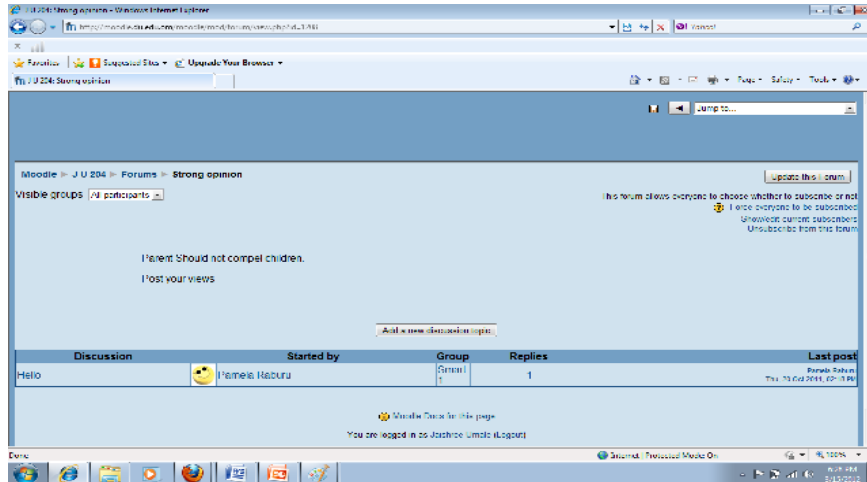


Figure 5: Forum Postings

- **Online Chat**

Online chat in Moodle is sans audio or video options. It could be exploited for generating ideas, synchronously in real time. It can be resumed by using **add an activity** feature. As students have no option but to write it also helps in developing their writing skills. A log report is available for further discussions.

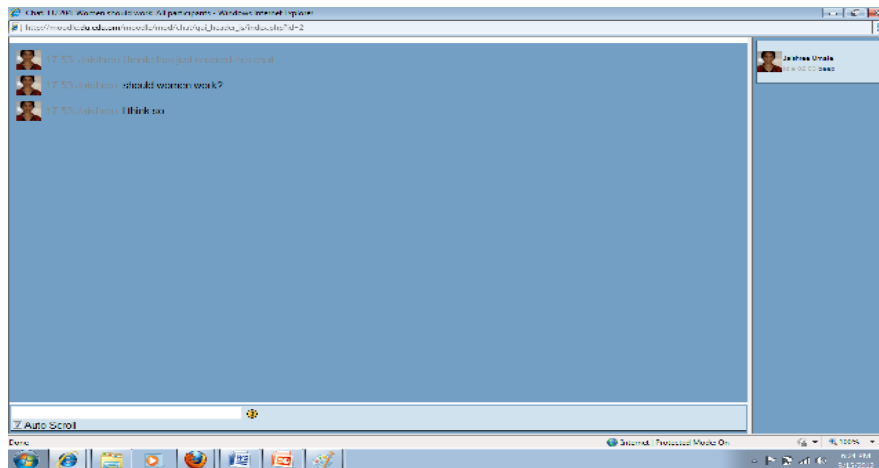


Figure 6: Online Chat

1.9 Drafting, Peer Reviews and Submissions

After having generated the ideas the students settle down to write the first draft and then subject their work for peer review before submitting their final draft. This can be done using the following options.

- **Assignment**

Students can use online text option under **assignment (found under add an activity)** to work in groups and plan out their essays. They can also upload their finished work using the advanced uploading of files feature.

Topic	Name	Assignment type	Due date	Submitted	Grade
1	Activity-1	Advanced uploading of files	Monday, 10 October 2011, 02:40 PM	View 26 submitted assignments	-
	Exercise-1	Advanced uploading of files	Monday, 10 October 2011, 01:45 PM	View 25 submitted assignments	-
	Assignment 1 : Personal Details	Advanced uploading of files	Tuesday, 18 October 2011, 12:20 PM	View 24 submitted assignments	-
2	Exercise : 2	Advanced uploading of files	Thursday, 20 October 2011, 10:30 AM	View 25 submitted assignments	-
	Project 1: Creating a Brochure	Advanced uploading of files	Thursday, 20 October 2011, 02:15 PM	View 25 submitted assignments	-
	Project 2: Create a Newsletter	Advanced uploading of files	Monday, 31 October 2011, 12:10 PM	View 24 submitted assignments	-

You are logged in as Mr. Babar Mubeen Sheriff (Logout)

Figure 7: Assignment Entries

- Workshop**
 This section monitors group work. Students can upload their work and give peer feedback
- Wikis**
 This section of the Moodle can be created by using **add an activity** feature. It is helpful in creating web pages inside the Moodle. It can be exploited for collaborative work and peer feedback.
- Databases**
 Students can submit their assignments using this tool and it could also be used to build a database of entries.

1.10 Maintaining Online Journal and Glossary

Students can maintain an online diary using this feature. They can also exploit it to keep a record of their writing work. Similarly students can keep a record of new words and develop their vocabulary using Glossary feature. They can browse it by alphabet, category, date and author. This feature could also be used to display quotations or new words at the site.

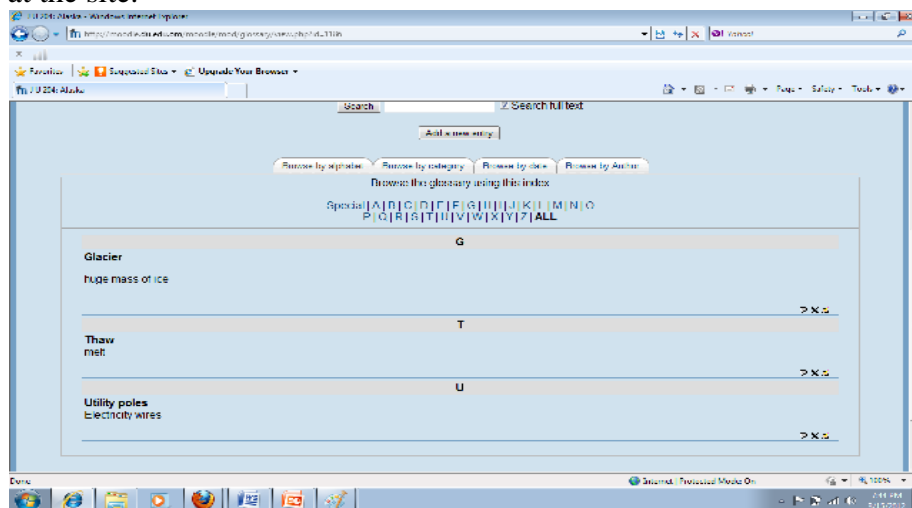


Figure 8: Glossary Entries

1.11 Motivating Students using Audio and Video content

The major drawback of EFL students is the lack of fluent speaking skills. Most of the time, they do not have enough exposure to English. Sound files in .mp3 format can also be uploaded and integrated in Moodle supporting activities. Students can listen and improve their speaking skills. Students can practice pronunciation, intonation and rhythm using this “listen and repeat” player (Kelly and Kelly, 2009). This can be done by clicking on **add a resource** and selecting **link to a file or a website**. Similarly video content can also be inserted by clicking on **add a resource** and selecting **link to a file or a website**. Two options are available. Either you download the video and save it in your files from where you could connect it to your lessons or you could directly connect it by embedding the html code in your lessons. The audio and video content make the lessons lively and really motivating for the students. It increases learner participation. Teachers can also upload power point slides to support their lessons.

1.12 Connecting to Various Websites

Students waste a lot of time searching the web. Teachers can construct lessons and embed the relevant websites in those lessons saving precious time of students. In this fashion web Quest activities could be designed that are interactive, project based and motivating. Similarly, web based lessons could be planned for the entire class to explain concepts in science, technology etc. As an adjunct students could learn more when web sites are linked where students can practice or view resources.

1.13 Online Practice Quizzes

Teachers can produce different types of practice quizzes ranging from Multiple Choice, True/False, Matching, Description and Cloze using the available software. A lot of options are available like randomizing the questions, setting the time frame, number of attempts, access to feedback or correct answers. The timer allows students to have their quizzes under strict time limits. Students can use these quizzes outside the class to prepare for the exams. This would minimize the exam fear and give them instant score as well as feedback allowing them to judge for themselves how well prepared they are!

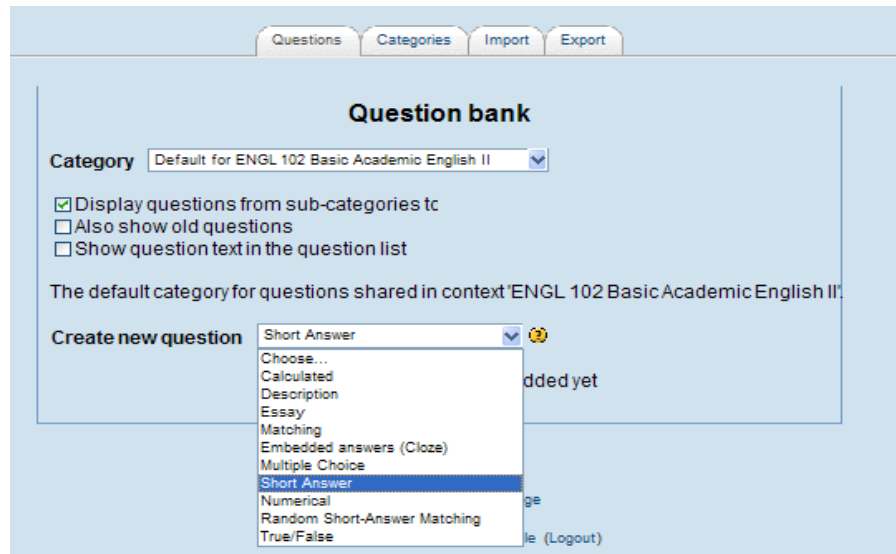


Figure 9: Forming a Quiz

2. Conclusion

The crux of education is enhancing skills of students which can be achieved when they are motivated and inspired. Society and culture also have a role to play in learning. We do not learn by ourselves but build on the available knowledge with the help of our peers and friends. Moodle has a great potential for involving students in learning activities. It has a learner friendly interface; it supports constructivist pedagogy and provides ample opportunities for synchronous as well as asynchronous communication. That makes it a great learning tool. Its integrative activities are motivating for the students. With correct handling it can go a long way in enhancing students' learning.

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