



Top 5 Research Findings

About student experience with Moodle

This white paper explores the top 5 insights we've uncovered on how students use Moodle. These have been identified from research directly conducted by CoSector, a University of London company that is the home of its professional and student support services.

Over the past six months CoSector's Research and Development team has carried out user research and design work to improve its VLE platform, Bloom. The aim is to create a user-focused digital service that addresses the needs of the staff and students that use the Bloom VLE on a regular basis.

Within this time 42 students, lecturers, technologists and administrators have been interviewed and 194 students have been surveyed. The research and development work is on going; this paper presents research findings to date and outlines the priority areas the team is addressing in the design work.

Table of contents

1

Submitting assignments

2

It's all about devices

3

The other platforms...

4

Navigation is a problem

5

Lecturers vs. VLEs

1

Submitting assignments

Students report a variety of issues when submitting assignments.

Time and time again, students have told us that one of the most important tasks they do on Moodle is submitting an assignment. Whether it be a short reading summary, an essay, or a take-home exam, students rely on Moodle to submit these assignments properly and on-time. Despite the importance of the assignment submission feature in Moodle, students report a number of frustrations and pain points, specifically around the length of time it takes and notification that their assignment was successfully submitted.

Many students said that the system is not responsive enough and is slow to process their uploads.

As one student said, "It could be a matter of minutes, so if you're running to hand something in at 12 and you're submitting it at 11:55, it could be late." And despite the feedback offered by the systems, students said it was not helpful as "on your screen, it says synchronising data and it will just keep running and you can't exit the page or it will ruin your progress."

At the same time, many students referenced the concerns about the robustness of the assignment submission process and whether or not their assignments have been submitted. As one student said, "They aren't foolproof!" and students, particularly those who are unfamiliar with Moodle, reported that they lost marks due to confusion, miscommunication, and platform issues.

“
After I've submitted an essay, I'll constantly check to make sure the essay has actually been submitted. I've heard horror stories that like someone submitted an essay and it didn't actually submit.

2

It's all about devices

Students use Moodle on a variety of devices - but not to do the same things.

It's no surprise that students use a variety of devices every day. Whether it is checking Facebook, posting photos to Instagram, downloading an assignment, or watching a movie, students report that they use multiple devices every day. The graphic on the right-hand side depicts the difference in device preference based on activities. Devices are shown by usage frequency order where smartphone is the most frequently used device and desktop, the least.



Smartphone



Social media



Multimedia platforms
(YouTube, Vimeo, etc.)



Software Suites
(MS Office, Adobe, etc.)



Tablet



Multimedia platforms



Social media



Software Suites



Laptop



Software Suites



Multimedia platforms



Social media



Desktop



Software Suites



Multimedia platforms



Other (Social media,
Academic Support Tools,
Specialised software)

“
If I’m using it [Moodle] in class, I’m using my phone. If I’m at home, I use my laptop.

The navigation experience, along with the often slow response times users encounter when using Moodle on their mobile, often results in students opting to use their laptop for more substantial work.

As one student said, “Because there’s a lot of info to absorb in one go, I don’t think I’d use my phone for that.” Instead of reading large amounts of information, students are looking for “mobile moments”¹, or quick bits of information, like whether the location of their lecture has changed or if their grades have been released. In many respects, this is influenced by students’ usage of other mobile apps and social media.

Our research has shown that students use both laptops and smartphones to access Moodle, with tablet use substantially lagging behind. Although students might use a variety of devices to access Moodle, what they do once logged in varies depending on the device as the navigation experience differs.

“
I find it easier to navigate on the laptop, rather than my mobile where there’s lots of drop down menus.

¹ “Moments That Matter, Intent-Rich Moments Are Critical To Winning Today’s Consumer Journey” by Forrester <http://bit.ly/1DbVLIN>

3

The other platforms...

Students use platforms other than Moodle ... but is this a battle worth fighting?

Students, learning technologists, and lecturers have all told us that the use of some of the features offered by Moodle (forums, quizzes, blogs) are seldom used by students. Instead, many students prefer to use other platforms to communicate, collaborate, and engage with colleagues. Whether it's Facebook, WhatsApp, or Skype, students use different platforms to do many of the tasks that Moodle can do.

That raises an interesting question, namely, "What's the path and future for Moodle?" Should we spend time improving the forums to bring students back in? Or do we acknowledge that students are using other platforms and integrate Moodle into those platforms?

There's no clear answer, but as we continue our research, this will be an important area to focus on.

“

Every time we've tried to do forums, they don't need it. If it's not assessed, they don't use it, because they can do the same thing via WhatsApp.

4

Navigation is a problem

“

The navigation could be made better. The bar at the top discusses your courses, general courses, and there's two other options. They aren't relevant so I haven't used them.

Being able to quickly and easily find information is the hallmark of many great websites and platforms.

Unfortunately, regardless of whether they are using a laptop, desktop, tablet, or smartphone, students report a variety of issues with navigating Moodle, all of which negatively impact the user experience.

For many students, trying to find the information they are looking for can be a challenge. But finding information is only half the battle. Many students also expressed frustration at the way that information is organised within a course.

The student experience is heavily dependent on how lecturers utilise VLEs.

From speaking to countless students and learning technologists, one key theme emerged. And that is that the student experience when using the VLE is very dependent on how their lecturers use Moodle, or whether they use it at all. Quite surprisingly, many students mentioned that their lecturers do not use Moodle, but prefer to use other platforms.

And even for students who have lecturers who consistently use Moodle, they also mentioned that the different ways that Moodle is used causes confusion. As one student said "It can get confusing at points. I don't think all lecturers know how to present information they are giving you."

5

Lecturers vs. VLEs

“One of my lecturers, he refused to use Moodle. For some reason, he didn't want to use it. It just meant that communication was very difficult. As a class we asked him if he could use it and he said no. He said instead he would email us every week with who needed to do what.”

Although the nature of the relationship changes as a student progresses through their studies, their experience is directly impacted by how a lecturer uses it. And for us, this is one of the areas we have identified that it needs more exploring. We have heard from countless learning technologists about the struggles with Moodle adoption. And given the importance of the overall learning experience when it comes to NSS scores, we believe it's an area of great importance.



If you want to know more about our
research or to take part, please contact us at

user-research@london.ac.uk

And if you would like to learn more about
Bloom, our flexible and easy-to-use VLE
solution, please visit

www.bloom.london.ac.uk