

Enhancing English Language Teaching using Moodle LMS: A Proposal

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Abstract

This proposal aims to describe experiences of the English Language Center in particular, and Nizwa College of Technology in general, regarding the implementation of blended learning in teaching English to Foundation Level students. Having just implemented a policy on e-learning in delivering English Language courses, ELC envisions to supplement their current course delivery plans with online resources and activities to practice its own version of “blended learning” using an open-source learning management system called Moodle. As there is no hard-and-fast rule on how to carry out the blended learning approach in various courses being taught at the Center, the proposed study aims to follow the practice being done by selected ELC teachers to identify best practices, challenges and opportunities that can be used as guide to be followed later on by others in creating a blended learning environment in teaching English Language courses. This study aims to follow six ELC teachers: two relatively new teachers in the Center, two that have been teaching in the Center from 3 to 6 years, and another two that have been teaching in the Center for more than 6 years. The study will monitor and record the practices they follow in the use of Moodle in delivering their respective courses, the challenges they face, the changes they make in the course delivery plan as a result of integrating Moodle in their course, and their perceptions on issues relevant to integrating online activities in teaching English. The study envisages using both qualitative and quantitative methods in analyzing data. Data collection will involve a survey, a Moodle assessment rubric, and an online semi-structured interview for the focus group comprised of the selected ELC teachers, their immediate superiors, and two IT teachers who serve as technical support. It is envisioned that through this study, a common framework and a list of best practices could be arrived at, which could be used as guide in the Center, to further implement and use blended environment in the delivery of courses.

Introduction

It is a very well-known fact that we are now living in a landscape where text messages, photos, audio and video files are transmitted from one mobile device to another in seconds and that these devices allow us to connect to the Internet through

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wireless networks; further, emails, instant messaging, blogs, wikis and social media networks have revolutionized the way we share information (Tanveer, 2011). Recently as well, the exponential growth in popularity of Online Learning Environments (OLEs) starts to drive change in many aspects of teaching and learning: course design, delivery methods, teacher-student interaction, design of student tasks and assessment (Bennett & Lockyer, 2004). Having realized that infrastructure and devices already exist and just waiting to be fully utilized, administrators of the English Language Center (ELC) in Nizwa College of Technology (NCT) decided to implement a policy of integrating an open-source learning management system (LMS) in the delivery of English Language courses for Foundation Level students. As it is also known that a full-fledged e-learning course will not suit the level of students in the current academic environment, the ELC management also advised to implement a combination of face-to-face sessions and select e-learning practices in the so-called “blended learning” approach. Simply put, “blended learning” means “the thoughtful integration of classroom face-to-face learning experiences with online learning experiences” (Garrison & Kamuka, 2004). In this regard, the study is proposed.

Although there are many commercially available LMSs, ELC chooses to implement their blended learning environment using Moodle as it is free and open-source, and it is the current e-learning portal being used by other academic departments as well. The word “Moodle” is short for “Modular Object-Oriented Dynamic Learning Environment”. As it is open-source and free, there is no associated license fees and the content and design tools provided are driven by the needs of Moodle user community (Moodle, 2016) including NCT.

Research Methods

Subject of the Study

The subject of this study is a focus group consisting of six (6) English Language teachers in ELC. Two of the teachers are considered “new”, that is, they are teaching at the Center for three years or less, another two of the teachers teach in the Center from 3 years to 6 years, while the remaining 2 are considered “senior” ones, teaching at the Center for more than 6 years already. Aside from the focus group, the Head of Center and Group Coordinator will also be considered for data collection, as well as the two IT Department staff who serve as technical support personnel in the implementation of this blended learning approach in ELC.

Data Collection

The Data collection method proposed in this study is a combination of qualitative and quantitative methods. An online semi-structured interview using Moodle’s online discussion forum will be created for the focus group. This will be facilitated by the two technical support personnel from IT Department who will also participate in the

discussion. The online discussion will be made available towards the middle of the semester in order for the teachers to have ample experience in the current semester regarding the implementation of blended learning using Moodle in their respective classes, which they can use to provide feedback/information for the data collection process. Meanwhile, an email interview will be provided for the Head of Center and Group Coordinator to substantiate and reinforce information that will be obtained from the focus group. All will be given another survey/questionnaire to obtain feedback that will be representative of the entire group.

Materials

An online semi-structured interview will be used as one of the main sources of data for this study. This will be conducted through Moodle online discussion forum. The interview will focus on several major dimensions as follows: general issues face in LMS, course design and delivery requirements that need to be addressed by Moodle, changes in teaching practice due to adoption of blended learning approach.

In regard to the survey, scale items will be developed for the following major dimensions: LMS functionality, system usability, and technical support. Scale items will be in 5-point Likert Scale ranging from Not Important to Extremely Important. The Moodle assessment rubric, meanwhile, will have choices as Do Not Meet the Needs, Meet the Needs, and Exceeded the Needs.

****Please see attached forms for the instruments to be used in the study.**

Semi-structured Interview Format

- A. General issues faced in using the Moodle LMS (Design elements for effective LMS)
 - a. What features of LMS enhance / inhibit student learning and/or knowledge construction?
- B. Course design and delivery requirements to be addressed by Moodle (Teaching for enhanced learning)
 - a. How are students engaged with digitally stored information?
 - b. How do students relate to the information presented?
 - c. How do students relate to the blended learning environment created?
- C. Changes in teaching practice due to blended learning
 - a. Has your experience using Moodle LMS changed your teaching style?
 - b. Do you think an LMS better facilitates: (a) a teacher transmission of knowledge to the student, OR (b) a student construction of knowledge with the teacher as moderator?
 - c. Have you found that using Moodle LMS allows students to have more, or less, options as to the number of pathways students follow through the materials? Can you give examples?
 - d. How do you think increased flexibility that the online format offers has changed the way you will teach a lesson/activity?
 - e. Do you think that this experience may affect other teaching activities that you do? Will this change in pedagogy cause a ripple effect out onto other aspects of your teaching?

Moodle Assessment Rubric

Areas of Consideration		Do Not Meet	Meet	Exceed	Remarks
1	Sufficient audio file capacity / storage				
2	Allow flexibility in grading				
3	Support for electronic communication / collaboration				
4	Student Attendance Tracking				
5	Allow posting of assignments				
6	Contents are protected with security protocols				
7	Can Generate Grade Reports				
8	Monitor course progress				
9	Provide feedback on assignments				
10	Layout that is relatively simple to navigate				

MOODLE LMS SURVEY

- 1 – *Not Important*
 2 – *Somewhat Important*
 3 – *Important*
 4 – *Very Important*
 5 – *Extremely Important*

No.	LMS Functionality	Importance
1	Allow creation/posting of assignments, tests, projects, etc. online	
2	Provide criteria and procedures to automatically grade assignments	
3	Include means to write objectives and learning outcomes	
4	Maintain records of communication with other users	
5	Post/monitor course progress and effectiveness	
6	Track registration records	
7	Provide feedback on assignments	
8	Allow chats and asynchronous communications: postings, forums	
9	Track and facilitate individual participation	
10	Support for electronic communications e.g. email, posts, etc.	
11	Support use of external resources e.g. web links, etc.	
12	Can incorporate multimedia resources: video clips, flash, ppt	
13	Facilitate collaborative learning tools such as wikis	
14	Support virtual community building	
15	Allow update and redesign of assessment rubrics	
16	Provide means to create multiple roles in the system	
17	Contents are protected with password and other security protocols	
No.	System Usability and Technical Support	Importance
1	Has a simple layout that is relatively easy to navigate	
2	Use of icons and other graphics provide cues regarding usage	
3	Screen contents and labels can be modified	
4	Allow multimedia and visual resources into an online module	
5	Support moving courses to other categories	
6	Provide users with basic online support	
7	Provide users with advanced online support	
8	Refer users to other sources for tech support	
9	Supports open source	
10	Allow use of HTML	