

Ms. Beyhan SARAR

Student ID: 1920366

UNIVERSITY OF WALES TRINITY SAINT DAVID LONDON

IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE
CERTIFICATE IN HIGHER EDUCATION

TERM 2, October 2020

DIGITAL SKILLS AND RESEARCH METHODS

MODULE CODE: BMSW4003_LON

Lecturer: Mr. Olusoyi Ashaye

Contents

1.0 Impact of The Virtual Learning Environment

What's a Virtual Learning Environment?

Digital Learning

2.0 Impact Generally

3.0 Moodle

Top 10 Moodle Sites from 249 countries by Registrations

4.0 Moodle and Unesco

Virtual Learning Environment During The COVID-19 Pandemic

5.0 Questionnaire of Virtual Learning Impact

6.0 References

1.0 Impact of The Virtual Learning Environment

The environment in which one “learns”, particularly in the academic sense as opposed to learning vocational skills, has traditionally been thought of as that of a classroom at a school, college, or university. [Cambridge Dictionary, (London, U.K. 2020) Definition of “academic” <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/us/dictionary/english/academic?topic=types-of-education>. (Accessed 01 November 2020)] The virtual learning environment system (VLES) on the other hand “. Was developed to allow students and faculty to experience various non-traditional modes of educational delivery”. [Cambridge Dictionary, (London, U.K. 2020) Definition of “virtual learning environment” <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/us/dictionary/english/virtual-learning-environment>. (Accessed 01 November 2020)]

What is a Virtual Learning Environment?

“A virtual learning environment (VLE) is an online platform used for educational purposes. It encapsulates all the online environments that act as supplements to the course, whether they are online courses, reading resources and informational sites with stand-alone skill assessments, or other forms of virtual learning.

Digital Learning

Not too long ago, digital learning was as technologically advanced as watching videos on a VCR. While videos are still a great way to deliver learning objectives, eLearning has dramatically expanded to include web-based educational delivery systems that provide a more man-ageable, dynamic, and engaging learning environment. Courses may be synchronous, in which participants interact in real time, or asynchronous, in which students may do the work at their leisure and respond to prompts online.

The advantages of current eLearning software programs include:

- Educators receive real-time data on the success (or lack thereof) of the students.
- Students communicate with their peers as well as their teacher.
- Coursework schedules can be personalized for each student.
- Work can be completed anywhere a student can log onto the site many learning platforms even include offline capabilities.

For e-learning to succeed, it is imperative to consider the setting, or virtual learning environment, in which the student is engaged. This environment includes both the physical factors of the learning space and the virtual components of the online platform.”
[e-think (Blog), 10 March 2020, (UK) “Building A Modern Virtual Learning Environment (VLE)”]

2.0 Impact Generally



Rebecca Winthrop, Co-director – Center for Universal Education Senior Fellow – Global Economy and Development observes:

“March 2020 will forever be known in the education community as the month when almost all the world’s schools shut their doors. On March 1, six governments instituted nationwide school closures due to the deadly coronavirus pandemic, and by the end of the month, 185 countries had closed, affecting 90 percent of the world’s students. The speed of these closures and the rapid move to distance learning has allowed little time for planning or reflection on both the potential risks to safeguard against and the potential opportunities to leverage.

With every crisis comes deep challenges and opportunities for transformation—past education crises have shown that it is possible to build back better. [Twitter @rebeccawinthrop]

A meaningful perspective regarding the applicability of The Virtual Learning Environment relative to education in general and the COVID-19 worldwide pandemic, is provided by the perspective provided by Jim Knight, head of education at Tes Global and a current member of The House of Lords and a former U.K schools minister who states:

We know that the more engaging learning styles are ones that are more interactive, and that face-to-face learning is better than 100 percent online learning. We also know blended

learning can draw on the best of both worlds and create a better learning experience than one hundred percent face-to-face learning. If, after having done 100 percent online at the end of this, I think it's quite possible that we can then think about rebalancing the mix between face-to-face and online. Teachers will have started to innovate and experiment with these online tools and may want to continue online pedagogies as a result of all this.

He goes on to say: "We know that some students who use ed-tech during the pandemic will have a poor experience because they're not used to it. Some people will say, "During the virus we tried the ed-tech-enabled learning approaches, it was terrible, and look at my test scores." Yes, this will happen. People's test scores will be impacted. People will become unhappy because the mental health effects of being isolated will be profound. We must be prepared for that. Those poor experiences are really important to learn what does and doesn't work.

Vicki Phillips is currently the Chief of Education at the National Geographic Society and a former U.S. superintendent of schools and state secretary of education. Somewhat of a critic of virtual learning environments vs traditional teaching, but acknowledging their benefit in terms of bring focus and respect to the traditional environment, says:

"I think it will be easier to understand that schools aren't just buildings where students go to learn, and that teachers are irreplaceable. There's something magic about that in-person connection, that bond between teachers and their students. Having that face-to-face connection with learners and being able to support them across their unique skills—that's very hard to replicate in a distance learning environment. Also, many students access critical resources at school, such as meals, clothing, and mental health support that may not be as widely available at home."

[Rebecca Winthrop, "Top 10 Risks and Opportunities for Education In the face of COVID-10" Brookings Institute, (Washington, D.C. 10 April 2020) Available at: <https://www.brookings.edu/blog/education-plus-development/2020/04/10/top-10-risks-and-opportunities-for-education-in-the-face-of-covid-19/> (Accessed: 05 November 2020)]

3.0 Moodle

Currently, nothing can more be more of an example of a virtual learning environment than the University of Wales Trinity Saint David London Campus' use of the Moodle Platform to deliver online course assignments and for faculty to interact with the university student body in a meaningful, academic and didactic way. This environment is now more so a focus on the delivery of knowledge and learning than it has ever been; brought about quite obviously by the ad-vent of COVID-19 and the "lockdowns" in London and throughout the UK. While it is self-evident for any current student at University of Wales Trinity Saint David of the applicability of the Moodle Platform in the delivery of knowledge and learning, it should be well noted that the use of Moodle has literally exploded worldwide with the advent of the present pandemic. This is evidenced by the fact that Moodle Cloud now has 1.67 million learner's vs 453,000 just last year.

This is a huge shift in the way education is being delivered, even at the highest levels of aca-demic institutions that once were solely "brick and mortar" institutions. In terms of electronic devices being used to access Moodle, there are 4,504,000 app user's vs 1,305,000 the same time last year. Around 50,000 new Moodle sites comprised of schools, universities and various other educational institutions have been registered since March 2020. [<https://moodle.com/covid19/>].

There are 249 countries using Moodle for the purpose of conducting online education objectives, with 31,000,00 million courses being offered and 243,000,000 users. There are 2,432 registered sites in the UK alone. Where this places the UK numerically, compared to the global implementation of the use of the Moodle model may be readily seen by looking at the following figures extracted directly from Moodle's website. [<https://stats.moodle.org>, (Accessed: 05 November 2020)]

Top 10 Moodle Sites from 249 countries by Registrations

<i>Country</i>	<i>Registered sites</i>
Dominican Republic	28,122
Spain	12,891
United States	12,081
Germany	9,478
Mexico	9,244
Brazil	6,769
India	6,751
France	5,545
Russian Federation	5,473
Indonesia	5,223

4.0 Moodle and Unesco

Moodle is a coalition member of The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, more commonly known as “UNESCO”. UNESCO points out:

“More than 1.5 billion students and youth across the planet are or have been affected by school and university closures due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

The Global Education Coalition launched by UNESCO, is a platform for collaboration and ex-change to protect the right to education during this unprecedented disruption and beyond. It brings together more than 140 members from the UN family, civil society, academia and the private sector to ensure that #LearningNeverStops.”

[UNESCO Global Education Coalition, “#Learning Never StopsCOVID-19 Education Response, (New York, New York, 2020) Available at: <https://en.unesco.org/news/learning-never-stops-tell-unesco-how-you-are-coping-covid-19-school-closures-0>, (Accessed: 05 November 2020)]

Virtual Learning Environment During The COVID-19 Pandemic

It is clear that the first observation on student’s learning experience is, under the current circumstances of fully shuttered institutions due the COVID-19 worldwide pandemic, a dramatic shift globally to a virtual learning environment consisting of an online learning model that does not during the present pandemic crisis, involve attending classes in a traditional university classroom. The immediate impact on the students at University of Wales Trinity Saint David London, has been to be locked down in their homes, and as a result, to be literally be locked out of the usual access to learning; the traditional university classroom. In the context of the shut-down of the physical university campus, therefore the first and most dramatic impact upon the student relative to the virtual learning environment, is the fact that were virtual learning models not available, the pursuit of a university education or elsewhere, would have come to a complete halt, unless of course instruction reverted to mail in correspondence courses, which given current technology would be deemed by most as completely archaic.

The obvious impact on online learning by COVID-19 is explored somewhat in detail by Michael Horn in his scholarly article “COVID-19’s Ultimate Impact on Online Learning: The Good and the Bad” who states:

“As colleges and universities have shuttered their physical campuses in the face of the spread of COVID-19, they have moved their courses to remote and online formats in rapid fashion. And that’s prompted many to wonder what the ultimate impact this period of time may have on online learning in higher education.

Based on the present situation, where individuals come to stand on online learning will depend on where they sit currently. That is, there will be both positive and negative impacts on the state of online learning in higher education.”

In terms of numbers, Horn goes on to say that 30% of post-secondary students took at least one online course and approximately 30% of graduate students study exclusively online. Therefore, the vast majority of students at institutions of higher learning, almost two thirds, have some, to extensive experience in virtual, online learning. He also points out that while many faculty members who struggle with the online environment, receiving little support from university administration aren't likely to have much enthusiasm for this type of learning in the future. Horn's perspective, taken from a US point of view, sees many poorly designed, cobbled together programs, hastily thrown together in the midst of the pandemic. This has caused many university students to question why they are paying premium tuition rates for an education they expected to be receiving; saying: "When colleges eventually resume physical instruction, many will breathe a collective sigh of relief and resume their studies as usual. It's unlikely they will look back fondly on their online experiences and wonder why it is that they ever dragged them-selves to a classroom in the first place."

[Michael Horn, Campus Technology, "COVID-19's Ultimate Impact on Online Learning: The Good and the Bad", (Woodland Hills, CA, U.S.A., 04 April 2020) Available at: <https://campustechnology.com/Articles/2020/04/30/COVID19s-Ultimate-Impact-on-Online-Learning-The-Good-and-the-Bad.aspx>. (Accessed: 04 November 2020)]



5.0 Questionnaire of Virtual Learning Impact

1. Do you think, studying from home to be more comfortable?
 - ☐ Strongly Disagree
 - ☐ Disagree
 - ☐ Agree
 - ☐ Strongly Agree
2. Do you prefer to attend on campus classes?
 - ☐ Strongly Disagree
 - ☐ Disagree
 - ☐ Agree
 - ☐ Strongly Agree
3. Do you think, your home environment is suitable for studying?
 - ☐ Strongly Disagree
 - ☐ Disagree
 - ☐ Agree
 - ☐ Strongly Agree
4. Do you find online classes to be boring?
 - ☐ Strongly Disagree
 - ☐ Disagree
 - ☐ Agree
 - ☐ Strongly Agree
5. Do you think, being in front of the screen for too long is unhealthy?
 - ☐ Strongly Disagree
 - ☐ Disagree
 - ☐ Agree
 - ☐ Strongly Agree
6. Do you consider it more difficult to understand topics when studying online?
 - ☐ Strongly Disagree
 - ☐ Disagree
 - ☐ Agree
 - ☐ Strongly Agree

6.0 References

- Cambridge Dictionary, (London, U.K. 2020) Definition of “academic” <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/us/dictionary/english/academic?topic=types-of-education>. (Accessed 01 November 2020)
- Cambridge Dictionary, (London, U.K. 2020) Definition of “virtual learning environment” <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/us/dictionary/english/virtual-learning-environment>. (Accessed 01 November 2020)
- E-Think (Blog), 10 March 2020, (UK) “Building A Modern Virtual Learning Environment (VLE)”
- Rebecca Winthrop, “Top 10 Risks and Opportunities for Education In the face of COVID-10” Brookings Institute, (Washington, D.C. 10 April 2020) Available at: <https://www.brookings.edu/blog/education-plus-development/2020/04/10/top-10-risks-and-opportunities-for-education-in-the-face-of-covid-19/> (Accessed: 05 November 2020)
- Twitter @rebeccawinthrop (Accessed: 05 November 2020)
- <https://moodle.com/covid19/> (Accessed: 05 November 2020)
- <https://stats.moodle.org> (Accessed: 05 November 2020)
- UNESCO Global Education Coalition, “#Learning Never StopsCOVID-19 Education Response, (New York, New York, 2020) Available at: <https://en.unesco.org/news/learning-never-stops-tell-unesco-how-you-are-coping-covid-19-school-closures-0>, (Accessed: 05 November 2020)
- Michael Horn, Campus Technology “COVID-19's Ultimate Impact on Online Learning: The Good and the Bad”, (Woodland Hills, CA, U.S.A., 04 April 2020) Available at: <https://campustechnology.com/Articles/2020/04/30/COVID19s-Ultimate-Impact-on-Online-Learning-The-Good-and-the-Bad.aspx>. (Accessed: 05 November 2020)