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Virtual Learning Environment (VLE) – The impact on students' learning experience

Abstract

Consequently, with the advancement of information technology, the conventional "teacher-centred" learning paradigm is being phased out in favour of a "student-centred" methodology. As a result of this shift in learning, technologists play an increasingly crucial role in helping students to become fully engaged in their courses of study. Education will alter just slightly in the future compared to how it is now organised. This method must be aligned with the goal of all higher education institutions to use technology-based educational services to give students with a superior learning experience before it can be successfully implemented. Students can access a broad range of knowledge and resources through services such as the Learning Management System (LMS) and the Virtual Learning Environment (VLE), which are among the most recent developments in online learning. A virtual learning environment (VLE) is an online learning platform that enables teachers to exchange educational resources with their students over the internet. The most widely used virtual learning environments (VLEs) include Moodle, Fronter, WebCT, Frog, LP +, Blackboard, and Kaleidos. Students, on the other hand, can use the "virtual" room either as a replica of their physical class or as an extension of their real class. This is an obvious advantage for both learners and teachers, since they can communicate with one another

regardless of where they are located. Each educational institution must incorporate a virtual learning environment (VLE) into its learning process and must make it possible for it to serve as a hub for the sharing of information. This study demonstrates an introduction to e-learning, the basic aspects of a virtual learning environment, and the influence of a virtual learning environment on students.

Introduction

Using technology to aid learning can be a valuable tool for students who want to be completely engaged in their educational experience. Greater attention is being paid by higher education institutions to establishing technology facilities and services (such as virtual learning environments and library systems) that are easily accessible and meet a broad variety of possible student needs. Improved standards of usage are achieved by systematic interaction with students and faculty about the accessibility of technology facilities. With the use of assistive technology, learning and teaching methods can be made more accessible to a broader range of pupils. The use of integrated systems across the organisation, rather than spread facilities or facilities targeted at a specific subset of students, is encouraged wherever practical for providing assistive technology to all students. As technology advances, the "virtual classroom" is becoming increasingly popular, with both institutions and students increasingly opting to enrol in online classes. They conserve resources while accommodating a greater number of pupils. They are more accommodating for people with hectic schedules or commuters.

A virtual learning environment (VLE) is a computer application designed to aid in the teaching and learning activities. Moodle is a secure, integrated system that allows learners, administrators, and teachers to create a tailored learning environment for themselves.

It is difficult to determine the historical context of the use and development of VLEs, and it is even more difficult to determine how long the VLEs have been in use. Universities in the United Kingdom have been using computers for learning since the 1970s, but it wasn't until 2000 that the commercial Blackboard VLE was patented that it became widely available. Since 2010, more than 3,700 educational institutions in more than 60 countries have made use of the Blackboard learning management system (Blackboard, 2011). The

other most popular VLE, "Moodle," was debuted in 2001 and quickly gained popularity (Ofsted, 2009). By 2011, Moodle had a user base in 212 countries with sites active in over 75 languages, and it was originally created to assist educators in creating online courses that were focused on interaction and collaborative content development (Ofsted, 2009). (Moodle, 2011). In the post-compulsory sector of the United Kingdom's higher education sector in 2008-2009, 92 percent of higher education institutions used a virtual learning environment (Sero, 2009).

The goal of implementing Moodle was to improve the student experience by offering a more flexible virtual learning environment that could be used as part of a blended learning environment. Each module now has its own Moodle website, which is designed to aid in student learning. All module coordinators are responsible for configuring Moodle sites with information, resources, and activities that are relevant to their respective modules. Students' concerns about the limited time available in face-to-face sessions have been addressed through the use of online forums, which have been investigated as a means of encouraging active participation in the VLE.

Literature review

VLEs, despite their questionable benefits, offer unique advantages to students, such as the ability to work at their own pace. Since students have access to online learning materials at any time and from any location, Casquero et al. (2010) make the point that students can learn from anyplace they have an internet connection. A number of studies have indicated that pupils benefit from more autonomy and time to process difficult or sensitive questions in a safe atmosphere (McFerrin 1999, Schoech 2000, Bertera & Littlefield 2003). Additionally, VLEs foster a sense of belonging for both students and faculty members, lowering feelings of loneliness and increasing the level of trust and participation among students (Aspden & Helm 2004, Clarke & Abbott 2008).

Only recently have we begun to see concrete evidence of the positive effects that virtual learning environments (VLEs) can have on student achievement (Fox & MacKeogh 2003, Williams & Cappuccini-Ansfield 2007). Learning higher skills can be greatly aided by engaging students in online activities like forums, which expose them to a variety of viewpoints, give them the chance to share their knowledge with one another, foster critical thinking, and help students improve their writing skills through peer and teacher evaluations

(Baud et al. 1999, Greenlaw 1999, Romanov & Nevgi 2007, Grosseck 2009). According to Van Soest et al. (2000), for example, the usage of online forums boosted students' understanding on social diversity and societal oppression and gave important feedback to teachers about the difficulties students faced.

Students and teachers must be engaged for a virtual learning environment (VLE) to be a success. In their study of the benefits of a mixed learning environment, Aspden and Helm (2004) emphasise the importance of both teachers and students participating in online activities. The findings of Leese (2009) and Romanov (2007) show that students who participate in online assignments do better on tests. Virtual Learning Environments are accused of giving a reading experience rather than an educational one (Blass & Davis 2003). In her research, Gonzalez (2010) showed that teachers' views of VLE ranged from information-oriented support to communication, cooperation, and support for knowledge construction. Information-based media consider VLEs as a tool of giving students with information in the form of course notes, online resources, and links to external websites, resulting in a "learning experience" (Gonzalez 2010).

The difficulties faced by teachers and students are highlighted, and this has an impact on their participation in the VLE. Teachers may encounter difficulties due to issues of habituation and motivation, such as the notion that VLE will result in lower attendance at courses or a deprofessionalization of the teacher's position (Donnelly & O'Rourke 2007, Schneckenberg 2009). McNulty and colleagues (2006) found that students' perceptions of learning with a VLE were influenced by their learning styles or personality types. For example, introverts may prefer anonymous discussion forums on a VLE, whereas extroverts may prefer to cope with class discussions (McNulty and colleagues 2006). This may be due to a stronger sense of belonging that is fostered by meeting other students and reading their comments on the blog (Bertera & Littlefield 2003). Additionally, some study indicates that participation in online conversations might have an impact on other areas of learning. For example, Dengler (2008) discovered that students who participate in online discussions are more inclined to participate in face-to-face talks.

Students and teachers must have the essential technical skills for VLEs to be successful. Good technical assistance is well documented as a motivating factor for teachers to employ virtual learning environments (Donnelly and O'Rourke 2007). Students frequently claim technical difficulties as a rationale for not utilising virtual learning environments. According to research, students are more likely to be dissatisfied with an

online learning resource when it is ineffective than when they have little or no access to online learning (Fox & MacKeogh 2003, Moeller et al. 2010).

Teaching new technology methods can take time, and teachers may find that the effort required to learn new technology approaches exceed the disadvantages (Alexander 2001, Fox & MacKeogh 2003, O'Rourke 2007).

Issues like relevancy and too much knowledge can also cause students to feel overwhelmed and demotivated in the classroom, which can lead to poor performance. There is evidence to suggest that students are more inclined to use virtual learning environments (VLEs) in their studies, as found by Davis and Wong (2007).

Data presentation, analysis, and discussion

To determine the direct influence of the VLE (Moodle) on students, we combined the results of class discussions with a 12-question questionnaire given to a sample of 20 students at Trinity Saint David University of Wales - London Campus to conduct our study. During the debates, we discovered that the good influence of VLE on students is comprised of a number of different components.

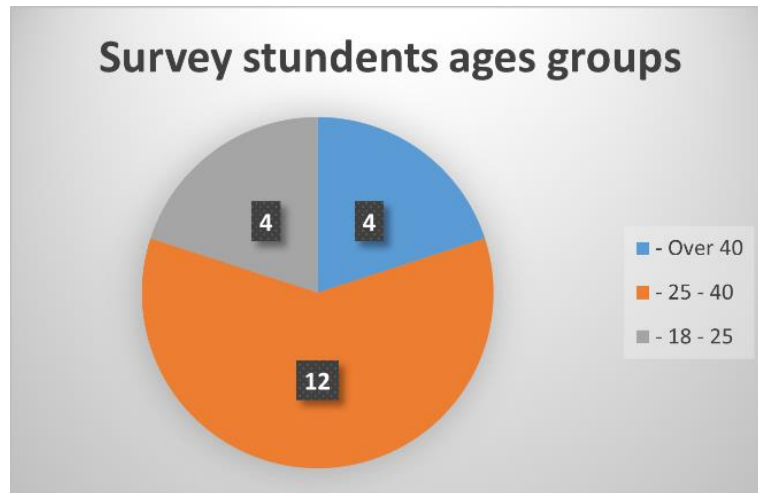
Aspects such as environmental protection are included in this. People no longer need to travel to the university campus to complete their studies because they can do them from the comfort of their own homes. This results in a reduction of global carbon emissions. In addition, it helps students to better manage their time by reducing the amount of time spent travelling to and from university. When it comes to learning, we choose the times when we are most creative and active.

One more consideration is the accessibility of the VLE from any location throughout the world. According to the preceding paragraph, we have the ability to choose the best time for learning and the best location for learning owing to accessibility.

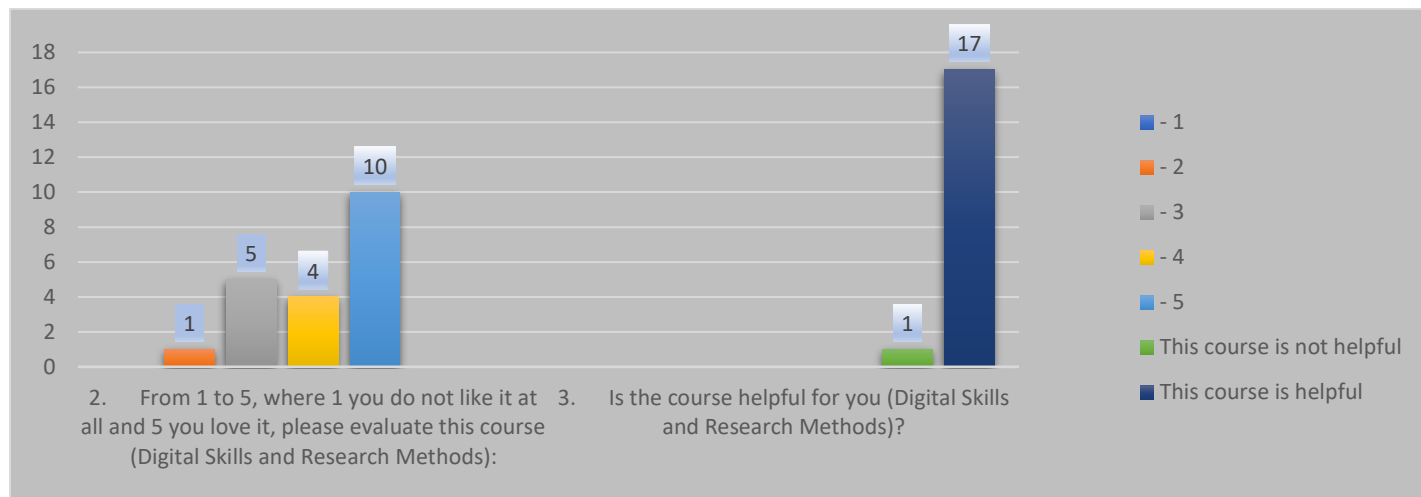
A negative side of VLE, on the other hand, was revealed to me, and it had to do with its social component. When students are separated by distance and not face to face during debates, direct human interaction is lost, which results in weaker social engagement and a lower quality of arguments. With the sum of all the good characteristics revealed, this element is minimal, leading to the conclusion that VLE has a favourable impact on students in the long run.

I discovered the following facts after conducting an analysis of the data from the questionnaire:

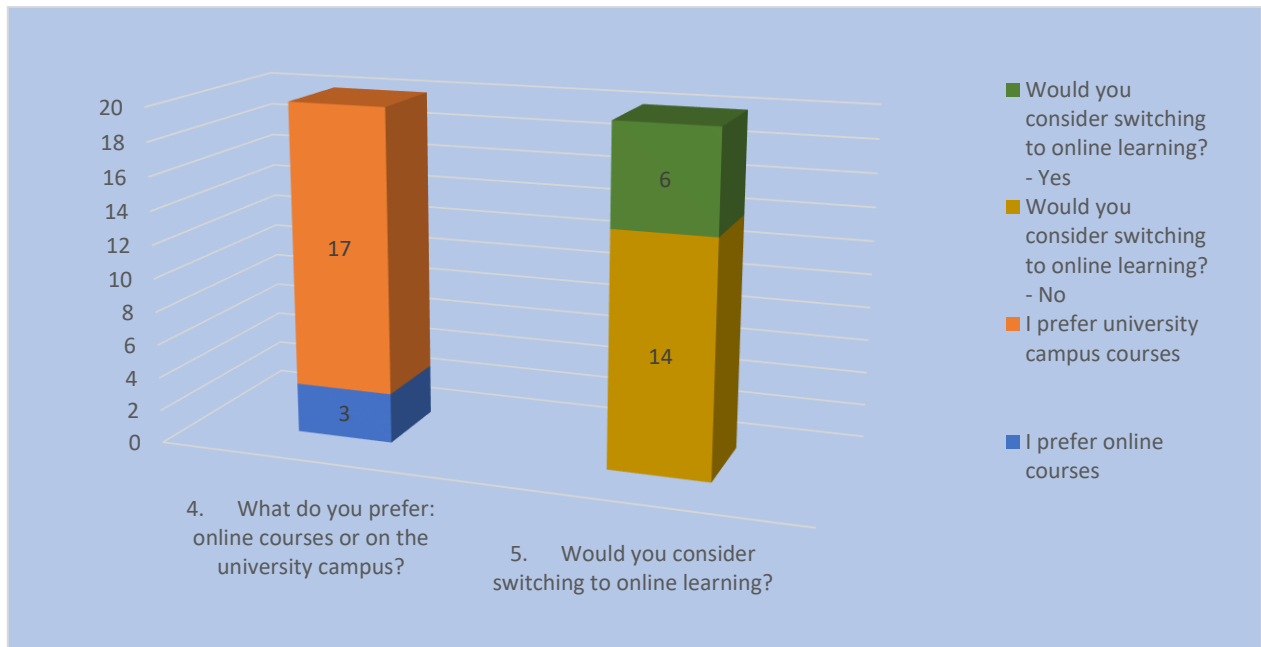
RQ1 An overview of the age dynamics at the University of Wales Trinity Saint David - London Campus is covered in this answer.



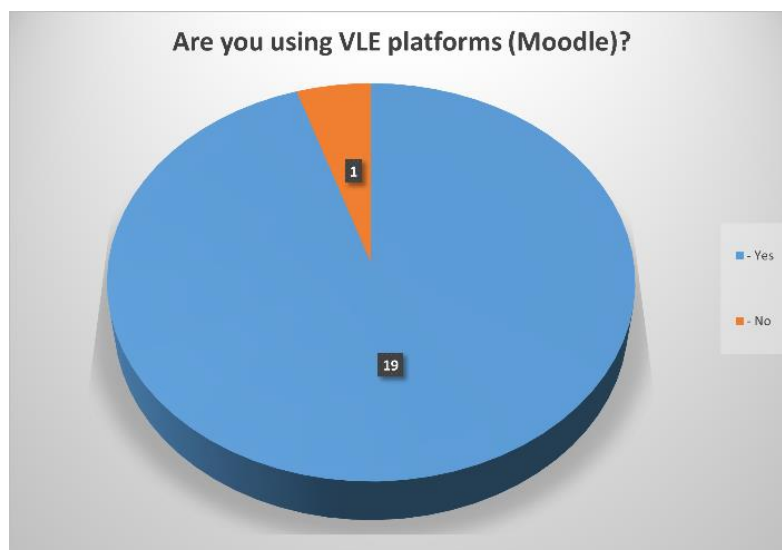
RQ2 - RQ3 It contains information about how valuable students believe this course is and whether they believe it will help them in the future.



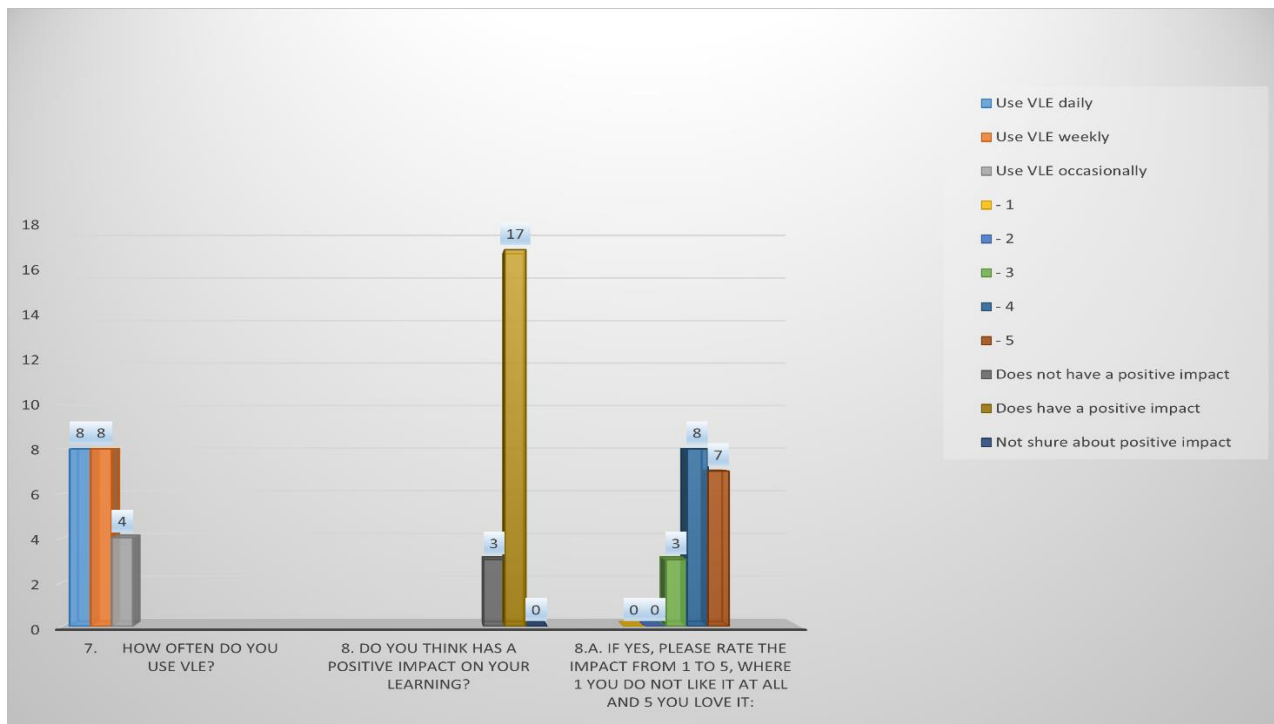
RQ4 – RQ5 It demonstrates the preference of the interviewees for the study location, which was previously mentioned, in direct connection with the social part of the VLE.



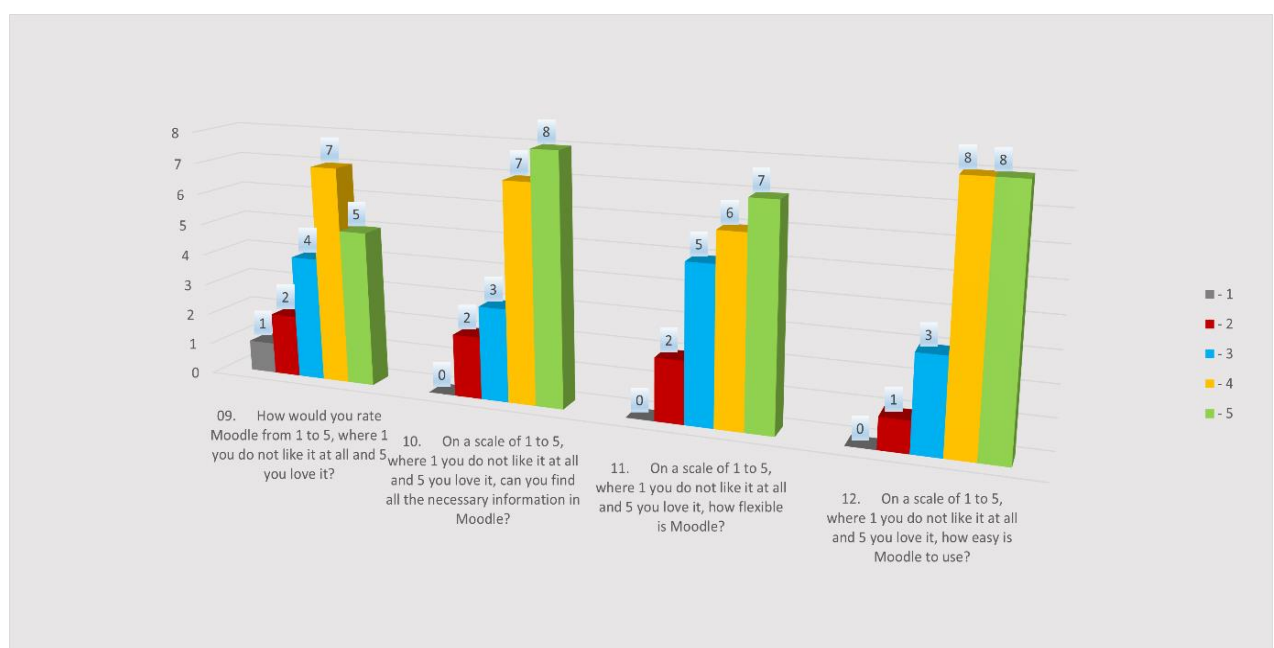
RQ6 The examination of this response reveals that practically all of the students who were interviewed utilise Moodle (95 %)



RQ7 – RQ8 Based on their responses, it suggests that students frequently use Moodle, and 85 % believe it has a positive impact on them.



RQ9 – RQ12 In these answers we have feedback about Moodle (how loved it is, if it has all the necessary information, how flexible it is and how easy it is to use)



Conclusion

Finally, I can state that my research discovered that virtual learning environments (VLEs) had a favourable impact on students. They are less anxious when using Moodle since they have access to all of the information they need at their fingertips. They are also lot more confident in the learning process. They have greater flexibility in terms of where, what, and how they learn, as well as a broader variety of time management options, including quantitative, qualitative, temporal, and geographical.

Personally speaking, in the current pandemic context, over the last two years, virtual learning environments (VLEs) have proven to be a durable education system, making an undeniable contribution to the fight against the pandemic while simultaneously increasing their importance within the educational system.

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Appendix - VLE SURVEY

Student Name: Mihaita Marius David

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Module Name: Digital Skills and Research Methods (SFTW)

Group: 4

VLE SURVEY

1. Please choose a group age you belong to:

- 18 – 25
- 25 – 40
- Over 40

2. From 1 to 5, where 1 you do not like it at all and 5 you love it, please evaluate this course (Digital Skills and Research Methods):

1	2	3	4	5
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3. Is the course helpful for you (Digital Skills and Research Methods)?

- Yes
- No
- I don't know

4. What do you prefer: online courses or on the university campus?

- Online
- University campus

5. Would you consider switching to online learning?

- Yes
- No

6. Are you using VLE platforms (Moodle)?

- Yes
- No

7. How often do you use VLE?

- Daily
- Weekly
- Occasionally

8. Do you think has a positive impact on your learning?

- Yes
- No

If yes, please rate the impact from 1 to 5, where 1 you do not like it at all and 5 you love it:

1	2	3	4	5
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9. How would you rate Moodle from 1 to 5, where 1 you do not like it at all and 5 you love it?

1	2	3	4	5
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10. On a scale of 1 to 5, where 1 you do not like it at all and 5 you love it, can you find all the necessary information in Moodle?

1	2	3	4	5
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11. On a scale of 1 to 5, where 1 you do not like it at all and 5 you love it, how flexible is Moodle?

1	2	3	4	5
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12. On a scale of 1 to 5, where 1 you do not like it at all and 5 you love it, how easy is Moodle to use?

1	2	3	4	5
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