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The impact of Virtual Learning Environment

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Content

- 1) Abstract
- 2) Introduction
- 3) Literature Review
 - Positive impact
 - Negative impact
- 4) Advantages/Disadvantages
- 5) Methodology
- 6) Conclusion
- 7) References

ABSTRACT

Virtual Learning Environment (VLEs) were introduced to progress student from passive to active learners. Active learning promotes the critical thinking skills essential for the transfer/use of classroom-acquired knowledge into the clinical setting. A VLE forms an increasing vital component of clinical skills development in a range of disciplines.

Virtual Learning Environment (VLEs) are widely used in education, in many sector, typically to deliver instructional material and facilitate communication and it is based on; whether the use of a VLE has a positive/negative impact on student learning; whether the use of a VLE in teaching and learning helps develop independent learning; and whether the use of a VLE increase student motivation to learn.

INTRODUCTION

A Virtual Learning Environment (VLE) is a web based software system designed to facilitate learning and teaching with the use of tools and activities (JISC, 2009). Student using a VLE can be set a 'task' to complete in class or at their own pace time, time and location, they can contribute to synchronous and asynchronous discussion to help develop their learning (JISC, 2009).

Empirical evidence suggests that the use of a virtual learning (VLE) has an impact on student achievement, encourage independent learning and increase students motivation to learn (JISC 2008). This report provides a snapshot of students views about the use of the VLE and its impact on their learning and advantages/disadvantages as well as primary/secondary data.

LITERATURE REVIEW

This literature review outlines the backgrounds and development of VLEs to support teaching and learning. It starts with a brief historical background followed by general positive and then negative impacts of VLE use.

Historical background on the use and development of VLEs It is difficult to define exactly how long VLEs have been in use. The UK's open University has been utilising computers for learning since the 1970s but it was in 2000 that the commercial computer based VLE Blackboard was patented. By 2010 Blackboard software was used by over 3700 educational institutions in more than 60 countries (Blackboard, 2011). The other most popular VLE, Moodle, was introduced in 2001, (Ofsted, 2009). It was originally developed to help educators create online courses with a focus on interaction and collaborative construction of content (Ofsted, 2009) and by 2011, Moodle had a user base in 212 countries with 49,365 active sites in more than 75 languages (Moodle, 2011). In the UK within the post-compulsory sector in 2008-9 92% of further education colleges had a virtual learning environment; the figure having risen from 58% in 2003-04 (Sero, 2009).

As a result of the government 2005 strategy paper Harnessing Technology transforming learning and children's services, which emphasised institutions and learning provides making more effective use of technology (Becta, 2010), Ofsted reported on a sample of 34 schools investigation the impact of VLEs on students learning (Becta, 2009). The reports published between September 2005 and December 2007 and concluded that just over half of the schools surveyed were positive about the impact of VLEs on learning and teaching.

GENERAL POSITIVE IMPACT:

Positive impacts of the use of VLEs on student learning are supported by a study (Scardamalia & Bereiter, 1996) in West Virginia, USA. Upper-grade elementary students used a software collaboration tool that enables students and teachers to communicate online to develop their understanding and analytical skills. Students performed significantly better on standardised tests in reading, language and vocabulary and on measures of depth of understanding, multiple perspectives and independent thought than students who did not use the software. The study concluded that VLEs maximise student reflection and encourage progressive thought, and independent thinking. This research was one of seven empirical research studies.

In research conducted in a higher education context into VLE use in 2000 surveyed two groups one undergraduate and one graduate. The research investigated whether computer dependent technology based instruction disadvantaged women, and older non traditional adults. Statistically significant result showed that graduate students were more likely to access their course from home whilst undergraduate students reported more enthusiasm about the use of technology for learning. The research concluded that the use of a VLE accommodates the needs of non traditional students in social work education and that students VLE satisfaction was dependent upon utility, exposure and access; the usefulness of the technology; and the tools used (Wernet et al, 2000).

LITERATURE REVIEW

And also it found that the necessity to be active learners when using a VLE, increased student enthusiasm, confidence and capacity. Students created their own knowledge through collaborative experiences with peers in other locations providing an opportunity to develop graduate employability skills and competencies (Diochon & Cameron, 2001)

In summary, VLEs have a range of research reported positive impacts from various contexts. They can; promote reflection, accommodate the needs of students, increase enthusiasm and confidence, improved readiness to learn, and broadly reported above course assessment performance.

GENERAL NEGATIVE IMPACT:

In 2000 and 2001 was indicated the view web-based instruction does not allow for the social and emotional interaction that takes place in traditional classrooms. In 2001 Piccoli & Ahmad compared, using a longitudinal experimental design, classes taught using VLEs with traditional teacher-led classes. They found no significant difference in learning performance between the environments. However, the participants in the VLE group reported being less satisfied with the learning process. And also assert that students in an online learning environment lack the opportunity and benefits of structured dialogue and the sense of community created in a traditional on-site classroom environment.

A survey of higher education carried out for the study, in their own words, explored the learner experiences. Two reports were produced; student experiences of technologies study, (LXP), (Creanor et al, 2006) and student experiences of technologies study (LEX) Conole et al, 2006). The LXP study, explores differences between subject disciplines in the uses of technology.

Four Higher Education Academy subject centres: Medicine Science, Dentistry and Veterinary Medicine; Economics; Information and Computer Science, and Language and Linguistics were researched. The study comprised both quantitative and qualitative methodologies and was based on a survey of over 400 learners, 85 audio logs and 14 follow up interviews. The research identifies how learners study habits are changing from prioritising use of the internet for information retrieval to incorporating personally owned tools and technologies e.g. (Conole et al, 2006). The research concludes that VLEs are often used for passive rather than active learning and significant number of respondents listed discussion boards as one of the least used technologies.

THE ADVANTAGES AND DISADVANTAGES

The key to constructing a successful VLE module and a fruitful teaching implementation is to detect the advantages and disadvantages of VLEs. VLE have a lot of advantages as opposed to classical teaching methods. For instance, teachers can track if learners are engaging with the internet- based communication and related materials by submitting evaluation online and providing quick feedback. The message services can inspire teamwork and communication both between instructor and learner and learner and learner. Teacher and learner can also involve more enthusiastically in a course at a time and place that is suitable for both (Becta, 2005). Moreover, course information such as past exam papers, timetables, and administrative information can all be found in one place, and are accessible from one authoritative source. Careful signposting (such as including links with course material) can provide extra care for learners, or inspire learners to study at an intensive level. With a VLE, it is possible save time for teachers by dropping time required for photocopying, course material delivery and updating course material (Becta, 2005). The main benefit of VLE appears to be that they can present information at a variety of scales and present images from a variety of perspective at once.

Expectedly, the apparent and most thoughtful shortcoming of VLEs is that they are ;less effective at is only an abstraction of the real thing and being on a VLE does not have the same impact as a real world or face to face education. VLEs can be designed to be interactive, but there is limited give and take interaction with a computer, in contrast to the interaction between real field trip leaders and participants.

METHODOLOGY

DATA COLLECTION:

There are two sources of data collection techniques. Primary and secondary data collection techniques, Primary data collection uses surveys, experiments or direct observations. Secondary data collection may be conducted by collecting information from a diverse source of documents or electronically stored information, census and market studies are example of common sources of secondary data.

PRIMARY DATA:

Primary data means original data that has been collected specially for the purpose in mind. It means someone collected the data from the original source first hand. Data collected this way is called primary data. Primary data has not been published yet and is more reliable, authentic and objective. Primary data has not been changed or altered by human beings; therefore its validity is greater than secondary data.

Importance of Primary data can not be neglected. A research can be conducted without secondary data but a research based on only secondary data is least reliable and may have biases because secondary data has already been manipulated by human beings. In statistical surveys it is necessary to get information from primary sources and work on primary data: for example, the statistical records of female population in a country can not be based on newspaper, magazine and other printed sources.

SECONDARY DATA:

Secondary data is the data that has been already collected by and readily available from other sources. When we use statistical Method with Primary Data from another purpose for our purpose we refer to it as Secondary Data. It means that one purpose Primary Data is another purposes Secondary Data. So that secondary data is data that is being reused. Such data are cheaper and more quickly obtainable than the primary data. These secondary data may be obtained from many sources, including literature, industry surveys, compilations systems, and computerized or mathematical models of environment processes.

METHODOLOGY

The most frequently used methods to collect opinions and factual data from people is a written questionnaire. This is the least expensive means of collecting survey data and similar in structure to telephone interviews but can be slightly more involved and can therefore take longer to complete. Also questionnaire that can be easily completed in not too much time and can be open-ended and close-ended.

As I had a research were collected from 20 out of 27 students from the London university of Wales Trinity Saint David, about Virtual Learning Environment based on questionnaire, which was conducted online with the help of Microsoft Team form, the result was amazing and 90% of students were agreed with Virtual Learning than in person

CONCLUSION

Primary research entails the use of immediate data in determining the survival of the Virtual Learning. The popular ways to collect Primary data consist of surveys, interviews and focus groups, which shows that direct relationship between potential tutors and students. Whereas secondary research is a means to reprocess and reuse collected information as an indication for betterments of the service or product (Bryman, A. And E, Bell. 2003)

I personally believe that both Primary and Secondary data are useful for almost every field especially in learning but both may differ from each other in various aspects.

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