

Report

Dominika Matug 2020974

Digital Skills and Research Methods

BMSW4003

Lecturer: Anupam Mazumdar

Title:

“Produce a research report on the impact of Virtual Learning Environment (VLE) – Moodle on students’ learning experience at the University of Wales Trinity Saint David London Campus. Students are required to collect and analyse both primary and secondary data as part of the research. In class (online for the time being), each student has to develop a questionnaire on the above topic, which should be operationalised as a primary data collection tool. Then the students need to use that questionnaire to conduct a survey. Due to the current pandemic situation, students are strongly advised to conduct the survey online only instead of face-to-face. This is to ensure the safety and wellbeing of the students. Students are then required to present their survey results in an excel table to generate graphs. Research of published material on the topic of the impact of Virtual Learning Environment (VLE) on students’ learning experience in general should be gathered and analysed as a secondary data collection tool. Finally, a conclusion should be provided from the analysis of both primary and secondary data. Students are also advised to provide in-text citations and references as per the Harvard referencing style.”



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Introduction

Nowadays, during the current situation in the world regarding a pandemic, Virtual Learning Environment became very common way to learn from home. As we have been locked up in our houses for months because of world pandemic, we did not have to stop learning thanks to ability of virtual learning. For many people it was already well-known term, same for me but I have never experienced it before. Thanks to this course I have the opportunity to learn regardless a world pandemic, and in this report, I will try to explain the knowledge I gained in and outside the class.

Rationale of the Study

In this report I am going to reflect on learning about Virtual Learning Environment and examine knowledge already gained about this subject. In current situation in the world caused by virus, which is spread through the world, people are very limited with all the previous duties and responsibilities. Thanks to online learning people have the ability to learn, keep in touch with classmates and teachers, that is why it is very important these days.

Research Methodology

I am going to conduct an analytical research to evaluate the facts and information relative to the research being conducted. I have decided to choose this method to find the most relevant information. My sample size is the group of my classmates counting 14 people. The data I will be collecting is a primary and secondary data found in online articles, books, in and outside the class exercises.

Positive impacts of VLE

- Undeniable and the most convenient thing about VLE is the fact that thanks to online learning and participate in lectures from a virtual classroom, limitation of time and location are being removed which is a common challenge in a traditional classroom. With uplift of these limitations, students have option to study and finish the coursework anytime and anywhere.
- Effective time management is another big advantage of VLE. While having a busy life and many different responsibilities, attending the online lectures at the comfort of living room saves a lot of time, effort and money e.g., for traveling to campus.
- Another VLE advantage that many people consider as very interesting and developing is namely sharpening of digital skills. While gaining the knowledge and increasing skills in a particular area of study, at the same time there is ability to evolve a digital skills.
- Students who prefer to keep their head down in a standard classroom, can find online classroom easier to participate in. The anxiety combined with raising a hand and fear of wrong answer can be eliminated through online lectures.

Negative impacts of VLE

- The main disadvantage of VLE is the fact that some people might not be comfortable and familiar with all the online learning tools and therefore an extra training would be required for them. It can be challenging to slide from traditional classroom into a virtual one using a modern technology.
- From an autopsy I can tell that, students might find online learning as disadvantage sometimes because it can be a kind of separation of students. Every individual remains on their own, in houses instead of classroom full of other students. It can be a reason to feel lonely and isolated.

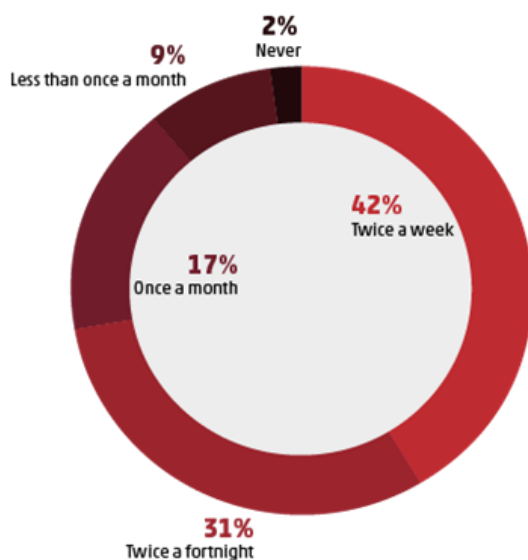
Literature review

I was trying to find a comprehensive overview about different aspects related to the Virtual Learning Environment. The VLE defined in the book with same title (Weller, 2007) as "a software system that combines a number of different tools that are used to systematically deliver content online and facilitate the learning experience around the content" I found easy. Some chapters are very specific and deal with the choice for a VLE, the integration of the VLE with other institutional systems such as student portals, interoperability and technical standards.

During going through the chapters, I found myself questioning about who the target audience might be as the book seemed complicated and unclear with every page. Nonetheless, there is lots of practical advice in this book e.g., integrating with other systems, how to do E-portfolio, Introduction to Learning Design tools.

Analysis & Discussions

As a secondary data tool, I have used a chart showing a usage of VLE by stranger to me people. This data was collected from 100 people, including students and teachers.



Frequency of VLE use

(FireFly, 2021)

I have used a survey as a primary data tool to find out what others think about VLE and Moodle. My classmates have responded to the questions I have prepared, data was collected from 14 students. I state the results below.

Answer Options:	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagreed	Total
Q1. I was given clear instructions how to access all online platforms needed for my study.	(8) 57.14%	(6) 42.86%	(0) 0%	(0) 0%	(0) 0%	14
Q2. It is always easy to communicate with my lecturer during each lecture.	(4) 28.57%	(6) 42.86%	(3) 21.43%	(1) 7.14%	(0) 0%	14
Q3. I find more advantages rather than disadvantages of virtual learning.	(1) 7.14%	(6) 42.86%	(6) 42.86%	(0) 0%	(1) 42.86%	14
Q4. Virtual learning is a good solution for people working full time with many other responsibilities.	(10) 71.43%	(3) 21.43%	(1) 7.14%	(0) 0%	(0) 0%	14
Q5. It is much easier to assimilate information at home during online lectures than in the classroom.	(3) 21.43%	(5) 35.71%	(5) 35.71%	(0) 0%	(1) 7.14%	14
Q6. Finding help within classmates can be easier and more effective online.	(2) 14.29%	(5) 35.71%	(5) 35.71%	(2) 14.29%	(0) 0%	14
Q7. By virtual learning both students and the organizations can save money.	(7) 50.00%	(5) 35.71%	(0) 0%	(1) 7.14%	(1) 7.14%	14
Q8. Virtual learning helps students to develop digital skills.	(7) 50.00%	(6) 42.86%	(0) 0%	(0) 0%	(1) 7.14%	14

Survey Monkey, VLE Virtual Learning Environment.

All the participants of the survey above are from foreign countries where English is not the primary language that is why, VLE must be clear and functional if it is taken in foreign language for the students. Age of students can vary, as well as digital skills knowledge. The essential thing for organisation that runs a Virtual Learning Environment should be an ability for students to become familiar with the digital skills required for online learning as not everyone can be capable to use all the digital tools needed for virtual learning.

Research Ethics/Ethical Consideration

In the research conducted I have done my best to minimize the risk of harm the participants involved and to avoid placing them in an uncomfortable position. I have obtained the consent of the participants involved in my research, to consider their responses in this report. All participants clearly understood that they will be taking part in this research and they know what is required of them. No names were stated.

Limitations

The main limitation in my research is the sample size I had to use. The number of the units of analysis was too small and it was difficult to find significant relationships from the data obtained.

Lack of time or not enough time was another limitation regarding the reason why my research might not be complete. With the deadline approaching, there was limited time to collect all the data.

Because of variety of data collection, I found it a limitation because there is plenty of different ways to collect data and it can be confusing and overwhelming when founded data differ in each source.

Conclusion

“Tell me, I will forget. Show me, I will remember. Involve me, I will understand.” I find this ancient Chinese wisdom very accurate to Virtual Learning Environment. It merges technologies that promote cooperation, ability to interact within students, parents and teachers. VLE is a way to eliminate barriers in education.

Virtual Learning Environment has more advantages rather than disadvantages. For the future research I would like to use a larger sample size to have a wider view of participants declarations and answers. Also, next time I would like to collect bigger data using various sources to improve my research.

References:

- Advantages and Disadvantages of Virtual Classroom, Webinar, Online Meeting, (2021). [ONLINE] Available at: <https://eztalks.com/elearning/advantages-and-disadvantages-of-virtual-classroom.html>.
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- Firefly, (2021). What is a Virtual Learning Environment (VLE)?. [ONLINE] Available at: <https://www.fireflylearning.com/what-is-a-virtual-learning-environment-vle>
- Weller, M., (2007). Virtual Learning Environments. Routledge.

Appendix

In Class exercise: 1

Topic: Impacts of COVID-19 on Online Learning

Total number of participants: 14

Q1. COVID-19 had reduced the number of students online.

Strongly Agree	Agree	Do Not Know	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
2	1	6	0	5

Q2. Students are continuing to feel anxious about returning to the campuses.

Strongly Agree	Agree	Do Not Know	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
3	8	2	1	0

Q3. Students are becoming depressed as self-isolation is required during COVID-19 pandemic.

Strongly Agree	Agree	Do Not Know	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
4	4	2	0	4

Q4. Levels of education has dropped since COVID-19.

Strongly Agree	Agree	Do Not Know	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
1	1	6	1	5

Q5. Because of lockdown, I feel less connection with classmates and teachers.

Strongly Agree	Agree	Do Not Know	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
7	2	1	0	4

Q6. A level of received knowledge through online platforms during lockdown is lower than would be in campus.

Strongly Agree	Agree	Do Not Know	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
1	4	7	1	1

Q7. Students have made learning gains since schools physically closed because of world pandemic.

Strongly Agree	Agree	Do Not Know	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
2	0	6	6	0

Q8. Remaining with online programme of study makes me feel safer during the pandemic.

Strongly Agree	Agree	Do Not Know	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
10	3	1	0	0

Q9. Since necessary online lectures, I have met more friends from different parts of the country.

Strongly Agree	Agree	Do Not Know	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
4	5	0	5	0

Q10. Students and teachers are getting tired of lockdown and remote work.

Strongly Agree	Agree	Do Not Know	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
5	2	5	1	1