

Research Report on The Impact of Virtual Learning Environment (Moodle) On Students

(University of Wales Trinity Saint David London Campus)

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1.0 Introduction

In this research report we will be looking at the impact of virtual learning on students and how they feel and are affected by this type of learning. Online studies are a fast-growing trend, which has proven to be a necessity in the past months due to the COVID-19 virus, which has pushed universities and schools to transform their form of study. Distant learning has existed for years under the form of distance degree, and studies have proven that the effectiveness of this type of course doesn't differ highly from the effectiveness of physical learning. Furthermore, cost effectiveness has proven a main reason for a number of studies and courses to be moved in an online form. Therefore, universities and students alike, have begun using the internet as a main tool for education. In this case, we have taken upon ourselves the responsibility to understand the impact on said students and teachers in the University of Wales Trinity Saint David, London Campus. The findings which are to be presented in this research are extracted from:

- (a) A survey-based questionnaire
- (b) One-on-one interviews with students.

These actions were taken with the aim to answer the following research questions:

- Do students enjoy virtual learning? (Figure 1)
- Do students prefer virtual learning, physical learning or a mixture of both? (Figure 2)
- What do students find in virtual learning, which is beneficial for them? (Figure 3)
- What do students dislike about virtual learning? (Figure 4)
- What is the preferred way of teaching online for students? (Figure 5)
- Should virtual learning become a continuous part of education? (Figure 6)
- What are the problems which arise for teachers, according to students? (Figure 7)

2.0 Background

According to researchers digital learning is “a form of education in which there is normally a separation between teacher and learner and thus one in which other means—the printed and written word, the telephone, computer conferencing or teleconferencing, for example—are

used to bridge the physical gap”. (Keleş, 2016) Therefore, despite the ease which distant learning creates, the physical gap cannot be fully filled through an online presence. However, the use of distant learning seems to have evolved over the years it has been used. Whilst in earlier years, distant learning might not have been as efficient, due to the basic computer technology that existed, today reliable communication exists. This type of reliable communication allows lectures to be under the form of electronic mail, class sessions and overall achieving an undergraduate degree or masters solely through the use of distant learning. The main purpose of distant learning is “to overcome barriers of place and time.” (Keles, 2016) Therefore, the purpose that distant learning serves is the education of those who are unable to physically access the specific course or degree. If this is the case, distant learning has proven to be a type of learning which is extremely beneficial for a vast amount of people.

Distant learning must have a strong base for communication between learners and lecturers. Therefore, despite the benefits of distant learning for some, disadvantages occur for others. During time, the biggest advantage of distant learning has proven to be flexibility – or the ability for students to study anywhere, at any time and whatever they choose to do at the said time. Furthermore, the independence of students can teach them a series of skills such as deep research, organisation skills and planning. Distant learning gives the opportunity for universities and lecturers to reach an unlimited amount of people at the same time, which isn’t possible with physical learning. Another advantage of distant learning for students and teachers alike is the cut in costs, whether they are food, transport or stationary costs. On the other hand, certain disadvantages have occurred and stayed during the evolution of distant learning. The main issue that has arised is the lack of eye-to-eye learning leads students to lack motivation and distract themselves easily. Unlike in class lectures, where the teacher is mostly active and that grabs the students’ attention, online learning requires for the student to become more active. This has been seen as both a chance and a drawback – through the need to be active, the student learns quicker and doesn’t simply listen, but explains and analyses the materials. Furthermore, there is a number of courses such as medicine, which do not allow distant learning due to the inability to implement practice in online learning.

There are two types of distant learning which exist today – asynchronous and synchronous. “Synchronous learning requires all students to participate the classes at the same time. The method of delivery is usually interactive and includes Internet chat sessions, teleconferences, telecourses, and web conferencing Synchronous distance education is less flexible than asynchronous distance education because synchronous distance education requires all enrolled students and the teacher to be online at a specific time. Asynchronous instructions do not require simultaneous participation of all students in the class, so it is more flexible. Asynchronous instruction gives students the freedom to interact with the material and instructor at a time that is convenient for them.” (Harrison, 2011) These two types provide students with freedom to study at their own convenience, or at the convenience of the teacher. Virtual learning is extremely different from the traditional type of education and it includes the following must-have features:

- “The identification and management of users
- Preparation of online course contents
- Managing courses
- Monitoring and analyzing student behaviors
- Assessment of students’ achievement status
- The creation and management of interactive communication media. “(Al, 2004)

3.0 Aims and Objectives

Moodle has proven to be a widely used computer software, which is also supported on mobile phone, thus it’s being preferred by many universities including The University of Wales Trinity Saint David. The main aim of this research is to understand how students are reacting to the continuous use of Moodle as a source of initial education. In order to understand the thoughts of students at The University of Wales Trinity Saint David London Campus we will see:

- How they benefit from virtual learning?
- What they dislike about virtual learning?
- How can virtual learning be improved?

4.0 Method

For the understanding of the thoughts of students at the London Campus I undertook an online survey in the form of a questionnaire, which was sent to a number of University of Wales students. The research only included students from the university and didn’t expand to other university students. The main criteria by which participants in the research were chosen, was the enrollment at The University of Wales Trinity Saint David and the undertaking of virtual learning in the past semesters. I reached out to as many people as I knew, however I received a total of 13 replies to the survey I conducted. Therefore, the results and opinions are based on the 13 students who replied to the questionnaire, as well as a few students who answered the questions in the form a verbal interview. In total, the interviewed students we 15. The questions on which I based my report were strongly concerning students’ opinions on their experience with virtual learning. The questions were meant to define whether there is a high preference to virtual learning or whether typical ways of learning are more supported within the university. I also wished to understand what students find as beneficial about virtual learning, as well as what it lacks. Furthermore, I considered the question of what types of virtual learning are more strongly supported than others, in order to understand how students, work more efficiently at home. Lastly, I looked at the problems students find are important for teachers to look at in order to improve virtual learning.

5.0 Results

In this section, I will display the results of the survey/questionnaire in the form of tables.

Do You Like Virtual Learning? (Figure 1)

Yes	11	84.6%
No	2	15.4%
No Comment	0	0%

Would You Prefer Virtual Learning or Classroom Learning? (Figure 2)

Virtual Learning	2	15.4%
Classroom Learning	3	23.1%
A Mixture of Both	10	76.9%

What Are the Advantages of Virtual Learning for You? (Figure 3)

Learning from Home	10	76.9%
Everything is in the Same Place (no need to run around campus)	7	53.8%
Easy Access to Information	7	53.8%
Freedom to Use Own Teaching Materials	5	38.5%
Lower Cost of Studying	8	61.5%
Good Because I Have Restricted Mobility	0	0%

What Are the Disadvantages of Virtual Learning? (Figure 4)

Harder to Focus at Home	8	61.5%
Less Social Life (Lack of Personal Contact)	10	76.9%
No Direct Communication with Teachers	7	53.8%
Loneliness or Depression	4	30.8%
No Compulsion for Learning	2	15.4%
Working for Long in Front of Computer	5	38.5%
Don't Have a Good Computer/Internet Connection	2	15.4%
Loss of Tradition	3	23.1%

What is The Best Teaching Method Online for You? (Figure 5)

PowerPoint Presentation	2	15.4%
PowerPoint + Reading	8	61.5%
PowerPoint + Explanation of Contents	9	69.2%
No Comment	0	0%

Should Virtual Learning Become a Part of The Curriculum? (Figure 6)

Yes, Definitely!	4	30.8%
Maybe, But There Should Be a Balance.	9	69.2%
No, I Don't Enjoy It!	1	7.7%
No Comment	0	0%

Do You Think Teachers Struggle When Teaching Online? (Figure 7)

Yes, Because it's Harder to Capture Our Attention.	8	61.5%
No, Because it's Easier to Share The Presentation.	3	23.1%
No Comment	1	7.7%
Other	2	15.4%

6.0 Discussion

From the results which have been delivered, we can see that a high percentage of students at the University of Wales Trinity Saint David London Campus enjoy virtual learning. Despite the high percentage (84.6%), most of the students would prefer a mixture of traditional and virtual learning, to a sole virtual learning environment. Most students appreciate the ability to study from home and the fact that there is no need to run around campus in order to reach lecture after lecture. Furthermore, students find it easier to study online as all of the information they need is in the same place – inside their computer. 8 of the 13 students believe that a lower cost of studying is a beneficial part of the virtual learning environment. On the other hand, most students (76.9%) agree to the drawback of a lack of personal connection with others, with 53.8% agreeing that the lack of direct communication with teachers is an issue. Furthermore, around 30.8% of the students admit that the lack of physical connection with teachers and students has led them to a state of loneliness or depression. 38.5% aren't happy with long working hours in front of the computer, which affects their eye health and learning effectiveness. Just 15.4% have issues with the internet connection and 23.1% agree that the loss of tradition is an existing problem with virtual learning. 69.2% of students believe that

virtual learning should become a part of the curriculum, however there should be a balance, while just 7.7% wouldn't like virtual learning as a continuous form of learning. 8 of 13 students (61.5%) believe that teachers might struggle due to issues with capturing the attention of students.

7.0 Conclusion

Overall, students at The University of Wales Trinity Saint David believe that virtual learning can be a beneficial part of learning. However, most of them agree that the traditional classroom learning shouldn't be dismissed, as it allows for growing connections and the improvement of social skills. With the evolution of technology, the probability of new software coming to the market is high, therefore in a few short years, virtual learning can take a completely different form. However, until this takes place, I believe, alongside the students from the London Campus, that virtual learning shouldn't be the main method of education. There should be an equal take of virtual and traditional learning, for effective and motivated learning. The risk of less motivated students due to the ability to study from home is high and it should be avoided. Instead, a balanced timetable should be created, so that students have the ability of working with computers, as well as with real-life people.

Survey Figures

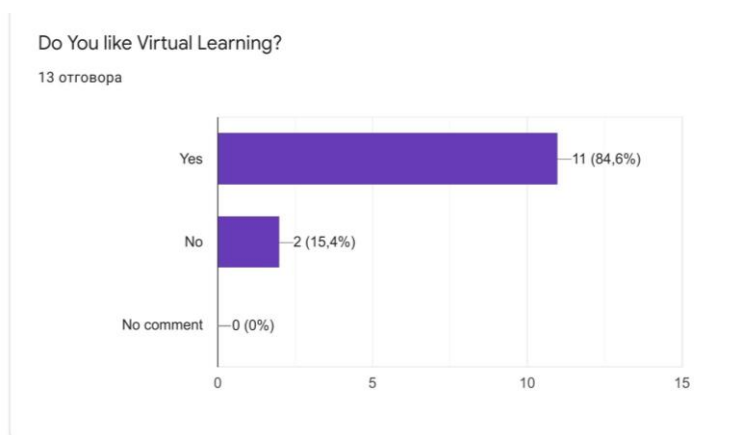


Figure 1

Would You Prefer Virtual Learning or Classroom Learning?

13 отговора

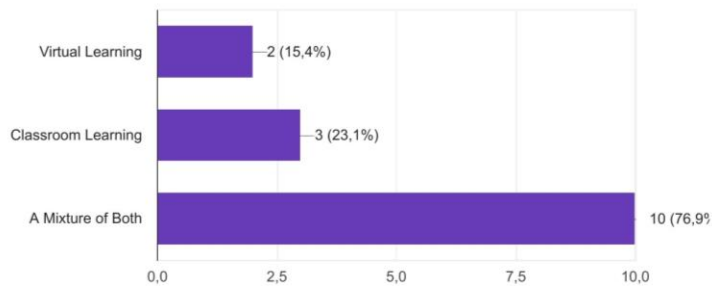


Figure 2

What Are The Advantages of Virtual Learning For You?

13 отговора

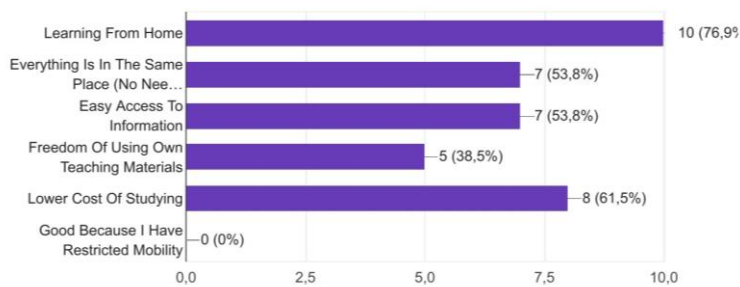


Figure 3

What Are The Disadvantages of Virtual Learning?

13 отговора

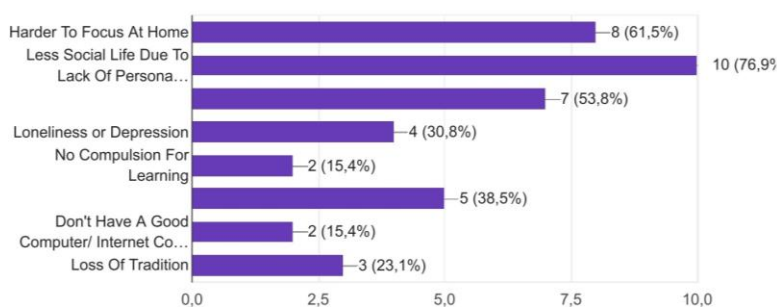


Figure 4

What Is The Best Teaching Method Online For You?

13 отговора

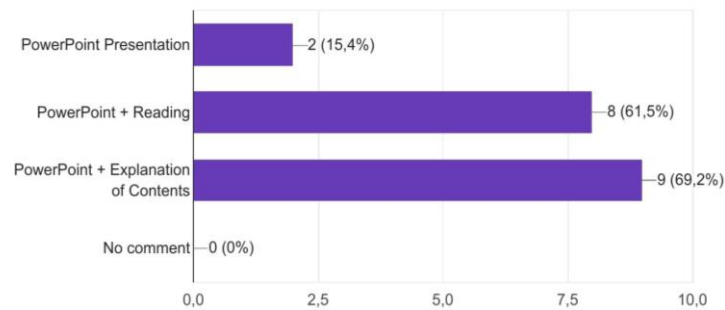


Figure 5

Should Virtual Learning Become A Part Of The Curriculum ?

13 отговора

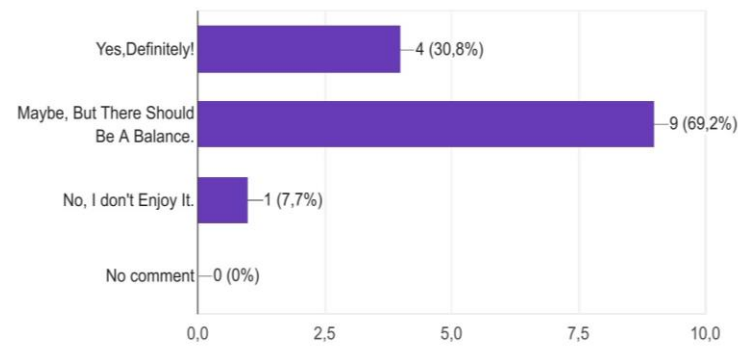


Figure 6

Do You Think Teachers Struggle When Teaching Online?

13 отговора

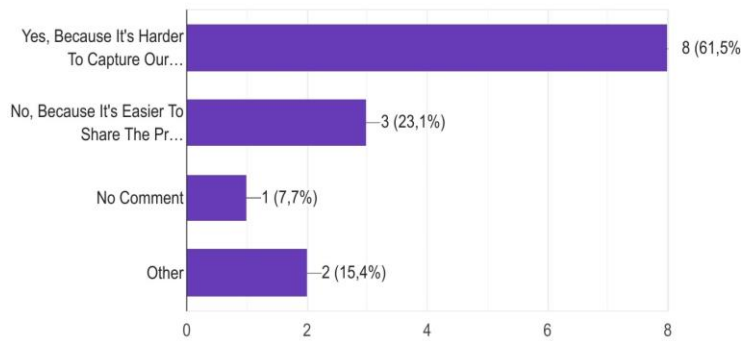


Figure 7

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