

University of Wales Trinity Saint David

Digital skills and research methods

BMSW4003

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Table of Contents

1.Introduction

2.Ritionale

3.Objectives

3.1 Literature revue

4.Reseach Methods

5.Conclusion

6.Reference

Virtual Learning Environment

Introduction

Virtual Learning Environments refers to virtual spaces used by teachers and students. It allows them to present and share documents as well as activities. It also allows them to interact with each other. Students can access a complete online course; teachers can manage the learning experience (Mosquera, 2017). Teachers are focused on giving their students a great learning experience that is beyond the classroom and motivates them. Although many people prefer VLEs, some do not support their implementation in the education process. Some argue that they waste time while others maintain that it is not useful in the teaching and learning process. The current paper will focus on the impact of Virtual Learning Environment on students' learning experience. The research will rely on both primary and secondary data.

Rationale

Barker and Gossman (2013) maintain that virtual learning environments are highly utilized in the education sectors. They have a considerable impact on students' achievement. Some of the effects listed

include, they encourage independent learning among students, and they motivate students to learn. Mosquera (2017) carried out a study on the impact of VLE in the EFL classroom. The conclusion of the research supports the hypothesis that the approach has diverse effects. One of the findings of the study is that VLE supports differentiated instruction. In this case, teachers can modify curricula as well as teaching approaches. According to Mosquera (2017) research, VLE has a significant impact on the students' learning process. Although the use of VLE is rampant, there is minimal research on its use.

The emergence of VLE has transformed the learning environment. It has increased the use of information technology on the learning process. Diverse students utilize the VLE in different ways. For instance, some students use it to read learning materials, while others utilize it to download learning materials. However, only a few students access external web pages. In this case, it shows that a high number of students view the VLE as online forms of lecture notes instead of as a source of more information to enhance their understanding. The current research will aim at highlighting the benefits of Virtual Learning Environment on students. It will help understand the impacts that the technology had on students. The study will also try to add on the few resources that focus on VLE and its influence in education.

Objectives

1. To understand how VLE is used
2. To comprehend the effect of VLE on students' learning process
3. To understand the hindrances of implementation of VLE
4. To understand the activities students, carry out when using VLE
5. To understand the challenges that students encounter when using VLE

Literature review

Currently, there is increased interest in virtual learning environments among students and teachers. The concept is continuously affected by the evolution of digital technologies. Many universities and colleges incorporate VLE in their courses (Alves et al., 2017). The system allows them to gather quality data which helps in assessing course contents. Virtual Learning environments that rely on the usage of technology as well as digital resources, enhance learning due to the activities they support. The concept enables interaction and interrelation within a constant communication process (Demian and Morrice, 2015). Therefore, it allows students to gain knowledge and meanings. The idea of a virtual learning environment includes diverse factors. The important ones are linked with virtual space, time, strategies and resources. They offer institutions with

different quality information. The data gathered from the concept are presented in a simple manner which makes them easy to understand.

The implementation of the VLE offers students a chance to catch up with the school work. Students who miss school may download lecture notes online. Virtual learning includes course work that is delivered through web, message boards, as well as email (Portela et al., 2016). The coursework is posted on online platforms which make it easy for students to access. Students can communicate and collaborate using their computer. They can complete their course work on their pace. Mainly, a virtual learning environment benefits the teaching and learning process. For instance, they help in dealing with issues of time management. In this case, the instructors do not have to worry about lousy class time as students can still access learning materials.

Students can as well fit learning times in their schedules. Additionally, materials are always upgraded, and students can access them through links which are available through various websites (Portela et al., 2016). It helps students to manage time and money as they do not have to buy learning materials. It is vital to ensure that online learning is productive and informative. Therefore, the student should give a chance to demonstrate their ability to implement what they have learned in real life.

Over the years, Virtual learning environments have changed, as they are collaborative platforms. They offer students various benefits to students (Alves et al. 2017). Teachers utilize the media to enhance their subjects and upload new materials. Most teachers consider the platforms vital as they help strengthen education and promote learning. Research carried out by Bri et al. (2009) shows that teachers maintain that there are minimal hindrances towards using VLE. The study also indicates that teachers support the concept as it enhances the education system. Teachers have come up with new ideas that will help in improving the concept. For instance, they have come up with the idea of coming up with a similar tool to the messenger, which will enable a person to use the webcam.

Another idea is adding online animations which will help enhance the learning experience. The research also shows that it is vital to increase the easiness of the platform. VLE has a great impact on students' performance as it supports education in both formal and informal education sector. It motivates them to participate in the learning process (Stasinakis and Kalogiannakis, 2015). The concept promotes interactive

learning which makes the learning process easy. However, VLE has its disadvantages as some instructors do not understand the idea. Also, some teachers find it challenging to meet the demands that are brought about by the use of VLE. The platforms rely on the internet, and due to the rapid growth, it is at times challenging to keep up with the changes.

Another issue is that some students are unwilling to participate in two-way online activities. However, despite the challenges, students prefer the platform as they can easily access learning materials. Research by Wells et al. (2005) highlights that there is high satisfaction linked to the use of VLE. Also, the virtual learning environment encourages social interactions in various ways. For instance, students can send their questions to the instructors. They can use diverse new communication approaches that work well with virtual learning environments (Demian and Morrice, 2015). They can exchange non-verbal communication easily. Most virtual environments include a shared space. It allows users to view the same objects, and they can add more items. Although virtual learning environments have various benefits to students, they may affect their learning process. For instance, they do not take the time to reflect when answering questions.

Research Methods

The current research will use secondary and primary data collection approach. The approach will help gather an understanding of the benefits of the online learning environment to students. The direct data collection approach includes interviewing students to understand their perception of VLE and how it has influenced their learning process. The interview is conducted online, whereby the participants were selected randomly.

The participants are from the University of Wales Trinity Saint David London Campus. The questionnaires were sent to them through email. However, they were first informed about the research and its significance. They will be required to sign a consent form; it is to ensure that they participate at their own free will. Also, they will not be needed to include their names on the questionnaire. We also made sure we informed the participants before emailing them the questionnaire. This guaranteed us

that the participants received their questionnaire. We also considered that most of the participants were busy; they may not see the email.

Fifteen participants were selected for the research. They included both men and women and were all students at the university. Also, the participants aged between 19 and 35 years. Some of them started school at the university recently while others were beginning their third year. It allowed us to gauge the students' perception based on their experience with VLE. The questionnaires were distributed to them through email, and they were given a time frame to answer them. It ensured that no one delayed with the questionnaires.

Primary data analysis

During the interview, the participants were asked various questions. One of the questions was whether the students were familiar with virtual learning. 11 participants out of 15 are acquainted with virtual learning. Based on the problem, it is evident that most of the students knew how to use VLE.

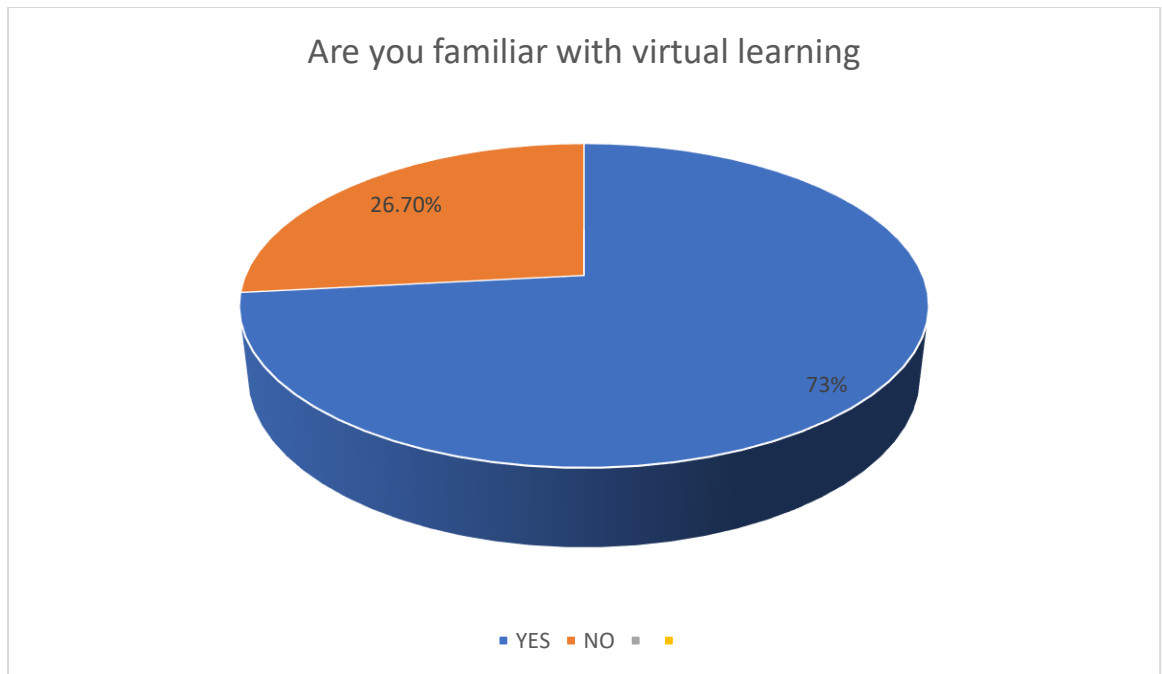
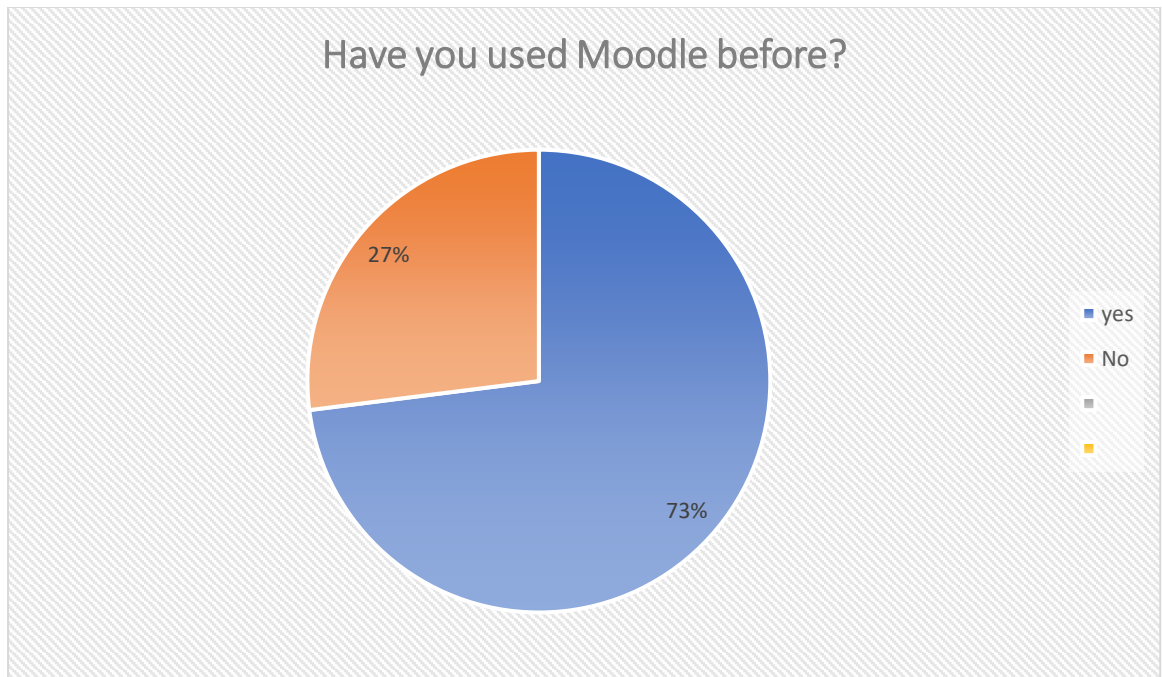


Fig 1.0

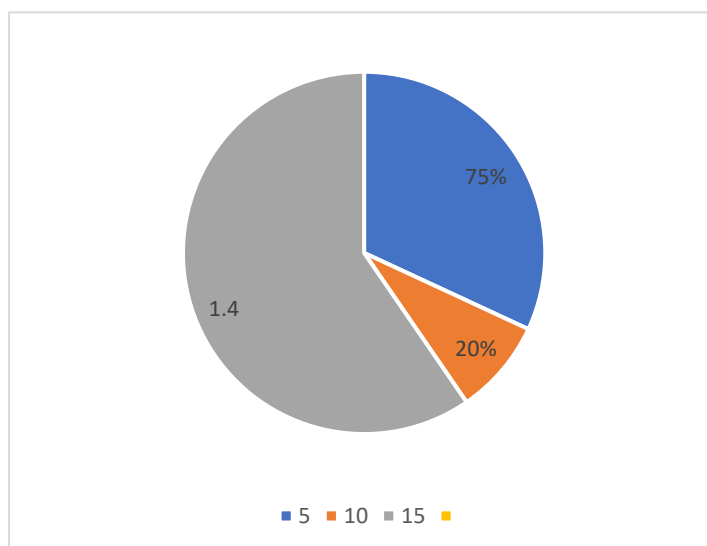
Have you used Moodle before?

The second question focused on whether the students have prior knowledge of moodle.73% of the participants maintained that they had used Moodle before.



How often you use Moodle?

Based on the third question, it is evident that most of the students spent less time using Moodle. 75% of the participants maintained that they use Moodle for 5hours only. 5% of the participants claimed that they used it for 15hours, while 20% supported that they use it for 10hours.



How can you access easily to the Moodle?

Based on the research, most of the participants maintained that the easiest way of accessing Moodle is through downloading the software. After downloading the software one can access the Moodle by logging in using a personal password.

Do you think your Moodle learning is effective for you?

Thirteen of the participants maintained that Moodle learning was effective to them. Therefore, the majority of the students were satisfied with virtual learning environments.

What are the technical challenges you got facing with the Moodle?

However, they maintained that there were various challenges they faced with Moodle. One of the difficulties is difficulty accessing the site at times. They argued that they end up wasting a lot of time. Others maintained that Moodle limited their face-to-face interaction with their classmates and instructors.

What do you want to change in the Moodle learning tool?

Also, most of the participants argued that the Moodle needed some changes, especially with its accessibility. They also maintained that communication needed to be enhanced.

Have you found Moodle valuable in online learning?

However, despite the challenges, 90% of the participants maintained that Moodle has been useful in online learning.

How do you rate from the scale of 1-10 your learning in Moodle tool?

They rated their learning in Moodle tool 8 out of 10.

Secondary data analysis

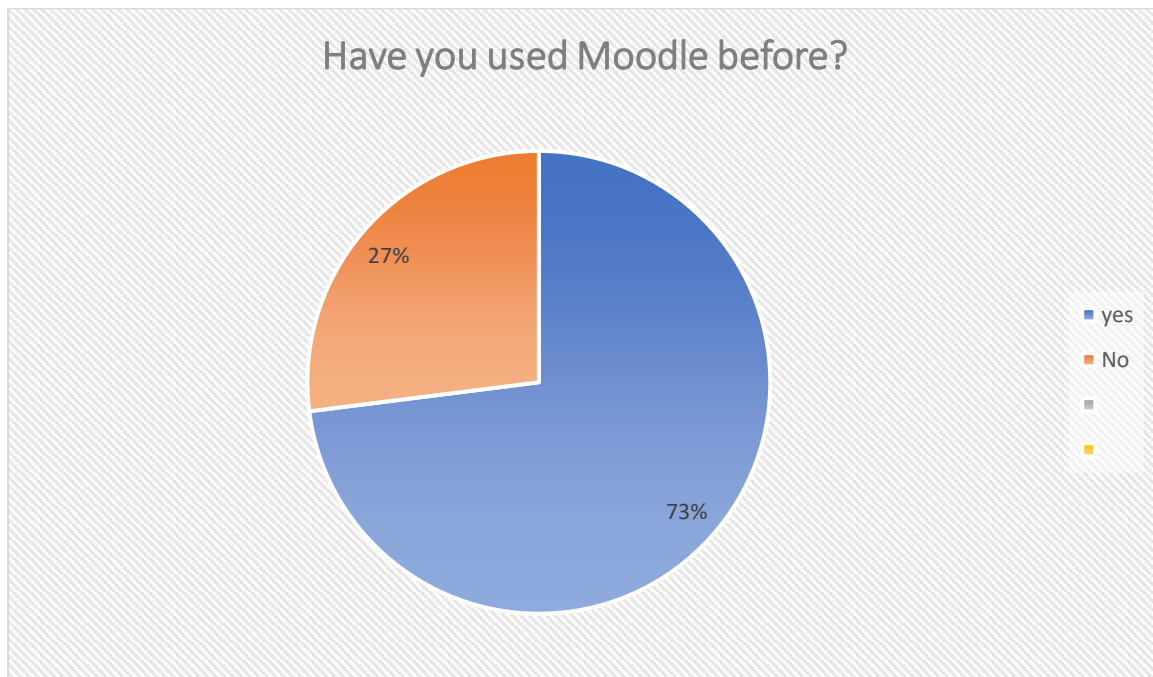
Research carried out by Stasinakis and Kalogiannakis (2015) shows that using Moodle for e-learning has different benefits. For instance, it is effective as students can access material and information is communicated to all students using the platform. It also helps in evaluating the students as it permits analytical reports (Tabakova, 2020). Another benefit of Moodle listed is that it is easy to use, and one is not required to use additional software. A-Ajlan and Zedan (2008) maintain that Moodle has a high potential for generating effective e-learning. It offers students great tools that they can use to improve the conventional learning environment. A study carried out by Chourishi et al. (2012) shows that Moodle is significant as it allows instructors to create and save teaching materials. It is also a collaborative platform for both teachers and students. It joins online communities and keeps the students updated. It makes both teaching and learning effectively.

Conclusion/ Recommendation

As the use of technology continues to expand, schools are implementing new approaches to learning. Many Universities have embraced the use of the internet to teach their students. The current research focused on the benefits of Virtual learning environment among students at the University of Wales Trinity Saint David London Campus. The study involved interviewing 60 students and analyzing secondary data. Based on the research, Moodle tool has a great impact on students' learning process. Many students maintained that it is effective. The learning tool allows students to interact with one another easily. They can access updated learning materials at all times. However, students did not spend much time using Moodle software. Most of the students maintained that it was easy to access.

There is a minimal study on the impact of VLE on students' performance. Therefore, further research should be carried out to have a clear understanding of the different tools used and their benefits. Also, researchers should focus on more schools when conducting the study.

Appendices



Questionnaire

1. Are you familiar with virtual learning?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

2. Have you used Moodle before?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

3. How often you use Moodle?

- ☐ 5 hours
- ☐ 10 hours
- ☐ 15 hours

4. How can you access easily to the Moodle?

5. Do you think your Moodle learning is effective for you?

☐ yes

☐ No

6. What are the technical challenges you got facing with the Moodle?

7. What do you want to change in the Moodle learning tool?

8. Have you found Moodle valuable in online learning?

9. How do you rate from the scale of 1-10 your learning in Moodle tool?

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10

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