

THE USE OF THE LEARNING MANAGEMENT SYSTEM 'MOODLE' FOR PROMOTION OF ONLINE METHODOLOGY

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Abstract

Teachers living and working in the 21st century need to adapt to the new technological environment, lifestyles and habits. The learning management system Moodle has been used in our institution for creating hybrid courses. Moodle as an educational tool has proven to enhance learning and teaching processes through creating a different type of interaction and a new learning experience. Part of this paper presents the many various features of Moodle which help the teachers produce interactive online courses. Here we also offer a sample of a hybrid course based on the face-to-face course content. The face-to-face component is essential in creating foreign language courses but, on the other hand the project result from the hybrid course content suggested collaboration, interaction, learner support, etc. This study briefly explores the features, activities and steps taken when creating a contemporary English language course at University 'Goce Delcev' – Stip, R. Macedonia.

Keywords – Moodle, online courses, hybrid learning, foreign language teaching.

1. INTRODUCTION

Macedonia as all the other countries from the Balkan region has been implementing the Information and communication technology (ICT). Our university is fairly young but very promising, dedicated and focused on the one and most important goal of any educational institution, and that is providing the best education to its students. For that reason, we try to keep up with the fast pace of technology and methodology when it comes to contemporary teaching. We were encouraged and motivated to use and implement this technology and write this paper by a Tempus project titled 'Integrating E-Learning across the teachers' curriculum' CD JEP-40020 2005. This project involved trainings teachers, teacher educators and administrators. The project itself had certain conditions that needed to be satisfied for the successful application and integration of the ICT and, finally, providing effective teacher education. The project had a model of ICT integration in the teachers' curriculum. Information and communication technologies consist of hardware, software, networks and media for the collection, storage, processing, transmission and presentation of information (voice, data text, images), as well as related services.[1] This paper deals with the actual application of e-learning and ICTs in an educational institution. Taking part in this project extended our views and possibilities to perform and offer as motivating and convenient teaching process for the students as possible. The experiences so far have proven that ICTs should not be excluded when creating teaching programs and designing curricula.

1.1. What is a hybrid course?

A hybrid course is also called a blended course which is taught partly in the classroom and partly online. Blended courses allow students to benefit from both methods of teaching: online and face-to-face. Online learning activities usually include writing papers, posting comments or essays to online discussion forums, completing individual or group projects, and taking quizzes. While students can generally choose when and where to complete online assignments, there are usually deadlines for homework and exams. Those students that are interested in taking an online course may find it useful to explore online learning by

taking a blended course first, since the blended courses represent a bridge between the face-to-face and the more traditional type of organizing the teaching process and the entirely individual on-line or distance learning. In the hybrid or blended course, the students interact with their teacher and classmates both in person during the on-campus classes and online, via web discussion forums, e-mail, assignments, chats, etc. As we have already mentioned hybrid or blended courses include both face-to-face components (such as lectures, language labs and office hours) and online components (such as databases, testing, assignments, etc.). A hybrid class typically reduces on-site class time by about half, so that a face-to-face class would have an equivalent hybrid class meeting on campus - the remaining time would be spent in online activities.

2. CONTENT OF THE HYBRID MANAGEMENT SYSTEM MOODLE

E-Learning environments are often called Learning Management System (LMS), Content Management System (CMS), Learning Content Management System (LCMS), Managed Learning Environment (MLE) Learning Support System (LSS); it is education via computer – mediated communication (CMC) or Online Education. Moodle is a hybrid course management system that enables administrators or teachers to create hybrid courses. The word Moodle was originally an acronym for Modular Object Oriented Dynamic Learning Environment. [2] We will hereby present some features of Moodle as a hybrid course management system. The first thing about Moodle is that it arranges its courses into categories.

Courses

UGDLearning > Course categories

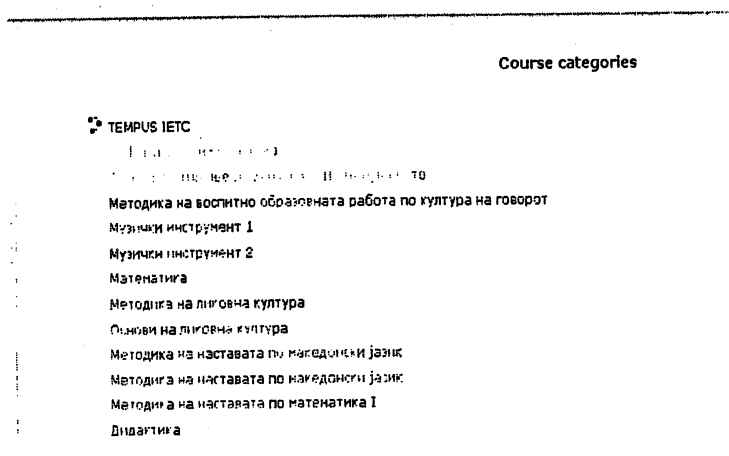


Fig. 1 Moodle course categories at UGD

As soon as the categories and courses are created, we have the framework of the Moodle site. In terms of course materials it is important to know that anything that can be presented on the World Wide Web can also be presented on Moodle. We will, of course, refer back to this feature further on. When these points in the creation process have been covered, the next step is making and designing the courses to be interactive using the available features of Moodle. A Choice activity is designed to be a single, multiple-choice survey question that you pose to the class. Students choose one of the choices that you present. This is meant to be faster and more spontaneous than a survey. You can use a Choice activity to stimulate thinking about a topic, to find out how the students feel about the direction of the course, or to get the class's agreement on the next steps. Interactive course activities enable students to interact with the instructor, the learning system, or each other. Note that Moodle doesn't categorize activities into "Interactive" and "Static". In Moodle, all activities are added from the Add an activity menu, after Turn editing on. After logging in as a teacher, and turning on editing, you can add an assignment from the Add an activity menu. This brings up the Figure 2 Editing Assignment window: [3]

Assignment name:

Description: 1 (8 pt)

Write carefully (i) Ask good questions (i) About the HTML editor (i)

that part you pass every day? What kind of flowering plant is growing in that field across from where you work?

Upload a picture of a plant or a green area that interests you. The picture must have sufficient detail to identify the plant(s) in it.

If you have a digital camera, this is easy. If not, you can take any copyright-free plant picture you find on the Web (government sites are good for this) and upload it.

The instructor for this course will put the pictures into an album, and try to identify the plant(s) for you.

Path: body

Grade: (i)

Available from: 7 - - :

Due date: 2 - - :

Prevent late submissions:

Assignment type: (i)

Fig. 2 Editing Assignment

The social Moodle features can also be applied, as a next step, such as Wiki, Forum, Choice, etc.

2.1. Contemporary English language course content

The Contemporary English language (CEL) is taught at our Department each semester in the course of the four-year study program at the Faculty of Philology, Department of English language and literature. The subjects' study plan is designed in such a way to be realized partly in language labs where students can practice all the four language communication skills: reading, writing, speaking and listening. In terms of course materials, we usually use foreign literature due to the nature of this subject. However, we have always been aware of the fact that there is a huge amount of on-line materials like language learning sites, tests, dictionaries, grammar books, etc. Simply telling students that there is a huge 'aquarium' with materials on-line has not always resulted in a positive result. Students can easily get 'lost' in their search, not being able to differentiate relevant from irrelevant information, data and sources.

It is not anything new to admit that future generations will live in a high-tech society. The real question is why not take advantage of the knowledge that they go to school with, of their ability to find their way easily with computers. We simply have to accept the fact that they love being in front of a computer, so we can make good use of this to improve learning and education in general.

When the design of the e-learning hybrid course for the CEL subject was considered, we found the weekly format to be most appropriate for our subject, needs and ideas. The Weekly format as a feature offers a weekly outline at the very top of the page where all the resources which are used at all times are placed and the students have access to them at all times. We have found this place perfect to put links to online dictionaries, placements tests, etc. Namely, the Weekly format appears almost identical to the Topics format, except that it displays dates for each topic. As of this writing, Moodle does not automatically enforce these dates. That is, Moodle does not turn on and off weekly sections on the appropriate dates. The site administrator or teacher must do that. Alternatively, one can just allow students to access the weeks in any order. Using the option hide in a form of an eye we only allow students to see the current week and all the previous ones, while not allowing them to see the upcoming ones. Figure 3 Weekly format of the CEL course

Weekly outline

- 📄 News forum
- 📖 Monolingual dictionary
- 📖 Bilingual dictionary
- 📄 Placement test

- 22 September - 28 September
- Unit 1 - A Sense of Adventure
- Vocabulary: feelings,
- Reading: Why do we risk it?,
- Grammar: Questions
- 📄 Matching exercise
- 📄 Notes on adjectives ending in -ED and -ING
- 📄 moods and feelings
- 📄 Are you willing to risk your life for the ultimate experience?

Fig. 3 Weekly format of the CEL course

Since our course and vocation is teaching a foreign language we have also found the Glossary feature very helpful. The Glossary activity is said to be one of the most underrated in Moodle. But for foreign languages, this is a very authentic activity. This activity allows participants to create and maintain a list of definitions, like a dictionary. On the surface, a glossary is a list of words and definitions that students can access. However, a course creator can allow students to add to a Glossary. This transforms the glossary from a static listing of vocabulary words to a collaborative tool for learning. This is a sample of a glossary that the students needed to work on in this course.

CEL-111a > Glossaries > Adjectives for feelings

Make your own glossaries about positive and negative adjectives expressing feelings

Search full text

Browse the glossary using this index

A|B|C|D|E|F|G|H|I|J|K|L|M|N|O
P|Q|R|S|T|U|V|W|X|Y|Z|

Fig. 4 Glossary for adjectives expressing feelings

This is only a small part of the course with only a few features and activities that are part of it.

3. ONLINE METHODOLOGY THROUGH MOODLE

The use of these activities and the way they are divided and mixed depends on the instructor or on the course demands. For example, in a foreign language class, the teaching process for the writing skill might prefer online assignments, whereas for the speaking part the face-to-face class is still the best choice. Some might prefer discussions in the classroom, while others might find that they work better online. For those worried about security, testing could be done on-site with other components online. Yet, for others, the convenience of online testing might be preferable. Using online components in today's classes is not really a choice at all. All teachers at least use email now. Using only face-to-face components is much too limiting for modern students and teachers - a mixture is much more effective. Adding more online components at first can be more work, but it is also more convenient and adds more variety to the students' learning experience. Each instructor needs to find their own balance between the two formats.

Sometimes part-time students feel that they are missing something that those in the host classroom are experiencing, and ask that lecture notes and resources be available to them through other means. The reason we have chosen Moodle is because it is very resourceful, easy to use, and it offers a great range of features. All this brings us again to the study of the methodology of the future; e-learning today allows students to get fully involved, to try things out, to participate in simulation and tests like never before and to get more out of learning. So, far we have found our way to integrate the classroom based learning with support materials like PDF documents or Microsoft Office documents. Teachers should be able to adopt different software and hardware tools with one aim: to prepare their teaching units in a most beneficial way for the students. Moodle has offered us freedom of our own creation and the possibility to choose the most proper technology to interact with our students. The initiative to start using hybrid courses can still be an issue mainly because teachers do not feel up to the task of using new technologies; some of them are not prepared to change their methodology of delivering lectures, but this is usually the case with older teachers.

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