

E-Learning in LIS Education: Satisfaction of Part-Time LIS Students with Omega

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Summary

The application of e-learning in Croatian universities has increased rapidly, with the introduction of the Bologna process to create the European Higher Education Area. The application of digital media for teaching and learning makes distance education for LIS professionals at the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, University of Zagreb, possible. E-learning and traditional classroom learning have been combined to deliver library and information science (LIS) education. The aim of our research was to obtain a general overview of the part-time LIS students' expectations and experiences using Omega, a specific learning management system.

Key words: e-learning, LIS education

Introduction

Implementation of ICT into education and training was encouraged as early as 2001 by the European Council Resolution on e-Learning. It invites the Commission to pay particular attention to the implementation of the e-Learning action plan and to the concrete future objectives of education and training systems, in line with the objective set by the Lisbon European Council to make the EU the world's most competitive and dynamic knowledge-based economy by 2010.¹ According to a UNESCO report "Open and distance learning is one of the most rapidly growing fields of education, and its potential impact on all education delivery systems has been greatly accentuated through the development of Internet – based information technologies, and in particular the World Wide Web."² E-learning definition states that it is learning that is delivered, enabled or mediated by electronic technology, for the explicit purposes of training

¹ Council Resolution on e-Learning. Europa: summaries of EU legislation. http://europa.eu/legislation_summaries/education_training_youth/lifelong_learning/c11052_en.htm (28.6.2011.)

² Moore, M. M.; Tait, A. Open and Distance Learning – Trends, Policy and Strategy Considerations, UNESCO Division of Higher Education, Paris 2002. p. 7 <http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0012/001284/128463e.pdf> (28.6.2011.)

and/or education. It does not include stand-alone technology-based training such as the use of CD-ROMs in isolation.³ E-learning has, therefore, become an important component of both formal and non-formal education. The advancement of e-learning in universities is also influenced by the introduction of learning management systems. In addition to ICT initiatives, terms like learner-oriented teaching, learning outcomes and satisfaction are being mentioned in the academic life both by students and teachers more and more frequently.

In 2007, the University of Zagreb drafted the E-learning Strategy 2007 – 2010, which states that "the University of Zagreb supports and actively promotes e-learning and the application of information and communication technology in teaching and learning at all levels of university education. E-learning is a legitimate and desirable way of learning and teaching at the University of Zagreb."⁴ The Strategy points out that the four goals the University of Zagreb aims at achieving, through e-learning, are the following:

- to improve the quality of university education
- to enable teachers and students to play new roles in the educational process
- to increase the competitiveness of the University and university curricula
- to train students to use technology for lifelong learning.

The open-source course management system Moodle has been used in the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, of the University of Zagreb, since the academic year 2000/2001. A survey conducted in 2007 examined students' attitudes and satisfaction with the use of Omega, a customized version of Moodle in use since the year 2004/2005. The majority of the students were from the Departments of English (34%), of Sociology (29%), and of Information Sciences (20%). The results indicated positive attitudes towards Omega.⁵ The first research among LIS students' carried out in the Department of Information Sciences showed also that students have a positive attitude towards Omega. This research also showed that Omega makes studying easier.⁶

³ Allan, B. E-learning and teaching in library and information services. London: Facet publishing, 2002.

⁴ University of Zagreb E-learning Strategy 2007. – 2010. http://www.unizg.hr/fileadmin/rektorat/dokumenti/eucenje_strategija/University_of_Zagreb-E-learning_strategy.pdf (28.6.2011.)

⁵ Klasnić, K; Seljan, S; Stančić, H. Quality parameters for the e-learning Omega system. http://bib.irb.hr/datoteka/361763.Klasnic_Seljan_Stancic.pdf (28.6.2011.)

⁶ Tot, M. ; Živković, D. The role of e-learning in LIS education: students' evaluations. // MIPRO 2011 / 34th International Convention Computers in Education, May 23-27, 2011 / Čičin-Šain, Marina (ed.). Rijeka : MIPRO, 2011. p. 263-266.

The aim of this paper is to see what the attitude of the part-time students towards Omega is. The reason why the author decided to conduct a survey is also to make comparison between the full-time and the part-time LIS students.

Research

A research was carried out among the part-time students of library and information science of the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences in Zagreb. The research included part-time students who attended the Reference Work in Libraries course. The survey questionnaire was not completed by all the attendants of the students, since they were not present at the lecture, for valid reasons. Still, the research sample was representative because it was carried out on a majority of the students. Out of the 90 students enrolled in the course 67 students were present in class and they all completed the survey. These are the students who have already completed another course of study, and are currently employed in a library. Since they have no formal education in the field of library and information science, in line with the Croatian Library Act they are required to complete a two-year study of library and information science while working full time. Part-time students didn't have any official training on how to use Omega, but every professor introduces students with his course on Omega. Also every professor decides if usage of Omega is requirement for passing the course. At Reference Work in Libraries course usage of Omega wasn't obligatory to pass the course. The aim of the research was to obtain a general overview of the part-time students' satisfaction with Omega, a distance learning tool, and to establish to what degree this tool makes studying easier for students; and also to compare the results obtained in the present research with the results of the previous research conducted among full-time students of library and information science. The authors assumed that Omega met the students' needs and helped making their study much easier.

Methodology

The part-time students at the Reference Work in Libraries course were asked to complete an anonymous survey questionnaire, consisting of 13 questions. There were only two questions, out of the 13, that required from students to write their own answers, other questions provided multiple choice answers for students to choose from. The first three questions were general questions aimed at getting data about students' gender, age and their so-far achieved education. Questions 4 to 9 were essential ones related to Omega: is it used, how often, how many courses the student has on it, is this an e-learning tool, can Omega replace lectures. Questions 10 to 13 evaluated students' satisfaction with Omega, providing also answers about how much it makes studying easier, how satisfied they are with the content offered, and what is on Omega used by the students most, using grading 1 to 5, where 1 indicated the lowest grade of satisfaction, and 5 the highest.

Results

The total of 67 students completed the survey, out of which 13% male and 87% female students; 24% respondents were between 24 and 27 years of age, 18% between 28 and 30 years of age, 42% between 31 and 41 years of age, and 16% between 41 and 50 years of age. All the respondents replied that they used Omega: to the question about how often it was used, 14% replied every day, 46% replied 2-3 times a week, 37% replied 2-3 times per month, and 3% replied that they used Omega very rarely. Asked how many courses the respondents had included in Omega, 4% of the students replied they had 1 – 3 courses included, 30% had 3 – 5 courses included, 45 respondents had most of the courses included in Omega, 19% had all the courses included in Omega, and 2% did not provide an answer to this question. Asked whether the respondents were familiar with the e-learning concept, 93% of them replied YES, and 7% replied NO. Omega is considered an e-learning tool by 97% of the respondents, and 3% of them do not consider it an e-learning tool. It is considered that Omega may replace lectures by 34% of the students, 61% consider that Omega cannot replace lectures, and 5% did not provide an answer to this question. The respondents' satisfaction with Omega was distributed as follows: 24% of the respondents evaluated Omega as excellent, 48% as very good, 24% as good, 3% as satisfactory, and 1% of the respondents evaluated their satisfaction with Omega as negative. Not one of them evaluated their satisfaction with Omega as negative. The satisfaction with Omega's contents was evaluated as follows: 27% of the respondents evaluated the contents as excellent, 45% as very good, 22% as good, and 6% as satisfactory. The respondents evaluated how much Omega makes their study easier, as follows: 43% of the respondents evaluated Omega in this respect as excellent, 30% as very good, 24% as good, and 2% as satisfactory, and 1% as unsatisfactory.

Table 1: Satisfaction with Omega.

	5	4	3	2	1
satisfaction with Omega	24%	48%	24%	3%	1%
Omega is making studying easier	43%	30%	24%	2%	1%
satisfaction with content on Omega	27%	45%	22%	6%	0%

In the last question the respondents evaluated what contents they use the most on Omega with grades from 1 to 5. The contents offered were the following: news forum, course description and reading list, presentations used in lectures, additional material related to the course, articles from the Faculty repository, submission of home-works and seminar papers, communication with the teaching staff, communication with students.

Table 2: Usage of content in Omega.

	5	4	3	2	1	no answer
news forum	34%	21%	9%	14%	19%	3%
course description and reading list	64%	27%	4%	3%	0%	2%
presentations used in lectures	82%	11%	4%	1%	0%	2%
additional material related to the course	27%	28%	27%	9%	7%	2%
articles from the Faculty repository	24%	24%	25%	11%	13%	3%
submission of home-works and seminar papers	19%	14%	22%	12%	28%	5%
communication with the teaching staff	17%	22%	15%	18%	22%	6%
communication with students	7%	15%	9%	9%	54%	6%

Their use of news forum was graded as excellent by 34% of the respondents, by 21% as very good, by 9% as good, by 14% as satisfactory, by 19% as unsatisfactory, and 3% did not evaluate how much they used the news forum. Their use of course descriptions and the reading lists was graded as excellent by 64% of the respondents, by 27% as very good, by 4% as good, by 3% as satisfactory, none of the respondents graded their use of course descriptions and the reading lists as unsatisfactory, and 2% of the respondents provided no answer to this question. The use of presentations from the lectures was graded as excellent by 82% of the respondents, by 11% as very good, by 4% as good, by 1% as satisfactory, and 2% of the respondents provided no evaluation. The use of additional material was graded as excellent by 27% of the students, by 28% as very good, by 27% as good, by 9% as satisfactory, by 7% as unsatisfactory, and 2% of the respondents provided no evaluation. The use of articles from the Faculty repository was graded as excellent by 24% of the students, by 24% as very good, by 25% as good, by 11% as satisfactory, by 13% as unsatisfactory, and 3% of the respondents provided no evaluation. Using the possibility to submit home-works and seminar papers via Omega was graded as excellent by 19% of the respondents, by 14% as very good, by 22% as good, by 12% as satisfactory, by 28% as unsatisfactory, and 5% of the respondents provided no evaluation. Using the communication with the teaching staff was graded as excellent by 17% of the respondents, by 22% as very good, by 15% as good, by 18% as satisfactory; 22% of the respondents graded their using the communication with the teaching staff as unsatisfactory, and 6% of the respondents provided no evaluation of their using the communication with the teaching staff. Using the communication with students was graded as excellent by 7% of the respondents, by 15% as very good, by 9% as good, also by 9% as satisfactory; 54% of the respondents graded their using the communication with the students as unsatisfactory, and 6% of the respondents provided no answer to this question.

Discussion

The results obtained show that the part-time students use the distance learning tool Omega, and that high percentage of them uses such tool relatively often (14% use Omega every day, and 46% use Omega 2-3 times a week). Even so, the number of 37% of the students using Omega only 2 – 3 times a month causes concern. One of the reasons for such use may be also the fact that 30% of the respondents have 3 – 5 courses included in Omega. However, 45 % of the students have most of the courses included in Omega, 19% of them have all the courses in Omega, so that these results show that e-learning has been accepted as a standard part of tuition. The survey shows that the students are familiar with the concept of e-learning, and they consider it supplementary to traditional learning (61% of the students believe that Omega cannot replace lecturing). Based on the research results, we can determine that the students are satisfied with Omega (24% evaluated Omega as excellent, and 48% as very good), and that Omega makes studying easier (43% evaluated Omega in this respect as excellent, and 30% as very good). Yet, one should not disregard that 1% of the students evaluated their satisfaction with Omega negatively, and that the use of Omega to make studying easier was evaluated negatively by 1% of the students, which may be a consequence of the fact that a part of the students do not use Omega often. The satisfaction with Omega's contents was not evaluated negatively by any of the respondents. This shows that the students should be encouraged to use Omega more, so that Omega would make their studying easier. The contents found in Omega and used most often by the part-time students are the following: presentations used in lectures, course descriptions and reading lists, additional materials related to the course and news forum. The contents in Omega used least often by the students are communication with their fellow students and communication with the teaching staff. This may be caused by the fact that they still use other media for communicating with the teaching staff and their fellow students, such as telephone and e-mail, so that the communication via Omega is not needed.

The author carried out the same research also among full-time library and information science students, and those results were presented at MIPRO 2011 conference.⁷ The sample used for the research on regular students was 68 students, thus making these two samples very similar so that they can be compared. However, it is necessary to point out that the part-time students completed their first course of study before Omega existed, and a considerable

⁷ Tot, M; Živković, D. The role of e-learning in LIS education: students' evaluations // MIPRO 2011 / 34th International Convention Computers in Education, May 23-27, 2011 / Čičin-Šain, Marina (ed.). Rijeka : MIPRO, 2011. p. 263-266.

number of them completed their first course of study even before internet existed. As the results of the survey show, most of the respondents (42%) are between 31 and 40 years of age, and there were also older respondents (16% between 41 and 50 years of age), and they are only now coming to grips with computer literacy. Having compared the results of the full-time students and the part-time students of library and information science, it is evident that the full-time students use Omega more. The reason for this may be that the part-time students are employed, and they have less time than the full-time students, while the full-time students belong to the Google Generation, and spend most of their time on internet. Both groups of students are satisfied with Omega, but higher percentage of part-time students evaluated their satisfaction with Omega as being excellent (24% of the part-time students in contrast to 13% of the full-time students). Likewise, being asked how much Omega makes their studying easier, higher percentage of the part-time students evaluated this tool as excellent (43% of the part-time students in contrast to 28% of the full-time students), but the total number of students, who evaluated Omega as excellent and very good in making their studying easier, is higher among full-time students (78% of the full-time students evaluated it as excellent and very good, and 73% of the part-time students evaluated it as excellent and very good). Higher percentage of the full-time students are familiar with the e-learning concept (94% of the full-time students, and 93% of the part-time students), and higher percentage of the part-time students believe that Omega is an e-learning tool than the full-time students (97% of the part-time students, 91% of the full-time students).

Table 3: Part-time and full-time students satisfaction with Omega.

		5	4	3	2	1
FULL-TIME STUDENTS	satisfaction with Omega	13%	58%	28%	1%	0%
	Omega is making studying easier	28%	50%	22%	0%	0%
	satisfaction with content on Omega	9%	57%	30%	4%	0%
PART-TIME STUDENTS	satisfaction with Omega	24%	48%	24%	3%	1%
	Omega is making studying easier	43%	30%	24%	2%	1%
	satisfaction with content on Omega	27%	45%	22%	6%	0%

Conclusion

This research shows that e-learning has become integrated in LIS curriculum in the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences in Zagreb. A tool for e-learning in the Faculty is called Omega. A survey was conducted among part-time students to see what their opinion on Omega was and whether Omega was making their studying easier. The results show that students often use Omega, that they have the majority of the courses on Omega. The survey also shows that the

majority of students are familiar with the concept of e-learning, considering it supplementary to traditional learning. The students are satisfied with Omega, and Omega makes their studying easier. The contents used most often by the students are the following: presentations used in lectures, course descriptions and reading lists, additional materials related to the course, news forum. Comparing regular and part-time students, the survey has shown that full-time students use Omega more often. Both groups of students are satisfied with Omega and Omega is making their studying easier. However a higher percentage of part-time students assessed Omega excellent. But total number of full-time students who evaluated that Omega makes their studying easier with excellent and very good is higher than the number of part-time students. The author believes that this type of research should be conducted regularly on annual basis, thus enabling e-learning to be improved.

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