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Students' Suggestions for Improvements on a Pre-Degree Language Course Moodle Page at the University of the South Pacific

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ABSTRACT: This study explores students' responses in the form of suggestions on what could be done to enhance the learning process and increase interaction on their course Moodle page. The study involved 109 pre-degree students enrolled in LLFXX, a compulsory English course for the Foundation program. A questionnaire was designed on Moodle and 80 Blended and 29 Print mode students were enrolled on this Moodle page to answer this questionnaire. Students' responses were classified according to their mode of study (Blended and Print) under two themes: enhance the learning process and increase interaction on Moodle. Their response identified changes that could enhance their learning and increase their interaction on the LLFXX Moodle page.

KEYWORDS: eLearning, interaction, LMS, Moodle

Introduction

The expectations of all education system stakeholders (parents, teachers, students, and management) are always on the students and their performance in school. Their priority has always been for the better performance of students and their continued participation in class. A lot of resources, in the form of finance, time, staff, physical assets, and virtual resources, are employed in the delivery of classes to enhance students' performance. Since the methods of deliverance have never been stagnant, there has always been a need to change the teaching-learning environment according to the demands of that period. Facilities in schools and campuses are renovated to accommodate the growing number of students. It is also mandatory for the education sector to be Occupational and Health Security compliant. The requirements of special needs students are also facilitated. In the process of changing with the opportunities around, blackboards have been changed to whiteboards. Some classrooms also have smartboards to boost the learning and teaching practice.

Moreover, with the advancement of technology in the teaching-learning process, a lot of resources are deployed toward the technological development of schools and campuses. The way classes used to be taught has been modified, if not fully changed, with the introduction of eLearning. This ubiquitous teaching and learning method has brought a lot of flexibility in the delivery of classes. Moodle is not only used as a Learning Management System (LMS) at tertiary levels but also in high schools in Fiji. Thus, stakeholders have invested a lot in upgrading the resources to ensure a smooth transition from traditional classes to a blended form of learning. At tertiary levels, classes are taken in four modes: Face-to-Face, Print, Blended, and Online. This requires more resources and more facilities, be it physical or virtual.

Many times, the stakeholders are so engrossed in trying to facilitate and accommodate all these needs that they overlook a key factor. The question of 'what do the students need?'. Seldom are students given the opportunity to express their views on their needs and thus the facilities that are provided are what the providers assume students will need. This includes all physical, financial, and virtual resources.

Background

University of the South Pacific (USP) is a regional university in the South Pacific. It is a university-owned by 12 countries: Cook Islands, Fiji, Kiribati, Marshal Islands, Nauru, Niue, Tokelau, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tonga,

Tuvalu, and Vanuatu. The USP has students from its 12 member countries and from countries outside the region. Pre-degree to post-graduate courses are taught via Face-to-Face, Print, Blended, and Online modes. Initially, courses were taught either Face-to-Face or Print mode. With the introduction of virtual learning and Moodle at the USP, Blended and Online modes were introduced. However, the university did not give appropriate instructions on changing courses to Blended mode (Racule and Buadromo 2020).

To facilitate classes, Moodle was introduced as an LMS in 2006 on trial in the School of Computing, Information Systems and Mathematical Sciences and in 2008 Moodle was implemented across the USP (Whelan and Bhartu 2007). Moodle has undergone a tremendous transformation (Bhartu and Koroivulaono 2014) since 2008, with the latest version introduced in the USP in 2023. With the use of satellite, Moodle is connected from the main campus to the other campuses across the region (figure 1).

Moodle page is provided for all courses despite their varied modes. The Pre-degree courses are taught either using Print or Blended modes across the region. All the courses at the Pre-degree level have a Moodle page where resources are uploaded. The template is provided by the Centre for Flexible Learning (CFL) department. The course coordinators design it to suit the needs of their students. It is assumed that whatever material is provided will enhance students' learning and increase their interaction on Moodle.

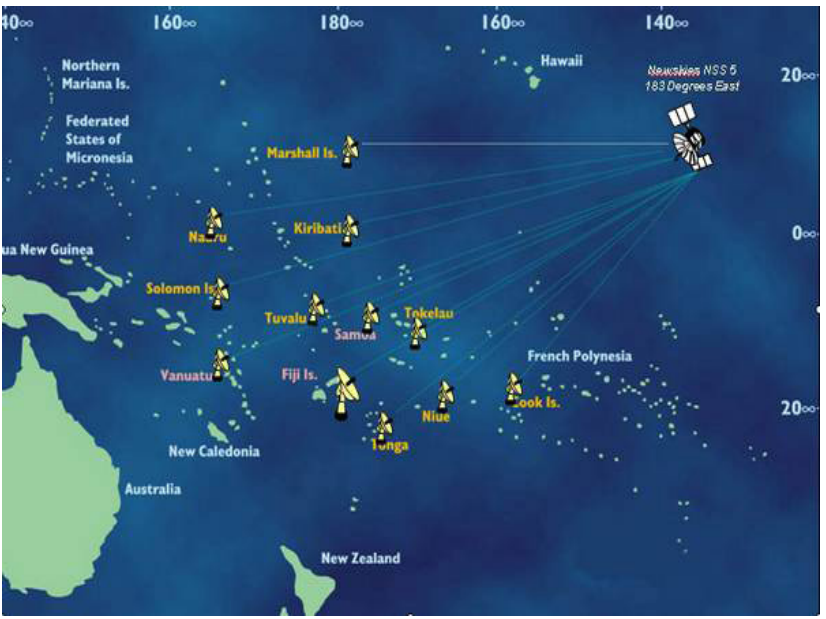

Figure 1. USP connectivity: Moodle (University of the South Pacific 2015)

However, at times, what appears on the Moodle page is very monotonous, as per requirements of the CFL departments or as instructed or guided by the education technologists. Many times, it is what the instructors feel is mandatory or crucial for the students that are placed on the Moodle page regardless of their modes of study. It is always assumed that this is what students would need for their studies and on this assumption learning materials are placed. Learners are not consulted on what they would prefer to find on Moodle or how much of each resource (activities, revision materials, or past exam questions with model answers) would they desire to access on Moodle. It is crucial to take students' views on the usability of the Moodle page for better performance and engagement. More specifically, for pre-degree students who are experiencing their first year in the USP Foundation studies are a bridge between secondary schooling and the university experience. Their experience, dilemmas, challenges, and positive responses towards Moodle can assist future students and the deliverance of the course on Moodle.

Therefore, the following research questions framed this study:

Q1 Learners need changes on their course Moodle page to enhance their learning.

Q2 Learners need improvements in the Moodle page and a change in their approach when they deal with the Moodle page to increase their interaction on the course Moodle page.

Literature Review

Learners have their own preferences for learning regardless of whether the classroom has a traditional setup or is facilitated virtually. From designing the course material to facilitating these in classrooms, students' learning capacity, proficiency, and readability to accept the teaching method have been investigated for all forms of classroom setup. Students' perceptions of these have also been studied to enhance its usability.

Moodle is used widely as a LMS, and many studies have been conducted on it. Its usability (Ifinedo, Pyke and Anwar 2018, Aikina and Bolsunovskaya 2020, Delone and McLean 2003, Sabah 2020), effectiveness, and limitations have been explored from the learner and instructor perspective. For Moodle to meet the expectation of the educational stakeholders, it is crucial to assimilate students' views on what Moodle should contain and how it should be organized or designed to assist students in their learning and address their learning needs (Tsai, Shen and Tsai 2011; Zengin 2012).

It is important to consider the factors that affect the effectiveness of Moodle from students' perspective (Damnjanovic, Jednal and Mijatovic 2015). The use of Moodle can optimize the teaching-learning process and provide an effective and flexible learning environment (Damnjanovic, Jednal and Mijatovic 2015). While designing the course Moodle page, it is crucial to ensure that there is minimal scrolling and fewer clicks as multiple resources can be embedded in one link (Moore 2012; Zengin 2012). Furthermore, learning can be made friendlier and more exciting by incorporating appealing activities on Moodle (Martin-Blas and Serrano-Fernandez 2009). Activities that are attractive to students can be designed on the Moodle page. It can vary from the paper-based activities given in traditional classrooms to gamed-based activities (Zengin 2012).

With the benefits of Moodle and its effectiveness in the teaching-learning process, there are also challenges of using Moodle. The benefits of using Moodle can be weakened or rejected due to a lack of capabilities, expertise, intelligence, and skills to use it (Damnjanovic, Jednal and Mijatovic 2015; Paragia et al. 2011). Moreover, if the content on Moodle does not to students' expectations or interests, then they lose motivation to use it (Ayan 2015; Aikina and Bolsunovskaya 2020). Therefore, it is vital that students' views and needs should be incorporated on the Moodle page to ensure increased student interaction and improved student performance.

Methodology

For this research, data was collected using the qualitative research method. This research investigated students enrolled in a compulsory English course (LLFXX) at the University of the South Pacific. Data was collected during the semester of their enrolment.

Participants

For this research, 109 students enrolled in LLFXX were studied. These students were enrolled at the Laucala Campus (main campus) of the USP. 80 of these students were enrolled in Blended mode and 29 were enrolled in Print mode. The 80 Blended-mode students were based at the main campus. All 80 students were born after 1980 and thus were categorized as digital natives (Prensky 2001). The 29 Print-mode students, on the other hand, were based at a secondary school in the Suva area. They were enrolled as Print-mode

students due to their school being a franchise of the Pre-degree program of the USP. These Print-mode students were also digital natives (Prensky 2001).

Study Program

The Pre-degree program at the USP offers Preliminary (equivalent to Year 12) and Foundation (equivalent to Year 13) studies. LLFXX is a compulsory Pre-degree English course for the students enrolled in the Foundation program. It is offered via Blended and Print mode across the region.

Data

All the Laucala students enrolled in LLFXX were given an information sheet on this research and were informed about the study. Those who decided to participate were given a consent form to sign for their approval. These students were enrolled on the researcher's Sandbox Moodle page. Data was collected using the qualitative method as students filled in a questionnaire on the researcher's Sandbox Moodle page that the students were enrolled in.

Instruments

In this qualitative study, students answered a questionnaire, and data was collected from it. The questionnaire was designed on the researcher's Sandbox Moodle page and 109 students were enrolled in it. Options to the questions were given for students to choose from. A "other" option was also given in which students could type in any factor or option other than the ones mentioned that they would prefer. The data on the 109 students' responses was extracted from this Moodle page.

Data Analysis

Data was collected from students' responses to the questionnaire. These were divided into two themes from the research questions. Theme one was 'enhancing learning' and theme two was 'increasing interaction on Moodle'. The responses were further categorized into two modes of study: Blended and Print modes. The students' responses were portrayed using bar graphs.

Results

The results show students' suggestions for the changes that could be made to the LLFXX Moodle page to improve their engagement with the Moodle page.

Enhancing learning process

As shown in Figure 2, Blended mode students suggested including or improving on four elements of the LLFXX Moodle page to enhance the learning process. Most of the students (38%) opted for more resources for revision. 31% of Blended mode students also suggested changing the layout of the page. While 16% of students needed more activities and 15% of students needed more audio and video resources to be included on the course Moodle page.

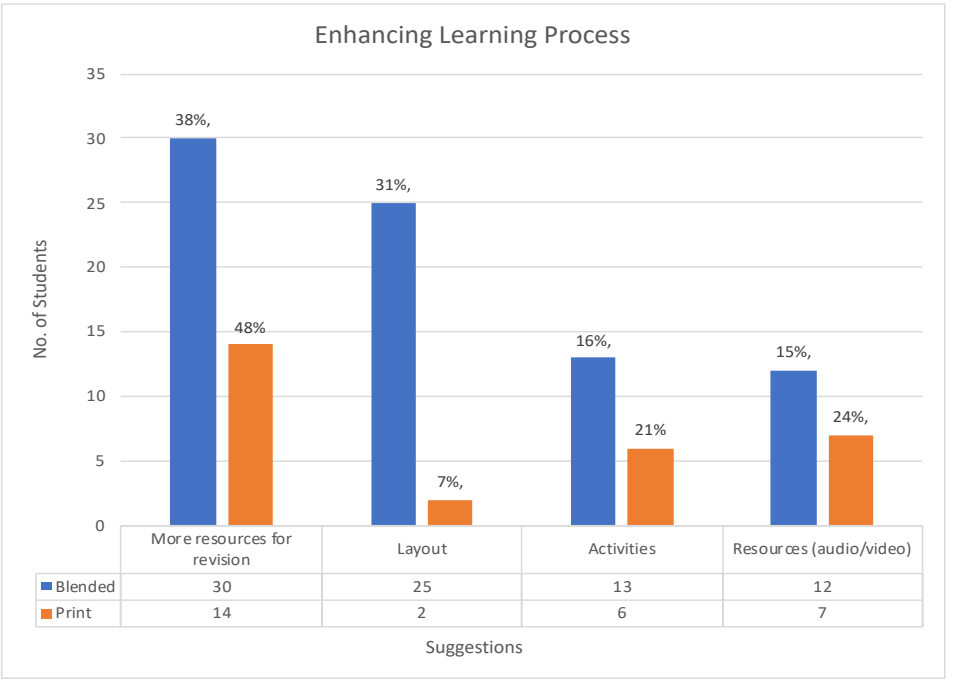

Figure 2. Suggestions for LLFXX Moodle page to enhance the learning process for students

Like Blended mode students, most of the Print students (48%) suggested that more resources for revision should be included on the course Moodle page. However, only 7%, the least number of students (2 students) wanted a change in the layout of the course Moodle page. This was the second highest suggestion for the Blended mode students. 24% of Print students wanted

more audio and video resources on the LLFXX Moodle page while 21% of students wanted more activities.

Increasing Student interaction on Moodle

Figure 3 depicts students' responses on increasing student interaction on Moodle. 59% of Blended mode students wanted access to resources on the Moodle page with fewer clicks. The remaining 49% of Blended mode students chose rewards for the highest number of interactions to boost students' Moodle interaction. On the other hand, most Print-mode students (55%) would like rewards for the highest number of interactions on the LLFXX Moodle page. While 41% of students preferred to have access to resources on the course Moodle page with fewer clicks. One student (4%) thought that focusing and managing student time would increase students' interaction on the LLFXX Moodle page.

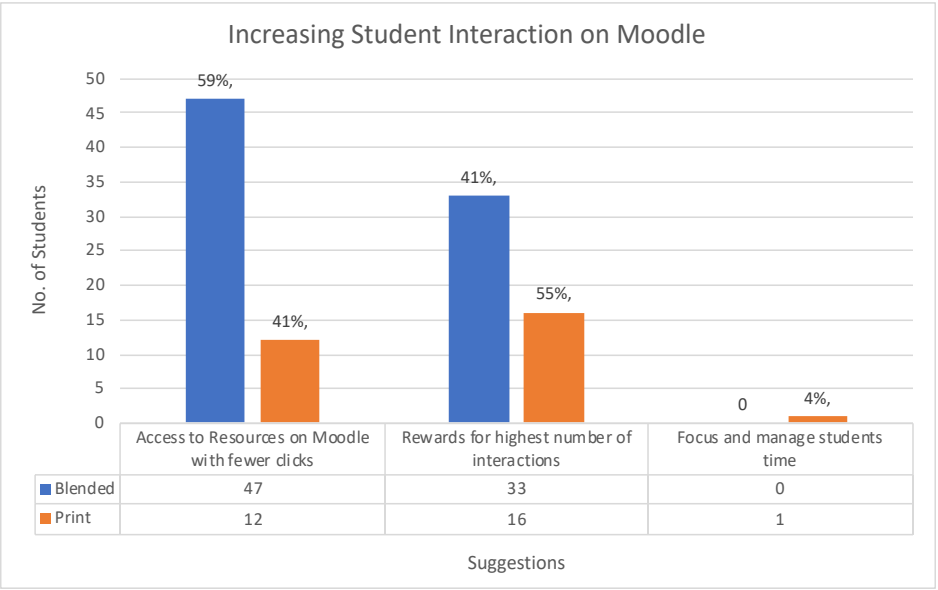

Figure 3. Suggestions for LLFXX Moodle page to increase student interaction

Discussion

This study explored Laucala campus students (both Blended and Print mode) preference for their LLFXX Moodle page. One of the first research

at the USP where Pre-degree students were asked for their suggestions on what changes on the Moodle page would boost their learning and increase their interaction on the course Moodle page. The first research question investigates if learners needed changes on their course Moodle page to enhance their learning (figure 2). Results show that students wanted a few changes on their Moodle page to improve their learning process.

Both Blended and Print mode students suggested that there was a need to increase resources (content) on the course Moodle page. The majority of the Blended (30) and Print (14) students needed more resources for revision on the LLFXX Moodle page. Revision materials in the form of past semester tests and exam papers are placed on the LLFXX Moodle page. Students need more topic or unit revision activities. They also need revision materials that can guide them in their assignments.

Similarly, a total of 37% of students (both Blended and Print modes) needed more activities and more audio and visual resources ((39%) (Ayan 2015, Aikina and Bolsunovskaya 2020, Zengin 2012). The Moodle page had tutorial activities for each unit with few audio and visual resources. Some audio and visual resources are guidelines for assignments. There is a need for instructors to provide links to resources rather than students looking for them. More educational videos on the topic of the units can be added to the resources. Grammar games rather than grammar activities would be more attention-seeking and would not only enhance student's learning but also increase their interaction on the Moodle page.

Furthermore, while a change in the layout of the course Moodle page (Moore 2012) was chosen by 31% of Blended mode students, being the second highest choice, only 7% of Print mode students wanted a change in the layout of their course Moodle page. It was the least option preferred by Print mode students. The layout of the page is a little confusing. It is essential to organise the resources properly so that students can locate and access them effortlessly.

The introduction and organizational resources need to be placed one after the other. The LLFXX Moodle page had the lectures and Unit 1 (weeks 1 & 2) resources in between the introduction and course overview. The page is organized according to the weeks. Basically, it outlines in which week(s) which unit needs to be taught. Unit 3 is taught in weeks 5 and 6. The tutorial activities are designed according to the unit. It does not differentiate which materials would be used in which weeks. Students need to know their resources

according to the weeks so that it is easy for them to organize themselves while attempting them. Each unit should have a small introduction to brief students on the learning outcomes and introductory notes. Then, in each unit, the different weeks can be mentioned as a folder. By clicking on that folder, the students can be directed to the resources and activities of that week. Such a layout would reduce confusion among students and enable them to access resources and activities swiftly and easily.

The second research question explores if learners need improvements in the Moodle page and a change in their approach when they deal with the Moodle page to increase their interaction on the course Moodle page (figure 3). It was discovered that learners confirm that changes in the Moodle page can lead to increased student interaction on Moodle.

Firstly, students prefer to access their learning resources easily and quickly. In simple terms, they need to access their resources with a few clicks on the course Moodle page (Moore 2012). Having to go through many sections or many clicks to reach the desired material is discouraging. Hence, students would not prefer to access these at all unless needed for assessment purposes. Thus, decreasing their interaction on Moodle.

Furthermore, motivation in the form of marks for the highest interaction can improve student interaction on Moodle. Receiving marks for interacting on Moodle will be an incentive for students. This can be assessed by the frequency of their engagement on discussion forums, chats, and other communicative sections. These engagements will generate communication and interest amongst students, resulting in increased interaction on the course Moodle page.

Finally, the appropriate attitude of students (Ifinedo, Pyke and Anwar 2018, Waheed et al. 2016) towards their study and educational platform is needed to ensure that they interact on their course Moodle page (LLFXX). It was acknowledged by a Print mode student that 'students need to be focused and manage their time wisely to increase their interaction' on the course page.

This research has acted as a mirror where students can reflect and report on their expectations of their course Moodle page. It should be mandatory for instructors to receive such student feedback regularly to provide to students with what they need and not what instructors assume students need. Thus, incorporating these suggestions from students on the Moodle page may improve students' interaction on the LLFXX Moodle page and may boost their learning and results.

Limitations

The limitation of this study was that only Laucala-based Blended and Print-mode students were studied. The research may have gathered more suggestions and would have been more informative had the students across the region been investigated.

Conclusion

This study concludes that students' responses in the form of suggestions should always be incorporated when designing or incorporating resource materials. Their suggestions give a clue as to what they prefer and, thus, what they may enjoy as their study resource.

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