Chapter 18
Evaluation of Moodle, Canvas, Blackboard, and Open EdX

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ABSTRACT

The digital world abolishing all the limitations to reach knowledge and removing the borders of the countries and even continents serves as a facilitator for everyone who wants to learn and reach knowledge. The growing demand for knowledge throughout the world also increases the need for a variety of courses from highly appreciated institutions and instructors in the most effective educational methods and techniques. Therefore, deciding which substructure or platform to be chosen by both enterprises to make a profit and learners to acquire knowledge in the most suitable way is becoming a more challenging issue for both counterparts of teaching and learning. In order to make this selection process easy, based on the document analysis method, this chapter presents an evaluative report on globally popular e-learning platforms including Canvas, Blackboard, Moodle, and Open edX in terms of their market share, user interface, feature strengths and weaknesses, and it reaches a conclusion by comparing and contrasting their differences and similarities.

INTRODUCTION

Ford (2015), who emphasizes the dazzling development in technology based on Moore's law in the mid-60s, indicates that every couple of years the speed and the power of processors double and their cost is halved. Accordingly, e-learning platforms and their usage are increasing day by day at an incredible speed everywhere in the world. This increasing speed of technology and the demand for knowledge demonstrate the need for facilitating factors to access any kind of knowledge via the internet. Today, "distance" has

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little meaning when there is an internet connection in our globalizing world. Web-based learning has been gaining more importance in the learning environment that allows both learners and instructors to learn and teach respectively without time or space limitation. The Internet and related web technologies do offer great solutions for presenting, publishing and sharing learning content and information, as is the case in many other areas (Cavus, 2010; Ramesh & Ramanathan, 2013).

Rapid changes and innovations in technology and technology-mediated instruction have removed the barriers of traditional teaching and learning, and by discarding the four-wall concept of traditional classrooms and schools. Nowadays, special-designed software environments are enabling teachers to extend the classroom beyond its traditional boundaries of time and space and can be used to supplement a conventional course experience. The success of the e-learning paradigm has led to the development of a great number of either commercial or open-source learning environments (Pecheanu, Stefanescu, Dumitriu, & Segal, 2011). In accordance with the developments of such kind software, the increasing adaptation skills of the learners to these kinds of technologies force institutions to make a choice whether to offer web-based instruction facilities to learners all over the world.

There are currently over 250 e-learning platforms (Al-Ajlan & Zedan, 2008) and those platforms bring selection issues among various software packages from the providers. The existing literature focuses on LMS platforms and MOOC platforms separately. However, this chapter compares MOOC and LMS platforms selecting the most valued and preferred e-learning platforms throughout the world.

This chapter aims to make the selection of suitable e-learning platforms easy for both the enterprises and learners in higher education. Therefore, it provides an overall evaluation of the four different e-learning platforms and tries to answer the following research questions:

1. What are the differences between Canvas, Blackboard, Moodle and edX in terms of user interface and user experience?
2. What are the differences between Canvas, Blackboard, Moodle and edX in terms of features?
3. What are the strengths and weaknesses of Canvas, Blackboard, Moodle and edX?

This chapter provides detailed information on how to select the optimum e-learning platform for higher education institutions by analyzing and comparing the most widely used e-learning platforms in the world including Canvas, Blackboard, Moodle and Open Edx and by making the SWOT analysis of the potential candidate platforms. Based on this analysis, this chapter deals with the current issues of mostly used e-learning platforms.

First, this chapter briefly describes what online learning platforms are, and covers major Learning Management Systems (LMS), including their market data, brief introduction, user interfaces and feature comparison. Next, it encompasses four e-learning platforms such as Canvas, Blackboard, Moodle and Open Edx. Finally, it seeks out the potential requirements of the system that is desired followed by some suggestions about adopting platforms for educational platforms by providing their SWOT analysis data.

BACKGROUND

There is various web-based software developed to enhance learners' diversity both in learning management systems (LMSs) such as Angel, Blackboard, Canvas, Desire2Learn, Moodle, Sakai and in massive open online courses (MOOCs) platforms such as Coursera, EdX, XuetangX, FutureLearn and Udacity.