

Chapter 50

Where Are They and Are You There Yet?

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ABSTRACT

People's environment is increasingly enriched and changed with computing devices which offer services that aid users in their daily activities. In addition, the way that people using the Internet have begun to change with these high-tech computing tools and devices. Following the recent trends on digital technologies, this chapter will discuss how to select and utilize existing Internet technologies for the benefits of education, and policies on using these technologies. The rapid improvements in the field of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) and the wide introduction of the Internet have added a whole new dimension to education. There are seemingly limitless ways of using technologies and the Internet to enhance the quality of instruction, both in face-to-face courses as well as in distance courses. This chapter will also explain how technological advances and ICT policies are being applied to assist for both instructors and students.

INTRODUCTION

Possibly, while surfing the Web you realize the changes on users' behaviours with the innovative technologies and tools. By taking these changes into consideration, educational institutions need to adapt and take a step forward to improve learners' participation and mobilization. Widespread availability of the Internet and common access to

information, freely available novel technologies and types of social interactions have inevitable impacts on learning and teaching.

e-Learning, using electronic devices and new technologies, is a modern learning method. There are various case studies, practices and applications in education literature on how to modernize teaching and learning process (Grodecka, Pata & Våljataga, 2008). "Embracing e-Learning in higher education requires a shift in the paradigm, as well as the use of mediating technologies"

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(Grodecka, Pata & Våljataga, 2008, p.10). This new educational delivery method provides independence and personalisation in learning.

Tools to gather information through the Internet provide great opportunities for searching literature and establishing fast communication with international resources. The Internet already hosts an increasing variety of programs and databases, making them available for effective and inexpensive for learning to all kinds of students and professionals, from online tests to case studies and simulations (Schitteck, Mattheos, Lyon & Attstrom, 2001).

New generation of web technologies enables active participation and collaboration of users. The fast broadcasting of social and open software on the Web is reshaping the current online learning habits that are based on institutionalized systems. Advanced Web applications and services such as blogs, wikis, podcasts and videocasts are becoming an increasingly feasible alternative to the proprietary learning systems (Ullrich, Borau, Luo, Tan, Shen, & Shen, 2008). Users who use an online environment for learning can publish their own ideas and comments in blogs, create online documents, wikis or dictionaries collaboratively, share or exchange photos, videos and files within at least one online community.

The main objective of this chapter is to provide an entry point into the application of internet technologies to support both learning and teaching. Also, applied policy models will be guide and resource for those who consider using internet technologies in order to support learning.

COURSE AND LEARNING MANAGEMENT SYSTEMS

The primary learning technology employed recently is a type of system that organizes and delivers online courses (Downes, 2005) and known under different names: Course Management Systems (CMS), Virtual Learning Environments (VLE),

Learning Platforms, Learning Management Systems (LMS) and Learning Content Management Systems (LCMS). This kind of software has become almost ubiquitous in the learning environment and they are widely used for both corporate and educational purposes (Hart, 2008). Commercial learning management systems such as Blackboard, Angel and Desire2Learn have been installed at thousands of universities and colleges and are used by tens of thousands of instructors and students (Downes, 2005). On the other hand, two major open source learning management systems are growing in popularity: Moodle and Sakai (Ganjalizadeh & Molina, 2006). In the following of this section two major LMS will be briefly discussed.

Moodle Learning Management System

Moodle stands for Modular Object-Oriented Dynamic Learning Environment. It is freely available and flexible learning management system to help educators create effective online learning communities. As it is highly modular open source software, depending on users' need, new modules can be added to the system. It supports social constructionist pedagogy with collaboration, activities, critical reflection, etc. Every user can specify their own time zone and can choose the language used for the Moodle interface (<http://www.moodle.org>). You can download it from moodle.org and use it on any computer. Moodle also has a variety of modules in order to meet users' needs.

Learning materials can be presented in different formats such as by week, by topic or a discussion. Courses can be presented in linear or non-linear formats and sequential and random navigational path on contents can be provided. Instructor has full control over all settings for a course. Moodle supports display of any electronic content including Word, PowerPoint, Flash, video, sounds etc.

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