

Chapter 8

Faculty Adoption, Application, and Perceptions of a CMS in a University English Language Program

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ABSTRACT

Central to most e-learning strategies is the course management system (CMS). While a CMS has the potential to facilitate better course management, enhance learning, and encourage student autonomy, reports indicate that faculty are slow to adopt a CMS, and yet others claim most faculty are not using a CMS to its potential. This chapter considers teachers in a university English program who were surveyed about their perceptions of the Blackboard CMS using the technology acceptance model (TAM) and data from usage logs were analyzed to appraise actual CMS application. While the teachers had an overwhelmingly positive view of the CMS, their utilization of Blackboard was limited or unsophisticated. As e-learning coordinators in the English program, the authors are interested in increasing CMS adoption and developing a robust e-learning component in the curriculum.

INTRODUCTION

Online learning or e-learning has become a crucial component of most tertiary institution's education initiatives (Alharbi & Drew, 2014; Park, Lee & Cheong, 2007). Additionally, universities are promoting their use of e-learning technology as a means to lure prospective students, and promised implementation of e-learning strategies is in some cases crucial for securing federal government grants. According to Lawrence (2014), because modern language use is dependent on technology for transmission and reception, there is tremendous pressure to integrate technology-mediated approaches into the language

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classroom. Within the large variety of e-learning technologies on the market, universities around the world have invested in electronic course management systems (CMSs) for a range of purposes (Alharbi & Drew, 2014; Fathema & Sutton, 2013; Toland, White, Millis & Bolliger, 2014). Defined by McCabe and Meuter (2011, p. 150) as *an integrated set of web-based tools to help facilitate course administration and delivery*, a CMS makes it possible for teachers to address different audiences and it allows them to diversify their teaching style. Students benefit from the flexibility of accessing class assignments and resources at times convenient for them. Moreover, students can schedule class work around family time or part-time work, and a CMS facilitates learning through a variety of activities (McCabe & Meuter, 2011). The integration of CMSs in language programs is also promising as they can encourage students to use metacognitive and self-regulation skills because they are asked to use their language knowledge to solve problems in various situations (Tsai, 2015). CMS systems can also provide a platform for delivering flipped learning approaches, which Leis and Cooke (2015) found to be particularly effective in their foreign language teaching environment. CMS systems, such as Blackboard (<<http://Blackboard.com>>), Manaba (<<http://www.manaba.jp>>) and Campus Suite (<<http://www.campussuite.com>>) are designed to help instructors manage their courses both electronically and remotely, fulfilling such tasks as document sharing, assignment distribution and collection, markable quizzes, wikis, blogs, discussion boards, exam management, and grading management (Alharbi & Drew, 2014; Park, N., Lee, K.M., & Cheong, P. H., 2007; Sinclair & Aho, 2017; Toland, S., White, J., Mills, D., & Bolliger, D. U., 2014; Tsai, 2015).

The authors recognize that in current CALL research and literature, the terms CMS and LMS (Learning Management System) are both used frequently and interchangeably. As noted above, the authors' understanding of the term CMS applies to Blackboard® or Moodle®, and an LMS applies to M-Reader® or Xreading® - two platforms which strictly support Extensive Reading (ER) only. Furthermore, the authors acknowledge that throughout this paper, LMS-focused research is used to support their investigation into Blackboard® CMS adoption and use because, for many researchers, Blackboard® is both. As such, and despite efforts to use 'CMS' consistently throughout this article, for the sake of simplicity the authors will treat the terms equally and not draw a strict difference between them.

This chapter, an enhanced version of a previously published research paper (viz., Milliner & Cote, 2016) reports on faculty adoption and application of the Blackboard CMS in a university-level English language program and examines faculty perceptions of the Blackboard CMS according to a TAM analysis. As e-learning coordinators in the English language program, the authors are interested in increasing adoption of the CMS and developing a more robust e-learning component in the curriculum.

CMS USE IN THE UNIVERSITY CLASSROOM

There is a growing interest among English educators to use technology as a way to bring students closer to authentic texts and facilitate stronger communication in the foreign language (Toland, S., White, J., Mills, D., & Bolliger, D. U., 2014). Indeed, as Basal (2015) claims, the language teaching industry requires the use of technologies more than any other field of social sciences. The use of technologies in the language learning process *can increase motivation, decrease anxiety, foster more student-centered activities, provide students with authentic materials and audiences* (Erben, 2013, p. 17, as cited in Basal, 2015). A CMS could be used in a language class to: provide assessment feedback, manage assignment submissions, deliver vocabulary or grammar drills, share authentic content, write a blog, send email, and archive a repository of resources and materials. A CMS allows access anytime from any location

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