

Chapter 18

LMS for Information Science Students in an Open Distance E-Learning Institution in South Africa

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ABSTRACT

In an open distance e-learning (ODEL) environment, the lack of infrastructure causes certain obstacles that result in students not utilising the learning management systems (LMS). The aim of this study was to examine the usability and reliability of myUnisa as the LMS used for teaching Information Science at the University of South Africa (UNISA). In the particular context, a quantitative research approach was followed, and a questionnaire was designed and distributed as a web survey in an attempt to reach scattered respondents. The research findings show that the majority of students appreciate myUnisa as being reliable in for information science students. Also, students find learning on myUnisa more convenient than face-to-face instruction, as it offers more flexibility. This study recommends all students being provided with the internet as an access tool as well as the provision of free internet access or lower charges in data bundles to all registered UNISA students.

INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

The rapid growth of new resulted in the need of transformation between higher education institutions and students interact. As citadels of tertiary education, universities are expected to play a prominent role in transforming higher education so that becomes relevant to modern societies. In order to keep up with these developments and demands, higher education institutions in both developed and developing countries have to strategise on how to match the emerging technologies with pedagogical intentions and students' diverse needs. Higher education institutions need to implement and apply strategies that are flexible and responsive to the changing needs of students. One of these strategies is the adaptation and use of Learning Management Systems (LMS) in universities.

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The use of LMS in higher education has been promoted as a means of modernising learning material; improving learning outcomes; and enhancing student engagement (Grant-Smith, Donnet, Macaulay & Chapman, 2019). The social demand for improved utilisation of and access to higher education has stimulated the rapid growth of LMS and e-learning adoption (Oh & Yoon 2014).

The LMS is used in conjunction with e-learning systems. The two technologies are used by academic institutions to reduce cost; attract more students; and meet the educational needs of students (Arpaci, 2015). Universities have different teaching and learning strategies as part of promoting e-learning as a pedagogically-driven initiative that enhances traditional learning experiences. Higher education institutions have a mandate to identify, recruit, employ and develop skilled human capital capable of teaching online courses as well as ensuring that students acquire the knowledge and skills to use LMS.

This research was conducted at the University of South Africa (UNISA), which is currently classified as an Open Distance e-Learning (ODEL) university (Ngubane-Mokiwa, 2017). The transition from distance learning to an ODeL at UNISA has created numerous opportunities for teaching, learning, research and reaching out to dispersed students (Kunene & Barnes, 2017).

The distance education mode, made discussion classes compulsory, even though more emphasis was placed on written assignments. The tuition was done through written instructions in the form of tutorial letters, workbooks and course outlines. The distance education mode has limitations in terms of course delivery. Lecturers and instructors are limited to teach the content in the in the prescribed tutorial letter. The lecturers' teaching and assessment by the course outline .

The ODeL philosophy caters for innovative tuition strategies and it promotes the blended learning mode (Tarhini, Mohammed & Maqableh, 2016; Ossiannilsson, 2018),. This mode combines traditional and online learning (Arinto, 2016; Buyuk, Kocdar & Bozkurt, 2017; Ossiannilsson, 2018). The blended learning mode opens opportunities to large numbers of students to enrol in higher education to acquire formal qualifications (Manwaring, Larsen, Graham, Henrie & Halverson, 2017). The blended learning mode accommodates students irrespective of their technological competencies.

ODEL has been further investigated as a framework that is premised on the assumption that every student involved in learning should be supported by emerging electronic technologies and other digital facilities (Mncube, Dube & Ngulube, 2017; Ngubane-Mokiwa, 2017). At UNISA, tuition is offered through the LMS through myUnisa whereby learning material are accessed by students (UNISA Policy, 2011). The study recognises that, in an ODeL environment, academics and administrators have no right to prescribe a particular mode of study for student.

UNISA offers a diverse choice of study fields at various levels ranging from certificates to degrees and post graduate studies to more than 400 000 students from across South Africa, Africa and other parts of the world. UNISA is made up of the following nine colleges: Accounting Sciences, Agriculture & Environmental Sciences, Economic & Management Sciences, Education, Graduate Studies, Human Sciences, Law, Science; Engineering & Technology and the School for Business Leadership (SBL) (UNISA Web, 2018).

Furthermore, this study focused on one department at UNISA namely: the Department of Information Science. The purpose of the Department is to produce Library and Information Science (LIS) professionals, who are responsible for transforming the societal, technological, political and economic challenges affecting information users and institutions (Rubin, 2017; Hislop, Bosua, & Helms, 2018). In addition, the work of LIS professionals involves knowledge creation, acquisition, organisation, dissemination and the utilisation of information (Sinkula, Baker & Noordewier, 1997; Rowley, 1999; Nonaka, Toyama & Konno, 2000; Darroch, 2005; Fari & Ocholla, 2015; Frega, Ferraresi, Quandt & da Veiga, 2018). The multidisciplinary nature of LIS theory and practice necessitates an investigation into the way in which

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