Teachers’ Attitudes Towards the use of Moodle Platform in Teaching Philological Academic Courses

Extended summary

Although the learning platform Moodle, which is based on a social-constructivist approach to teaching and learning, is not a new tool in university teaching, it is unclear how far its potential to support collaboration and the transfer from teacher-centered to student-centered learning is being exploited in the classroom. Numerous studies on the use of Moodle in learning settings highlight the significant and effective role of this system in fostering group work, interactivity, and autonomy in learning (Boelens et al., 2018; Stein & Graham, 2014; Wang, 2009). However, it is a considerable challenge to find the ways of instigating student interaction for writing assignments, which are usually performed individually, and which form a substantial part of philological studies.

In this paper we examine how Moodle is currently being used in this context. The aim of the paper is threefold: (a) to determine the types of activities frequently used to achieve different teaching goals, (b) to discuss the reasons why others are neglected, but also (c) to analyze whether the platform is used to encourage active learners’ participation and interaction and to what extent. The analyzed data was obtained during the summer term of 2017/2018 through an online survey, which was answered by forty-four teachers and teaching associates working at philological departments at six higher education institutions in Serbia, Croatia and Slovenia.
The survey questions covered the following points related to the use of Moodle: context, types of assignments, characteristics of the teacher-student interaction, the limitations of its use and the ways in which these limitations were overcome. A mixed method approach is applied in the analysis of the data and the quantitative data are analyzed by means of descriptive statistics and non-parametric tests (chi-squared test, the McNemar test and the Kruskal-Wallis test). The results indicate that in the courses surveyed, Moodle is used with small and large groups for the purposes of an efficient teacher-student communication, improving presentation or facilitating access to course materials, and for assessing student engagement with assignments - all of which are examples of usage which supports a transmissionist rather than a collaborative approach to teaching and learning.

Research into the use of learning management systems in online and face-to-face classroom settings shows that they are primarily seen as tools that enable access to learning materials (cf. Eraković & Lazović, 2017) and that the shift to collaborative online learning usually occurs after the system has been used for at least five to six years (Ertmer, 2005:27). This research, however, shows that the teaching model does not change regardless of the number of years the system has been incorporated in the course.

In order for Moodle to be used in a way which is more in line with a social-constructionist epistemology, training for its usage should also include raising awareness of the benefits of this kind of approach. As shown, without the user’s proper knowledge of all the possibilities and functionalities it offers, Moodle may serve as a resource repository, which consequently puts its collaborative potential aside. For this reason, new types of collaborative activities need to be developed and tested (e.g. the use of the embedded Google Doc application), which would also facilitate peer collaboration on textual assignments.

Keywords: Moodle, university teaching, philological courses, collaborative teaching and learning.

References


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