Chapter 15

An Evaluation of WebCT Course Content Management System at the University of Botswana

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ABSTRACT

This study evaluated a WebCT course content management (CCMS) system at the University of Botswana. Survey methodology was used and questionnaires were distributed to 503 students selected from six faculties, and an in-depth interview were conducted involving (20) twenty lecturers who teach via the WebCT platform. Findings reveal that, generally, WebCT CCMS is doing well at the University of Botswana and that the system has been a success. The results also confirm the quality of course materials uploaded on the system, that is, service quality and the quality of the teaching and learning via the system. Furthermore, by learning through WebCT, students are able to self regulate their learning and, given the opportunity, they are ready to use and continue learning using the WebCT platform. Results also indicate that generally students are satisfied with the performance of WebCT and that there are many benefits associated with the system in context to teaching and learning at the university. Problems associated with WebCT CCMS that are experienced by staff and students of the University include access, network/server failure, lack of link between ITS and WebCT, lack of teaching expertise using WebCT, and failure to remove completed courses from the system.

DOI: 10.4018/978-1-4666-0041-6.ch015
INTRODUCTION

The use and adoption of WebCT is gaining popularity in higher education the world over (Alhhayat et al., 2004). WebCT course content management system is a class of Information System that manages teaching and learning. It is a system developed to support and enhance the organizational processes of content creation, storage and retrieval, transfer, delivery and application. WebCT is an integrated, user–machine system for providing information or content to support teaching and learning operations, management, analysis and decision-making. Based on these actions, it is thus clear that WebCT is similar to early Information system ideas as defined by Delone and Mclean (1992, 2003), and Davis and Olson (1985). To these authors, an “information system collects, transmits, processes, and stores data on an organization’s resources, programmes, and accomplishments. The system makes possible the conversion of these data into management information for use by decision makers within the organization; and thereby produces information that supports the management functions of an organization. However, it is generally accepted that the evaluation of information systems is complex. Evaluation from multiple, interrelated success dimensions on both a stakeholder and technical perspective is more likely to capture changes in performance than one single item or even a set of financial measures (Segars & Grover, 1998). WebCT evaluation is recognized as one of the problematic issues that can be interpreted in many different ways.

Ferguson, Hilder, and Kelly (2005) have pointed out that one hardly needs to labour the point that information systems evaluation is a critical activity. Given the overwhelming scope and emergence of course content management system in the e-learning environment, it is important for information system professionals to develop the means to evaluate this new service and delivery system. As observed by Ferguson et al., (2005), there has been considerable research into the evaluation of information systems. The considerable financial investment by organizations in information systems underlines the importance of evaluation for IS researchers and practitioners (Saarinen, 1996, p. 103). Evaluation occurs twice in the traditional structural systems analysis and design approach: first, in the feasibility phase in which an attempt is made to establish the likely impact and cost, and, second, in the form of a post-implementation evaluation, which is an attempt to measure the impact the system has actually had (Smithson & Hirschheim, 1998, p. 160, Serafeimidis, 2002, p. 172). This second approach focuses on issues of whether the project was delivered on time, whether the budget was enough and whether it met the specifications (Smithson & Hirschheim, 1998, p. 162). The second approach to evaluation of information systems indicated above is chosen for this study. This is because it is an attempt to measure the benefits of WebCT course content management system after implementation to determine its success in terms of its actual benefits on the primary consumers who are the students.

It should be noted that the evaluation of the WebCT system can be done from various perspectives. For instance, the system can be evaluated from the point of view of the administrative and academic staff; the technical staff and the content of the system. However, an evaluation of the success of the system from the students’ perspective was chosen in this study because they are the primary users of the system.

Several problems associated with WebCT have been identified in the literature. For instance, the inability to meet the usability requirements of the students or staff members, confusing navigation systems and multiple screen designs within the same course (Storey et al., 2000). According to the UB WebCT Report 2007, WebCT off campus access is still unpredictable and unstable. For instance, there were several reports of access problem, students’ assignments submissions not being sorted out by IDs and surname, lost or forgotten
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