Students’ Perceptions of the Utilization of Learning Management System (LMS) Features: A Case Study of a Geology Course at KFUPM, Saudi Arabia

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ABSTRACT

Utilization of the LMS in teaching is a very crucial and important issue. It will reflect on the students better learning and understanding of the subject. The current practices of student-centered learning (where students contribute to the subject and get involved in the learning process) can also be applied very effectively through using the LMS. This paper summarizes students’ perceptions and point of view of utilizing LMS learning features and how important it is to their study and comprehension of the course subjects. The study was conducted on a geology graduate course (Advanced Structural Geology) taught in Earth Sciences Department, at KFUPM. Several features of the LMS were used, including e-mail, announcement, course content, and online discussion. A survey seeking students’ perceptions of the utilization of the LMS in teaching was prepared and the learning measurement was determined through the level of satisfaction of students and how much the experiment added to their learning. The study showed that students are favoring the online discussion and considered it as a very effective tool that helped them in their understanding and comprehension of the course subject. Moreover, other features, such as email, announcement, and grade-book, were also of importance from the students’ point of view as they enhance their contact with the instructor and provide them with feedback on their performance.

Keywords: Learning Measurement, LMS Features, Online Discussion, Student Learning, Structural Geology

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USING ELEARNING IN EDUCATION

elearning, not like traditional education, as it takes students to their higher limit of learning capabilities that depend on constructive and interactive approach. Palloff and Pratt (2001) indicated that the key success in elearning is that it will not stop at the content limit, but exceeded to students involvement in the subject. Additionally, using e learning in education is considered to be an important strategy of delivering knowledge. One of the several advantages of e learning is its flexibility and availability which is related to the nature of this type of education. The flexibility and availability nature of e learning also encourage acquiring knowledge in asynchronous times which in turn allow student to be more independent and controller of his/her education. This in turn will create and develop deeper learning within students and will also allow students to be more creative and engaged with the subject. Therefore, those advantages of e learning make it a very important approach of education that let students to be more attached and linked to the subject and be more interactive with the learning process.

The LMS (Learning Management System) is one of the effective tools that can be used for fulfilling several of the indicated e learning features. The effectiveness of the LMS can be noticed through the flexibility and availability of the content and through the students’ engagement with and contribution to the subject. Collaborative learning through discussion and e mails are also part of the effective use of LMS in teaching. Brown (1997) further emphasized that “Having access to a rich information source and the freedom for learners to determine their own pathways through it is only one half of the equation. Students also need to be able to collaborate in the learning process...”

UTILIZATION OF THE LEARNING MANAGEMENT SYSTEM (LMS)

Adoption and utilization of LMS (learning management system) in education became essential and necessary for better education and teaching at present time. The term LMS is used interchangeable with term CMS (course management system). However, Shankar, (2007) defined the features and functions of each terms and showed the differences between them. He further emphasized that “CMS supports long term classroom sessions, while an LMS supports a number of short training events.” Through the LMS the instructor can practice several aspects of effective learning such as student-centered learning, self-depended learning, writing and communication skills and collaborate learning. Those issues will reflect on the students’ comprehension of the subject. However, those issues will not be achieved unless they are considered as part of the teaching strategy when using the LMS and not only utilizing it as a tool. Additionally, Al-Busaidi, and Al-Shihi (2010), indicated that the adoption of LMS by instructor depends on several factors related to; the instructor, the organization and the technology. Among the factors that related to instructor are the teaching style and personal innovativeness. Moreover, among the five ways of using LMS effectively is the learning measurement that suggested by Gautam (2010). Measuring of learning will be achieved through the ensuring of that the inputs received from stakeholders are aligned with the objective of using of the LMS. If this issue is achieved then the LMS utilization will be considered as an effective learning.

The term LMS used in this paper refers to the Blackboard CE8 platform provided by KFUPM (King Fahd University of Petroleum & Minerals). The main purpose of providing the LMS at KFUPM is to enable faculty members to upload, and deliver their course contents, and to utilize it for better education through communication and engagement with students.
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