Adoption and Application of CMS: Crucial Steps for an Effective E-Learning Component

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ABSTRACT

Many tertiary institutions tout their implementation of e-learning technology as a way to lure prospective students, and promised implementation of e-learning strategies in college programs is crucial for securing valuable federal government grants. At the core of most e-learning strategies is the institution’s course management system (CMS). A CMS facilitates efficient course management, increased learning outcomes, and greater student autonomy. However, getting faculty and staff to adopt the CMS has proved challenging (Black, Beck, Dawson, Jinks & DiPietro, 2007). Applying a modified technology acceptance model (TAM) (Alharbi & Drew, 2014), teachers in a university-level English language program were asked to share their opinions about the Blackboard® CMS. This study reports on faculty application of the Blackboard CMS, faculty perceptions of the Blackboard CMS according to a TAM analysis, and presents steps for augmenting the effective use of the CMS in all English courses.

KEYWORDS
CALL, CALL Teacher Training, CMS Training for Faculty, ELF Teacher Training, Language Teacher Professional Development, Teacher Education in CALL, Technology Acceptance Model

INTRODUCTION

Online learning or e-learning has become a crucial component of most tertiary institution’s education initiatives (Alharbi & Drew, 2014; Park, Lee & Cheong, 2008). Moreover, 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. 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 at times convenient for them. Moreover, students can schedule class work around family or part-time work, and a CMS facilitates learning through a variety of activities (McCabe & Meuter, 2011). 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 et al., 2008; Toland et al., 2014).

This study aims to report on faculty application of the Blackboard CMS in a university-level English as a lingua Franca (ELF) program, share the faculty perceptions of the Blackboard CMS according to a TAM analysis, and present steps for augmenting the effective use of the CMS in all ELF classes.

**CMS Use in the English 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, et al., 2014). A CMS could be used in an English as a foreign language context to: track learning progress; practice online communication in English using blogs, wikis or discussion boards; and, share links to authentic texts. Students are able to access the CMS anytime, anywhere, likewise the CMS provides a context for students to become more responsible and reflect on their learning, which according to Toland et al. (2014) can foster higher degrees of student autonomy.

Over the last decade, as course management systems have spread in acceptance among higher education institutions, a number of reports on English teaching faculty use and perceptions of CMSs have emerged. In Saudi Arabia, Fargeeh (2011) used surveys and interviews to investigate both learners’ and English teachers’ adoption of the Blackboard CMS. The study concluded that inadequate or a complete lack of teacher training has contributed to reluctance to use the CMS. Moreover, recognizing the rapid changes in e-learning technology, Fargeeh recommended ongoing teacher training coupled with training in software evaluation as a strategy to overcome teacher resistance to technological change. Commenting on the limitations of his study, Fargeeh mentioned that the influence of cultural background, prior educational history, and e-learning experience should be considered in future studies.

At a private Japanese university, Toland, White, Mills and Bolliger (2014) reviewed English teaching faculty perceptions of their institutions’ CMS and used the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) framework to guide focus group interviews of the English language teachers. To encourage acceptance of the system, the authors advocated the following: software training tailored to meet the needs of teachers, training sessions which were more interactive and providing teachers with financial incentives to attend such workshops. The authors concluded that their findings would have been enhanced with a mixed methods approach (e.g., asking teachers to complete a questionnaire), and that future research should investigate actual instructor usage of the CMS within their educational setting.

**The Technology Acceptance Model**

First suggested over 25 years ago (Davis, 1989), the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) is a theory that models how users of information systems come to accept and use a technology. The TAM model considers the factors that affect an individual’s intention to use computer systems or a software application and explores the interaction between two key variables: perceived usefulness and perceived ease of use.

The variable perceived usefulness (PU) was identified by Davis (1989, p. 320) as the extent to which a software application augments the user’s job performance. In the context of this study, PU could be defined as the degree to which CMS enables a teacher to do their job more effectively. Perceived ease of use (PEOU) considers whether the performance benefits of a software or program outweigh the effort to use an application. The TAM model has been rigorously tested and modified for analysis purposes over a range of technology usage settings (Afari & Khine; 2014; Fathema & Sutton, 2013; Park, Lee & Cheong, 2008; Park, 2009). In addition, the TAM has been found to
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