Chapter 11

MyLO: Collaborative Learning through Web-Based Courseware Applications

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ABSTRACT

As one of the key infrastructures within web-based learning, courseware is adopted by schools and universities to enable a systematic learning delivery and education management. Students in both traditional face-to-face learning and online courses can benefit from this technology. The wide range of courseware platforms are supporting course needs by offering great flexibility in information delivery, communication services, and collaboration. This chapter looks at the role of web-based courseware in tertiary education, using MyLO (My Learning Online) as an example. It reveals that courseware systems like MyLO have a great potential in facilitating collaborations and enhance interactions among lecturers and students. To achieve this, potential efforts from all perspective are required; including students, lecturers and faculties.

INTRODUCTION

The world has become a digital world since two decades ago. The dramatically growing technology and networks have permeated into almost all areas within the society, including science, business as well as the field of education. In the tertiary education sector, the use of computer assisted learning (CAL) has also become prominent. Universities and other higher education institutions have been
adopting web-based courseware systems to support their students in both traditional classrooms as well as in online courses. These courseware platforms systematically support course needs by assisting information delivery, providing communication services, and offering collaborative learning tools (De Moor, 2007). They allow course contents and resources to be delivered in a much more flexible and exiting manner, and therefore, provide university students and teaching staff with a more convenient way to teach and learn.

The learning-technology environment of Australian universities involve a variety type of courseware applications, such as cloud-based service, university owned server, and desktop applications. The current technology environment is shifting from being dominated by a large number of desktop applications to having cloud-based services as the dominant of CAL education. This chapter looks at the central courseware system, My Learning Online (MyLO), at the University of Tasmania. It takes MyLO as an example to examine the utilisation of web-based courseware systems in the Australian university context. The functions and elements of MyLO will be examined. Lastly, this chapter discusses the important of courseware evaluation in creating an effective and meaningful web-based learning environment within the Australian universities context. This chapter provides readers with a new angle to view the role of web-based courseware in tertiary education, as well as an analysis on the trend of collaborative learning through web-based courseware applications.

**POSITION OF WEB-BASED COURSEWARE**

To understand the role of web-based courseware in teaching and learning, the other related terms and definitions must firstly be understood. “Educational software” is a widely used term in computer assisted education. It indicates to a type of computer software which is designed with a specific purpose of assisting teaching and learning. Educational software appears in various formats, according to its intended aims, including home learning software, classroom aids, courseware, etc. Web-based educational software is a particular type of educational software which operates fully or partially via the internet. It is vary in the objects of learning activities served and assisted, for example, a class, a seminar, a subject, or a course.

In this chapter, courseware refers to a specific type of educational software. It is used to offer information and communication services, and to support course needs within tertiary education contexts (De Moor, 2007). In large education institutions like universities, educational software packages are serving to support teaching across all courses, as well as to create independent asynchronous courses, which allow students to study or gain degrees off campers. The term courseware refers to these online learning systems in building virtual learning environments at universities. It appears in a variety of formats, such as html pages and PDF files, etc. Recently, higher education in most Australian universities is supplemented with courseware systems, for instance, the My Learning Online (MyLO) at the University of Tasmania, the MyUTS at the University of Technology, Sydney, and the Learning Management System (LMS) at the University of Melbourne. Students are accommodated by this online platform, which provides them with opportunities to interact with their instructors and to learn at anytime and any location.

Two types of web-based courseware systems are used by Australian universities and other tertiary education institutions. Since the mid-seventies, a variety of web-based courseware applications have been published. As a result of the rapid development of networks and web-based technologies, students’ demand of well designed courseware systems is also increasing. In tertiary education institutions nowadays, students call for high quality software that is designed