LEARNERS' FEEDBACK ON THE EFFECTIVENESS OF TEACHING ENGLISH AS A SECOND LANGUAGE USING A LEARNING MANAGEMENT SYSTEM

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Abstract

This particular study aimed at determining the meanings/sense learners give to their autonomous learning situation in an online learning management system. The problem is centered around the learners and seeks to find out how these learners rate/perceive their learning process an whether the instructional design of the online environment can assist in the learning of English(as a Second or Foreign Language). It also seeks to find out whether there are significant differences between respondents from the Institute of distance education IDE (University of Swaziland, Swaziland) (distance learners) and respondents who take the same coursein a conventional learning environment (i.e. a classroom setting), and distance learning respondents from the Shanghai Open University (Shanghai, China).The objectives assisted the researchers to look at previous TAM Models and determine whether Moodle as it is used at the University of Swaziland fits in the model. The research proposes a revised TAM model.The main research questions were the following:(1) What is the learners' feedback on the institutional delivery of their English course(s) in the online learning management system? Research question one has various components, including perceived usefulness of the LMS, actual usage, etc.,(2) Is there a significant difference in the feedback between distance learners (off-campus) and traditional (on-campus) students? In general the researchers positioned their methodology from a qualitative approach. In order to answer the main research question, namely what meaning/sense do learners give their autonomous learning situation in an online learning management system, or how learners view their learning process, the researcher used a questionnaire which was distributed to all participants in the study – 29 in total for the University of Swaziland and 132 in total for the Shanghai Open University. In addition to the above-mentioned topics which were surveyed using a multiple choice type of question, there were five open-ended questions to further probe the respondent's feelings and opinions. These looked at the reasons for liking or disliking the learning management system, the actual experiences with the LMS, the way the lecturers "used" the LMS and how the respondents felt the University could use the LMS to enhance the teaching/learning environment.

Keywords: learning management system – distance learners – English language – TAM model

INTRODUCTION

This particular study aimed at determining the meanings/sense learners give to their autonomous learning situation in a learning management system such as Moodle. The problem is centered around the learners and the study sought to find out how these learners rate/perceive their learning process and whether the instructional design of the environment in Moodle can assist in the learning of a course like ENG302 (Writing, composition and stylistics) or general English as a Foreign language courses. It also sought to find out whether there were significant differences between respondents from the Institute of distance education IDE (distance learners) and respondents who take the same course but on a conventional university basis, and distance learning respondents from the Shanghai Open University (Shanghai, China).

Background to the Study

The Institute of Distance Education of the University of Swaziland is a fast-growing institute set up in 1994 within the University of Swaziland to receive learners that are unable to attain entry into the mainstream, conventional University environment. A variety of reasons for their "exclusion" exist, but the main one seems to be that there is insufficient space for all the learners in Swaziland with the needed attributes for entry at university level. A parallel course exists for most University of Swaziland courses, such as the courses in the Department of English. Since two years the researcher has been trying to develop a Moodle environment to manage the teaching and learning of this course, for both the distance (IDE) learner and the conventional student. The researcher teaches both the conventional and the distance learners which gives her the advantage of being able to compare the learners' reactions to this learning system. The learners at Uniswa are keen to learn online but do not seem very actively involved. The study therefore also aims at discovering what is "blocking" the learners from taking on this mode of learning.

The Shanghai Open University (SOU), formerly known as Shanghai Television University, is an open university conducting distance education based on telecommunication, broadcasting & television, and computer and other technology based subject courses. On July 25, 2012, the university officially changed its name to Shanghai Open University, and now offers Associate and Bachelor degrees. Most of the registered students in Shanghai Open University (SOU) are adults with 3-5 years' working experience on the average. Unlike the full-time students in a traditional university, learning perhaps is not the priority of the part-time working adult students since theyhave many other responsibilities relating to their jobs, families as well as social life and this is understandable. In order to offer more effective learner support to our busy students, teachers in SOU are supposed to adopt a blended model of teaching, i.e. classroom tutorial session plus online learner support. The classroom tutorial sessions are conducted in a quite traditionalmanner - students come to the classroom and do everything as instructed by the lecturers. As a kind of compulsory requirement to each offered course, theonline learner supportaims to make the learning for our students more convenient and flexible - to facilitate them to learn anytime anywhere. The online teaching and learning is conducted on an e-platform which SOUcalls the'online classroom', which was designed by the University around 2000 and has been developed and upgraded each year with the ever-growing demands and the fast developments of IT. To sum up, SOU students can get their academic support from **1)** tutorial sessions, usually scheduled once a week, **2)** online classroom which students visit at their personal convenience; **3)** course forums, with compulsory participation in real-time sessions; **4)** other means can be used to connect faculty members and learners through email, telephoneand short messages.

Problem Statement

The teaching of Eng302, Writing, Composition and Stylistics, to students doing a BA Humanities degree, has traditionally been tackled differently when it came to distance and conventional students. In a bid to ensure that both groups learn the same content, a Learning Management System – LMS (Moodle) is used to manage learning rhythms, contents, etc. The research aims at getting the learners' feedback of such an environment and to further contribute to the knowledge on blended learning at the University of Swaziland, as it is felt that blended learning will more and more take the forefront of educational progress.

At SOU, the teaching and learning of English as a foreign language has, since many years, been done using a blended approach. This comparative study's purpose was to find out whether this had an impact on the learners' views of their learning environment.

Objectives

The objectives of this study are to:

1. Determine learners' opinions of an online learning management system such as Moodle or the SOU's e-platform

2. Determine learners' views on possible (dis)advantages of LMSs and/or Moodle or SOU's e-platform

3. Analyze the possibilities of teaching English language courses such as ENG302 (Writing, composition and stylistics), English as a foreign language, using Moodle or any other learning platform (in addition to face-to-face classes)

4. Verify whether the learners' views are related to their educational setting (conventional face-to-face or distance blended learning)

The objectives assisted the researcher to look at previous TAM Models and determine whether Moodle as it is used at the University of Swaziland fits in the model.

The Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) is an information systems theory that models how users come to accept and use a technology. The model suggests that when users are presented with a new technology, a number of factors influence their decision about how and when they will use it, notably:

- Perceived usefulness (PU) - This was defined by Fred Davis (1989) as "the degree to which a person believes that using a particular system would enhance his or her job performance".

- Perceived ease-of-use (PEOU) - Davis (1989) defined this as "the degree to which a person believes that using a particular system would be free from effort".

The TAM has been continuously studied and expanded-the two major upgrades being the TAM 2 (Venkatesh & Davis, 2000; Venkatesh, 2000) and the Unified Theory of Acceptance and Use of Technology (or UTAUT, Venkatesh *et al.*, 2003). A TAM 3 has also been proposed (Venkatesh & Bala, 2008). We have found that, in recent years, a number of studies on education have used TAM to examine learners' willingness to accept e-learning systems (Lee, Cheung, & Chen, 2005; Liaw, in press; Ngai, Poon, & Chan, 2007; Ong, Lai, & Wang, 2004; Pan, Gunter, Sivo, & Cornell, 2005; Pituch & Lee, 2006; Raaij & Schepers, in press; Yi & Hwang, 2003) or online courses (Arbaugh, 2002; Arbaugh & Duray, 2002; Gao, 2005; Landry, Griffeth, & Hartman, 2006; Selim, 2003).

Research Questions

Research question 1: What is the learners' feedback on the institutional delivery of the ENG302 course in Moodle?

Research question one has various components, including perceived usefulness of Moodle, actual usage of Moodle, etc. These are detailed below in the relevant sections.

Research question 2: Is there a significant difference in the feedback between distance (off-campus) and conventional (on-campus) learners?

This research question wants to verify whether IDE learners and conventional learners view their learning process differently, whether they need/use Moodle for different reasons, and whether their reactions to an online learning environment are similar or different.

METHOD

In general the researcher positions her methodology from a qualitative approach. In order to answer the main research question, namely what meaning/sense do learners give their autonomous learning situation in an online learning management system such as Moodle, or how learners view

This paper has been presented at Sriwijaya University Learning and Education-International Conference 2014. Faculty of Teacher Training and Education, Sriwijaya University, Palembang, May 16—18, 2014.

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their learning process, the researcher used some qualitative methods such as surveys. The researcher prepared a questionnaire which was distributed to all participants in the Eng302 and IDE-Eng302 module. The main questions include:

- Background information regarding whether the course meets the learner's needs, enough support is received by the learner, course is well taught and learner would recommend Moodle to a friend
- Frequency and place of computer usage; internet usage for research
- Perceived usefulness of Moodle
- Perceived ease of use of Moodle
- Attitude towards Moodle
- Actual usage of Moodle in general and in the Eng302 module
- Teaching factors

In addition to the above-mentioned topics which were surveyed using a multiple choice type of question, there were five open-ended questions to further probe the respondent's feelings and opinions. These looked at the reasons for liking or disliking Moodle, the actual experiences learners have with Moodle, the way the lecturer "used" Moodle and how the respondents feel the University could use Moodle to enhance the teaching/learning environment.Before undertaking any detailed analysis, the responses the questionnaire questions had to be vetted for consistency and completeness. The population was purposefully and conveniently chosen as the researcher-lecturer was appointed as the instructor of both respondents groups. As the researcher had only 45 learners in the IDE group and 6 in the conventional group, there was no need for sampling.

As is the case in a large number of surveys the researcher asked the participants to respond to questions on an ordinal scale, such a five-point agreement scale. For example, respondents were asked to specify the extent to which they agree with a particular statement.

This study is based on the 'mixed' or 'multiple' research approach which combines a predominantly qualitative method with limited quantitative aspects. It has been argued that mixed methods can validate information and "also provide more comprehensive answers to research questions going beyond the limitations of a single approach" (PREST Module A5, 2004: 2). The issue of reliability in any kind of research is best tackled through triangulation and the researcher wants to blend the qualitative and quantitative so as to triangulate the information gathered. Macun & Pose (cited in PREST Module B1, 2004: 89) stipulate that triangulation is crucial to strengthen and verify research findings. Some limited quantitative research methods was also applied, when analysing the data to reach the study findings.

Literature Review

This section gives a brief overview of the literature in this field. In particular, information regarding research on communicative and social-constructivist approaches to learning (language learning in particular), learners' feedback and emotions regarding Moodle, on Moodle in Swaziland, at the University of Swaziland and at the Institute of Distance Education,

The Moodle LMS primarily serves the academic mission of the institution. As the context of teaching and learning changes often, both management and teaching staff need to regularly evaluate its LMS to be sure that it is supporting the academic mission and strategic goals of the university and the Institute of Distance Education. In order to adapt to pedagogical change rapidly our LMS system, Moodle, has to be equally flexible. The evaluation process should engage the campus community in

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discussion around interesting and effective teaching, raise awareness that an LMS system is more than a course website and that a good LMS can provide tools for engagement and collaboration that support active learning.

In line with communicative and social-constructivist approaches to language learning and pedagogy (Amundsen, 1993; Jonassen, Peck, & Wilson, 1999), Moodle creates an online environment for collaborative interactions between teachers and students on the first hand, and among students on the other (Brandl, 2005; Murray, & McPherson, 2004). At the University of Swaziland, in the Institute of Distance Education, management has taken up Osguthorpe and Graham's (2003) position that lecturers, tutors and learners who use the blended approach - blended learning is a combination of face-to-face with distance delivery systems- tend to maximize the benefits and the affordances of both face-to-face and online learning methodologies by using the web for what it does best, and using real class time for what it does best. Alley (2004); Somekh (2008); Dwyer et al. (1989); Modesto and Tau (2010); Dickey (2003); Brindley et al. (2004) and Bates (1997) accentuate that the best way of offering distance education is through the use of online learning technologies. They argue that offering online learning is the most appropriate way of reaching out to a large number of students regardless of their geographical position.Newhouse, (2002) posits that online learning technologies provide learners with technological literacy, increase learning motivation, and help students perform better in their subjects. In that way they become independent and responsible, become cooperative and collaborative, and become self directed learners. Brindley *et al.* (2004) further add that through the use of the internet students are able to communicate and share knowledge thus pushing the boundaries of education.

Research on learners' feedback and emotions in Moodle is not that present. Rodrigues et al. looked at emotions in a 2011 paper entitled "Moodle and Affective Computing: Knowing Who´s on the Other Side". They explicitly state that "a wide range of emotions occurs naturally in a real learning processes, from positive ones (joy, satisfaction, etc.), to negative ones (frustration, sadness, confusion), to emotions more related to interest, curiosity and surprise in front of a new topic. Emotion is characterized by "any agitation or disturbance of mind, feeling, passion; any vehement or excited mental state. There are a hundred emotions along with their combinations, variations and mutations. In fact, there are more subtleties of emotions than the words we have to define them." Already affection means briefly "the whole realm of emotions properly said, the feelings of emotions, sensory experiences, and especially the ability to be able to get in touch with the sensations" (Bercht, 2001). Emotions have a close relationship to education, because the affective state of the student directly affects the motivation and aptitude to learn something. Thus, knowing the user's affective state might play an important role improving the effectiveness and efficacy of e-learning. The unawareness of emotional states has been considered one of the core limitations of the traditional e-learning tools. Skilled teachers modify the learning path and their teaching style according to students' feedback signals (which include cognitive, emotional and motivational aspects), e-learning platforms generally don´t take into account these feedbacks signals.

Ika Febrilia and Ari Warokka investigated "The Effects of Positive and Negative Moodon University Students' Learning and Academic Performance: Evidence from Indonesia" and discovered that (1) positive mood has no influence on learning, (2) negative mood has negative influence on learning, and (3) learning has positive influence on student's academic performance.They reported on Bryan, Mathur, and Sullivan (1996) who found that there was an impact of positive mood on the performance of the students in processing information. Positive mood facilitates complex cognitive functions requiring flexibility, integration, and utilization of cognitive material such as memory,

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categorization, creative problem solving, decision-making and learning. Therefore, it is reasonable to assume that it also affects underlying cognitive organization (Isen, 1987).Korin-Lustig and Lukaric's 2008 paper entitled "Pedagogical Aspects of E-learning Implementation: What Have We Learned?" has a short, limited section where students' points of view with regard to the use of Moodle are analyzed. Their conclusions are based on a survey in which 88 percent of their respondents would like to use the Moodle environment for other courses than the one they were using it for.

The aim of Abdelraheem's (2012) study was to identify learners' perceptions of the quality of interaction in Moodle and investigate the effects of gender, grade point average (GPA), individualized learning experiences and their experiences in using Moodle factors in perceiving the quality of interaction. Results showed that students perceived the quality of interaction positively and that there were no significant differences in the means for the four variables dealt with in this study which means that the wide diffusion of computers into educational fields and into the society at large in the last few years enabled students to develop more positive perceptions of information technology applications independent from their basic individual differences such as gender, GPA, computer experience and individualized learning experience. In terms of ranking of interaction types learners show that their interaction with themselves comes in first, then with the instructors and finally with content. The study recommended that higher education institutions should continue using Moodle and encouraged faculty members to adopt it in their teaching because of its distinctive features.

Most the e-learning systems focus attention towards knowledge acquisition or cognitive processing.When building such a system, affective states (such as motivation and emotion, for instance), are considered only in terms of how the content is structured and presented. To make learning efficient and to deliver personalized content, adaptive systems are based on student's goals models, knowledge, and preferences. Thus, a student model that integrates the cognitive processes and motivational states would lead to more efficient and personalized adaptation (Cocea 2007). Transforming a non-affect sensitive e-learning system into a system that includes user's affective states requires the modeling of a cycle known as the affective loop. The affective loop encompasses detection of a user's affective states, appropriate actions selection for decision making, and the synthesis of appropriate affective state by the system (D'Mello, 2008).In Khan (2010), 4 methods to infer student´s affective states are proposed , namely a verbal approach, where a questionnaire or self-report instrument is presented to the student; a non-verbal approach where a psycho-physiological instrument measures physical states, through the use of sensors; an intrusive approach through the use of intrusive instruments to measure affective states, (although that intrusive instruments influence a student's normal affective state and may thus lead to misinformation), and a non-intrusive approach where the affective state is identified through interaction with the system.

Many liberal arts schools have adopted Moodle because of its low financial barrier to entry; however, supporting and contributing to its development can require significant resources of both time and money. As such, there is growing support for "crowdsourcing" tasks, traditionally performed by an employee or contractor, to a large group of people (or community). The Collaborative Liberal Arts Moodle Project (CLAMP) is an effort by several schools to support a continued and sustainable process for collaborations on Moodle development (e.g., sharing documentation, fixing bugs, and developing code). CLAMP membership includes the following schools (http://www.clamp-it.org/about-2/clamp-participants/).

With regard to the implementation of Moodle at the University of Swaziland, the research data are still quite tentative as few studies have been undertaken so far. Some articles, however, shed light on current trends. In E-learning with ide through a learning management system, Moodle, published in

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the IDE Newsletter of October 2009, N. Vilakati publicly announced that IDE had set up an electronic learning platform, the Moodle Learning Management System (LMS), and that selected IDE staff and students would pilot–test this platform, whose medium of instruction is computer technology.The fact that it was published in the newsletter of the Institute of Distance Education demonstrated the will of IDE to be at the forefront of educational developments in Swaziland.

In 2010, Ferreira-Meyers made a presentation entitled *Strategic alliances for online learning within the Department of Modern Languages shared the implementation steps and strategies for online learning and teaching within the Institute of Distance Education (IDE) and the Department of Modern Languages of the University of Swaziland (UNISWA).* The decision to adopt the Moodle Learning Management System (LMS) was based on interdisciplinary teamwork with key players coming from various departments and units. Central to the strategy was a core team of change agents drawn from UNISWA faculties and departments already collaborating with the IDE in offering programmes and courses to distance learners. Another critical factor of the strategy was the active involvement of students from the onset, to incorporate their views during all phases, namely the design, development and delivery of the LMS. The paper, after a discussion of some of the challenges involved, reported on an implementation plan involving both students and staff members to probe their views on the online environment. In July 2011, K. Ferreira-Meyers and J. Nkosi published a follow-up paper entitled *Academic literacy at the University of Swaziland: Incorporating the enquiry-based approach into Moodle as a possible response to literacy development*. The main purpose of this paper was to analyze tools and methods to enhance literacy skills (reading, writing, use of academic language, technical literacy, information literacy, knowledge of cultural context) of University of Swaziland learners, a majority of whom enter the University with limited skills. In this paper the researchers focused on the resources and strategies proposed by the Department of Academic Communication Skills (English) and the Department of Modern Languages (French and Portuguese) to ensure that the learners' literacy skills are developed through the courses they follow.

Until recently, limited research had been made regarding the acceptance of Moodle and online learning at the University of Swaziland in general and at the Institute of Distance Education in particular. P.S. Maphanga's 2012 MA study entitled *Factors Affecting the Adoption and Implementation of Online Learning at the Institute of Distance Education in Swaziland* identified the factors that are perceived to support or inhibit the adoption and implementation of online learning at the IDE, and strategies that are seen as effective in facilitating its adoption and implementation. His findings showed that there were institutional factors, personal factors and external factors that both supported and acted as barriers to the adoption and implementation of online learning at the IDE. The study proposed strategies that might strengthen the supportive factors and overcome the barriers to adoption and implementation of online learning at the IDE. The conclusion drawn from the study was that there were more barriers than supporting factors and that this explains the slow adoption and implementation to online learning at the Institute. It also shows that while similar factors operate on the adoption and implementation of online learning at IDE as those identified in the literature, there are some factors which are particular to the IDE itself, and the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) (Davis *et al*., 1989) is thus modified to show the factors operating in this context.

As a first published study on Moodle in Swaziland, Ferreira-Meyers, K. and G. Nsibande's *Face-to-face tutorials: The case of the Institute of Distance Education and the possible introduction of Moodle*(2012) investigated the advantages of tutorials as they are undertaken at UNISWA and identify certain problem areas in this regard. While tutorials are seen as productive, they do not fully fulfill their promise of enhancing learners' knowledge, attitudes and skills. The authors contend that Moodle

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could solve some of the tutorial problems at IDE by offering additional support to the learners working at a distance.This research article makes it clear that the learners at the University of Swaziland, in particular those enrolled with the Institute of Distance Education, are ready for online learning.

Fowler, Vilakati and Sukati (2012, publication pending), *From Distance Learning to e-Learning: Experiences and Challenges from the University of Swaziland*, give a useful overview of what has been done at the University of Swaziland, Institute of Distance Education, up to now to enhance the learners' distance and e-learning experiences.

The use of technology in language teaching and learning has been the focus of a number of recent research review studies, including developments in technology and CALL research (Zhao, 2003), CALL as an academic discipline (Debski, 2003), ICT effectiveness (Felix, 2005), and subject characteristics in CALL research (Hubbard, 2005), to name a few. Such studies have contributed to clarifying how language learning technologies have been investigated, but questions remain regarding how these technologies have been used in achieving learning objectives. In 2007, Stockwell did research on the number of articles published regarding language learning and technology use. There was significant variation in the attention given to the various language skills and areas in the literature examined in the current study. Grammar was the most commonly investigated, followed by vocabulary, and then pronunciation, reading, writing (each of which had the same number of articles), listening, and finally, speaking. Empirical studies into grammar and vocabulary alone outnumbered the total of the remaining categories, indicating a tendency to focus on these two language areas.

Even though there seems to be no theoretical debate over writing as a process (Bernett 1989; Flower & Hayes 1981), classroom practices and students' understanding of this skill show that writing is still treated as a final and static product.Writing is a systematic process that involves organized steps that facilitate effectiveness in the message being conveyed.In a face-to-face classroom setting, time constraints impeded a true writing process as writing was being utilized as a means to teach and test grammar at the expense of a meaningful and academic writing that was the result of a reflective process rather than the pressure of a fifty-minute test. Writing is a skill that has attracted quite a wide range of technologies, ranging from online activities (e.g., Lee, 2005), corpora and concordancing (e.g., Chambers & O'Sullivan, 2004; Kaur & Hegelheimer, 2005), word processors (e.g., Biesenbach-Lucas & Weasenforth, 2001), online dictionaries (e.g., Kaur & Hegelheimer, 2005), and screen capture software (e.g., Glendinning & Howard, 2003). There were also examples of self-developed courseware applications such as the package created by Goodfellow, Lamy and Jones (2002), which provided automatic feedback for learners of French, and the translation commentary helper for Chinese learners of English, designed by Shei (2005). CMC technologies also featured in the literature for writing, such as Greenfield's (2003) study of ESL learners in Hong Kong exchanging emails with native speakers in the United States. However, no study looked at writing and Moodle usage. The inclusion of technology as part of the English language learning process has been widely discussed by several researchers in the field who see in it many benefits and challenges. Carter (2004) advocates that technology enhances language proficiency as it supports the integration of skills; she also highlights the promotion of a "writer-reader perspective towards written texts".

TAM is one of the most influential extensions of Ajzen and Fishbein's theory of reasoned action (TRA) in the literature. It was developed by Fred Davis and Richard Bagozzi (Davis, 1989; Bagozzi, Davis & Warshaw, 1992). Bagozzi, Davis and Warshaw states that because new technologies such as personal computers are complex, people form attitudes and intentions toward trying to learn to use the new technology prior to initiating efforts directed at using. Attitudes towards usage and intentions to use may be ill-formed or lacking in conviction. Therefore, actual usage may not be a

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direct or immediate consequence of such attitudes and intentions. Earlier research on the diffusion of innovations also suggested a prominent role for perceived ease of use. Tornatzky and Klein (1982) analyzed the adoption, finding that compatibility, relative advantage, and complexity had the most significant relationships with adoption across a broad range of innovation types. Several researchers have replicated Davis's original study to provide empirical evidence on the relationships that exist between usefulness, ease of use and system use (Adams, Nelson & Todd 1992; Davis 1989; Hendrickson, Massey & Cronan 1993; Segars & Grover 1993; Subramanian 1994; Szajna 1994). Venkatesh and Davis extended the original TAM model to explain perceived usefulness and usage intentions in terms of social influence and cognitive instrumental processes. In an attempt to integrate the main competing user acceptance models, Venkatesh *et al.* (2003) formulated the Unified Theory of Acceptance and Use of Technology (UTAUT).

Data Collection

The questionnaire was distributed and administered to all IDE and conventional students by the researcher in person. In total 50 questionnaires were distributed, 29 were returned with answers (all learners majoring in English). This is equivalent to a 58 percent response rate, which is acceptable for this type of survey. In Shanghai, the questionnaire was filled by 132 learners: 61 majoring in English, the remaining 71 taking English as a non-majoring subject.

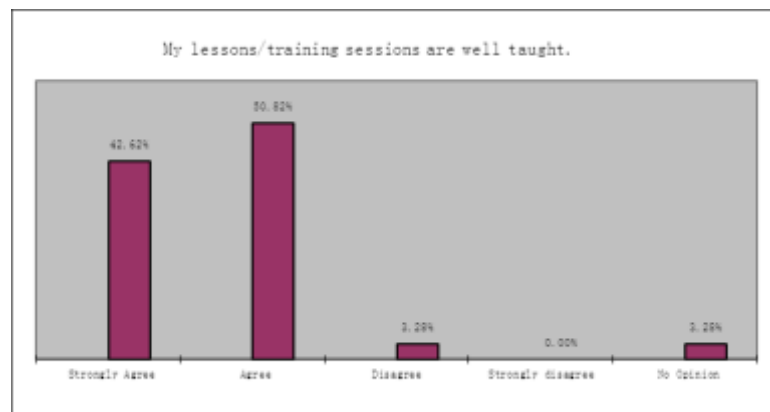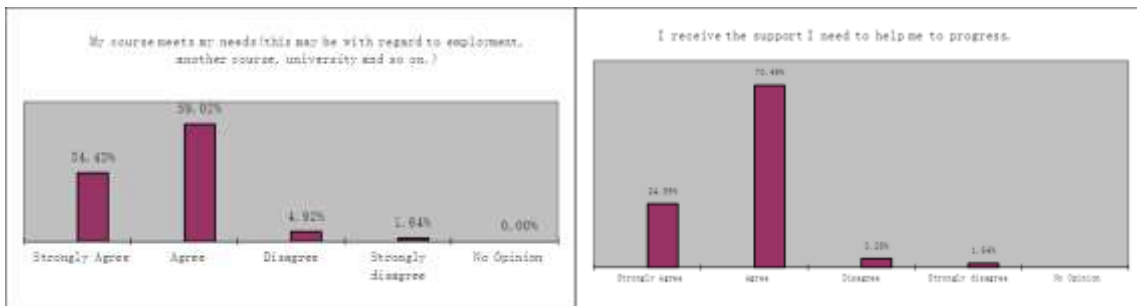## Data Analysis and Discussion of Results

As is the case in a large number of surveys the researcher asked the participants to respond to most of the survey questions on an ordinal scale, such a five-point agreement scale. For example, respondents were asked to specify the extent to which they agree with a particular statement. They were offered the choice of: strongly agree, agree, neither agree nor disagree, disagree, or strongly disagree. It is common practice to convert the ordinal scale to its numerical equivalent (e.g. the numbers 1 to 5) and to analyze the data as if they were simple numerical data. However, seen the small number of responses (26 for the IDE group and 3 for the conventional students) the information was analyzed as such; there was no need to convert them in numerical data. Other questions had a choice of true/false as their answer, while still others had very important, somewhat important, not important and not applicable. One last set of questions needed the respondents to answer yes or no.

Summary of Findings
Background information

The majority of respondents indicated that the ENG302 course met their needs (even though these needs were not specified by the researcher, and no space was given for the respondents to specify their needs). They also agreed that they receive the necessary support and that their lessons were well taught. 22 out of 29 respondents would recommend the Moodle platform to a friend, this is 75,86 percent, an overwhelming majority.
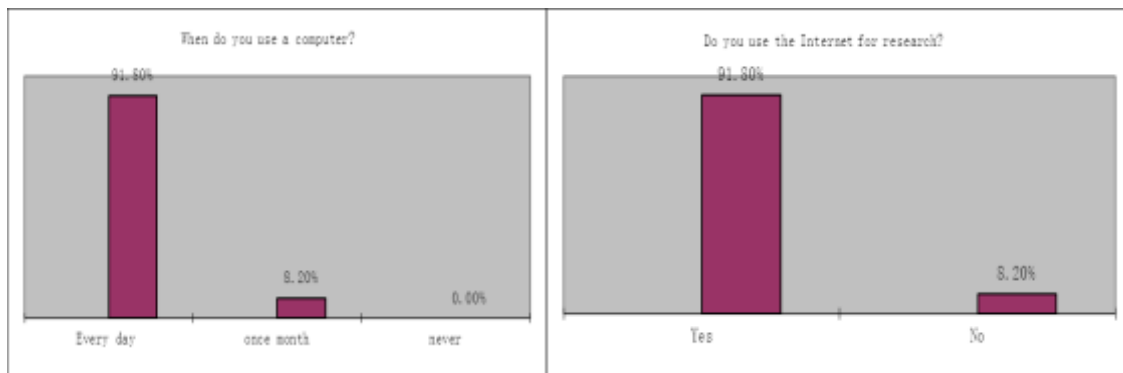
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For SOU, the responses of the learners taking English as a major were thus:

Frequency and place of computer usage; internet usage for research:

The findings for this section are positive too. All respondents use the internet for research. This means that they have the basic skills required for more active Moodle participation. Also, most respondents use the computers at the university, which indicates that further investment in computer laboratories, or wifi access would be more than welcome. 20 out of 29 (68,97%) respondents use the computer daily, while the remaining 9 use it weekly. Again, this indicated interesting prospects for Moodle usage.

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Perceived usefulness of Moodle:

This section indicated how often respondents log in on Moodle. This is important information as it has an impact on the other answers to the survey questions. For example, one respondent indicated that s/he never logs onto Moodle, so s/he was unable to give more detailed answers with regard to layout, ease of use, etc. This showed as for many of those questions a few respondents indicated "no opinion". 4 out of 29 respondents in total logged on once a day; this represents 13.79%. 19 respondents out the 29 possible answered they logged in once a week, which represents 65.52%, and 3 indicated they logged on once a month, an equivalent to 10.34%. A possible follow-up research should find out whether the link between Moodle and their personal emails is of assistance: do they feel 'urged on' when receiving an update via email to log onto Moodle and check out further features or information?
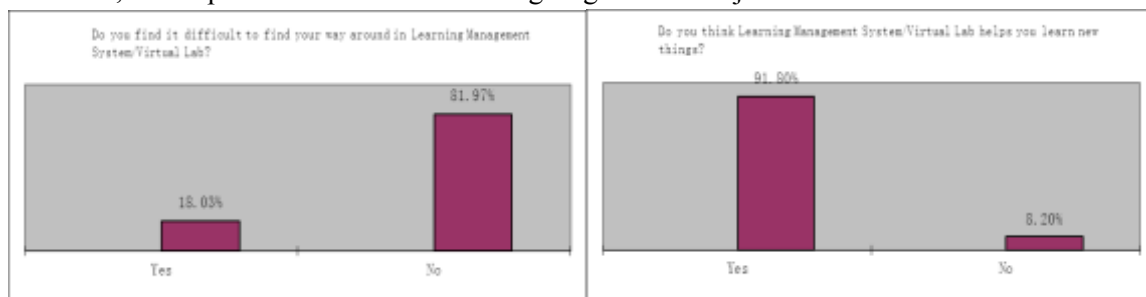
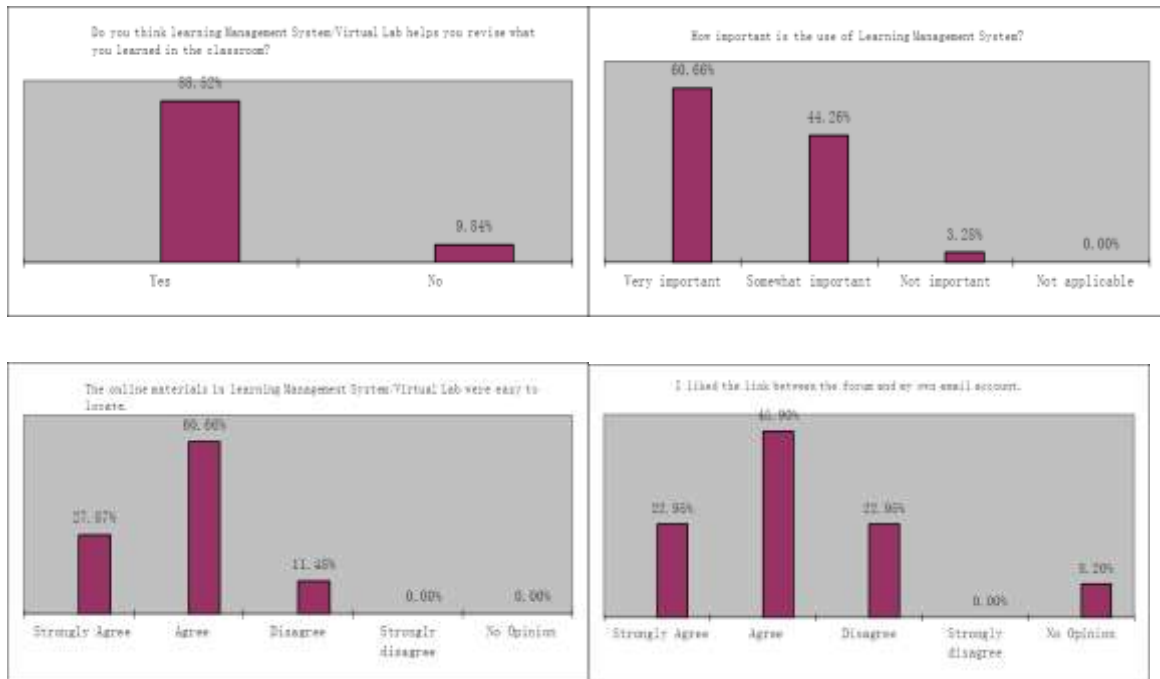For SOU, the responses of the learners taking English as a major were thus:
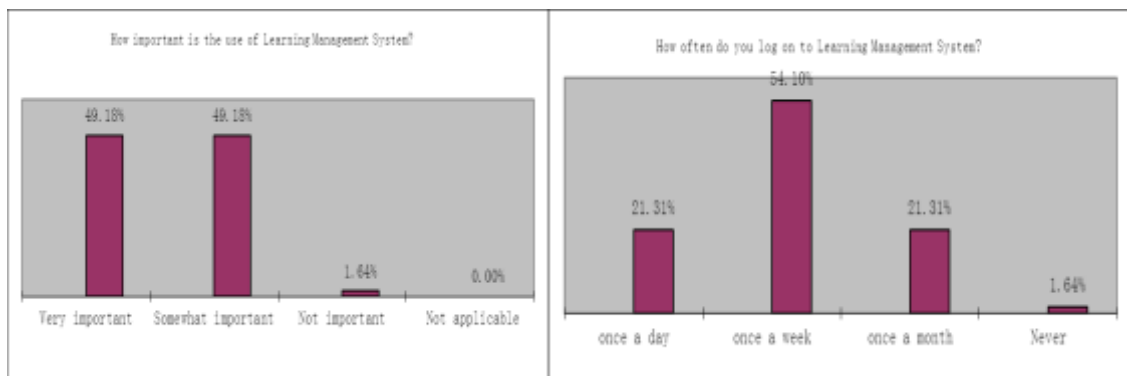
Perceived ease of use of Moodle:

This part wanted to find out whether learners feel Moodle is user-friendly. 8 learners (27,59%) found it difficult to find their way in Moodle, as compared to 19 (65,52%) finding it easy. For 21 respondents (72,41%) Moodle is helpful when it comes to learning new things and for 18 (62,07%) it is helpful in revising course material, while 7 (24,14%) did not see Moodle helping them learn new things and 10 (34,48%) did not feel Moodle helped in revising. The majority of respondents (18 out of 29, 62,07%) found the materials easy to locate and the majority (23 out of 29, 79,31%) found the link email-forum useful. An interesting interface (for 21 out of 29, 72,41%), useful topic organization (21 out of 29, 72,41%) showed that Moodle was appreciated and this was reiterated by the respondents when 19 out of 29 (65,52%) agreed that Moodle should be used in other courses too.

For SOU, the responses of the learners taking English as a major were thus:


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Attitude towards Moodle:

Here, the researcher set out to gather information regarding the feelings Moodle brings about in the learners. 21 out of 29 learners (72,41%) felt Moodle is straightforward and intuitive, while 4 (13,79%) disagreed. With regard to particular features: 16 respondents (55,17%) liked updating their profile (3 did not like that, 10,34%), 24 appreciate viewing feedback to students' comments (3 did not appreciate this, 10,34%), 24 (82,76%) thought the link between the forum and their personal email account was useful (2 (6,9%) disagreed and did not think the link was need).

For SOU, the responses of the learners taking English as a major were thus:
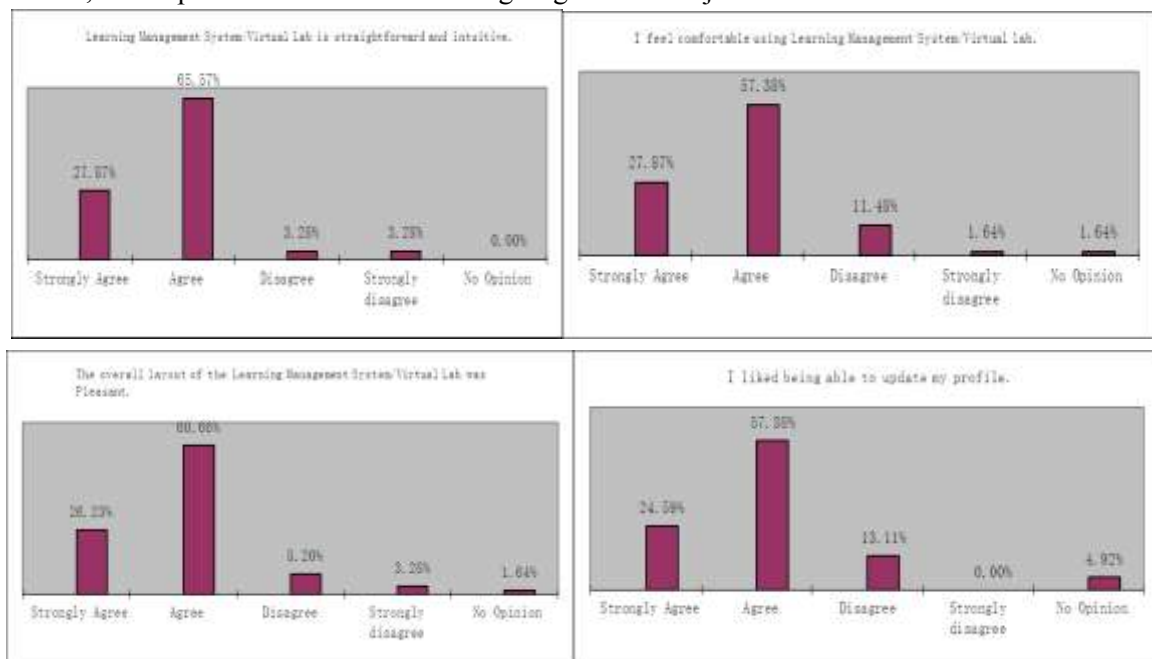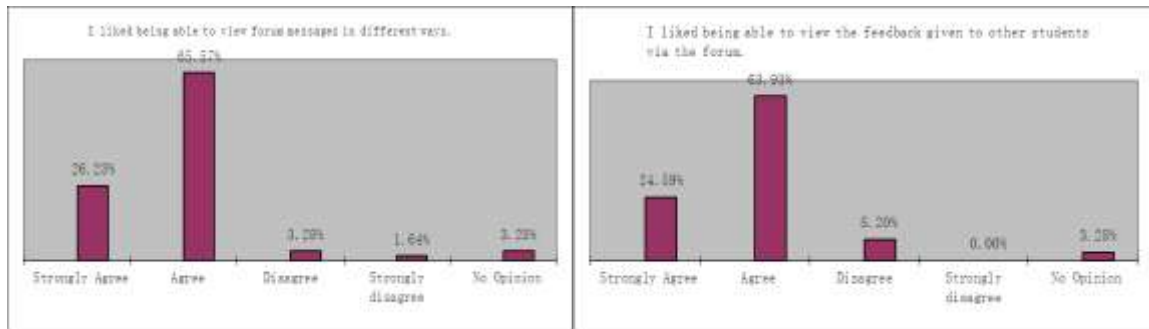
Actual usage of Moodle in general and in the Eng302 module:

The responses to the first question which sought to find out whether the learners were comfortable using Moodle indicated that they were: 24 out of 29 strongly agreed or agreed with the statement, while 4 (13,79%) disagreed. The remaining questions looked at Moodle usage for the Eng302 module in particular (regarding learner activities, additional writing opportunities making the Moodle page an extension of the classroom and facilitation of learning). 24 out of 29 participants (82,76%) to the survey felt the online activities in the ENG302 course helped them to understand the face-to-face activities and agreed with the statement that the Moodle page facilitated their learning. 4 (13,79%) learners thought the online activities hadn't helped, while 3 (10,34%) were opposed to the statement that Moodle has assisted them in learning. 21 learners (72,41%) felt the Moodle page was an extension of the classroom since it gave them additional opportunities to write, 3 (10,34%) disagreed with this.

For SOU, the responses of the learners taking English as a major were thus:
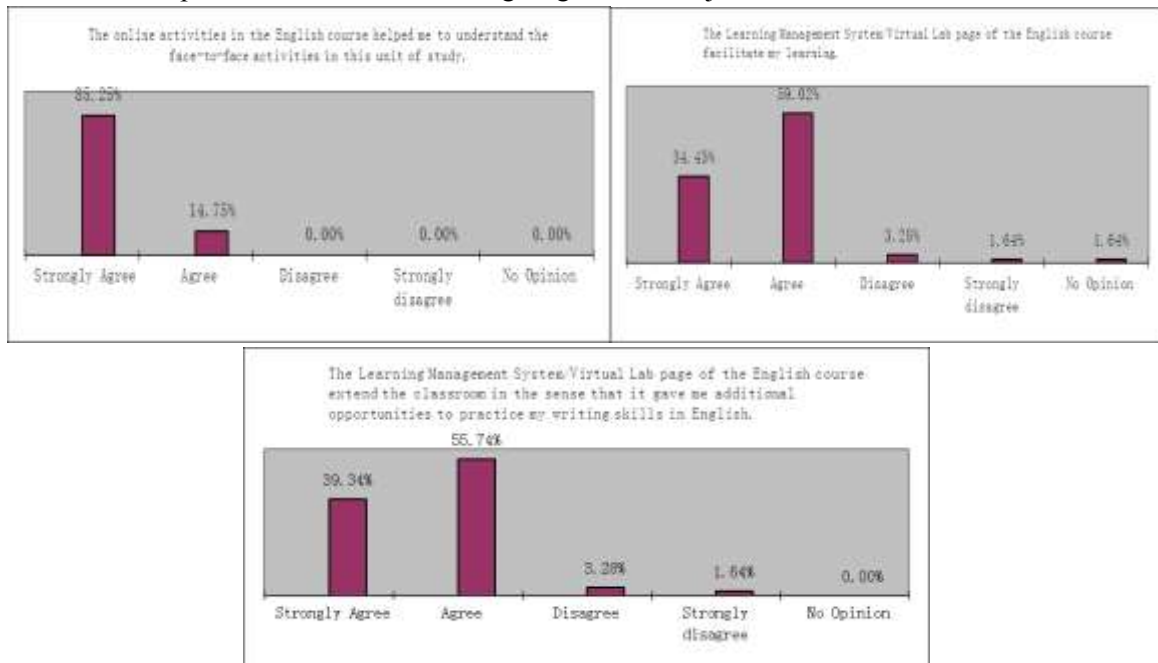

Teaching factors:

The majority of respondents were of the opinion that the lecturer used the online environment to regularly update students (26 out of 29 or 89,65%; 1 or 3,45% disagree), that the lecturer's online

interaction encouraged the learner to get the most out of his/her learning (26 out of 29 or 89,65%; 1 or 3,45% disagree), that the online teaching materials were designed to make the topics interesting to the learners (26 out of 29 or 89,65%; 1 or 3,45% disagree) and that the lecturer helped to focus online discussion (24 out of 29 or ; 2 or 6,9% disagree).

For SOU, the responses of the learners taking English as a major were thus:
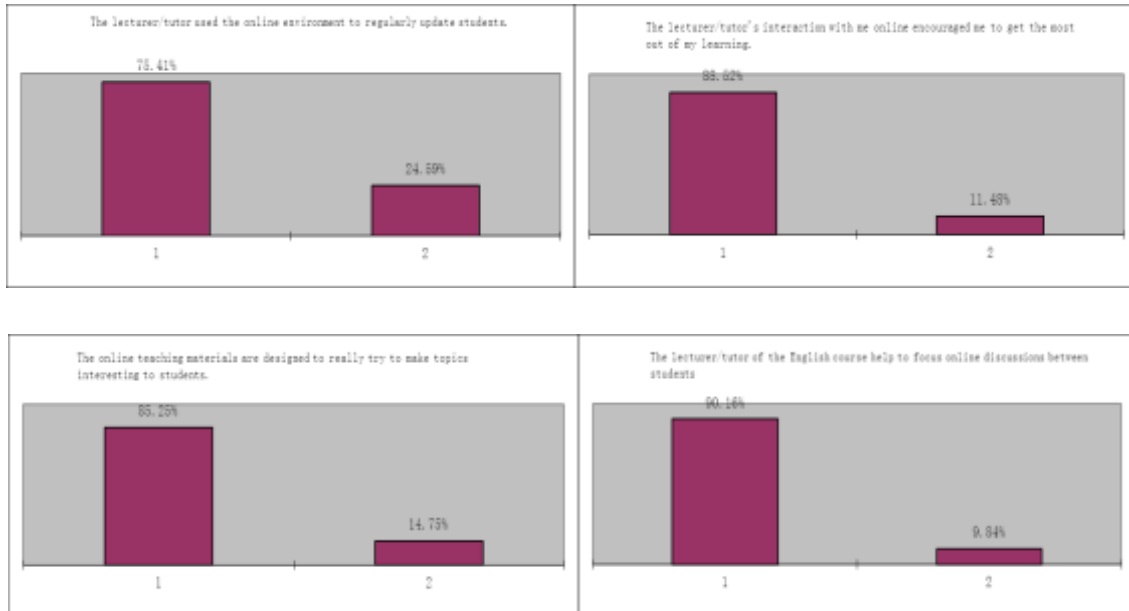
DISCUSSION

Apart from the analysis of data above, there is also need to look at some observations made by the respondents. The answers to the open-ended questions in particular are very informative.

The answers to the experiences learners had with Moodle are instructive. They can be divided into three main groups, namely those indicating a positive learner experience, those having mixed feelings about Moodle and its usefulness, and those showing negative feelings (mainly due to technical hiccups). Here are some of these views:

Part one (IDE respondents)

Mixed feelings: "Though not easy to access at times, but it is a good forum for students who need to post their comments on a subject or retrieve information." and "My experience so far has been a good one in the sense that I have been able to get most of what I need, though in the case of presentations, some students do not post them and some do that on the last minutes."

Negative feelings: "It is not easy to log onto and sometimes I hardly get information.", "I have some problem in opening and responding to discussions.", "I've always had difficulty logging in and at times end up not being able to."

Positive feelings: "I'm instantly able to get information or instructions from the lecturer. I have interacted with other students.", "I have had good experiences with Moodle so far.", "I have had a good experience with Moodle. Since I am able to get all the information that is needed for my study. I am able to interact with my lecturer even if we are in different parts of the country.", "It has helped improve my knowledge in as far as school/academics is concerned.", "It is easy to use and I have no complaints.", "It is a great mode or technique of learning.", "Moodle has developed my skills in the use of computers.", "Moodle helped me get in touch with my classmates, discuss topics with them and

share ideas that helped me in learning. It also helps me learn more about education and concentrate more on my studies.", "It helped me get or type out information/presentations I needed for my test.", "Moodle is quite useful for distance students because we are able to do a follow-up for our lesson even in our spare time or after work.", "I love Moodle." and "I am very happy with the Moodle site. It has and still is of great help to me. However, it would be great if I could access it even outside the campus. As an IDE student, I think it would greatly improve my learning as well as the lecturer/student relationship."

These positive responses correspond to some of the factors of success of Moodle identified by the respondents, namely Ease of use, Usefulness and Activities. Moodle is appreciated because it is easy to use, because it is useful in the sense that it allows learners to access the information they need for their study and because of the activities found there (interaction with classmates and instructor, discussion forums, follow-up after class, etc.). The negative feelings are mostly linked with log-on problems and the fact that Moodle is not always accessible off campus (even though, in theory, this should be possible[1]).

Part two: conventional respondents

"Moodle has been a good experience since I am able to discuss many academic and non-academic issues with my colleagues."

"Little experience."

"Honestly, I didn't know what Moodle was. Had to ask a friend the first time on how to go about it. Moodle has enabled me to communicate with my lecturers as well as my classmates without getting together. I get most of my notes from Moodle (…). That way I get to recap on the lecture and it makes learning easier for me."

These thoughts are very much in line with what P.S. Maphanga described in his 2012 MA thesis, namely that the programme coordinators, under the theme 'students' characteristics', mentioned that the majority of the students were born in the digital era and as such had no problem adopting new technological innovations such as online learning. Phrases like: "*The learners in general were very happy with the Moodle platform. At first they were scared, but after explaining to them what Moodle is, and how it can be utilised, they became open to it and the majority enjoyed using it. They participated on forums…*" (P 5) were mentioned by one of the respondents. The response suggests that the students have responded well to courses that are offered online. This has been proven by the current study too, as most of the learners were happy to use Moodle, thought their learning had improved, etc. This is probably largely due to the fact that these students are digital natives, for whom the use of technology is part of daily life. The latter part is clear also from the fact that the majority of respondents indicate using computers daily, or weekly, and that the internet is used to do research (this was stated by 100 percent of the respondents, be they distance or conventional on-campus learners).

Maphanga's 2012 findings included that certain characteristics of the students were perceived to be barriers to the offering of online learning. These characteristics included their unfamiliarity with distance education as a mode of teaching and learning, and their lack of requisite skills. This is what one of the research respondents said: "*...the calibre of students, the skills they have, and also the issue of culture that anything that comes in the form of online learning is new to them.*" (P 6). The present study opposes this view. Only one student indicated his failure to log on to Moodle, his inability to use Moodle. As the researcher did not look for parameters such as age or study/professional background, it is difficult to conclude anything regarding the reasons for such failure/inability. It could be agerelated,

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or related to any other factor. Further research on this particular point is needed. P.S. Maphanga's observation that the learners' lack of familiarity with online learning was seen as posing a barrier to the adoption and implementation of this mode of delivery at IDE needs to be invalidated here as my study indicates that respondents were pleased with the online environment and felt it was straightforward and intuitive. While P.S. Maphanga's study seems to suggest that the students are not yet ready for online learning, the current study states otherwise: the majority of respondents, be their face-to-face, conventional, on-campus learners or distance, part-time, blended learning students, agree that Moodle should be used in all their courses, that is improves their learning experience and that they would recommend Moodle to friends. The learners/respondents identified the time-place-independence as one of the Moodle features they prefer. This is in line with what other researchers such as Wen-Shuenn Wu (2008: 8) have observed: "This feature allows teachers to write and receive messages at any time from any computer with Internet access, which is especially useful to these part-time English writing teachers. Furthermore, all the written assignments and teacher's comments will be kept with date and time stamps so that they can be conveniently retrieved".

IMPLICATIONS/SUGGESTIONS/RECOMMENDATIONS

The implications of the study are manifold. Seen that the majority of learners enjoyed the different features of Moodle and felt these had helped them improve, assisted them in learning, encouraged them to get the best out of their study and extended the classroom environment by giving them additional writing opportunities, the introduction of Moodle in this course in particular can be seen as a success. In addition, one of the main findings, which came out clearly, is that learners would like to see Moodle used throughout their University courses. This is in particular so for the IDE learners who would like to see more learner-instructor interaction during the periods when there are no face-to-face sessions, but even the conventional learners indicated the Moodle usage should be uniform, by all lecturers, in all faculties of the University.

The present study findings reiterate what others have already identified as the major advantages of implementing blended or distant learning into language courses are: course management and administration (grading assignments, students attendance, communication between student and teacher, etc.); delivery of content (up-to-date content students can access, multimedia materials in targeted language); target language communication (opportunities to interact in the target language with other students, tutor and native speakers); collaborative work (ICT4LT Module 4.1).
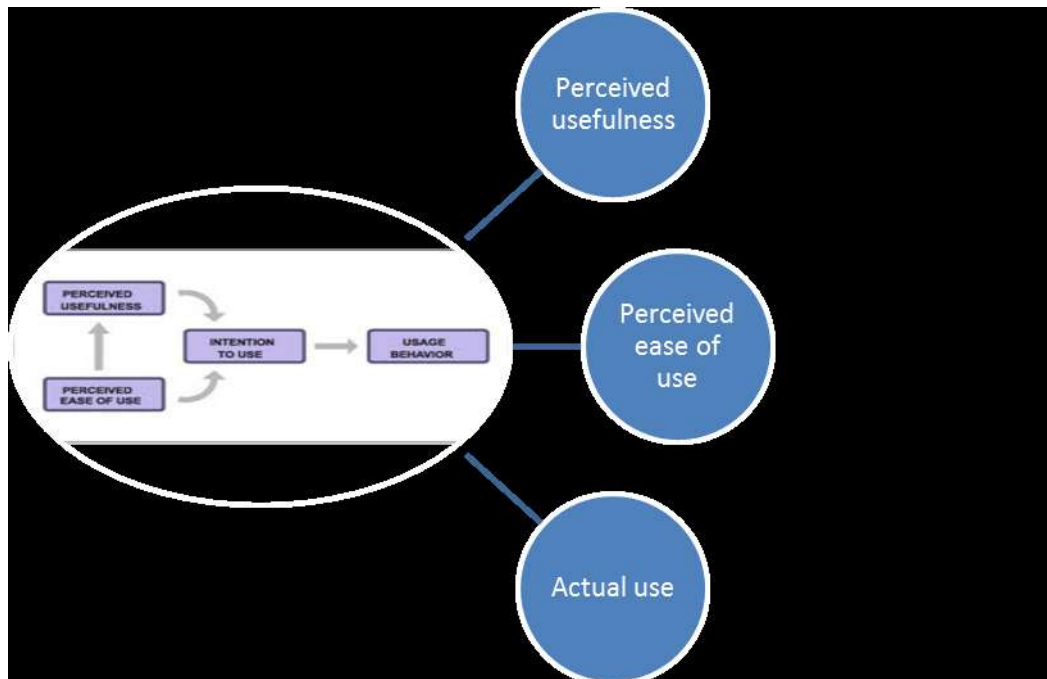
Limitations

The study did not differentiate according to age, gender or study/professional background. It might be useful to have follow-up studies that make these differentiations in future, especially seen that many studies indicate that digital natives are more ready for the uptake of e-learning than other groups. Other limitations have been indicated in-text above. The main finding here is that additional research which could look into more detailed aspects of this particular study is necessary to provide conclusive results.

Revised TAM Model

Having analysed all the data and taken into account the limitations of the study, the following revised TAM Model is seen as appropriate in this case.

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Revised TAM Model

The original Davis TAM Model (on the left of the above graphic) was adapted in a different way from what subsequent Models have proposed in the sense that the external factors which other researchers have put to the left of perceived usefulness and ease of use are included in these factors. According to me, background in computers, attitude towards usage, teaching factors and organisational factors all have a direct influence on perceived easy of use of Moodle and, similarly, organisational and teaching factors have a bearing on perceived usefulness. Actual use is then linked to the other two, but again factors such as actual usage, background in computers, specificity to this course are influential.

In TAM, the behavioral intentions of users regarding technology are affected by two variables: Perceived Ease of Use and Perceived Usefulness. The former affects the latter, which means that if users feel the system is easy to use, they will feel that online learning is useful and they will be prepared to use the technology. The causal relationship that exists between these two variables has been confirmed by a number of empirical studies (e.g., Davis, 1989, 1993; Venkatesh & Davis, 1996). The Technology Acceptance Model proposed by Davis predicts whether users will adopt a general purpose technology, without focusing on a specific topic (Pituch & Lee, 2006).

In short, the TAM Model remains pertinent, it is just that additional factors (often called external factors in other studies) need to be taken into consideration in a different way. To me, they should be seen as 'included' or 'inclusive' in perceived usefulness, perceived easy of use and actual use.

Research Question 2

Research question 2: Is there a significant difference in the feedback between distance (off-campus) and conventional (on-campus) learners?

The conventional learners use the computer on a more regular basis than the IDE respondents. This is probably due to the fact that they are on campus almost daily and can take advantage of the computer laboratories at their disposal there. The IDE respondents are more explicit with regard to why

they like (or dislike) Moodle, their list is much longer than the conventional learners. This has probably to do with the fact that more respondents came from IDE than from the conventional programme.There is no difference at all in the learners' use of the Internet for research purposes: all learners use it for these purposes, irrespective of the fact that they are on-campus or off-campus students.A slightly higher percentage of IDE respondents uses the computer daily than conventional respondents. This is surely in line with the fact that the distance learner is supposed to be a more independent learner, who has to access knowledge in a different way than the on-campus learner.

Much higher percentages of respondents of IDE feel Moodle feedback helps them improve (IDE: 84,62% to conventional learners: 66,6%) and Moodle is important for the course (IDE: 96,15% to conventional learners: 66,6%). IDE respondents, who are off-campus for most of the time log on every day in 15,38% of the cases, as compared to the conventional learners who never log on daily. 65,38% of IDE learners log on once a week; this is similar to the conventional students who do that in 66,6% of the cases.

A slightly higher percentage of conventional learners found Moodle difficult to use: 33,3%, compared to 26,92% of IDE respondents. On the other hand, conventional respondents are more in agreement that Moodle helps them learn new things (100%) than IDE-respondents (69,23%). The reason here might be that the conventional learners are, at the time when they filled in the survey, further advanced in their course than the IDE students. With regard to revision, the feelings are inversed: the conventional learners indicated that Moodle helped them revise with 66,6% of respondents agreeing, while the Ide respondents were more in favor of this statement as 80,77% agreed that Moodle was helpful when it came to revision. The percentages regarding Moodle's importance are high in both groups: the IDE respondents had 96,16% of them in agreement that Moodle was highly or somewhat important, while the corresponding result for the conventional group stood at 100%.

Very similar responses were seen in the field of materials location. Both IDE (61,55%) and conventional (66,6%) respondents felt it was easy to locate them on the Moodle platform. A higher percentage of IDE respondents (80,77%) felt the link between the forum and their email address was useful; this is as against 66,6% of the conventional respondents. This probably indicates that this feature is more important for distance education learners than for on-campus students, who have easier access to a variety of resources. The trend of IDE respondents being more in favor of certain features continues when we look at interface and organization. Indeed, 73,07% of IDE respondents found the Moodle interface pleasant, while 66,6% percent of the conventional participants found the same. Moodle's organizational structure was seen as useful by 73,07% of IDE respondents, as compared to 66,6% of conventional learners. However, when it comes to using Moodle for other courses, the trend is slightly different as here a higher percentage of conventional respondents (100%) than IDE participants to the survey (61,54%) would like to use Moodle. My opinion is that possibly the IDE participants understand the value of Moodle more, to them they can feel lost if there is no Moodle (as it allows regular contact with classmates and instructors), while the conventional, on-campus students can always fall back on the classroom interaction in the more regular face-to-face setting. This, of course, together with other hypotheses made based on the research findings, needs to be corroborated.

53.85% of IDE respondents felt that it was nice to be able to update their profile; 66,6% of the conventional learners felt the same. This is the only place where IDE participants 'scored lower' than conventional learners. A higher percentage of IDE learners liked to view forum messages in various ways (84.62% against 66.6% of conventional participants), enjoyed seeing the feedback given to other students (84.62% against 66.6% of conventional respondents) and felt Moodle was straightforward

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and intuitive (73.08% against 66.6% in the conventional group). The only difference in all these cases is that the percentage of surveyed learners 'strongly agreeing' was higher in the conventional group than in the IDE group. I am not sure what this might indicate, only that it looks like the conventional group is more convinced of the usefulness of these features.

More IDE learners indicate their comfort with using Moodle than conventional participants: 84.61% to 66.6%. More IDE learners found the online activities useful (96,16% against 66.6% of the conventional respondents): this is understandable, as they depend more on these resources than possibly the conventional learners who have more face-to-face time where interaction with both lecturer and classmates can take place and more discussion on in-class activities can happen. Similarly, the IDE learner in general feels that Moodle facilitates learning (84.61%) while 66.6% of the conventional student agrees with that. But, strangely, 'only' (this is my view) 69.23% of the IDE respondents feels the Moodle environment constitutes an extension of the classroom, while it is thus for 100% of the conventional participants. Perhaps, the IDE respondents don't think a classroom extension is a useful thing?

All conventional respondents agreed that the regular updates, the lecturer's interaction encouraging hard work, the design of online materials rendering the topic more interesting and the focused online discussion through the lecturer's intervention were interesting and useful Moodle features; they did so at 100%. It was higher therefore than the responses of the IDE respondents which stood at 88.46%, 65.38%, 88.46% and 80.77% percent respectively.

These research findings therefore make it impossible to state whether IDE or conventional respondents were more in favor of Moodle. There are no conclusive data to prove that educational background gives different results. In many cases, both groups reacted similarly, sometimes the IDE respondents being slightly more in favor of one feature or the other, at other moments the conventional respondents indicating a slightly higher preference.

Recommendations

The Table below gives an overview of the responses of SOU learners, majoring in English. These results are similar to what obtained in Swaziland.
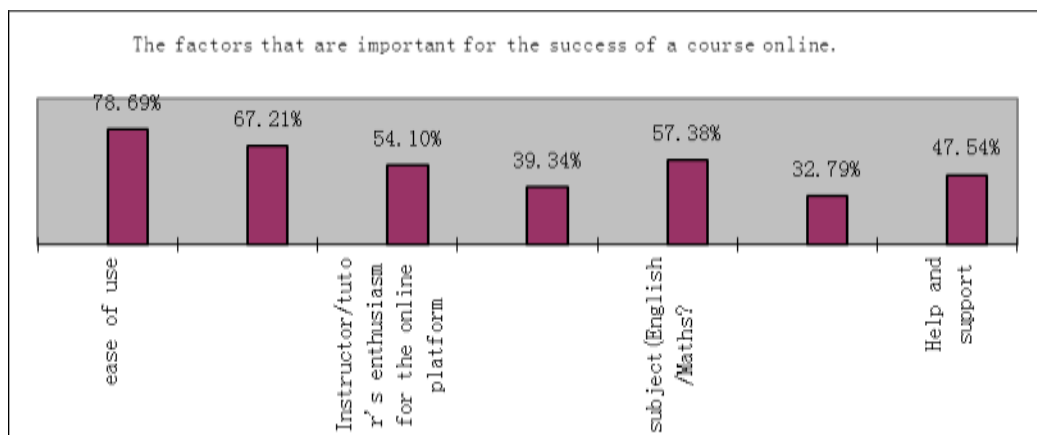
How can the University use a Learning Management System to enhance learning? Most respondents indicated that they would want the University to offer Moodle in all courses. According to some of these respondents, apart from Moodle for course work purposes, it should also be used to post emails and notes, to communicate on administrative matters with the students, to allow better interaction between lecturers and students and to announce new publications and, consequently, new

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knowledge. In order to have Moodle available to everyone, the respondents would like to encourage the University to increase access to computers on campus, to ensure that a more user-friendly version of Moodle can be accessed everywhere on campus and to admit only computer/internet literate learners. They further think that a partnership with the students to advance Moodle would be the right strategy to go about all this.

How can the University use Moodle to enhance learning? (IDE respondents)

Introduce Moodle in all courses	8
Post emails and notes, updates about everything that concerns students (will free more time for talking in class, for interaction between lecturer and students)	3
Ensure that it can be used everywhere on campus	1
Increase access to computers on campus	1
Learners need to be computer/internet literate when admitted	1
Introduce new knowledge (books recently published), relevant information	1
Make Moodle user-friendly	1
Involve students in advancing Moodle	1

How can the University use Moodle to enhance learning? (conventional respondents)

Introduce Moodle in all courses	2
Make internet available to students everywhere on campus	1

CONCLUSION

The study has been able to provide answers to all aspects indicated above. Learners' opinions were invited and received. Learners' views are quite explicit on the advantages of Moodle, but the disadvantages were also tackled. The disadvantages have more to do with the use of technology (difficulties to log on) than with inherent Moodle features. In general, the learners perceived the Moodle environment as advantageous to them. The third point, analysis of the possibilities of teaching Eng302 mainly via Moodle, was not fully discussed. The data obtained via the survey were not sufficient to draw a similar conclusion. The only thing that can be said with certainty is that the Eng302 students accepted Moodle and saw the benefits from the platform. No full conclusion can be made with regard to point 4 either, as both groups, the face-to-face conventional learners and the IDE distance blended learning respondents, reacted in quite similar ways. In some respects, reactions were foreseeable and in line with earlier studies, while, for certain aspects, this study gave different results from what could be expected. The latter is the case where conventional students agreed 100% with using Moodle in other courses, while the IDE respondents, who normally should benefit more from the Moodle platform than their conventional colleagues, indicated the same at 61.54%.

The research findings were indicative of the fact that learners in general are comfortable using Moodle, enjoy various Moodle features (such as the link between the forum and their email, updating their profile, viewing forum messages in different ways). The data reiterate the straightforward and intuitive nature of Moodle in general and state that learners would like to see Moodle implemented in their courses, over and above of its usefulness for the Eng302 course. The study gives evidence that in particular for the Eng302 course, which is a writing course, the use of Moodle is a bonus as it offers learners an extension of the classroom, giving them more opportunities to practice their writing skills.
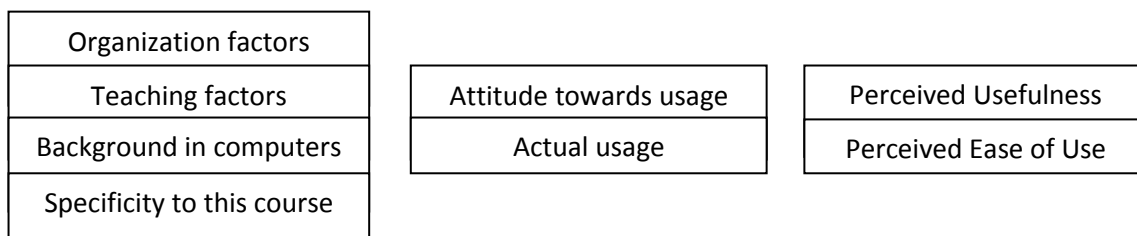
The learners also indicate that using Moodle for the course was beneficial as it improved their general computer skills, a competence that is of extreme importance to young professionals in today's world. While the application of Moodle to an EFL learning environment is not new, it seems to be quite an under-researched field in an ESL environment, and more particularly when it comes to the writing component of language learning, even though Moodle has different features which are useful to learners wanting to develop their writing competencies.

Change takes time and requires effort and patience. This study shows that students are still very used to being passive learners. This role brings a set of perceptions and beliefs that are difficult to modify. That is the case of writing. Implementing Moodle as a tool to enhance the written competence among year 3 Eng302 learners proved to be a challenge, as students were new to the environment. However, Moodle also proved to be an excellent tool to make students aware of the responsibility they need to take as learners as they understood that as learners they have deadlines to meet and challenges to overcome. They also learned that learning is an active process that involves doing and redoing.

I can conclude that the new virtual learning management environments, like Moodle, that new technologies offer as a resource in different learning contexts bring many advantages for those involved in the teaching and learning process. However, virtual environments demand higher levels of commitment, autonomy and responsibility for students who are used to being passive receptors and learners, and those (even though in my study they proved very few) whose response to any attempt of change is resistance as they feel that their comfort zone is being affected. Yet, the challenges that virtual environments present us with are necessary in order to produce the autonomous individuals that our society needs. This is one of the educators' responsibilities with the new generation of learners.

The data indicate that most parameters are in place for Moodle to be easily taken up by the university learners' population. The study confirms that ease of use is one of Moodle's most attractive features. It also attests to the fact that a positive attitude towards Moodle points in the direction of Moodle's success. The study further reveals, and this is particular to this study, that the ENG302 Moodle learning environment has been beneficial to the learners, and that this is because, among other things, the online activities and the additional opportunities to practice writing which is an essential element of a Writing, Composition and Stylistics course. The study also indicates that sound pedagogy needs to be at the basis of the use of Moodle in a learning environment. All the data confirm that the lecturer's intervention is essential to ensure Moodle acceptance, learners feeling comfortable in the Moodle environment and learners being active on the Moodle page.

The study results allowed a review of the TAM Models to include the following factors:

Organization factors		
Teaching factors	Attitude towards usage	Perceived Usefulness
Background in computers	Actual usage	Perceived Ease of Use
Specificity to this course		

Previous TAM Models have focused on perceived usefulness and perceived ease of use. In this study other factors are being taken into account in view of adjusting the existing TAM Models.

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