Research Paper: Moodle-Generated Courses at PSU
(Phuket Campus)

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Abstract
This paper reports on a quantitative and qualitative study at the Prince of Songkla University, Phuket Campus regarding the observations that were made during the recent establishment of Moodle-based online courses. How did the students at PSU react on this new form of “Blended Learning”? How did people at work accept an online course? What were the comments, the opinions, the difficulties and the advantages? How did the teachers react, when confronted with a new teaching method?

Keywords:
Moodle courses, Impact on PSU, community, students and lecturers

1. Introduction
In the first part, the development and acceptance of an online-course for the community will be looked at by Timo Kotzlowski.
The second part discusses the acceptance, opinions and suggestions of students at PSU regarding the courses.
The third part reflects feedback from teachers, who were introduced and trained to use Moodle in their courses.

An online generated Moodle course was first introduced to PSU in May 2006, initiated by Holger Roth under the sponsorship of the German Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Conceived and developed by Timo Kotzlowski and Stefan Haering, the “German language course for tourism” (“Deutsch für den Tourismus”) targets, especially, the southern Thai province, Phuket.

Later that year the course was part of the curriculum for students of German IV from PSU.

After these courses were finished, we evaluated the course and introduced it to lecturers of both FIS (Faculty of international studies) and the HTM (Faculty for Hotel and Tourism Management) with the aim to inform, motivate, teach and help lecturers to create courses by themselves.

Collis (1995, p. 146) [1] shows that the instructor plays a central role in the
effectiveness of online delivery. He writes “It is not the technology but the instructional implementation of the technology that determines the effectiveness of learning.”

2. Community-Courses

Timo Kotzlowski [2] described in his paper “Get away from the gap!” the first community course as follows:

…this course is designed to run for eight weeks with contact classes held once a week. However, the concept proved to be flexible enough to hold this course in the German for Tourism program at Prince of Songkhla University’s Phuket campus.

The pilot course consisted of 12 people working in various fields of the tourism industries – tour and transfer guides, a bell manager of a 1st class hotel, and office staff from a main German tour operator. As diverse as the participants' jobs were their language abilities ranging from the targeted entry level – end of A1, beginning of A2 – to a rather advanced level of proficiency – in oral use estimated level B2 or better.

The pilot course was held by two lecturers, Timo Kozlowski from the Goethe-Institut Thailand, and Farid Achour, from the German program at the Prince of Songkla University. The university … provided the infrastructure (classroom, internet access, beamer, visualizer, etc.) for contact classes.”

Online learning and contact classes have to be linked together so that they both add to each other. Connections are made mainly through two ways:

Preparation for next week – Bigger projects that students should work on are prepared, e.g. making up learning groups, assigning tasks to single students or groups, etc. Grammar structures that students get to know and work with during the following week are also introduced in contact classes, so that the tutor has first-hand feedback as to whether students understood, or questions about the topic remain.

Review of the past week – Many assignments require open production of texts, etc. by the students. Open assignments are nearer to real-life usage of language, but reviewing such tasks cannot be done by software. You need a person who has experience in using German in general and in the specifics of German for Tourism to provide students with a worthwhile feedback. So chat logs, forum postings are reviewed in various ways – looking for mistakes together, the tutor is there for questions about the past week’s content, and grammar structures that students practiced the week before are rehearsed in different situations. …” (End of quote)

2.1 Feedback

At the beginning there were 12 students on the course; but only seven completed it. Students who bailed out said that they had insufficient time to do the exercises. However, two of the “drop-outs” had a language level way above the level aimed at for this course – one person held a bachelor’s degree in German from Chiang Mai University; so it may be that for them the provided content was too easy, and so held no appeal.

On the last day of the pilot course, we asked the remaining 7 students to fill out an anonymous evaluation form. The
feedback from this group was, overall, positive. The most important trends in this evaluation are:

Students liked the form of blended learning as applied in the course. Some pointed out that they could easily arrange work duty with learning, or that they could repeat online lessons as often as they wanted, or until they understood.

Online learning was new to all participants, and some had technical difficulties, e.g. with streaming mp3 files, or the overall poor internet infrastructure on Phuket. Nevertheless, all students answered that they enjoyed online learning.

3. Students at PSU

24 Students in German IV 2008 at PSU were introduced to “Deutsch im Tourismus” during their studies for HTM or IBC. They were in their fourth year of their studies and had an average of 120 hours previous learning of German.

After a brief introduction all students were capable of using the platform and most of the arising problems were resolved by the group in a trouble-shooting forum they could find in the course.

The acceptance of the course was overwhelming. The course lasted 4 months with 4 hours per week and the students generated nearly 30,000 clicks. Asked in an evaluation about the pro and cons of this course all of the students were eager to express their appreciation about the course and Moodle as a platform.

They found it convenient, interesting, full of opportunities and fun. The “closed exercises” (tests and quizzes with an immediate feedback) were especially appreciated.

“Open exercises” (like: assignments, projects, surveys...) were named as useful, but would “take a long time”.

Chats and forums, particularly, when used for games or role-plays, were also very often visited.

When asked for keywords to express their feeling towards the course students came up with:

“hiSo, fun, challenge, give us more, please”, to give some examples.

Asked for improvements they came up with an astonishing list of ideas, revealing their positive attitude towards developing courses. As a matter of fact, I have to say, that a lot of new ideas (e.g. Google maps, you-tube, flash animation ...) for the further courses are the notions of interested students.

As for cons, the students mentioned the following points (in the order of appearance):

Teachers may need to put extra effort in developing their course at the beginning, and it will cost extra to get some media content like sound recording and video.

Students must have strong sense of self-discipline in taking courses.

Lack of face to face interaction among teachers & classmates means normal classes must be held at least once a week to recount everything done during the week.
Internet infrastructure must be fast and reliable..

As a point of fact; if you want to be better informed about the situation, all the relevant points were already said by a student, in a very convincing way. That’s why one should read the whole excerpt of Khun Pom. His assignment was to summarize the course’s beliefs and to evaluate the course.

3.1 Khun Pom Saikaew(3) wrote:

“However, could I write my experience for your reference and hope this will be useful in one way or another.

You can pass my testimonial around at your preference.

I was first introduced to formal online learning … as part of the course “German for Tourism”. This online learning is built on Moodle platform which is one of the most effective and popular open source platform for education know to man at the moment.

I am not be able to drill into all features of this platform, however, what I can say that is very intelligent, flexible, user friendly, interactive, in trend, and software itself is FREE. In addition … 90% of business transaction today go online, Why don’t education? Is it why FHT & FIS Students need to purchase laptop as a compulsory?

Next, let’s see pros and cons of the online course as I experienced.

Pros,

Students can learn everywhere and every time they like.

Students can revisit the course as often as they like, if they don’t understand.

It provides more space to Thai students in the discussion board as they don’t like to ask questions in class. Moreover, the Q&A among teachers and learners are captured in black and white automatically, and last long. …

It provides new social community of learning not only in the same class but worldwide. …

It saves cost in long term, for example, no need to print so much paper sheets.

Borderless for everyone who want to intake the course (for some general courses you would like to educate community at no cost). …

You can also use examination module on this online learning for you final examination in the close room like Ajarn Blaire did this for this computer classes couples of year ago and I works for both multiple choices and writing.

This is good if you would like to provide the classes for working people who are not able to join the weekday normal classes. …

They all do it around the world, let’s go google for “online degree”, “online course” keyword and you will see.

Cons,

Teachers may need to put extra effort in developing their course at the beginning and will cost you extra more to get some
Students must have strong self-discipline in taking courses.

Lake of face to face interaction among teachers & classmate, so I must go together with normal class at least once a week they all meet together to recap everything done during the week.

Internet infrastructure must be good.

Please kindly find my comment that you need to seriously improve PSU PHUKET’s internet infrastructure if you would like to go online. What I used to experience myself and got feedback from current junior students, honestly it is still poor in general in terms of brand witch and stability of Wi-Fi.

Many thanks for your time reading my message and do apologize if some parts are subjective to bias which I believe is the facts.

Pom Saikaew
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4. Teachers at PSU

After these courses were tested with the community and run with the students, the online course was introduced to 26 Teachers at FIS and 10 Teachers from HTM in form of two 6 hour workshops. In this workshops we had a look at existing courses, fought about how to create a proper course and discussed advantages and disadvantages of Moodle generated courses.

At that time teachers said to have created only one-way offers for the students so far, for example: pdf- or word-files for the students to be downloaded.

According to their first impression, the teachers said that existing courses look very good but seem to be difficult to create. After the course they said to be much more confident, because implementing chats, forums, glossaries, tests, hot potato-tests, wikis, assignments and so on, were much easier than they had thought.

8 of these teachers decided to open a course directly after the workshop, while another ten wanted to collect and work on ideas in order to open a course for the next semester.

The online course “noworkteam” is still running and offers all lecturers help and troubleshooting forums.

5. Conclusion

The great acceptance of learners, students and lecturers should encourage us to support lecturers at PSU who are willing to open Moodle-generated courses. Students will benefit from well organized, ambitious and challenging courses. Online courses offer individuality and can be created to fit in all forms of relevant courses offered at universities.

Things need to be developed and to be implemented:

Faster internet, trained administrators, further education for lecturers.
Sources


Literatur


- www.bildungsserver.de