

TAU REPORT: UG SINGH (2019)

Empowering UKZN academics to adopt e-assessment

Aim

Grappling with large student numbers, many Universities in South Africa have adopted Learning Management Systems over the past decade to assist with the ‘massification’ of education. Essentially a **learning management system (LMS)** is a software application or Web-based technology used for the administration, documentation, tracking, assessing, reporting and delivery of educational courses or training programs. It is meant to provide the instructor with a way to create and deliver content, monitor student participation, and assess student performance. If adopted correctly, LMS’s can serve beyond just a repository of learning materials, but can be used to encourage student engagement through collaborative learning in a blended learning environment.

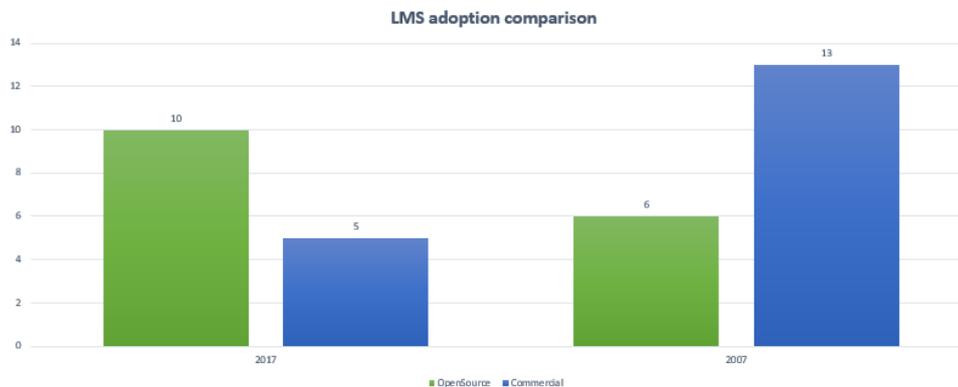


Figure 1: LMS adoption comparison – South African HEIs

As depicted in Figure 1 above, preliminary informal research demonstrates that the move has been towards adopting more Open Source LMS than Proprietary ones.

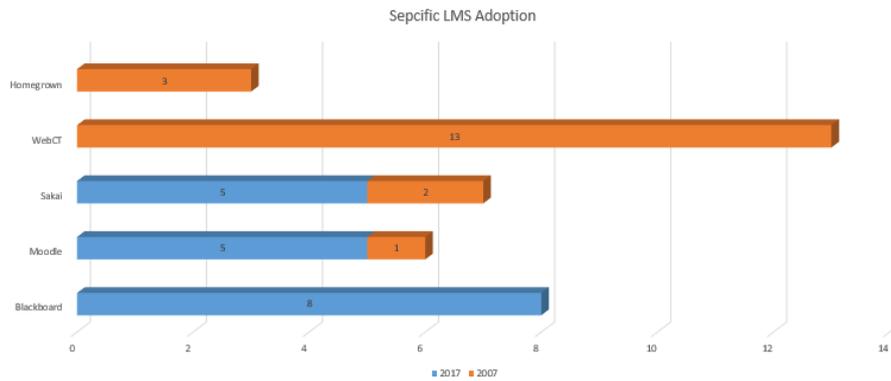


Figure 2: Specific LMS adoption – South African HEIs

As illustrated in Figure 2 above, in South Africa, Moodle has grown in popularity as an Open Source LMS.

In 2016, UKZN officially announced the compulsory adoption of Moodle for all academic courses. In the discipline of IS&T, we have been adopting Moodle for many years, and have offered more than just academic material, to students, through the use of this Learning Management System. Academics within IS&T have experimented and successfully adopted discussion forums, assignment submissions and online assessments. **The challenge we face is that currently, the wider UKZN academic community is making little innovative and interactive use of Moodle.** This challenge may also be present at other SA HEIs.

Furthermore, learners today are technology savvy. They appreciate the use of innovative use of technology. Thus to serve them better, and also enhance our own teaching, it is imperative for academic to start embracing technology in the teaching. However, technology must not be adopted for the sake of adoption, but rather, must fit into the pedagogy. So it should be integrated with caution. The best way to ensure this, is to learn from experiences of other academics and to share our knowledge.

Hence through in this TAU project I would like to share experiences with academics from multiple disciplines to identify creative ways of adopting Moodle within UKZN.

Outcomes

I envisaged the outcome of this project as the empowerment of academics at UKZN to adopt online assessment. This has partly been achieved, through a series of workshops conducted. The first set of workshops was conducted with a fellow TAU colleague, introducing them to the environment of Blended Learning in the Moodle Environment. These workshops were conducted at 2 campuses of UKZN (Westville [WC] and Pietermaritzburg [PMB]). A total of 27 academics (10 at PMB and 17 at WC) participated. It was encouraging to see a range of disciplines represented, with academics from Engineering, Medical School, Linguistics, Education, Stats, Management and Health Sciences participating. This clearly indicates the need for 'empowerment' institutional wide, rather than discipline specific. Both sessions were well received with participant actively involved in the discussions during these workshops. Feedback indicated that these academics have a vested interest in improving their teaching methods by adopting blended learning approaches, with the assistance of Moodle. "This workshop has opened my eyes to new methods of engagement with students and I am eager to try these out next Semester", said Participant X. The statement "we would appreciate more practical session on Moodle tools by the instructors", by Participant Y, was encouraging, and this was supported by 25 of the 27 academics (93%) indicating interest in future workshops.

Following the blended learning workshop I embarked on my individual set of workshops. I envisaged conducting 3 workshops in this series. However, due to lack of funding and time/workload constraints, only 1 of the 3 has been completed. Workshop 1 focused on Setting up a Moodle Quiz for online Assessment. Once again this workshop attracted a range of disciplines with a total of 20 academics attending across both campuses. Being a 'hands-on' workshop, academics were given the opportunity to set up their own quiz during the session. This allowed for more interaction between not only the participants and me as the facilitator, but also engagement amongst themselves. Academics also seemed more comfortable participating as the workshop was being conducted by a fellow academic, "this workshop, conducted by a UKZN academic, has empowered me to use Moodle more effectively", said Participant Z.

Workshops 2 and 3 will regrettably have to be conducted post TAU4, as funding has only just been approved. I have no doubt though, that these will be successful and many more academics will be 'empowered' to experiment with Moodle to support the

new imperative of Digital Teaching and Learning at UKZN. These remaining workshops will focus on assisting academics with the creation of questions (varying) in Moodle Quiz; conversion of their paper-based assessments to online assessments; and grading and reporting of results.

Some challenges faced in completing this project include:

1. Workload allocations – insufficient relief to focus on this project
2. Funding delays – administrative processes are prolonged
3. Time constraints – participants requested the sessions to be longer
4. Assistant constraints – academics require assistance during and post the workshops, for this a research assistant is required
5. Unforeseen issues – workshops had to be rescheduled twice due to violence on the roads and truck strikes

Impact

In a small way, this project has reached out to the wider UKZN community. This was evidenced by the delegates who attended the workshops held in 2018. Academics from a variety of disciplines and in different positions/levels at the University, attended. It was encouraging from the feedback received, to note that these academics were interested in follow-up workshops. I have also noted the adoption of e-assessment, with open book testing, in one of the disciplines in my School, in 2019. Furthermore, administrators in my School are investigating the option of moving to online assessment instead of investing in a new OMR scanner, for paper-based MCQs, which has the potential to save the School a large amount of budget.

Change Agent

I see my role as a change agent being a double sided sword for this project. On the one hand, the University, through its Teaching and Learning Office, acknowledges and recognises my contribution in empowering academics with these technology-based assessment skills. However, within my School or Discipline there is little support for this project. This restricts the way I can bring about change, as I find myself battling to keep up with regular academic and administrative activities, and my passion for empowering academics. Despite this, through the above 4 workshops, at least 25 academics institution-wide have commenced their engagement with the Moodle

assessment tool(s). One academic in particular was able to successfully implement group assignment submissions in his module, post the workshop. He indicated that this process has made his work so much easier, and students also appreciated the use of technology for this process. Stemming from the workshops conducted thus far, I believe that this project is making an impact, albeit slowly, as academics have made appointments with me for individual consultations on implementing e-assessment through the adoption on online quizzes, assignment submissions and understanding the process of converting their paper-based assessments to online assessments. Thus, my passion for e-assessment, has helped me to 'empower' academics in the disciplines of Health Sciences, Linguistics, and Management, in this short space of time.

Publication

I hope to make the following contributions from this project:

1. A paper presentation at HELTASA Conference 2019
2. A journal article, post the TAU program in 2020

References

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