LEARNING CONTENT MANAGEMENT SYSTEMS IN FLT: CANADIAN EXPERIENCE

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ABSTRACT

The rise of virtual education over the last ten years has forced educational institutions to rethink how course materials and educational resources are to be produced, shared, and used. The current paper discusses the educational opportunities based on LCMS, which is a complete e-learning system specifically designed to help universities implement better learning processes and practices and to create an unlimited number of e-learning courses. It has been shown that most of Canadian universities support flexible learning through online foreign language programs designed to provide extra opportunities to students wishing to learn languages distantly. A special attention is paid to the teaching technologies used in Canadian virtual foreign language classrooms. The author concludes that the wide variety of language courses needs to be activated in the national education systems. This will enable students to work independently on their language proficiency, enhance their language competence and help them become organized, self-directed life-long language learners.

Contribution/ Originality: This study contributes to the issue of using LCMS in foreign language teaching and learning, developing methodical instructions on how to enhance e-learners' language performance.

1. INTRODUCTION

The advancement in multimedia and information technologies have introduced new tools of learning, banking, trading, conferencing, etc. Nowadays most of the universities, institutes, colleges and schools implement e-learning technology as an integral part of their learning systems and a part of our day-to-day lives. It helps to enhance their traditional learning systems and to use an alternative approach to learning. Due to the almost unlimited power of internet, virtual classrooms make the learning process much easier. E-learning can be defined as a learning process based on digitally delivered content, services and tutoring support which is an alternative to traditional education featured as personalized and collaborative learning involving a community of learners, teachers, facilitators, and experts (Jethro *et al.*, 2012). Since the early days of e-Learning, Learning Management Systems (LMS), Learning Content Management System (LCMS), Learning Design System (LDS), and Learning Support System (LSS) are becoming more and more usual words and the key driving products on the market, educational in particular, the

valuable tools that compress the time required to develop learning content. Through the use of learning objects, the technology provides targeted learner focused learning, shortening the time of acquiring necessary skills.

Nowadays most university students have access to the internet; they are becoming more and more independent in their learning. Learning foreign languages is also can be successfully conducted through the internet. With e-learning, students gain additional motivation for learning a foreign language, enjoy creative self-fulfillment, and establish intercultural communication. For the purpose of this paper, we will be focusing on the Learning Content Management System – an e-learning system used by universities all over the globe. A special attention will be paid to the Canadian experience of using e-learning systems in foreign language teaching in order to implement the best practices and progressive achievements for improving national education systems. Based on the literature review, previous studies and the research problem, this study endeavors to answer the following questions:

- What are the advantageous LCMS used for FLT goals at Canadian universities?
- What are the efficient pedagogical technologies and how are they implemented in virtual foreign language learning?
- Which Canadian practices could be followed and implemented into national education systems?

The author's contribution to the issue of using LCMS in foreign language teaching and learning is the development of methodical instructions on how to enhance e-learners' language performance.

According to the above-mentioned goals, the structure of the article includes introduction, literature review, data collecting and analysis, findings and discussion.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

So far several studies have been conducted by researchers to show that the internet is being used for academic purposes around the world (see works of (Jethro *et al.*, 2012; Popa and Stănculea, 2012)).

Many of e-learning systems developed during the last decades have given us an understanding of what does and doesn't work. In recent years, a great deal of attention has been paid to Content Management Systems (CMS), Learning Content Management Systems (LCMS) and Learning Management Systems (LMS).

The problem of using the newest Content Management Systems is discussed in the works of (Ninoria *et al.*, 2011; Ion, 2012; Adzharuddin and Ling, 2013) and other researchers. Though very expensive and yet very little implemented CMS is one of the best tools that helps us to cope with the realities of the 21st century that is basically designed to support distance learning courses. According to Ninoria *et al.* (2011) CMS allows the instructor to upload course materials and documents in popular formats such as word, power point; lead the students through varied learning activities; supervise course discussions through the discussion board (Ninoria *et al.*, 2011).

Ninoria *et al.* (2011) discuss the role and functions of Learning Management Systems. The researchers believe that "typical LMS integrates most common e-learning functions in a single application" and "provides a centralized organizational approach to learning for scheduling of courses and registration of learners, and assessment of their learning outcomes" (Ninoria *et al.*, 2011). Accordingly, the specified functions of Learning Management Systems are: "centralize and automate administration; use self-service and self-guided services; assemble and deliver learning content; consolidate training initiatives on a scalable web-based platform; support portability and standards; personalize content and enable knowledge reuse" (Ninoria *et al.*, 2011).

Thus, LMS successfully connects students with fellow students and their instructors extending classroom activities online and empowering internet sharing of information, research materials and library resources. E-learning language courses for higher education based on LMS force the teacher into using a wide range of delivery and instructional methods in a computer-based learning environment such as presentation, audio and animated demonstration, discussion and debate, tutorial, gaming, role-playing, simulation, cooperative and collaborative learning, etc. For example, a discussion forum could enhance speaking skills and collaborative learning since online forums reduce physical and psychological barriers. According to Bakar *et al.* (2013) "online discussion forum not

only motivates learners to speak, but also encourages those who are shy and withdrawn to be more courageous and willing to participate", "provides them with a non-threatening environment that reduces their anxiety and concerns about being embarrassed if they were to speak face-to-face in front of the public"(Bakar *et al.*, 2013).

Thus, LMS creates an environment for fostering communicative skills of e-students, transforms pedagogical interaction into new effective learning process.

Learning Content Management System uses the strength of CMS with the integration of LMS. LCMS itself makes creating content more efficient, helps users avoid redundancy. Adzharuddin and Ling (2013) define Learning Content Management System as a "multi-user environment where learning developers can create, store, reuse, manage and deliver digital learning content from a central object repository" (Adzharuddin and Ling, 2013). LCMS provides a learning content object repository and enables course authors and learners to work together, access the learning objects, develop new learning information, have discussions through forums, interact out of the classroom, create and administer tests and quizzes.

In modern times, students rely on the internet for most of their daily activities and their academic needs. The learning portal is a place where students can successfully search and obtain information regarding their courses; lecturers in their turn can interact with students at a distance and give out lecture notes and further information for the students to discover on their own; it is a helpful web based technology which assists in the delivering learning content and resources to students, assists in planning, distribution and evaluation of a learning process. LCMS can be regarded as an integral part of the learning portal.

The interactive features of LMS and LCMS are quick messaging, threaded discussions, videoconferencing, tracking and reporting, discussion forums, collaborative content development. In fact, they enable a wide range of collaborative activities and the major goal is to facilitate any time, any place any pace access to learning content and management and to keep track of students' progress and performance.

Learning Management Systems and Learning Content Management Systems are used as an efficient complement to the traditional educational system and support both the students and lecturers in a unique situation at virtual university allowing developing new strategies for a new way of online learning.

3. DATA COLLECTING AND ANALYSIS

3.1. LCMS Based Language Learning

The implementation of the web-based technologies has developed a new field for foreign language learning which is becoming more and more popular in different countries. Learning languages on the internet is one of the most important and efficient learning approaches as it can activate and foster students' communicative competence and learning autonomy.

Brouse *et al.* (2011) consider the following e-learning activities that could be used to enhance students' language proficiency and independent learning: chats; the choice activity module; the database activity module; the external tool activity module; the forum activity module; the glossary activity module; the hotpot activity module; the lesson activity module; the quiz activity; SCORM Package; the survey activity module; the workshop activity module; the wiki activity module; the book module; the file module; the folder module; the label module; the page module; and the URL module (Brouse *et al.*, 2011). The researcher comes to the conclusion that e-learning is an essential tool including various activities and resources that could enhance the students' language proficiency and independent learning.

Chen (2014) argues that "in contrast to traditional classroom learning methods, virtual learning environments allow a new method to facilitate student motivation" (Chen, 2014) It brings language learners closer to the target language community facilitating learning through communication and exploration.

In our opinion, the LCMS based technologies should propose many opportunities for both teachers and students when it comes to delivery methods and language learning styles; the pedagogical methods should be also prioritized.

Employing the virtual learning environments and using distance learning applications could serve to implement the multiple conditions for learning, which in return has the potential of upheavals in the online teaching and learning of foreign languages.

The implementation of LCMS in the context of language learning benefits learners with enriched resources and possibilities for language use, creation and practice, it has the potential to free the learners from the rigid rules of classrooms. Taking learners away from classrooms assists in self-awareness and autonomy by providing opportunities for ownership in learning.

3.2. Virtual Language Learning in Canada

Let's consider the opportunities and advantages of LCMS based language learning and teaching in the Canadian context.

Distance learning and online courses are provided at most Canadian universities, in particular at Simon Fraser University, the University of British Columbia, University of Ottawa, the University of Western Ontario, Laurentian University, Mount Saint Vincent University and others. Flexible learning systems of these universities enable pedagogical flexibility so that students have more choice in their learning opportunities, including when, where, and what they want to learn both in-class and online.

In particular, the University of Winnipeg "delivers high quality programming to international and domestic students seeking to enhance their English proficiency" (see http://www.uwinnipeg.ca/elp). Apart from traditional learning The University of Winnipeg offers the ESL Teacher Certificate Program (ESL TCP) in an online format (on the base of Nexus learning management system) that makes this program "more accessible to students both locally and internationally" (see http://www.uwinnipeg.ca/elp/esltcp/online-tcp-program.html). To ensure quality of programming, the syllabus has been designed to meet the standards of TESL Canada, the national accrediting body for ESL teacher education

The Centre for Teaching, Learning and Technology of the University of British Columbia also supports flexible learning that promotes effective improvements in student achievement and includes online, flipped, and blended environments. Among the English distance courses are as follows: Strategies for University Writing; Literature in Canada; Technical Writing; Advanced Composition; History of the English Language; English Grammar and Usage; Stylistics; Shakespeare and the Renaissance: Shakespeare; Secrets and Hidden Lives in Novels of the Victorian Period; The Modern British and Irish Novel; Children's Literature (see http://ctlt.ubc.ca/distance-learning/courses/engl).

The University of New Brunswick also offers a wide range of e-learning programs: individual courses (open entry) that provide online, self-paced courses to people wishing to pursue their formal education, but who are not currently served by classroom-based courses; and term-based online courses that provide interaction between fellow students and the instructor, a number of weekly scheduled learning activities or assignments, opportunities to work in collaborative groups and participate in discussions. Among the English online courses are the following ones: An Introduction to Prose Fiction; An Introduction to the Novel; Survey of English Literature from the beginnings to 1660; Survey of English Literature 1660-1900; Shakespeare (see http://www.unb.ca/cel/online/courses-programs/open-entry/index.html#English).

Among over 400 courses and programs offered at the Memorial University of Newfoundland to suit many student needs there is an online bachelor's course for students who choose English as their major (see http://delts.mun.ca/fs/programsofferedonline.php) Each student has the choice to pursue academic goals and get the same degree, from the same professors, from the same university as if they were studying on campus.

The Trinity Western University promotes not only academic and intellectual excellence, but integrates these with high standards of personal, moral, and spiritual integrity. Many of online language courses at the Trinity Western

University are offered as independent study formats: Introduction to Communications; Introduction to Literature; Introduction to Drama & Poetry; Shakespeare; Children's Literature (http://www.twu.ca/extension/program/focus).

The Mount Saint Vincent University offers a number of undergraduate language programs online via distance learning:- an undergraduate degree in linguistics which gives students opportunities to study the formal, functional and systemic nature of language and languages (Structure and Variety in Contemporary French: Grammar; The Development of Modern French; Teaching English as a Second Language; Directed Study in Linguistics; Directed Study in Linguistics; Directed Studies in French Linguistics; Honors Essay);

- A Bachelor of Arts program with a major in French and Spanish offering a broad background in the humanities and social sciences.
- English and Cultural Studies;
- English and Women's Studies (Introduction to Literature: Gender and Form; Themes in Women's Writing; Feminisms and Their Literatures; Queer Theory) (see http://www.msvu.ca/en/home/programsdepartments/distancelearning/default.aspx).

3.3. FLT Technologies in Canadian Virtual Classrooms

In this section, we would like to consider some foreign language teaching technologies successfully employed at Canadian universities for e-learning. Indeed, the major concern of Canadian educational community is to fortify language education that is the reason why university teachers have the responsibility to create communicative learning environments to promote language proficiency, self-learning, research activities and collaborative work.

It is worth mentioning here, that e-learning requires careful planning, and the foreign language course design should be innovative and allow learners to interact with each other and the materials. The effective design starts with purposeful planning of the target audience, learning-teaching environment and set of specific learning goals. It should be based on the following principles: consistency, usability, logical coherence, interactivity, multimodality, adaptability, and accountability.

Due to its diverse and widespread geography, Canada has been a leader in distance education for many years; it has made many significant contributions to the e-learning sector, the most significant of which was probably Murray Goldberg's invention of WebCT at the University of British Columbia in 1997 (WebCT is now part of Blackboard – the largest vendor of eLearning software in education). Canadian education institutions, wishing to adopt the implications of technological developments, have introduced online courses on various learning platforms such as Canvas, Drupal, WordPress, LON-CAPA, Sakai, Moodle, Blackboard, WebCT and others. According to the survey of 2010, percentages of Learning Management Systems adopted at universities in Canada are as follows: Moodle has 40 per cent, while Blackboard (with Angel and Web CT) has 36 per cent of the market, and Desire2Learn (a Canadian company based in Ontario) has 14 per cent. Sakai, Instructure, In-house, FirstClass appeared to be less popular – about 1 per cent (Ontario Online Learning Portal (OOLP), n.d). It is not easy to make a decision about which LMS an institution should adopt. Moreover, the technology is constantly changing, offering new and different opportunities for teaching and learning. Professor Ben Levin of Ontario Institute for Studies in Education pointed out that "it is important to get the balance right between sustainability and innovation; innovation should bring gradual, well-tested improvements. Change for the sake of change is disruptive and ineffective and there is little evidence that it has an impact on student engagement or learning outcomes" (OOLP, n.d).

Let's discuss the FLT techniques based on the Moodle and Blackboard Collaborate – the most popular platforms shared by all Canadian universities offering e-learning foreign language courses.

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3.4. Moodle

Moodle is "an e-learning software platform developed by Martin Dougiamas that allows educators to create and manage online courses for university students; therefore, the participants or learners can access the modules of those courses as a virtual classroom" (Díaz, 2012).

Moodle is the LCMS used by many Canadian professors. It is based on the theory of cooperative learning and communicative approach to foreign languages allowing such work formats as cooperative work, exercises, critical reflection, surveys, glossary, etc. Professors can set up and grade quizzes, create communicative assignments, online discussions, forums, wikis, questionnaires and more. It is a tool which allows working on communication in a global manner, by means of the integration of the four linguistic skills: oral expression and comprehension, written expression and comprehension. Moreover, this method of learning has an eminently creative and collaborative character: it provides an opportunity of interaction through active engagement of students in communication and conversational exchanges via texts; it also facilitates motivation, understanding, cooperation and emotional support among students. The real-time feedback, mutual engagement, the creative activities foster the improvement of the foreign language skills.

Every course module usually has an associated Moodle module to help the staff deliver course materials, online tasks and activities to students. The universities provide teaching staff and learners with training guides to understanding of Moodle's basic features showing how to set up modules, add and manage content, make the module available to students, how to get started with Moodle and access modules.

3.5. Blackboard Collaborate

Blackboard Collaborate is the tool used in many online courses to provide real-time communication and recording of classes, seminars, and presentations. Blackboard Collaborate facilitates real-time communication and recording of online classes, seminars, and presentations, it helps combine web conferencing, instant messaging, and voice authoring to help make learning more interactive, immediate, personal, and real. Whether it's web conferencing, instant messaging, or voice authoring capabilities, Blackboard Collaborate makes it easier to create a vibrant and engaging foreign language learning environment.

There are extra e-learning opportunities provided for students at Canadian universities like KentPlayer (the lecture recording and educational multimedia service which allows audio and/or video recording of the lecturer via web cameras), MyFolio (which is e-portfolio tool providing students with an easy in use tool to track and reflect on their experiences, professional performance and personal development), TurningPoint (which is a "Personal Response System" facilitating communication and supporting interaction between teacher and students during lectures via a PowerPoint presentation), GradeMark (which is an online marking tool allowing teachers to add text-based comments and marks to assignments) and more.

4. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

LCMS have been adopted by many Canadian universities because they offer a large set of tools, have a good architecture, implementation, inter-operability, and also have the strength of the community.

The first question raised in this study was to describe the advantageous LCMS used for FLT goals at Canadian universities. We have succeeded in finding that optimal e-learning systems used at many Canadian universities are Moodle and Blackboard Collaborate. They have a great potential for creating a successful e-learning experience in foreign language teaching by providing an abundance of excellent tools that can be utilized to enhance language proficiency. As it has been shown language e-learners have the opportunity to work together and collaborate while learning the language, they have more opportunities to contact all classroom materials, activities and the instructor both synchronously and asynchronously. By using LCMS tools students improve their language skills as they practice reading, listening, speaking and writing via the different e-resources and tasks, develop their competences.

The second task was to find out what the efficient pedagogical technologies are and how they are implemented in virtual foreign language learning. In comparison with the traditional lecture-based learning, Moodle and Blackboard Collaborate are the platforms which create interactive and dynamic spaces for the development of the foreign language competences. Their pedagogical effect includes facilitating the process of working on linguistic and communicative competences due to the motivation they spur in the students who access the platforms to interact with peers, read texts, do exercises, write reports and tests. That means providing information, accessing, and searching the contents of the language course. The potential of using these platforms is remarkable thanks to the interaction among peers via different activities and texts (including audio and video). These learning situations are necessary to improve the students' language skills. When students recognize they have more time to think, better performance in writing is reached. It also enhances learners' listening and reading skills because LCMS provides such tools as illustrations, cartoons, and videos. Moreover, the platform allows giving immediate feedback throughout the course.

At last the article was aimed to answer which Canadian practices could be followed and implemented into national education systems. The answer is the Flexible Learning Initiative allowing to achieve more student interactions, to enable pedagogical flexibility driving learning performance through a wider choice of learning tools, technologies and activities including in-class and out-of-class experiences. In our opinion, the transition to flexible learning and e-learning could transform pedagogical techniques and curricula, change approaches to teaching foreign languages.

Using LCMS in foreign language teaching and learning could enhance e-learners' language performance if you follow the methodological guidance:

- carefully design your course and develop instructions for students;
- encourage your learners to work independently according to their own pace;
- use the variety of e-learning resources and tasks to improve students' reading, listening, speaking and writing skills;
- take into account different learning styles and allow your students to choose from a variety of activities and resources;
- use the opportunities of forums and chats, which improve learners' communicative competency at maximum;
- encourage students to increase study time of the language over the week to improve their overall language proficiency.

5. CONCLUSION

The efficiency of e-learning, observed recently, has boosted a strong demand for e-learning systems at higher educational institutions, that enhanced the growth of a number of LCMS.

Canadian policies on language education are supposed to be highly successful when viewed in a comparative international context. The Canadian experience of employing technological platforms like Moodle and Blackboard Collaborate has proved to be efficient and could be implemented in national pedagogy and methodologies for foreign language teaching as it develops new approaches to language learning like computer-supported collaborative and problem-based learning, goal-based scenarios and self-learning. We strongly believe that the wide variety of LCMS based activities and resources needs to be activated in the university foreign language modules to increase the time students interact with the language and to motivate them to work independently and thus to promote their language and communication skills, encourage them to become life-long learners. All these seem to be promising practices in FLT in the 21st century.

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