ASCILITE 2023

People, Partnerships and Pedagogies

Evaluating programme-wide course redevelopment within a learning management system

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Introduction: Effective course design within the architecture of a learning management system (LMS) is crucial for achieving high-quality learning outcomes in blended and online courses (Bollinger & Martin, 2021; Spiceland et al., 2015; Vaughan, 2010). Implementing a consistent visual design template across multiple courses can promote student engagement and achievement of learning objectives (Ralston-Berg & Braatz, 2021). Other elements of effective course design include clear instructions, structured learning activities, and effective mechanisms for interaction and feedback (Baldwin et al., 2018; Martin et al., 2021).

Method: A comprehensive redesign was conducted of the LMS component of 34 undergraduate course instances (20 blended on-campus courses; 14 online distance courses) across three programmes in the science and health faculties at a New Zealand university. The redesigned template aimed to improve the clarity and ease of navigation to important course information, structure student learning tasks, and provide a foundation for effective course delivery. The initial phase involved creating and testing the template. This was subsequently presented to faculty as a means to cultivate commitment and collaboration among academics, academic support teams, and administrative staff. The template was designed to minimise cognitive load to promote comprehension and retention (Schnotz & Kürschner, 2007). It incorporated evidence-based course components based on principles of effective course design, including detailed and comprehensive information on the course and assessments; weekly modules with clearly stated learning outcomes, task lists, lecture slides and recording links, required readings, tutorial and lab materials; assessment requirements; supplementary materials; and links to available course support (Bollinger & Martin, 2021). While maintaining a standardised visual design, the template was flexible to accommodate the specific needs of individual courses.

Results and Discussion: An evaluation of the impact of the redesign project will be conducted. Data sources will include student surveys administered midway through and at the end of each course, as well as coded feedback from academic and support staff. The effect of the redesign on key student and instructor outcomes will be analysed. Based on research on effective blended and online course design, we expect our evaluation will uncover systematic benefits to student experience as measured by perceptions of course organisation and engagement of course material. For instructors, we anticipate that the standardised template will reduce time on administrative activities such as answering student emails, allowing them to focus on higher-value tasks.

Conclusion: This study aims to provide valuable insights into effective practises for course design that promote student engagement and the achievement of intended learning outcomes. The project aligns with Ascilite 2023 subthemes. The focus on effective course design relates to subtheme 3 on digital pedagogy. Designing an effective online component of blended courses represents a key challenge for educators in a digital world. Additionally, the collaborations between academics, administrators, and support staff reflect subtheme 2 on building deeper partnerships within an institution. By evaluating a programme focused on enhancing blended learning through partnership and pedagogical research, this study will offer critical perspectives on key issues in teaching and learning in a digital world.

Keywords: course design, online learning, blended learning, learning management system

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