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## E-LEARNING AND QMINDSHARE® AS MODERN TOOLS FOR QUALITY HIGHER EDUCATION AT KATOWICE SCHOOL OF ECONOMICS (GWSH)

### Summary

The process of higher education especially the quality control index in higher education in Poland has evolved in recent years. The contemporary higher education market and labour market have become very demanding, on one hand students prefer different, more modern teaching tools, on the other hand employers expect the alumni who can use IT fluently both on domestic, and international markets. The article is the continuation of research on e-learning and virtual tools that help in the education process at Katowice School of Economics. The results of recent survey show the importance of E-learning, interactive techniques and case studies.

**Keywords:** e-learning, higher education, technology, distance learning, case study

### Introduction

The evolution of the higher education system in Poland over the last ten years has influenced the ways of teaching and techniques that lecturers can use during their classes and lectures. The changes of education law, different qualifications necessary for the labour market purposes, higher expectations of potential and actual students and their employers and mostly higher competition on education market are currently the most important challenges that all Polish universities face. New technologies can be helpful in managing some of those challenges, especially

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amongst the students and their expectations. This article shows the recent survey results of students of second cycle studies at Katowice School of Economics (GWSH). The research is a continuation of previous evaluations conducted every year after some e-learning contents that were introduced to students. The Authors focused here on the general evaluation of usage the e-learning platform and supporting tools, like e.g. QMINDShare® by American company Count5 amongst part time students.

## **1. Quality of higher education – challenges and overall perspective**

Nowadays the most important for the labour market – and the same for young people who want to study is practical knowledge and experience they can obtain during the study programmes. It is crucial to adjust the study programmes to those specific features that help young people to get their first job. That caused a lot of challenges that universities in Poland have to face during the education process. The Authors try to share their experience for planning, implementing and evaluation distance learning tools at Katowice School of Economics in Silesia. The reasons for implementing and developing in Katowice School of Economics the e-learning system were first of all the European Union funds obtained. On the other hand the students market demand that has been observed proved the necessity of using new modern technologies during the study programmes. The authorities decided to spread the offer not only in terms of study programmes, but method of teaching, especially e-learning. The disadvantage of using the distance learning that is very often shown as the most important – is the lack of direct contact between a student and a teacher. At Katowice School of Economics the first e-learning programmes were introduced to students some years ago so there have been some disadvantages and advantages observed so far. But in general the lack of contact is not the most important, because there are a lot of other advantages that cause increasing popularity of it. Another interesting issue is the QMINDShare® tool that was tested at Katowice School of Economics for six months in 2012 as a tool for supporting e-learning that helped the students in learning and remembering the knowledge. The possibilities of increasing the attractiveness of study programme for students are quite high.

The education system in Poland has been changed for many years, but the most influential changes have been observed since 1989 when the free market economy became a fact. The factors that influenced that process were very different and the level of their influence differed as well. The most important was obviously internalisation and globalisation of economy influenced also other sectors, including the education one. The free market economy means also in terms of higher education the freedom and autonomy in building and implementing the study pro-

grammes, of course with specific features and templates that are important for quality education in certain fields of studies (Chmielecka, Marciniak, Kraśniewski 2010, p. 34–36). This autonomy given by law was the first step to adjust the study programmes to the contemporary market expectations and demands. From a very early stage it was clear that the higher education system must be similar to other European study programmes and ways of teaching. In 2004 Poland became a European Union member, and since then the process of changing the education system became quicker (CEDEFOP 2008). But the changes began earlier – before joining the EU was a fact. The universities in Poland have been always trying to keep up with the contemporary economical and social changes that could be observed (CEDEFOP 2009). For teachers who are the most important part except students in the education system it was obvious that using modern technologies during the lectures and workshops is the key to success especially within the private sector of education system in Poland.

During the last twenty years there were a lot of social and economical changes in the Polish economy and society. Polish students were always very eager to get an education abroad, but before 1989 it was not so easy to travel for studies abroad. Recent years brought a vast change into the education market, because there are a lot of study programmes that help to continue the studies abroad (Warsaw University 2009). On the other hand the technologies developed into a stage where almost everybody has Internet access on their mobiles and computers, so studying in an e-learning system became more and more popular in many universities in Poland. E-learning was first introduced in KSE in 2007 because of KSE distant department in Vienna. At the beginning there were some issues because students had to get used to a new way of teaching in some parts of their traditional lectures and workshops. Since that time KSE experience has grown and in 2011 university was granted the EU funds for supporting the traditional teaching methods by e-learning (blended learning) for at least 10% of each subject curriculum. Currently there are over 70 subjects that are supported by e-learning contents on e-learning platform, both lectures and workshops. The amount of teaching hours covered by e-learning contents per each subject differs from 7 to 12 depending on the total amount of the hours within the subject and its complexity. Moreover the blended learning (without direct contact with the teacher) is less than 40% of the total amount of teaching hours. That gives Katowice School of Economics (GWSH) not only the advantage of implementing new teaching methods at study programmes, but also keeps the quality of teaching with traditional methods and contact with teachers at the very good balance. After implementing each e-learning content and including it into study programme KSE evaluates the students progress and also does the surveys with students' feedback about the e-learning content and usage of e-learning platform during the semester. The level of students' satisfaction from new form of teaching differs depending on the subject and the studies level. The results of the

survey conducted in December 2013 showed below are part of the whole Quality System Control of e-learning and study programmes at the university.

## 2. E-learning at KSE (GWSH) – results of evaluation survey

In December 2013 the new part of research was conducted amongst 159 part time students who currently use e-learning (subject: Entrepreneurship). 23% of respondent were men, 77% – women. The age structure is shown in the table below.

Table 1

Age of respondents in December 2013

Age group	Amount	Percentage
21 – 25 years old	78	49%
26 – 35 years old	56	35%
36 – 45 years old	21	13%
Over 45 years old	4	3%
Total	159	100%

Source: based on research conducted in December 2013 (n=159).

The majority of respondents think that graphics and easy way to use the platform are its best features. Only 1% of respondents finds the graphics as poor (see fig. 1 ). On the other hand the functionality could be a bit better, because less than 45% of respondents like it very much. Very good marks were given by respondents also to support (helpdesk) – more than half of respondents gave a good mark, but on the other hand there is still over 15% of students who think that the helpdesk is poor and needs to be improved. Regarding the support the respondents had to give the marks for instructions (if they are clear and simple) and direct contact with helpdesk (by email or telephone) – the results below are shown as a whole. General overview on the e-learning platform used in Katowice School of Economics (GWSH) is positive, but there are some things that should be improve to satisfy the students even more and encourage them to use that tool more often.

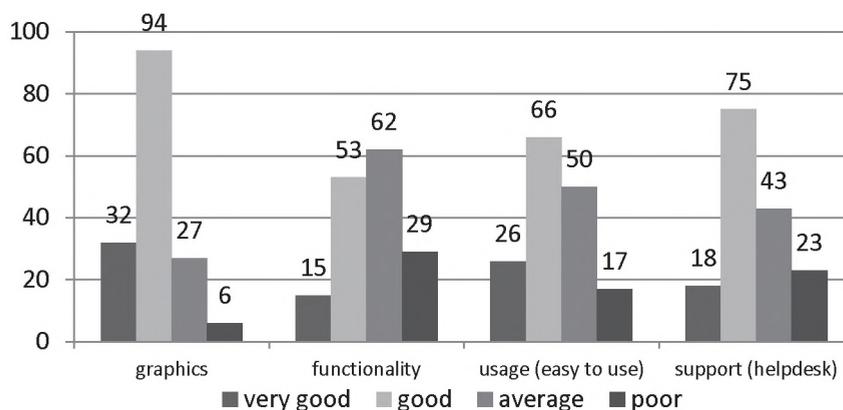


Fig. 1. General overview on e-learning platform – Evaluation of E-learning platform features (amount of respondents)

Source: based on own research – December 2013 (n=159).

Another issue that was taken under consideration is students' satisfaction on using e-learning by lecturers in the study programme (as an addition to live lectures, workshops and regular classes). In general respondents are rather satisfied (almost half of them) and 10% marked the answer they are very satisfied. On the other hand almost 20% of respondents do not like if the lecturers use e-learning to their subjects, they are also a bit older students, so it might be the result of more traditional way of learning. The results are shown in the fig. 2.

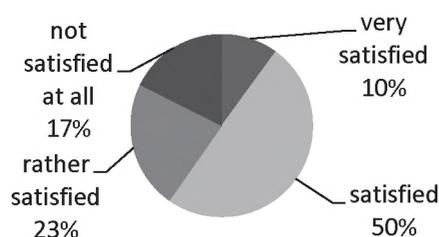


Fig. 2. Using e-learning – respondents' satisfaction level

Source: based on own research – December 2013 (n=159).

There was also the question about the necessity of using commonly new technologies in education in the survey. The results are shown below. It occurred that the majority of respondents strongly agree or rather agree with that statement, less than 4% strongly disagree. It shows how important for students the modern technologies are.

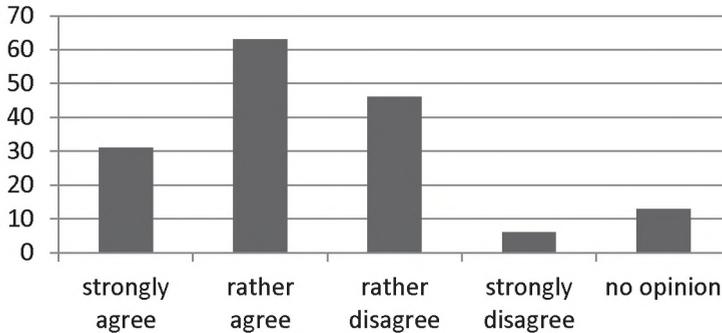


Fig. 3. New technologies should be commonly used in education – respondents' opinion

Source: Based on own research – December 2013 (n=159).

One of the most important parts in the research was question of features that a good platform should have. The results based on 159 respondents showed that the most important in e-learning platform is the lack of e-learning system crash, then clear and understandable messages, then less important are in order of frequency: interactive functionality, using case studies, nice and interesting graphics and additional tasks within the subject.

To sum up the general overview on e-learning platform that is used at Katowice School of Economics (GWSH) is positive, but there should be some slight improvements done to adjust it to the users (students).

### 3. QMINDShare® as a supporting tool – evaluation and possibilities for future

The QMINDShare® tool was tested at Katowice School of Economics two years ago during the classes on international marketing. In 2012 KSE together with University of Silesia and American company Count5 conducted a joint programme of testing the QMINDShare® application that supports the e-learning programmes by helping student to remember the important parts of material and revise it for an exam. This tool was for the first time introduced to the Polish market.

The application can be used on mobile or computer that have internet access (this is the only condition for using the Q). It sends to student a set of questions to be answered (the amount of questions and frequency of sending them depends completely on a teacher who sets that at the beginning). If students give the correct answers to the question they can get the same question only one more time (for revision purposes). But if the students' answers are wrong, then Q application sends them the same questions many times (how many times depends on a setting done by a teacher).

Project Q (the short name for the project at KSE) implemented during winter semester was a great success. Q is an application that contacts with students at least twice a week and forces them to answer the additional questions (different type – open, close, multi choice and also a quiz and some games similar to social media like Facebook) based on the main material that was discussed during the traditional classes and was to be read and prepared on e-learning platform. It occurred that students who were using that tool (the experiment consisted of two groups of students that were the control groups and two experimental groups that used Q project on their laptops) had better marks and in general they remembered more than their colleagues from the control groups (without Q as a supporting tool).

Unfortunately although the students said yes for future usage of the Q tool and their satisfaction was very high, as well as the lecturer, the costs to be paid per one user were too high and Katowice School of Economics made a difficult decision to give up the Q tool as a support for e-learning platform. There is a possibility to use it in the future if there are some additional funds for that purpose.

## **Conclusions**

To sum up e-learning is getting more and more popular at Katowice School of Economics and students would like to use that tool on a regular basis. This tendency is similar in other universities in the region. Students prefer direct contact with their lecturers on one hand, but on the other hand they like some new, additional and innovative ways of teaching to make the subject more interesting. Especially if they can use interactive tasks, case studies and messages used in e-learning contents are clear and easy to understand. Katowice School of Economics as an innovative university was testing the QMINDShare® application and the results in general were very good – students who had access to that application supporting e-learning and traditional teaching methods got better marks and remembered easier the material from the subjects. They wanted more functionality (the possibility of using it not only on their laptops but also other devices – the limitation of that feature was on purpose, but in regular usage the QMINDShare® can be used in all kind of devices with internet access). Unfortunately the accessibility of Q tool is limited by high costs per user, that is why so far it was only the test of Q amongst chosen students once.

Nowadays the range of tools that can be used for teaching and evaluation purposes is getting bigger, so the new IT tools can be obtained. Also the prices for the modern technologies that can be used at universities are going down in order to increase their range of availability.

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### **E-LEARNING ORAZ QMINDSHARE® JAKO NOWOCZESNE NARZĘDZIA PODNOŚĄCE JAKOŚĆ KSZTAŁCENIA WYŻSZEGO W GÓRNOŚLĄSKIEJ WYŻSZEJ SZKOLE HANDLOWEJ IM. WOJCIECHA KORFANTEGO W KATOWICACH**

#### Streszczenie

Proces kształcenia wyższego, a w szczególności wskaźniki kontroli jakości tego kształcenia w Polsce zmieniały się w ciągu ostatnich dziesięciu lat. Współczesny rynek kształcenia wyższego oraz rynek pracy stały się bardzo wymagające. Z jednej strony studenci woleliby zróżnicowane, nowocześniejsze narzędzia wspomagające proces kształcenia, z drugiej strony pracodawcy oczekują absolwentów przygotowanych do pracy praktycznej z nowoczesnymi narzędziami IT zarówno na rynku krajowym, jak i międzynarodowym. Prezentowane w artykule wyniki badań są kontynuacją procesu badawczego przeprowadzanego od 2011 r. w GWSH w Katowicach na temat e-learningu oraz QMINDShare®.

**Słowa kluczowe:** e-learning, szkolnictwo wyższe, technologia, nauczanie na odległość, studium przypadku

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