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Using Moodle e-learning platform for first year students library training – training years of transformation

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USING MOODLE E-LEARNING PLATFORM FOR THE FIRST YEAR STUDENTS' LIBRARY TRAINING - THREE YEARS OF TRANSFORMATION

Abstract

In Poland each student has to take a library course at the very beginning of their learning process. At the majority of the universities and academies similar courses are given in a library, during the first month of the academic year. In 2008, Medical University of Lodz had decided to change the traditional way of training and switched to the on-line courses instead. Firstly, we have started with static web pages and separated dedicated system for a test of library skills. Since 2010 the library course has been implementing on the Moodle platform. The e-learning environment allows for using more active forms of learning, forcing students to pass all the modules before the final test. In this presentation I will show our experience, including crucial points of system implementation with SWOT analysis of this way of library training.

The program for each of the courses of study in Medical University of Lodz provides the mandatory library training for the students. Until 2008, classes were held in the library. Each dean's groups (up to about 15-20 students) had been assigned the date of their class. All classes were held in October and by mid-November, all students had completed a library training. Classes were held once and lasted about 1.5 hour. During the course students had taken short trip through the library building, getting information about the library resources, ending with a short practical exercise – searching the card or computer catalogue. There was no time to do anything else.

For several years there has been a steady increase in the number of students admitted to the first year of study. The turning point was the academic year 2002/2003 when number of students had doubled (increase from about 700 students in 2001/2002 to 1400 in 2002/2003). In 2002, Medical University was founded, resulting from the merger of the Military Medical Academy and Medical Academy of Lodz. Overcrowding problems have been encountered. In 2007 number of students reached 2200 (over 50% growth since 2002). There were occasions when the library course was carried out in parallel classes for four groups of students. It was quite cumbersome to

organize it (due to e.g. lack of sufficient number of computer terminals or classrooms) and thus the quality of the library training was significantly impaired.

In 2006, on XXV Conference of the Polish Medical Libraries, the Library of Medical Academy of Gdansk presented their own web-based system for library training for the first year students[1]. The system consisted of two modules. The presentation module was build using Flash technology. The second one was a module for the library test. We decided to buy a license for the examination module only. The information part of the class we put on the library website using Mambo/Joomla as a CMS. It included basic information about the library, the location, opening hours, the most important information from the regulations, terms of use, information about available electronic resources and short tutorials about using OPAC, traditional card catalogue, and bibliographic databases.
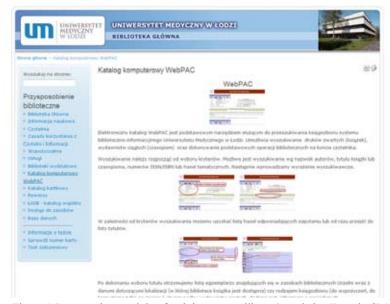

Figure 1 Presentation module of training on our library's website (Joomla CMS)

In the 2008/2009 academic year for the first time students could learn individually the information about the library instead of coming to the library.

To test the module, we have imported data of 2650 students from Medical University recruiting department. 1688 of them took the test and 1674 passed. In academic year 2009/2010 there were 2486 students, 1302 took the test, and 1286 passed

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[1] Anna G r y g o r o w i c z , Elżbieta K r a s z e w s k a : Szkolenie biblioteczne on-line jako nowoczesna forma zajęć dla studentów I roku Akademii Medycznej w Gdańsku
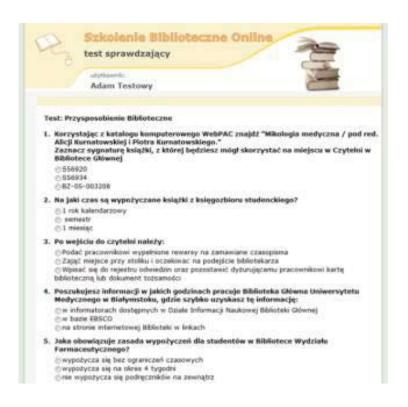
Figure 2 Examination Module by Library of Medical Academy of Gdansk

We have prepared about 50 questions divided into several categories, from which 1-2 questions were selected at random, giving the total 15 questions per test. Therefore, any attempt on a test gave a different set of questions, with different order of responses. Students had an unlimited number of tries - each of them serving as a part of training, supporting the active reinforcement of knowledge. The result of best approach formed the basis for obtaining credit. The threshold was set at 75% of correct answers (12 correct answers of 15 questions). The system also collected information about the number of correct answers - it was helpful in evaluating the content and design questions. The main disadvantage of this system was absence of history of answers.

Figure 3 Question evaluation by Library of Medical Academy of Gdansk

In December 2009 we opened our library of e-learning system for Moodle. The courses about electronic resources (databases on-line journals, reference manager, etc.) for employees of our Medical University[2] were launched first.

In summer 2010 we moved the whole library training course to the Moodle e-learning platform. The course content remained mostly unchanged, but the form changed entirely. For a vast part of the training we used Slideshows, one of the Moodle activities, that have worked well in courses for employees. The biggest change which was possible through using Moodle was forcing the students to pass all elements of training. In the old model, they could skip parts of training and go straight to the test and try to solve it by guessing at random. On Moodle, using an additional module called Activity Locking the course can be build up sequentially. Student, in order to move to the next module, has to read the previous one. Setting up a test at the end of the task, forces students to complete each module of the library training.

Figure 4 Library training on Moodle platform. Note the padlock near each part of the course

Since the evaluation of questions from previous years has proven successful, we decided not to change the structure and content of the test. The test still consists of 15 questions selected from a set of 53, divided into 8 categories.

- General Information about Main Library and Departmental Libraries (6 questions)
- Catalogues (9)
- General Rules (3)
- Lodz Academic Library Network (2)
- Polish Medical Bibliography database (11)
- Library Services (9)
- OPAC - practical (9)
- Circulation rules (4)

In the academic year of 2010/2011 2545 students were registered in system, until mid-April 1250 took the test (less than in the old system), out of which 1243 passed.

New module, namely the evaluation questionnaire was implemented in the system. We asked students four questions concerning this form of training. Each had three possible answers to yes / no / I do not know, but we required additional comment if

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the answer was yes or no (depending on the question)

941 students fulfilled the questionnaire. Here are the results:

- Is the online library training a convenient form of getting to know the Library?
  - yes - 94%
  - no (why) - 1%
  - I do not know - 5%

Two answers „no „ included a comment that the training should take place in the library in person

- Was the training content, and the given sources, sufficient to give correct answers to the test questions
  - yes - 92%
  - no (why) 1%
  - I do not know 7%
- Has the training given you any additional skills or knowledge, which you did not have?
  - yes - (what new skils) 24% (it was necessary to describe)
  - no 25%
  - I do not know 51%
- Have all the issues been discussed in sufficient detail? If not, please indicate the content requiring extension.
  - yes - 87%
  - not (what) 1%
  - I do not know 12%

Conclusions from the survey were positive, but due to the design of questions requiring additional description, may be a little confusing. However, the information submitted by students is valuable.

In addition, the survey included a comment box.

The opinions expressed by the respondents were mostly in favour of this form of training, like "*I thought it was not very useful, but now after the course I know that it makes life easier*" or "*Very good idea that such training takes place on the Internet, anyone can take place at any time and get the amount of information that is most important to him."* However there were also negative comments "*the training has too much unnecessary information and takes a lot of time*" or "*I cannot use the library, I know nothing of how it looks in practice.* "

Three years of e-Library training is a good base to make some conclusions. Two different platforms posed similar problems. Switching to Moodle helped to solve some of them, but new one arose. The SWOT analysis is a good point to start thinking, how can the course be improved, what should we be afraid of, where are the strong points of this system.

<div align="center">Strenghts</div>

- The course can be taken anytime and anywhere
- Students can work at their own pace
- Practical training of using the on-line resources: OPAC, AtoZ journal list, bibliographic databases etc.
- Evaluation is much better than in traditional way through anonymous (almost) form
- The test is a part of training – the construction of questions forces students to make some queries.
- No attempt limits for the test – each try is opportunity to learn and practice
- Flexibility – adding, removing and changing the course elements is very easy
- Students at any time can go back to the course and recall any part of the training.
- Better usage of e-resources – databases, e-books, e-journals
- Library promotion – good possibility to present all of our resources and how to use them

<div align="center">Weaknesses</div>

- Students quickly go through the course modules and test's questions without reading them - possibly the need to modify the structure of questions and course.
- Problems to contact librarian - no possibility to ask questions
- Poor integration with other systems in University –(library system, university e-mail accounts, departments databases, etc) - too many passwords and IDs
- No need to contact library staff, nor to visit library at all
- No errors allowed for the staff – the course must be prepared perfectly.
- Students do not respect the deadline of the test, many students takes the test at the end of the first year only to get the credit. We can't force them to take it on time.
- On Moodle platform the course is available only for registered user

<div align="center">Opportunities</div>

- E-learning is getting more popular among teachers – the library Moodle courses have a chance to become a part, or a base for all e-courses in University.
- Fast growing university e-services for students.
- Upgrade to Moodle 2.0 planned for 2011 summer – new features like Activity completion or new comment module.
- Implementation of new tasks for the library training, forcing students to visit library eg. student has to borrow at least one book from library.

<div align="center">Threats</div>

- Cancelation of Library Training – for a few years now, this subject is not

obligatory in Polish education system.
- Student does not have to visit the library - the library is not a place, only the web services for some of them.
- Only a part of the students takes the course.

Conclusions

The Library Training is the first on-line only course at our University. The three years' experience let us know that switching to e-learning was a good decision. The system allows students to learn how to use the library resources more actively and efficiently. Some things still need improvement, but this system is much more flexible than traditional stationary courses. New parts of the course can be added, changed or removed in an easier way. The on-line course is more friendly for the young students. Also, less librarians are involved within education process, and classrooms can be used for other purposes.

The e-Library Training is a constantly developing project, it has to be, if we want to keep up the proper level of information literacy of our students.