Blended Learning in Adult Education in the Óbuda University

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Abstract

Taking into consideration the changes in higher education teaching, it is paramount that the teachers receive the most up to date training. Lately, the increasing number of students is parallel with the difference in age of our students, which accentuates the need for lifelong learning. Training mature students has shown a need for different approaches in teaching, in comparison to traditional teaching. Besides the lectures during the day, a bigger role is played by distance learning and e-learning. The teachers pedagogical knowledge and motivation, in any teaching institution is the most important.

This article is about educating mature students, the role of andragogy and the electronic learning system, Moodle introduced in our institution. These instructions give you basic guidelines for preparing camera-ready papers for conference proceedings.

I. INTRODUCTION

Adults continuing further education or considering a career change, has created new cliental for educational institutions. These changes have an effect on the network, management, andragogy and pedagogy of higher education. Higher education for mature students includes evening classes and distance learning, in order to complete postgraduate courses however in this category can be included young adults who's further education can be continued in full-time education.

Figure 1. The age distribution of students in higher education
Source: Ministry of National Resources, 2011, manuscript, own edition

Many higher educational institutions recognized the need to broaden the traditional teaching services by introducing distance learning and other alternatives in the hope to attract increasing numbers of mature students. (as shown in Figure 1, this effort was in no avail). According to the data presented the number of mature students, who have already broad work experience is higher than the number of young adults.

The great challenges of adult education includes the expansion of technological development, managing time devoted to study, pressure and demands on individual student. These students need to choose the most effective and efficient methods to fulfill the academic preparation for their chosen career.

Teaching methods at universities are still far too rigid. Teaching occurs at the front of a classroom while students take notes. University lecturers are highly qualified specialists, in their field, preparing the next generation of specialists, however these lectures from pedagogical point of view, are unqualified.

II. TEACHER IN HIGHER EDUCATION

The Leuven's Declaration in 2009 has accentuated the need for its lifelong learning policy in higher education. The implementation of this policy has been supported not only by international organizations as UNESCO & OECD, producing slogans and action programs but also the increasing need of high expectations in everyday work life.[1] Specialists wanting to keep their positions need to constantly keep up to date with the developments in their field.

In today’s fast developing world, learning cannot be restricted only to children and young adults, it has to continue throughout adulthood.

In 2011, our university had 11,870 students with nearly 50% participation in the form of a distance-learning.

Figure 2. Student numbers in Obuda University
Source: Ministry of National Resources, 2011, manuscript, own edition
In addition to learning, mature students also have to combine other factors of their life, like work, supporting their families, socialising, free time which has an impact on their learning, being so much different than their previous school system way of learning. The distractions for adult students implies the need for positive attitude and motivation which will make their learning process more rewarding and a successful activity.

The new leaning culture will change significantly the role of teachers and lecturers. The new teaching methods require not only high motivation, but also building on previous knowledge and finding methods which will build on the trainees existing professional competence. Constant monitoring and assessment are paramount for the trainees development, in combination with regular feedback and advice on how to improve.

The teachers methodological knowledge is based on one hand on his/her previous knowledge and preparation as a teacher, on the other hand his/her capability of assessing the trainees ability and use this in selecting the best teaching method in order to succeed.

This concept is hard to achieve in higher education because the focus is on the content rather than pedagogical aspect of delivering the syllabus. The lecturer feels comfortable in his/her role as an engineer rather than a teacher. This has been proven by the answers given by the students asked the following question: "In your opinion do you find that the lecturer, who prepares you for your engineering career is more comfortable in his/her role as an engineer or as a educator?"

The new learning culture will change the role of teachers and trainers significantly.
In lifelong learning the age of the adult requires that the educators must be aware that there have a duel role: facilitators and educators.

If we look at the educator's profession we should take into consideration two different aspects, beside the role of the educator we have to consider his/her subject knowledge and the way he/she is able to put across the syllabus. This skill seems to be much more important for the students rather than their lecturer's qualifications.

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**Fig. 5 In your opinion considering the above aspects of a lecturer which is the most important?**

The effectiveness of the educator's job is determined by how confident he/she feels in the role of educator, whether he/she has concerns about being put in an embarrassing situation where he/she could lose the respect of students. The skills required for being a good educator is vast, they need to have a variety of behaviour patterns ready and the flexibility to choose the appropriate way of reacting in any unexpected situation.

### III. ADULTS IN HIGHER EDUCATION

Most mature students are continuing their studies through distance learning alongside work, therefore their leaning needs are different compared to those who are in full time education. I have asked distance learning students what they find the most difficult. Surprisingly they find more difficult the time factor rather than the syllabus.

**Fig. 6 Choosing the time and place of the course**
I think that the time factor is not the only one when it comes to distance learning, so I asked students what kind of support they expect from the university. The answer of most students was that the quality and range of information provided by universities should be higher. Students are using the world wide web besides the information provided by universities. [2] In technical subjects besides the theoretical knowledge, developing someone's approach is very important. The approach can be developed with well planed and even better executed lectures, and for this reason many educators do not see the need for the introduction of an online learning system. In teaching other subjects this method has been successfully used, therefore the technical educators are said to be "old-fashioned and nonchalant".

We are certain that to prepare the next generation of specialist the online system is necessary, so that we can be competitive with other higher educational institutions. The Moodle system was introduced at Budapest Technical College (Budapesti Muszaki Foiskola) in 2006. We are proud to announce that the introduction of the Moodle system in our institution has been a success. The transition, at first wasn't easy, but the commitment, determination and hard work of our staff has made it possible.

The number of our courses are constantly increasing, we are able to offer more than 300 and the number of students is more than 5000. The network is mostly used to inform students about the lectures and tasks they have to complete and also to set and submit assignments.

**4. TECHNICAL BACK GROUND**

When we decided to introduce the system, we knew that a long and difficult road is ahead of us. I knew that the students will not have objections against the idea, however this cannot be said about the staff, therefore putting across the final objective was essential for the introduction of this system. If we don't have high expectations and clear and concise objectives, further development cannot be expected. [3] Therefore we had to combine the traditional teaching methods and the modern way of learning. We had to take into consideration the technical developments and the needs of our students. [4] The goal was to slowly get the staff on board with this new initiative.

This system was design for the whole university, across all subjects, the overall objective is to make our student's preparation as easy and effective as possible. Most courses are run by Rejtő Sándor Faculty of Light Industry and Environmental Protection Engineering, they have introduced this system one and a half years ago, and it has been more and more used. The system can be used during lectures taking an important part in the teaching process, is also indispensable for uploading assignments. Due to more and more faculties using the system, during the academic year in more than more occasion the system registered over 110 000 records.

The job of tutors is extremely complex, they have to provide their students with tasks which involves high level thinking, linking the students previous knowledge and also taking into consideration students individual needs, and building teamwork activities. The tutors themselves need to be up to date with how the system works. [5]

Our university employs 381 lecturers, but only 39 uses the network. I have asked members of staff to complete a questioner regarding why they don't use the system. Only 78 lecturer completed the questioner, from the answers I deduced the gaps in our pedagogical role. We should recognise that our role as an educator is just as important as our subject knowledge and qualifications.

In the end of the day we are working in an educational institution and we have to have the best possible training so than we can train our students to the best of our ability.

![Fig. 7 Why are you not using the system?](image)

Asking about what exactly they use the system for, the majority use it to upload subject related information. They not simply upload a 150 page PDF file, but unit by unit information for students to use gradually.

![Fig. 8 The teachers' activities](image)

The majority of the students have been pleased with the quality of materials uploaded, however with the quality of their tutors work, much less. This is valuable information for us to develop the system further more by concentrating on the weakest points.

"Evaluating the tutor’s work within the Moodle system, by participating on courses provided they could follow their student's progress, give advice when needed and answer questions."
How much help did you receive from tutors?

The majority of the students were unhappy about the lack of communication from their tutors, this is due to the reduced number of lecturers who uses the system which stops them from following their students activities on the system. The lecturers answer to students' questions only via email.

Fig. 10 How much help were the materials form the system (tests, ppt's, guides, extracts)

The centre of every teaching process is the relationship between the teacher and the student, for those students how are not yet confident in their learning the teacher is indispensable. The job of the teacher is not only to pass on the content of their course but to put the students in situations where they have to apply what they have learnt. The goal of the teacher should be to develop each of his/her students taking into consideration their ability, personality and pace of learning. The teacher has to be a role model for the students, being open minded, putting to the test his/her theories but most importantly being able to acknowledge mistakes. These qualities will make the students open to learning.

V. SUMMARY

Our goal, is to further encourage our staff to use the system, to help them find their own subject's interest within the system and also to convince them that this system is not an impersonal platform, but more a tool which will help their students preparation. The secrete of good teaching is based on the right mixture of optimum teaching methods which is used to bring out the maximum of our students. The mixture is right if the answers to the following questions contain the same or very similar components.

- Which teaching method is the best for my subject?
- Which teaching method is the best to put across my subject to my students?
- Which teaching method is best for my subject from the point of view of my universities expectations and limitation?

Let’s not forget, the best cocktail is not the one which contains the mixture of all the drinks we know, but the mixture of those few which complement each other to bring out the best taste, much better than each drink on its own. However there are drinks which work best on their own, like whiskey.