From Learning Management Systems to Learning Experience Platforms: Do they keep what they promise? Reflections on a rapidly changing learning environment

Dr Antje Cockrill

Cardiff Metropolitan University

acockrill@cardiffmet.ac.uk

Key Words: Virtual learning Environment, Learning Management System, Learning Experience Platform, student experience, staff perspective

WORKING PAPER – EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Track: AMI-06 Business /Management Education- Learning and Teaching

Introduction

In the last 10 years, a new concept of learning support has been introduced to Higher Education. Learning Experience Platforms (LXPs) are now competing with more traditional learning Management systems such as Blackboard or Moodle. The recent pandemic has accelerated this development and has pushed universities to embrace a change process that was already happening, but which became much more pertinent at a time of enforced online learning. LXPS promise a more interactive, current, and social learning experience, with easy access and communication. This paper will explore the question if LXPs deliver on their promises by comparing experiences with two different LXPs (AULA and Curatr) and a more traditional LSM supported teaching and learning approach.

Background

Supporting learners through Internet based platforms is not new. For decades Learning Management Systems (LMS) such as Blackboard and Moodle have been the basis for online support of learners. LMS provide a comprehensive electronic learning environment where teaching and learning materials can be delivered, stored and assessed. Often these systems are also linked in with administrative functions such as student enrolment and student performance monitoring. Typically LMS are built on extensible frameworks that let implementers adjust and modify the systems to suit their specific needs (Dagger et al, 2007) As LMS evolved, they became systems with a more module architectural design with a clearer distinction between course management and learning content. A key feature of LMS is this dual function, to provide course management support for academic and administrative staff, and to provide a learning platform for the learner. Generally speaking, LMS are not interactive, they "relegate students to the role of passive recipients of information" (Hotrum, 2005). In recent years, third generation platforms have been developed which claim to provide a more interactive, current and social learning experience, the so-called Learning Experience Platforms. Originally developed for learning in the work place, they have recently begun to replace the use of LMS in higher Education.. LXPs combine aspects of a social media platform with a virtual learning environment. The term was coined by Josh Bersin, who also likened these new platforms to "Netflix for learning" and the phrase has stuck ever since (Bersin, 2017). Uploading content is fast and easy for all users, with the integration of any number of applications – a LXP functions as a platform rather than a system with different building blocks such as an LMS. A key characteristic of LXPS is an interactive approach to learning. Learners are no longer passive recipients of information but play an active role by contributing to a social media type stream of information. LXPs are also usually personalised and gamified, the use of emojis, badges and other e-rewards is common to encourage participation and motivation.

Content creation is no longer limited to the course instructor but in an LXP, everyone creates content (Madures, 2019). In LMS the learning path is largely linear, a learner completes a task and then moves on to the next one. An LXP system allows learners to personalise their learning experience and move between sections as they wish. It is aimed at increasing engagement and sharing experience between users, rather than function as an information depository. The recent push in higher education towards online and distance learning, already a trend before the pandemic, has been accelerated and let to faster introduction of LXPs in higher education

However, the introduction of a new LXP is an expensive endeavour for a university, and in addition there are also staff training costs and 'switching costs' for students. Therefore the key research aim of this project is to establish if the learning and teaching experience using LXP goes beyond rhetoric and indeed provides an enhanced learning experience.

Research Design

This paper uses an inductive approach to explore teaching experiences with two different LXP systems (AULA and Curatr). The initial research for this paper is based on the personal experiences of the author of working with two different LXPs ober a period of three years. A pragmatist approach to reflection (Mortari, 2015) is used. Further planned work includes the use of a series of interviews with academic staff with experience of LXPs; and a survey of students who have experience with both an LXP and an LMS. The focus of this wider research will be the stated main benefits of LXPs; namely student engagement, effectiveness of gamification, effectiveness as communication platform, effectiveness as learning platform, sharing of content and personalisation. A selective sampling approach will be used to include academic staff with experience of both LXP and LMS.

Initial Reflections

Since their introduction to HE, LXPs used by universities had a multiple functions – to support a blended learning approach; and/or to provide a platform for online learning; and to a lesser extent, fulfil the functions of a traditional LMS. This 'hybrid' nature of LXP use creates a specific set of opportunities and challenges especially for academic staff. Students appreciate the social media type interface and the easy interactivity LXPs provide. But, and this seems to be a challenge for both staff and students, LXPs do not appear to be as effective with the programme management side of HE learning, i.e. structured storing of information and adding exercises and facilitating small group learning. Staff used to the course management functions of an LMS may find many basic functions available are not available or need special set up in the current versions of the LXPs. Covid 19 has changed the learning landscape for the future and initiated a rapid and fairly radical change in approach to higher education. The move from a one-fits-all approach of traditional on campus delivery to a much more varied and bespoke delivery customised to individual students' needs has been accelerated and the increased use of LXPs is part of this development. The initial reflections for this project suggest that perhaps an 'addition to' rather than 'replacement of' functionality in the discussion of LXP versus LMS may be the most beneficial for learning and teaching in HE.

References

Bersin, J. (2017) A New World of Corporate Learning Arrives: And It Looks Like TV. Available at A New World of Corporate Learning Arrives: And It Looks Like TV – JOSH BERSIN , accessed 23.3.21

Bershin, J. (2018) The Learning Experience Platform (LXP) Market Expands. Available at The Learning Experience Platform (LXP) Market Expands – JOSH BERSIN (2018), accessed 23.3.21

Dagger TS, Sweeney JC, Johnson LW (2007) A Hierarchical Model of Health Service Quality: Scale Development and Investigation of an Integrated Model. Journal of Service Research 10(2):123-142.

Hotrum, M. (2005) Breaking Down the LMS Walls. International Review of Research in Open and Distance Learning 6 (1): 1-6

Kyewski, E. & Krämer, N. C. (2018). To gamify or not to gamify? An experimental field study of the influence of badges on motivation, activity, and performance in an online learning course. Computers & Education, 118: 25-37.

Madures, N. (2019) LMS vs LXP: How and Why They're Different available at [LMS vs. LXP: How and Why They're Different - Unboxed Technology](), accessed 09.03.21