CARNet Pilot Project

Online IT Courses for Students in Higher Education in Croatia

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Objectives

> Detect the students' attitudes towards e-learning

> Detect the students' learning motivation, values and needs

> Test the appropriateness of specific courses for students

Courses

> Basic Internet Services:
> The Basics of Internet and WWW, Internet Communications – e-mail (Internet)

> Development of Web Animations Using Macromedia Flash (Flash)

Participants

> 51 students

> 4 groups

> No previous experience in taking online courses

Project Phases

- › Preparations (May 12-21, 2004)
- › Introductory lecture (May 25, 2004)
- › Online course (May 26-July 14, 2004)
- › Evaluation (July 15 - August 19, 2004)
- › Recommendations (September – October 2004)

Online Course

- ⟩ Scenario
  - ‣ Introductory test, lessons, exercises for each lesson and a final project
  - ‣ Communication channels: e-mail, chat and forum
- ⟩ Support
  - ‣ Technical support by telephone
  - ‣ LMS manual and a course handbook
- ⟩ LMS
  - ‣ Lotus Learning Space 5

Evaluation

- Results achieved by the participants
- Questionnaire filled out by the participants
- Focus groups with participants
- Semi-structured interview with the tutors

Focus Groups

- › 3 group discussions
- › 20 participants
- › Open-ended questions

"Learning" vs. "e-learning"

- "Learning" - divided opinions and associations
- "e-learning" - new, fun and dynamic
- Rare negative associations mostly concerned technology (bugs, viruses) and the lack of interpersonal communication
- Personification technique
  - The classic mode of learning (ex cathedra lecture) "an uncreative, monotonous and slow person"
  - e-learning "innovative, modern, young"

Term "Online Tutor"

> Curious about the way online tutor looked

> Relationship was highly impersonal

> Better communication with an online tutor than a classic tutor

> Helping the students learn and an adequate form of addressing the students are important

> Frequency of address and encouragement to a more active participation carry less weight

> Tutor was necessary to the course
>> Rational reasons
>> Emotional reasons
>> Lack of participants' self-discipline

Advantages of Online Courses

> Freedom in terms of time and space

> Unlimited opportunity for revision of any part of the course

> Interesting

> Forum and chat as means of communication

> Do not require a minimum number of participants in order to take place

> Free of charge

Drawbacks of Online Courses

- ❯ Communication/environment
  - ‣ No human contact
  - ‣ Not enough communication
  - ‣ No difference of opinion
  - ‣ No external control or discipline to study
- ❯ LMS
  - ‣ No possibility to skip any section of the course
  - ‣ Strict guidance of students throughout the course
  - ‣ Only one way of performing an activity allowed
  - ‣ Slowness of the recording with no fast forward option
  - ‣ Monotonous voice
  - ‣ Slow mouse cursor
- ❯ Technical problems
- ❯ Expensive Internet access

Suggestions for Improvement

> More communication

> More tests and exercises

> More detailed printed handbook

> Ideal way of learning: the theory in the old-fashioned way (lectures), followed by an online practice section of the course

Conclusions

- › Course participants prefer e-learning to "classic" way of learning
  - ‣ Capitalizing on positive attitude to e-learning
- › Different, sometimes opposite opinions
- › No clear attitude to e-learning
  - ‣ Necessity of informing and promoting e-learning
- › Necessity of adjustment of different aspects of online courses to students' population
  - ‣ Students' interaction (communication, tests, exercises)
  - ‣ Clear expectations and instructions

Next steps

- > Recommendations for new e-learning projects as well as promotion activities
- > Recommendations for potential adjustment of specific courses

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