Learning Networks for Lifelong Learning: An Exploratory Survey on Distance Learners Preferences

Adriana J. Berlanga, Ellen Rusman, Jannes Eshuis, Henry Hermans & Peter B. Sloep

Open University of The Netherlands Centre for Learning Sciences and Technologies celstec.org
Overview

• Introduction
• Learning Networks
• Survey: distance learner preferences
• Discussion
• Exchange of experiences
OUNL: Open Universiteit Nederland

- Distance education
- Adult & continue education
- Bachelor and master programs
  - Informatics
  - Psychology
  - Management
  - Law
  - Cultural Sciences
  - Natural Sciences
  - Education
OUNL: Open Universiteit Nederland

• About 30,000 students
  • 51% female; 49% male
• Adult learners (25-45 years old)
  • Self-directed, plan and study in isolation
  • 60% has a full-time job
  • 44% are second-chance students
  • Choose OUNL programs because of their time- and location-independent character
Challenge & Solution

• Challenge
  • Distance learners
    • High drop out rates
    • Have few f2f contact with peers, staff, institution
    • From isolated learning to social learning

• Solution
  • Learning Networks
    • Online social network: participants and learning actions
    • Facilitate social interaction and knowledge sharing
Learning actions help learners to acquire a competence (formal/non-formal/informal):
- courses
- assessments
- learning resources
- workshops, etc..

Participants
- learners, institutions, trainers, teachers...

Learners
- self-directed learners, responsible for their own learning process
- can participate at the same time in formal & informal learning actions
- heterogeneous with respect to competences they have and their learning goals
Learning Network: Services

• Recommendation
  • People, peers, experts
  • Resources: learning content, materials, readings
  • Learning path: learning offers
  • Next step to follow

• Advice
  • Study progress
  • Formative feedback
  • Learning strategies
  • Self-assessment
Questions

• How Learning Networks should be designed for distance learners?

• Can we learn from social network sites? What?

• … are OUNL students actually using social network sites? How?
Survey

• Objective

• Investigate OUNL students
  
  (a) Social Network sites (SNS) usage, perceived benefits & drawbacks
  
  (b) Design features they value most
  
  (c) Desired features in a OUNL Learning Network designed to support them to develop their competences
Survey

• Demographics
  • N=353 students
  • First year Psychology Faculty (97%), 67% female
  • Average age, 39.33 (Min = 20; Max=69; Mode= 39; SD= 9.72)
  • Educational background: 52% higher education; 38% secondary education
  • Weekly Internet usage: 10 to 20 hours (30%); 5 to 10 hours (25%)
(a) SNS awareness & usage

• **Aware:** YouTube (65%), Hyves (54%), Schoolbank (40%), LinkedIn (32%), Facebook (27%), MySpace (17%)

• **Active participation:** Hyves (24%) & LinkedIn (13%)
  • → Profiling SNS the most known and used

• **Use**
  • personal (78%), work (17%), study (3%)

• **Reasons of using SNS = social**
  • Keep in touch with people (56%), Leisure (39%), Networking (28%), Socialization (27%)
  • Versus → career development less relevant
    • Acquire new knowledge (13%), sharing expertise (13%), business (12%) or acquire new skills (7%)
(a) SNS perceived benefits and drawbacks

• Benefits
  • Keep in touch with others (64%), networking (52%), make renewed contact with old acquaintances (51%)
  • versus
  • Useful to share knowledge and expertise with others (33%), can help to learn from others (25%)

• Drawbacks
  • Share information (48%), too many SNSs available (37%), time consuming (34%)
  • versus
  • Privacy (25%), insufficient data protection (24%)
(b) SNS most valued functionalities

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Functionality</th>
<th>1&lt;sup&gt;st&lt;/sup&gt; (%)</th>
<th>2&lt;sup&gt;nd&lt;/sup&gt; (%)</th>
<th>3&lt;sup&gt;rd&lt;/sup&gt; (%)</th>
<th>4&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt; (%)</th>
<th>5&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt; (%)</th>
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Communication 1-1
Content-driven

Community aspect

Social aspect
(c) Aspects that motivate/hinder participation in a OUNL Learning Network

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Willing to participate if</th>
<th>Hinder to participate if</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Trustworthy information</td>
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<tr>
<td>Tools for self-assessment on progress and skills</td>
<td>63%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Easy to use</td>
<td>59%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Interesting course materials</td>
<td>56%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Get fast response to their problems</td>
<td>52%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Are able to contact peers easily</td>
<td>37%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Able to collaborate with others</td>
<td>36%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Functionality</td>
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<td>--------------------------------</td>
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Discussion

• Respondents are self-centred, goal-oriented learners, for them:
  • It is not essential to share their knowledge, find peers or work collaboratively
  • Focus on developing competences as fast and efficiently as possible
  • Want to get support from experts, not so much from peers
  • Are not willing to work collaboratively in communities
  • Are not keen on Web 2.0 tools (blogs, wikis, etc.)
Discussion: Learners need support

• Learners are not accustomed to work in new social approaches
  • Their learning strategies might not fit the ‘new’ educational trends on social learning
  • Need support to develop social learning strategies
  • Learning activities should show the potential of social learning

• Learners do not feel part of a community, need support to
  • Create an identity and to access resources
  • Become familiar with others
  • Interacting with the community and actualizing their identity

• Are teachers accustomed to work in new social approaches?
• Are institutions?
Questions?

adriana.berlanga@ou.nl

http://dspace.ou.nl