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## TEACHERS' PERSPECTIVES ON THE USAGE OF SOCIAL NETWORKS AND LMSs IN LANGUAGE TEACHING<sup>2</sup>

A Learning Management System (LMS) is a web-based system that allows learners to authenticate themselves, register for courses and complete them, and take assessment tests. The aim of this paper is to determine the extent to which English teachers in Serbia are familiar with LMSs and use them in foreign language teaching. The main instrument used in data collecting is a questionnaire that comprises ten close-ended questions and two open-ended questions designed to define teachers' familiarity with the key terms related to LMSs and the type of applications they use in their teaching process. The survey has included 31 respondents – English teachers from Serbian higher-education institutions. The results of the questionnaire show that the majority of the respondents are familiar with the abbreviations associated to LMSs but not with E-learning. Although the examined teachers agree that the usage of LMS can improve the process of teaching and motivate even shy students to participate in class activities, only 29% of the teachers know how to use the system, while 19% of them are still unsure about it. The respondents also consider LMS to be an easy and quick way for sharing teaching materials among students. Thus, it can be concluded that the implementation of LMS into university teaching curricula may lead to a new kind of learning resources development and learning management, while the conducted survey and similar ones can offer an insight into students' and teachers' perspectives on formal learning/teaching by means of LMS and social networks.

*Key words:* Learning management system, social networks, language teaching/learning, university teaching

### 1. INTRODUCTION

The fast-paced growth of E-learning has brought about a new context for learning within corporate and academic organizations. The exciting and developing sphere of learner-centric methods balances the traditional classroom approach with the constantly evolving technology-based learning. This balance has a tremendous potential for building an increased performance

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within all educational organizations. By mixing traditional methods with the new ones, we now possess synchronous and asynchronous tools that provide modern training and learning programs with some enormously powerful methods (Woodall 2010).

A Learning Management System (LMS) is a typical web-based system that allows learners to authenticate themselves, register for courses, complete courses and take assessments (Gallagher 2005). Learning Management Systems (LMSs) are specialized Learning Technology Systems (IEEE LTSC 2001) which are based on the state-of-the-art Internet and WWW technologies in order to provide education and training with various open and distance learning paradigms.

The design and the implementation of such systems is not an easy task, since they are complex systems that incorporate a variety of organizational, administrative, instructional and technological components (Moore & Kearsley 1996, Carlson 1998). Therefore, some systematic and highly disciplined approaches must be devised in order to leverage the complexity and assortment of LMSs and achieve an overall product quality within specific time and budget limits. One of these approaches is the use of already designed patterns, so that the specific learning management system does not have been designed nor implemented from scratch, but based on the reusable design experience gained over several years of try-and-error attempts.

LMSs grew from a range of multimedia and Internet developments in the 1990s. In the last four years, the systems have matured and they have been adopted by many universities across the world. Also referred to as “learning platforms”, “distributed learning systems”, “course management systems”, “content management systems”, “portals”, and “instructional management systems” they combine a range of course or subject management and pedagogical tools to provide a means for designing, building and delivering online learning environments. LMSs are scalable systems which can be used to support an entire university teaching and learning program. With an appropriate elaboration, they can also be used to drive virtual universities.

Among various Language Management Systems, The Blackboard Learning System and Moodle are the most prominent ones. The Blackboard Learning System is a world-class software application for educational institutions, highly intuitive and easy-to-use. It possesses powerful capabilities in three key areas: instruction, communication and assessment (Beatty & Ulasewicz 2006). Moodle is the leading open source LMS which is commonly used by North American and European universities. It is a software package designed by the help of sound pedagogical principles in order to assist educators to create effective online learning communities.

Though reports comparing LMSs are abundant, they are few comparative studies between Blackboard and Moodle regarding their teaching and learning effectiveness. Bremer and Bryant (2005) provide a comparative report acquired during the process of migration from Blackboard to Moodle and describe the advantages of Moodle over Blackboard, as 1) ease in implementation, 2) saving costs for licensing, and 3) higher functionality for discussion forums. On the

other hand, they see disadvantages of Moodle in comparison to Blackboard in its functionality, concerning 1) the grade book, and 2) the quiz activity imported from other LMSs. A post-course online survey of the students (n=14) reveals that overall, 80% of them prefer Moodle over Blackboard. On the other hand, comparing the two E-learning platforms, Miyazoe (2008) found in his study that positive evaluations of the blended course design may have derived from the higher usability of Moodle over Blackboard, especially in the elements concerning discussion forums.

Being relatively new technologies, there have been no large-scale studies of the actual uses and pedagogical implications of LMSs. However, in a recent study on online education, Bell *et al.* (2002), reported about a widespread incorporation of online technologies into teaching programs at Australian universities. Although the penetration of new technologies is the most common in the areas of commerce, education and health, where there is a strong demand for mixed-mode or off-campus delivery, the study has found out that in around 60% of Australian postgraduate subjects and around 25% of undergraduate subjects some form of online technology is used, which means, that in general, around 54% of these subjects contain an online component. The report concluded that “even though the percentage of fully online courses and units is low, the percentage of web supplemented and web dependent units seems to be a clear statement that many institutions are using online technology to add value to teaching and learning” (Bell *et al* 2002: 27).

Within the limited educational research about the pedagogical impact of LMSs, there has been an explosion of small-scale, localized and descriptive case studies looking at the influence of information and communication technologies in teaching and learning (Kezar 2000, Merisotis & Phipps 1999). These studies typically focus on the use of particular technologies in particular classes or subjects (Flowers *et al* 2000, Kuh & Hu 2001, Kuh & Vesper 2001). With technological and economic factors often the primary drivers behind the adoption of technologies, researchers have frequently produced some post hoc observations and explanations of their pedagogical qualities. Despite considerable practical impact and much exploratory attention in the research literature, researchers have only begun to identify the underpinning practical and theoretical issues. However, choosing a system to manage and deliver learning is one of the most crucial decisions any organization can make. Though most of these systems contain the same basic collection of functional elements, they are optimized for different types of learning goals, learners, and organizations (ADL Instructional Design Team 2010).

It is also important to refer to the term “computer - supported collaborative learning” and its abbreviation CSCL, which exists along with the term LMS. Collaborative learning allows WWW to become an active environment in which users can create and share information. The users, in this case – students or teachers, can select user-friendly applications to assist in content delivery and collaboration. English language teachers can use the tools that are available through free and open source applications in document and information sharing for the purpose of synchronous and asynchronous

communication.<sup>3</sup> Some of the examples of these tools include networking sites, such as Facebook, Skype, Twitter, social bookmarking sites such as Linkroll, then the sites for information publishing such as SlideShare, PinIt, Blogger and a multimedia sharing tool, YouTube (Kim *et al* 2005).

Bearing in mind the importance of Learning Management Systems for language teaching, in this paper we aim at determining the extent to which teachers in Serbia are familiar with LMSs in language teaching, which could make the first step in its full integration in the Serbian educational system.

## **2. RESEARCH: INSTRUMENTS AND METHODS**

The main instruments used for data collecting were a survey and a questionnaire. The survey data were collected by using an online survey, while the questionnaire contained 10 close-ended questions and two open-ended questions that aimed at defining teachers' familiarity with some key terms in LMSs in language teaching and at determining the applications that teachers use in the teaching process.

The questionnaire was created in Google Drive and later sent by e-mail or social networks to teachers of the English language who teach it as a foreign language at higher education institutions in Serbia. It examined two main factors that teachers perceived as potential barriers to or opportunities for using LMSs in language teaching, as well as teachers' familiarity with LMSs. The questionnaire was constructed by using the statements adopted and modified from previously published questionnaires in the study conducted by Larsen (2012).

The teachers (respondents) were reassured that there was no right or wrong response to the close-ended questions and that the researchers were only seeking for their opinions in order to determine their perspectives on the usage of LMS in language teaching. Also, they were assured that complete confidentiality would be maintained at all times. A total of 31 teachers responded to the questionnaire.

The next step in the research was to analyze the obtained data based on the responses from the questionnaire. Then, descriptive statistics was used in the statistical analysis.

## **3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

In order to examine the teachers' perspectives on the usage of LMSs in language teaching it was necessary to determine whether the teachers were familiar with the terms that are associated to LMS and are important for

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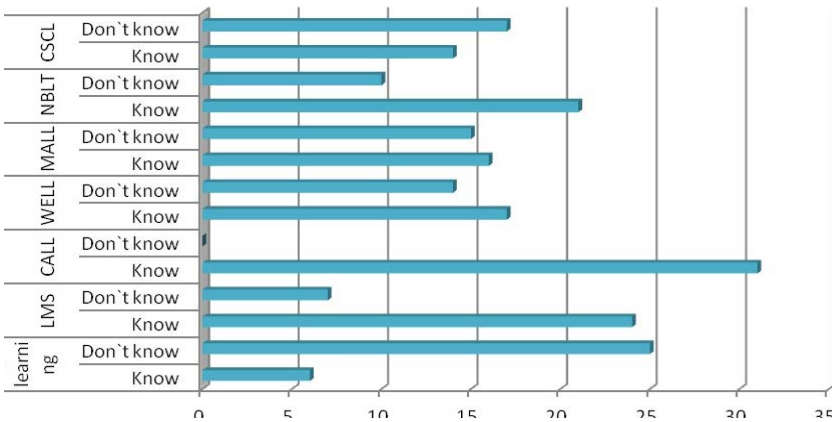
<sup>3</sup> By synchronous communication we assume a virtual communication that occurs simultaneously with the people who are communicating. It is synchronized in time and includes online chats, instant messages, videoconferencing, VoIP (voice over Internet protocol), and virtual classes (Lavooy & Newlin 2008), while asynchronous communication does not require real-time interaction. It is a two-way communication in which there is a delay between when a message is sent and when it is actually received. It takes the form of e-mails, voicemails and discussion boards (Tomei 2009).

language teaching. The following terms were examined: E-learning (Enhanced Learning), CALL (Computer-assisted language learning), WELL (Web Enhanced Language Learning), MALL (Mobile-Assisted Language Learning), NBLT (Network- Based Language Teaching), CSCL (Computer-Supportive Collaborative Learning). The results are presented in the table and the chart below:

E-learning		LMS		CALL		WELL		MALL		NBLT		CSCL	
Know	Don't know	Know	Don't know	Know	Don't know	Know	Don't know	Know	Don't know	Know	Don't know	Know	Don't know
6	19.35	24	77.42	31	100	0	0	17	54.84	16	51.61	21	67.74
25	80.65	7	22.58	0	0	14	45.16	15	49.39	10	32.26	14	45.16
												17	54.84

**Table 1.** Teachers' familiarity with the abbreviations associated to LMSs

**Teachers' familiarity with the abbreviations**



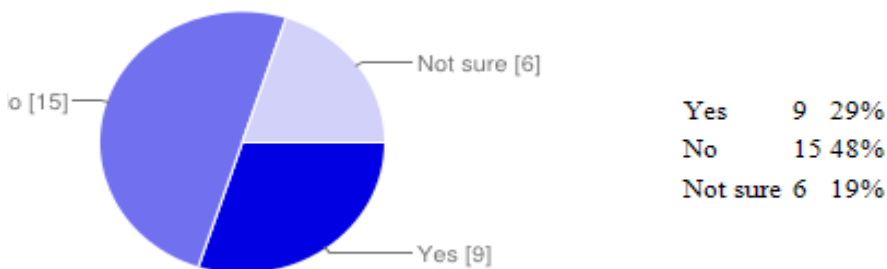
**Chart 1.** Teachers' familiarity with the abbreviations associated to LMS

The obtained results indicate that the respondents are familiar with the abbreviations associated to LMSs, which can be explained by the fact that the teachers who participated in this study had already had certain experience in the field while they were working at higher education institutions. Some of them know how to benefit from LMS, since their institutions have already introduced them to learning platforms such as Moodle. The teachers are also familiar with the abbreviation CALL, due to the fact that they have talked and learnt about it during their bachelor studies. They are also familiar with the abbreviation NBLT, as they have heard of it through their professional seminars or symposiums, while some of the teachers have already undergone a

certain training concerning network based language teaching, such as WELL and MALL.

The “problematic” terms were the ones associated to E-learning: the results show that even 78% of the respondents think that this term indicates electronic learning, not enhanced learning. Only 19% of the examined teachers showed familiarity with the term. The confusion about this term probably comes from the letter ‘e’, which is directly associated with electronic technology that plays an important role in modern language learning. Thus, it can be concluded that teachers should be directly shown the way electronic devices and software, as well as LMS with its different platforms, enhance language learning. Another term diagnosed as problematic was CSCL (Computer-Supportive Collaborative Learning) since the majority of teachers have never heard of it. However, this term is significantly important for modern language learning because of its frequent usage nowadays in blended learning.<sup>4</sup> It is closely related to LMS and it directly explains what kind of learning system it actually presents today.

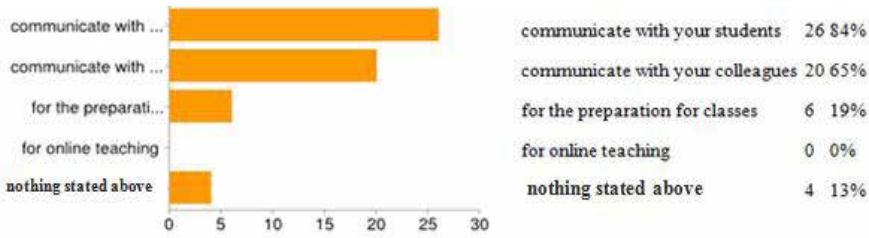
After the extent of the teachers’ familiarity with the terms important for LMS had been demarcated, the next step was to determine whether the teachers knew how to use some of the platforms, such as Edmodo and Moodle, and how to use them in language teaching. The acquired results indicate that only 29% of the questionnaire respondents know how to use them while 19% of them are still unsure. This relationship is presented by the following chart:



**Chart 2.** Teachers’ knowledge of using learning platforms

The next question in the questionnaire aimed to define the particular reason for the teachers’ using social networks and LMSs in language teaching. The results show that the examined teachers mainly use these devices to communicate with students and colleagues, which can also be seen in the following chart:

<sup>4</sup> “Blended learning” can be defined as “combining the Internet and digital media with established classroom forms that require the physical co-presence of teacher and students” (Friesen 2012, available online)



**Chart 3.** The usage of LMSs and social networks

From the results stated above it can be concluded that although LMSs are important for online teaching, teachers in Serbia do not use them in online language teaching, but rather as a means of both synchronous and asynchronous communication and for the preparation for their classes. It means that Serbian teachers choose to use them for blended rather than online learning.

The next two questions aimed to define how the teachers communicate with their language students. Firstly, it was important to delineate whether they prefer using social networks for such communication to using LMSs, and then to find out which social networks and platforms they use. The results show that about 90% of the teachers prefer communicating and providing students with study material in person in class, while the rest of them (only 10%) use social networks and learning platforms as a means of blended learning, especially Facebook and Mail. They rarely use Twitter or MySpace for communication. For providing students with the material, the teachers mostly use FB, Mail and Skype. The results also show that the teachers commonly use Slide Share for sharing their PowerPoint Presentations with the classes, and learning platforms for short quizzes. Some of the teachers create blogs, while the others use YouTube links either to post the students' activities or to introduce them to the topics of the next class. Some of the teachers (32% of them) also use social network applications in their teaching, mainly for grammar and vocabulary learning, such as Flashcards, My Word Book, and British Council Podcasts.



**Chart 4.** The usage of LMS and social networks for communication with students

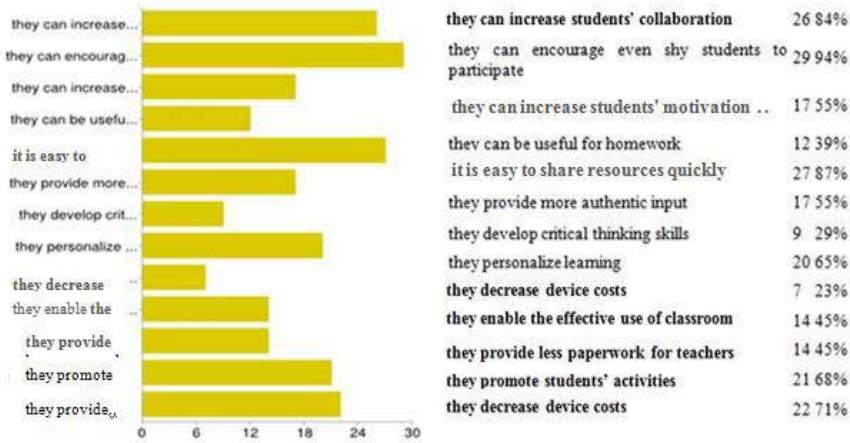
The results concerning the teachers' preference for the usage of a particular social network indirectly reveal the fact that the language teachers at the higher education institutions in Serbia prefer synchronous (58%) to asynchronous (42%) communication.

Although the majority of the teachers who participated in this study do not use either LMSs or social networks to a large extent in their language teaching, even 87% of them think/have thought about introducing them into their teaching process. The reasons why the teachers do not use them as often as they should are given below (with the indicated percentage of the gathered opinions):

- The teachers think that the above-mentioned devices are better for informal (87%) than formal (19%) learning and teaching.
- According to the teachers' opinion, too much time is required for the preparation of the teaching material (68%).
- Some schools do not allow the usage of LMSs and social networks (61%).
- The teachers do not know how to use them in formal teaching (48%).
- The teachers do not have time to interact with the students outside the classroom (45%).
- There is always a possibility that inappropriate content can be placed by the students (42%).
- Cyber bullying can be an issue (35%).
- Too many students in a class are difficult to control and to have their activities checked regularly (23%).

The last question in the questionnaire aimed at defining the teachers' perspectives on the usage of LMSs in language teaching. It was devised to outline their opinions concerning the benefits of introducing LMSs into language teaching. The results can be seen in the following chart:





**Chart 5.** The teachers' opinion on the benefits of using LMSs and social networks in language teaching

According to the above-stated results, it can be concluded that the teachers agree upon the fact that the usage of LMSs and social networks in language teaching can encourage even shy students to participate in learning activities and can also increase their class collaboration. The examined teachers think that LMSs and social networks make an easy and quick way of sharing materials among students and can be successfully used to promote students' activities concerning language learning. It is important to stress the teachers' awareness of the opportunities these web-systems offer both to students and to teachers, as well as their readiness to implement them in their language teaching. First, by using LMSs and social networks students can personalize their learning and can choose the platform which is the best for them and their way of learning. Students can also be provided with various kinds of authentic input, while teachers can make connections with native speakers and initiate students' pair learning. Another reason for the implementation of LMSs and social networks in language learning is their ability to ensure an effective use of classroom time. If teachers use them for blended learning and in a flipped classroom<sup>5</sup>, they may afford more time for practice and discussion during the class. Students can become familiar with the topics in advance if teachers lecture by using LMSs and by sending their lectures and instructions for activities before their actual appearance in the class.

Since Serbia is facing a massive problem with the availability of teaching devices, the usage of LMSs which are free of charge (such as Moodle and Edmodo) can spare schools from huge expenses. Also, by using social networks as learning platforms both teachers and students huge expenses. Also, by using social networks as learning platforms both teachers and students can

<sup>5</sup> The expression 'flipped classroom' refers to an educational technique that consists of two parts: interactive group learning activities inside the classroom, and direct computer-based individual instruction outside the classroom (Bishop & Verleger 2013).

benefit, and at the same time avoid extra charges for photocopying materials and other classroom devices.

#### 4. CONCLUSION

Numerous studies have shown that teachers' acceptance of technology and its implementation in the teaching process depends on the attitudes they have towards technology itself (Huang & Liaw 2005). The results from this study offer several conclusions. Firstly, teachers agree LMSs to be a good means for increasing the efficiency of teaching. In addition, the teachers in the research agree upon the fact that the usage of LMSs and social networks in language teaching can encourage students of different affective profiles to participate in the learning activities and can increase their collaboration. They also have favourable opinions about the usage of LMSs and social networks as easy and quick ways for sharing study materials among students.

However, it is obvious that the studies concerning the pedagogical impact of LMSs are sporadic, which is in line with apparent limitations of LMSs and their implementation in language teaching. Nevertheless, this and similar studies can show a general understanding of students' and teachers' attitudes towards the usage of LMSs and social networks in formal language learning and teaching. Moreover, this study indicates that English language teachers in Serbia are interested in using such platforms for language learning, although they prefer using them in blended than in online learning.

The introduction of new technologies into a university teaching program has a tendency to create new relationships between academic staff and students, as well as some relationships between academic and administrative staff. The implementation of LMSs into university teaching programs leads to a new kind of organization in the development of learning resources and the management of learning. It is important for educational institutions to be open, inclusive and well-informed in order to develop an understanding of the educational role of LMSs and their importance for learning in general.

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## **STAVOVI NASTAVNIKA U VEZI SA KORIŠĆENJEM DRUŠTVENIH MREŽA I LMS SISTEMA U NASTAVI JEZIKA**

**Rezime**

*Learning Management System (LMS)* je sistem zasnovan na internet mreži koji svojim korisnicima omogućava da se upoznaju sa različitim kursevima, između ostalih, i kursevima za učenje stranih jezika, da se prijavljuju za njih, da ih pohađaju, i na kraju, da se podvrgnu provjeri znanja. Cilj rada jeste da utvrdi stepen do kojeg su nastavnici engleskog jezika u Srbiji upoznati sa ovim sistemom, kao i vrstama društvenih mreža koje se mogu koristiti prilikom učenja engleskog jezika, i u kojoj ih meri koriste u svom radu. Za dobijanje podataka sprovedeno je istraživanje koje je uključilo 31 ispitanika – profesore visokih škola u Srbiji, a kao osnovni instrument u istraživanju korišćena je anketa sa deset zatvorenih i dva otvorena pitanja, osmišljenih tako da se utvrdi ne samo koliko su nastavnici upoznati sa terminologijom iz oblasti učenja jezika preko web-mreže, već i da se donesu zaključci o tome koje vrste od raspoloživih internet sredstava oni koriste u nastavi. Rezultati ankete su pokazali da većina ispitanika poznaje skraćenice koje se odnose na *LMS*, ali ne i na *E-learning*. Mada se većina ispitanika slaže u tome da upotreba *LM* sistema može da poboljša nastavni proces i motiviše studente da više učestvuju u aktivnostima na času, samo 29% od ispitanih nastavnika zna kako da ih koristi, dok 19% od njih još nije sigurno u vezi sa njihovim korišćenjem. Svi ispitanici smatraju da se pomoću ovih sistema nastavni materijali mogu lako i brzo dostavljati studentima, te su dali pozitivne odgovore u vezi sa tim. Na osnovu rezultata dobijenih sprovedenom anketom može se zaključiti da su ispitanici svesni činjenice da implementacija *LM* sistema u univerzitetske programe vodi ka razvijanju nove vrste resursa u učenju stranih jezika i u organizovanju učenja uopšte, a istraživanja, kao što je ovo predstavljeno u radu, mogu pružiti jasan uvid u stavove nastavnika i studenata u vezi sa formalnom nastavom stranih jezika putem društvenih mreža i korišćenjem *LM* sistema.

*Ključne reči: Learning management system, društvene mreže, stavovi nastavnika, nastava stranih jezika na univerzitetskom nivou.*

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