

Virtual Learning Environments: Moving from good practice to best practice.

Emmanuel Ehimare Isibor

under the Supervision of

Dr Edel Sherratt and Dr Amanda Clare

A presentation at Aberystwyth University Learning and Teaching Conference (AUTEL)

6-8 July 2016

Overview

- * Pilot Study (summer 2015) identified challenges associated with using AberLearn Blackboard
- * Current study builds on pilot
- * The roles of stakeholders in striving for excellence with respect to the use of VLEs.

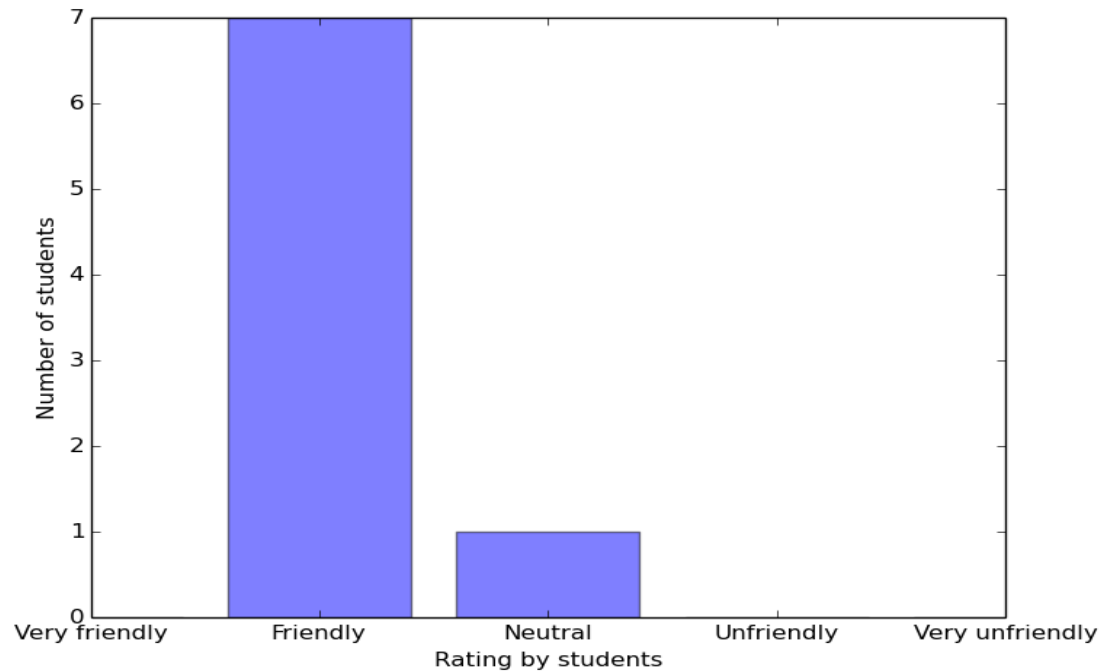
Research Questions of Pilot Study

- * The study was driven by two research questions (RQs):
 - * RQ1. To what extent is AberLearn Blackboard an effective learning tool for students?
 - * RQ2. To what extent is AberLearn Blackboard an effective teaching tool for staff?

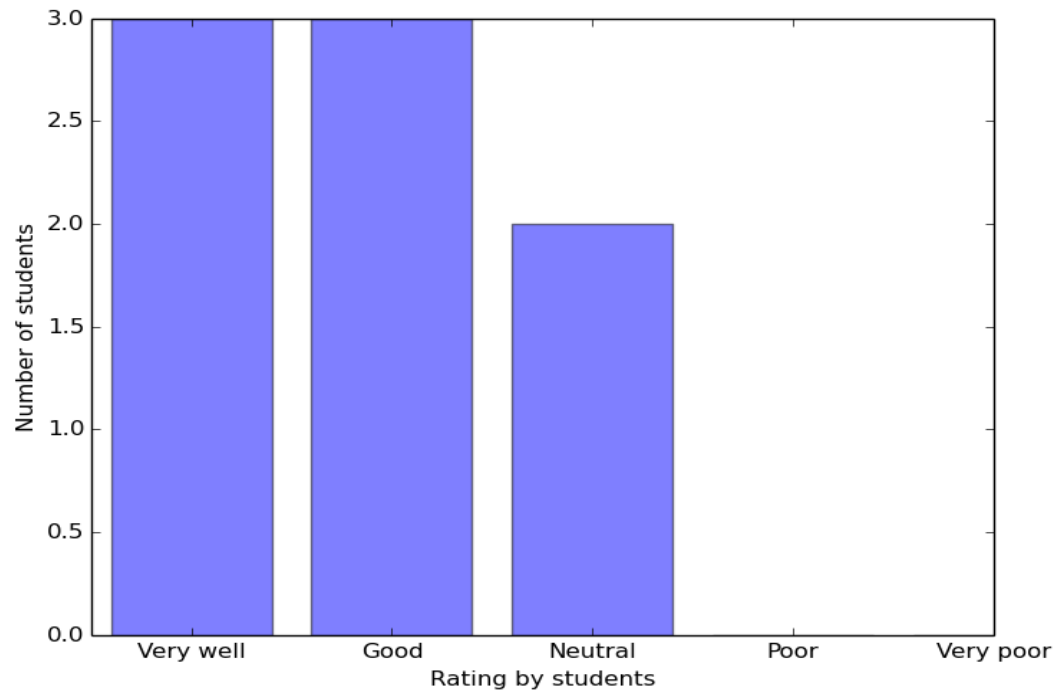
Methodology

- * Study design
- * Categories of participants:
 - i. Students;
 - ii. Teaching staff;
 - iii. Members of the e-learning team.

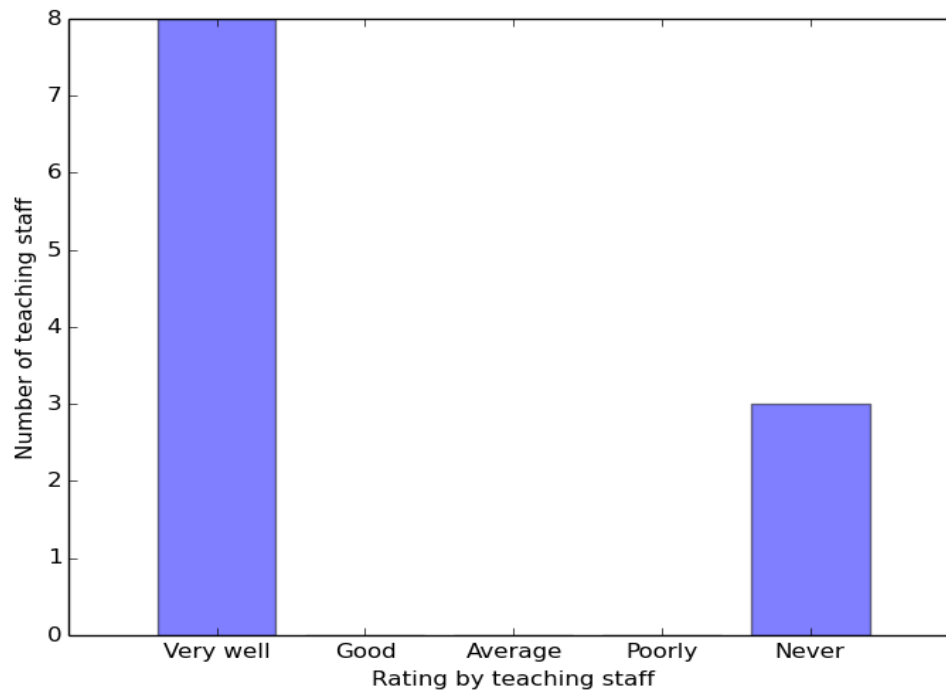
How students rate the user-friendliness of AberLearn Blackboard



How well AberLearn Blackboard meets the learning needs of students



How well teaching staff provide lecture notes through AberLearn Blackboard



In their words

- * *“Well I think there are lots of redundant features there which don’t serve a lot of purpose. So I think they could be taken down. The direct access to course materials will be good”* - student participant

A Screenshot of the landing page of AberLearn Blackboard when students log in

The screenshot shows the AberLearn Blackboard interface. At the top, there is a navigation bar with the Aberystwyth University logo, the 'AberLearn Blackboard' logo, and user information for Emmanuel Ehimare Isibor. Below this is a secondary navigation bar with tabs for 'Student', 'My Modules', 'Study Skills', and 'My Career'. A third navigation bar contains links for 'Welcome Student', 'My Department', 'Getting Help', and 'Computer Rooms - Availability'.

The main content area is divided into several sections:

- What's New:** A section with a purple header containing a message about checking for new additions to Blackboard courses.
- Academy Forum:** A section with a purple header featuring the 'Aber Academy Forum' logo and text about a community for good practice in learning and teaching.
- To Do:** A section with a purple header and a user profile icon, containing 'What's Past Due' and 'What's Due' lists with filters and dates.
- Exam Timetable Summer 2016:** A section with a purple header, a photo of a lecture hall, and text about the finalised timetable for Semester 2 examinations.
- My Announcements:** A section with a purple header showing a message: 'No Institution Announcements have been posted in the last 7 days.'
- AberLearn Blackboard Required Minimum Presence:** A section with a purple header and a diagram showing the RMP applies to all taught undergraduate and postgraduate modules.
- Tools:** A section with a purple header listing various tools like Announcements, Calendar, Tasks, Send Email, User Directory, Address Book, Personal Information, PDP, and Goals.
- Primo library catalogue search:** A section with a purple header and a search bar.
- More Books:** A section with a purple header and a book icon.
- Your Links:** A section with a purple header listing links such as Student Record, Manage My Account, and Search Primo.

In their words

- * *“I will like to see a revamp of the system ... like you have in Facebook where with a single click, you get things done. I will like to have it look like it was designed for this century rather than the last century.”* - teaching staff participant.
- * *“Lecturers should have the professional freedom to be able to use AberLearn Blackboard in a way they like and in a way they feel comfortable with.”* - teaching staff participant

In their words

- * *“For logging in you put your password, webmail you put your password, primo you put your password. I think it is quite too many. I think a central login for all these will be good.” - student participant*
- * *“The reorganization of the home page of modules to make it more useful. A Better way of having the students interact with the system to ask questions because there are forums they have at the moment that are really terrible. We have Facebook groups where questions allow discussions because Blackboard interface is so awful.” -teaching staff participant*

In their words

- * *“while I agree with the basic presence of Blackboard, I think increasingly it’s becoming much more, I don't know like a directive- you have got to do this, you have got to do that. And I think it is better if staff are allowed to adapt Blackboard to suit their purposes ” - teaching staff participant*
- * *“Our aim is always to make the system easier to use as well as richer in useful content. We want to apply principles of good design and feedback from users to make the welcome pages for staff and students simpler and easier to navigate.”- e-learning team participant*

Current study

- * Research question

How should a VLE should be tailored in order to retain and build on the best aspects of the learning experience offered by an institution?

Current study - methodology

- * Study design – interview questions designed to provide answers to research questions
- * Interviews – 60 completed to date
- * Analysis – relating interview responses with research questions

Initial Results: what participants want

- * Less clunky VLE designs.
- * Immediate access to relevant materials.
- * Freedom to use the VLE in preferred ways

Discussion

In order to move from good practice to best practice, these real and perceived barriers need to be addressed

- * Simple UIs.
- * Immediate access to materials.
- * A less clunky VLE that is easy to use and responsive.
- * Institutions- and users-specific designs. (Beckton, 2009; Ocak 2011)

Striving for best practice: who plays what role?

- * University administrators
- * e-learning team
- * Teaching staff (Chowdhry et al. 2014)
- * Students
- * VLE developers

Thank you!

Questions and contributions