

USING THE INTERNET AS A NEW EDUCATIONAL TOOL: THE CASE OF *LIBRI* PLATFORM AT SEEU



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ABSTRACT

With the development of new technologies, the use of internet in education has become a necessity and a tool that can contribute in fulfillment of curriculum requirements as well as in communication between the lecturer and the students.

The South East European University has developed its own Learning Management System named *Libri* and it can be accessed both by teachers and students via the internet. This platform is in line with the up to date trends in information systems and plays its role in the development of the educational system within the University.

The gained experience in this field will be the main focus of our research. We will introduce and analyze the annual reports of the Quality Assurance and Management Office of the same University regarding the usage of *Libri* by students and teachers of the university. The used methodology will contain content analysis, comparative and analytical methods.

Key words: internet, education, *Libri* platform, learning management system

INTRODUCTION

The Internet and other electronic media are inevitable in modern times, and are part of our everyday activities, whether we are at home, outdoors or in a working environment. In this regard, the institutions of higher education are faced with constant challenges in order to cope with the new technologies and to remain competitive and authoritative in front of the new technology era.

It is more than evident that within the institutions of higher education, there is constant innovation in terms of provisioning of online services as a response to new challenges. Learning Management Systems, distance education and online learning, have become an important feature of online service delivery within the Higher Education Information Services sector, requiring close attention to issues of functionality, sustainability and usability (Caushi, 2015).

How capable are the teachers and students in using LMS? Can the higher education institutions in Macedonia catch up with the latest innovations in information technology? These are the two main questions in this research that we are going to analyze and explain further.

In order to address the questions above we will use the data obtained from the SEEU Quality assurance office reports regarding the use of LMS by the SEEU academic staff during the last three years, as well as the information obtained by the focus groups which included students studying in SEEU and professors teaching in SEEU. These data will be analyzed and the results will give us a clear picture for the application of LMS in the advancing of the teaching and learning system within our University.

WHAT IS LMS

A learning management system (LMS) is a software application for the administration, documentation, tracking, reporting and delivery of electronic educational technology (also called e-learning) education courses or training programs (Ellis, 2009). Communication is simply defined, as in the Shannon-Weaver mathematical model (1949), as a process of transmitting a message from a transmitter to one or several receivers using a code common to all participants in the process, a proper channel and a permanent feedback, is a basic component of any organization, be it private or public (Georgesku, 2014). In Macedonia there are few Institutions of higher education that use LMS. This is due to their incapability to develop, install and maintain this sort of technology. Moreover, the lack of compatible and professional users is another issue to be considered.

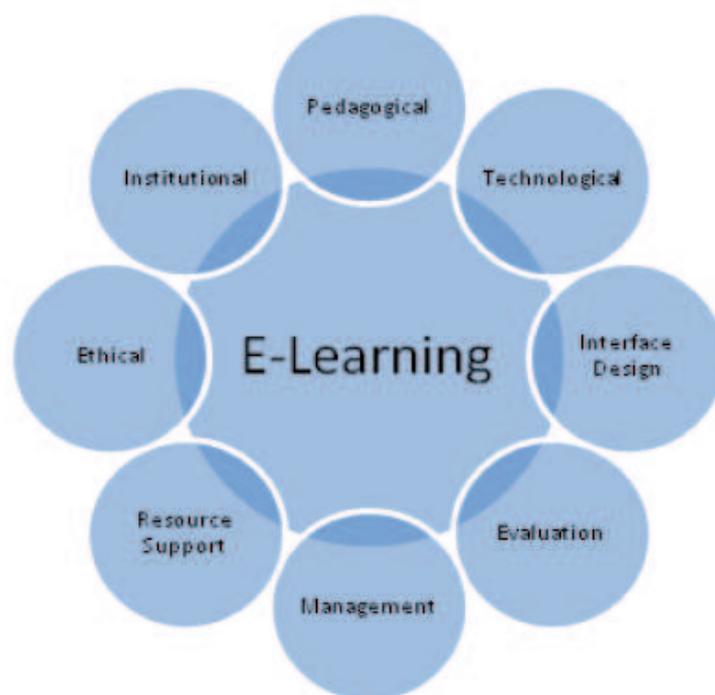


Figure 1. The 8 Dimensional frameworks for e-learning.

Source: The Global E-Learning Framework by Bardul H. Khan

LMS IN MACEDONIA

The Ministry of Education and Science has adopted Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in Higher Education. Having in mind that the new knowledge can be achieved only by qualitative education and research (Emini, 2010), the South East European University was one of the first Higher Education institutions to introduce e-learning and to adopt this technology in line with its long term strategy of learning and teaching methodology. The institutions have to make sure that the available resources for supporting the learning process for students are adequate and specific for any offered program (Dukovski, 2007).

Many methods and tools are used to address the situation and seek solutions for its improvement in order to provide quality in education in Macedonia. In the publication regarding quality assurance in higher education - a view from Macedonia - is shown the Macedonian view to the overall operation and results in quality assurance, but most of the processes and assessments have turned towards the universities Cyril and Methodius, St. Kliment Ohridski and SEEU since they first introduced mechanisms of evaluation in order to improve the quality in education (Cepujnoska, 2005).

THE CASE OF SEEU

From its beginnings, The South East European University has recognized that one of the essential instruments in achieving that mission would be to develop a strong and sustainable E-Learning initiative by following a clearly defined E-Learning strategy. This was realized together with our partners from Indiana University which developed this system as a part of its research program in E-Learning.

If we have in mind that Institutions should ensure that they collect, analyze and use relevant information for the effective management of their study programs and other activities (Dukovski, 2007), then these researches will further contribute to analyzing and understanding the real picture of our LMS.

The South East European University is internationally recognized and provides a new model of study and research in the region. The modern teaching methods backed by certified quality management and advanced IT services, offer diversity in teaching and education. South East European University (SEEU) is one of the few Universities in the region that offers various online services in order to provide students with higher education methodology. Introducing new technologies has made our young university highly competitive in the region, providing us with quality and ensuring control in the education system. This is very important tool and a great advantage vis à vis regional classic universities. The focus of our research will be towards the usage of these kinds of services by academic staff and students who attend various study programs in different languages and Faculties in seeing their practicality using contemporary Learning Content Management Systems.

LEARNING MANAGEMENT SYSTEM - ANGEL

E-Learning system - Angel Learning (www.angellearning.com) was the first LMS used in our country. This system allowed instructors to easily and efficiently to manage instruction, develop sophisticated, collaborative learning experiences, and, most importantly improve learning outcomes. However, a couple of issues needed to be resolved in order to use the system at the SEEU. Problems occurred regarding content development due to the level of staff computer literacy. In order to capture such a specific context we have decided to extend the Angel Learning System and tailor it the specific requirements in the SEEU.

CREATION OF LIBRI

South East European University has developed its own Learning Management System named *Libri* which can be accessed both by teachers and students via the internet. This platform is in line with the up to date trends of the information systems and plays its role in the development of the educational system within the University. *You can access LIBRI learning platform by going directly to the website.*

RESEARCH

The methodology used during the research consisted of interviews and content analysis from the results of the Quality Assurance and Management Office annual reports regarding the usage of LIBRI by the academic staff.

Figure 2 shows the results taken from the Quality Assurance and Management Office annual reports regarding the usage of LIBRI by the academic staff of the Faculty of Contemporary Sciences and Technology. Based on the annual reports we see that the level of usage of this LMS has increased after several years. The measures show that during the winter semester 2012, 10 persons from the academic staff of CST faculty had a level 0 in *LIBRI* usage, 8 were Level 1 and 15 were Level 2 and used it more efficiently. In 2014 we have a different picture. 7 persons from the academic staff of CST faculty had a level 0 in "LIBRI" usage, 3 were Level 1 and 18 were Level 2 and used it more efficiently.

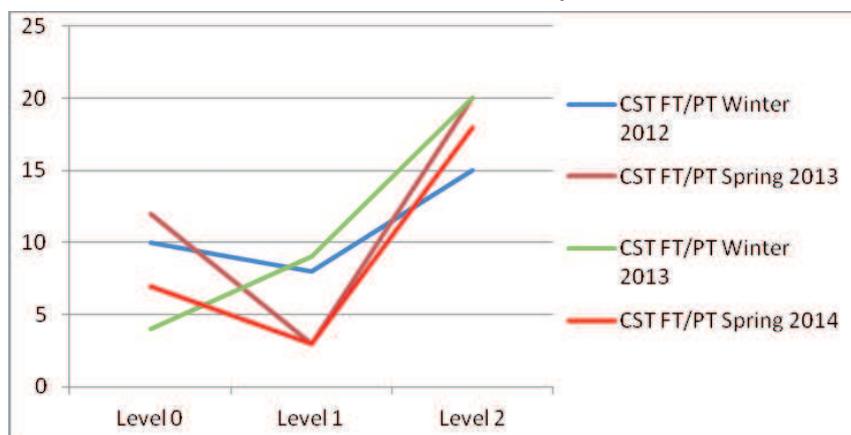


Figure 2. Quality Assurance and Management Office annual reports regarding the usage of LIBRI by the academic staff of the Faculty of Contemporary Sciences and Technology.

Source: SEEU Quality Assurance and Management Office

Figure 3 shows the results taken from the Quality Assurance and Management Office annual reports regarding the usage of LIBRI by the academic staff of the Faculty of Business and Economics. The measures show that during the winter semester 2012, 10 persons from the academic staff of BE faculty had a level 0 in “LIBRI” usage, 19 were Level 1 and 12 were Level 2 and used it more efficiently. In 2014 we have a different picture. 5 persons from the academic staff of BE faculty had a level 0 in “LIBRI” usage, 10 were Level 1 and 10 were Level 2.

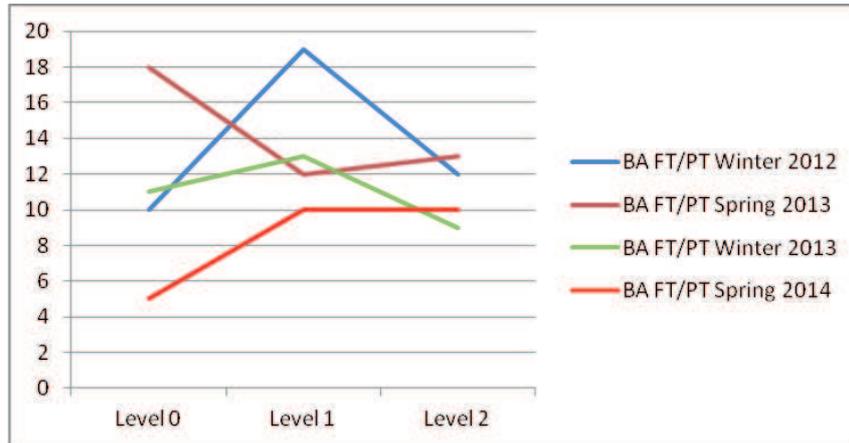


Figure 3. Quality Assurance and Management Office annual reports regarding the usage of LIBRI by the academic staff of the Business and Economics Faculty.

Source: SEEU Quality Assurance and Management Office

Figure 4 shows the results taken from the Quality Assurance and Management Office annual reports regarding the usage of LIBRI by the academic staff of the Faculty of Public Administration and Political Sciences. The measures show that during the winter semester 2012, 10 persons from the academic staff of PA faculty had a level 0 in “LIBRI” usage, 9 were Level 1 and 5 were Level 2 and used it more efficiently. In 2014 we have almost the same picture. 10 persons from the academic staff of PA faculty had a level 0 in “LIBRI” usage, 11 were Level 1 and 5 were Level 2.

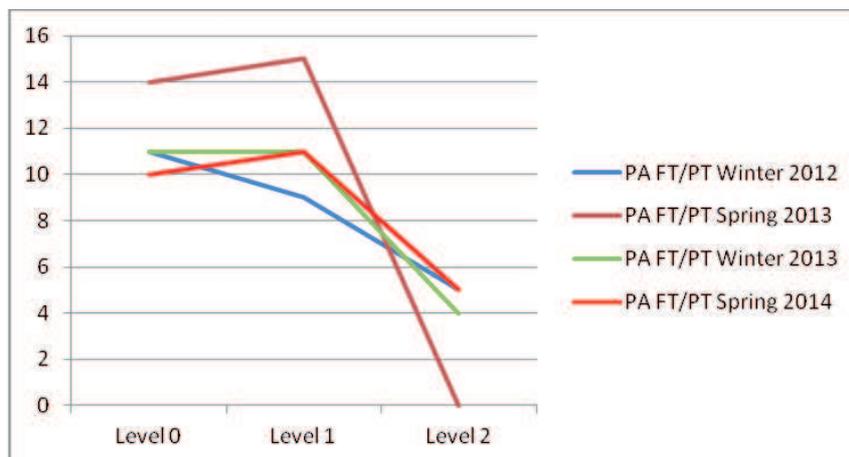


Figure 4. Quality Assurance and Management Office annual reports regarding the usage of LIBRI by the academic staff of Public Administrative Faculty.

Source: SEEU Quality Assurance and Management Office

Figure 5 shows the results taken from the Quality Assurance and Management Office annual reports regarding the usage of LIBRI by the academic staff of the Faculty of Law. The measures show that during the winter semester 2012, 15 persons from the academic staff of Law faculty had a level 0 in "LIBRI" usage, 6 were Level 1 and 4 were Level 2 and used it more efficiently. In 2014 we have a different picture. 13 persons from the academic staff of Law faculty had a level 0 in "LIBRI" usage, 8 were Level 1 and 2 were Level 2. Here we can see that after several years we have a slight decrease in the level of LIBRI usage among the academic staff of Law Faculty.

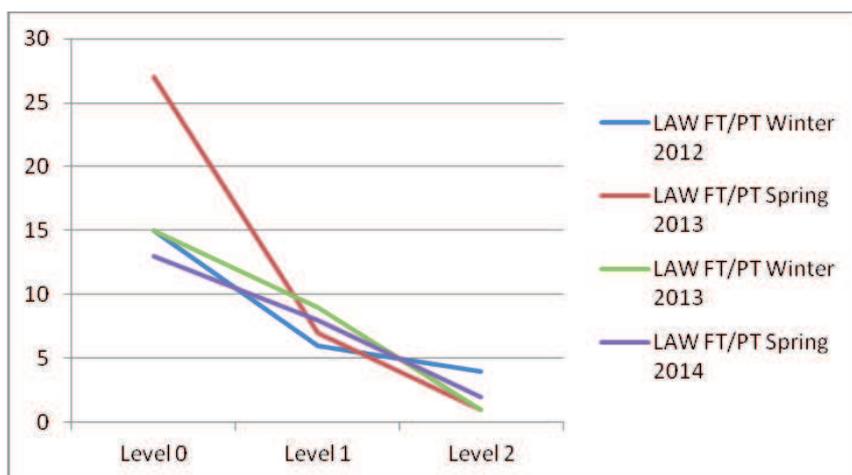


Figure 5. Quality Assurance and Management Office annual reports regarding the usage of LIBRI by the academic staff of Law Faculty.

Source: SEEU Quality Assurance and Management Office

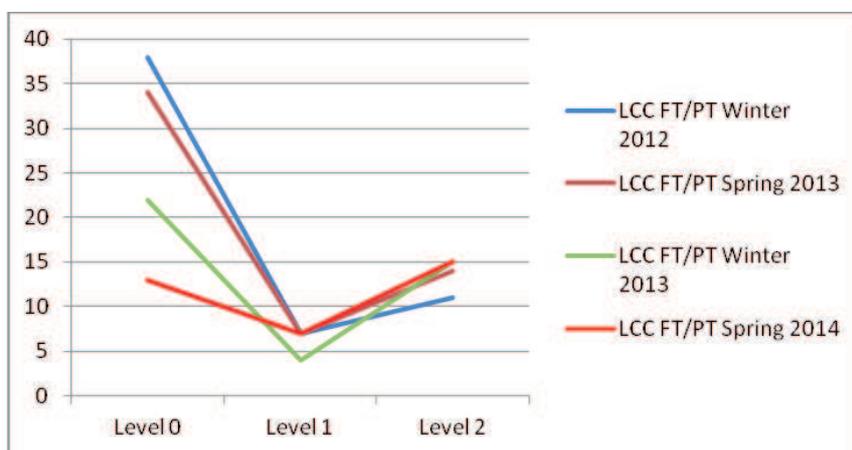


Figure 6. Quality Assurance and Management Office annual reports regarding the usage of LIBRI by the academic staff of LCC Faculty

Source: SEEU Quality Assurance and Management Office

Figure 6 shows the results taken from the Quality Assurance and Management Office annual reports regarding the usage of LIBRI by the academic staff of the Faculty of Languages, Culture and Communication. The measures show that during the winter semester 2012, 38 persons from the academic staff of LCC faculty had a level 0 in "LIBRI" usage, 7 were Level 1 and 11 were Level 2 and used

it more efficiently. In 2014 we have a different picture. 13 persons from the academic staff of LCC faculty had a level 0 in “LIBRI” usage, 7 were Level 1 and 15 were Level 2. Here we can see that after several years we have a significant increase in the level of LIBRI usage among the academic staff of LCC Faculty.

In order to have a complete picture about the LMS in our University, we created two focus groups. The first consisting of 13 students, and the second of 11 professors. From both groups we asked for the pros and cons of LIBRI usage.

FINDINGS

Findings from the focus groups:

- Students and lecturers are satisfied with LIBRI because they can have access to all course materials 24/7, from any place.
- It is very useful for announcements and information regarding exam dates, quizzes and homework.
- It makes University staff and students feel special, due to the lack of such applications in the region.
- There is a need for prior IT training in order to use LIBRI.
- Many students face difficulties having access to “Libri” because of their blocked accounts – due to late fee payments.
- Unlike students, many teachers (especially the ones from CST Faculty) think that LIBRI needs further upgrades and better IT Support.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATION:

- *Libri* as an educational tool at the moment generally meets the needs of students and lecturers. There is still a need for upgrade and improvement of functionalities taking in consideration the acquired feedback
- In order to meet the best practices, LIBRI needs to increase the interactivity between teachers and students through LMS.
- Based on Quality Assurance and Management Office annual reports we notice constant improvement on usage of LIBRI by academic staff, except in the case of the academic staff of Law Faculty.
- Based on best practices taken from top universities and research centers, there is a need for more student involvement, especially those studying Computer Sciences, in developing and upgrading LMS.
- Research department should continue and look forward to improving the LMS, such as creating an android application that will boost further the usage of LIBRI and make the access
- SEEU can catch up with the latest technological innovations, mainly because of its latest digitalization plan and investment in the technology park, but it lacks the financial and regulative support from the state institutions. The state constantly promotes reforms in education, but they lack implementation.
- The academic staff in contemporary universities needs constant training

when introducing new technologies. This means that the institutions of higher education in Macedonia, as well as the state institution should invest more in human resource development in order to stay up to date with the new trends in education.

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