E-learning from a student’s view with focus on Global Studies

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Abstract

Purpose – The current Internet Outlook of the OECD states that e-learning has the potential to revolutionise education and learning – if complemented by suitable didactic approaches. Therefore, the situation of e-learning is analysed from a student’s perspective with focus on a new master program in Global Studies. The purpose of this paper is to give an overview of the use of ICTs within Global Studies compared to other fields of study.

Design/methodology/approach – The empirical basis of this paper is one online survey for students of Global Studies Graz and personal interviews with students’ representatives of three different courses of studies at the University of Applied Sciences in Graz and at the University of Vienna.

Findings – Although the intensity of e-learning technologies is relatively low in Austria as compared to other OECD countries, several courses within the master curriculum of Global Studies Graz use innovative e-learning techniques at several levels. The level and intensity of ICT usage in Austria reflects the interests of students: around 60 percent prefer ICTs as amendment to traditional teaching methods. Only around 7 percent demand a higher supply of pure online courses.

Practical implications – The findings of this paper can be helpful especially for universities that intend to initiate a master program on global equity, multiculturality, social inclusion, global development, or globalisation.

Social implications – The findings show that students in Austria prefer on-campus contact with students and lecturers. Nevertheless, in cases where e-learning increases the quality of lectures and their academic outcomes, it is preferable from a student perspective to further promote the use of ICTs in tertiary education.

Originality/value – Authentic results of student experiences and approaches such as the present analysis are important in order to improve the quality of Global Studies and other similar academic programs.

Keywords E-learning, Blended learning, ICTs, Global Studies, University of Graz, University of Applied Sciences, University of Vienna, Computer based learning, Austria

Paper type Research paper

Introduction

This article considers the use of information and communications technologies (ICTs) in multicultural and developmental studies from a student perspective. It examines the role of learning technologies in supporting multidisciplinary developmental education. Empirical surveys provide authentic insight on how to enhance social inclusion through learning innovation.

Global Studies at the University of Graz

Global Studies (GS) is an emerging field of multicultural studies worldwide. Based on decades of experience with interfaculty and interdisciplinary cooperation (KFU, 2013;
USW, 2013), at the University of Graz, Austria, a master curriculum GS commenced in the winter semester of 2010/2011. This master curriculum has developed from a bundle of electives also called GS which were established in 2004 and can currently still be attended. The master program GS is currently the only study program in Graz that is not attributed to one out of the six departments at the University of Graz. Although it has been added to the department of social and economic sciences as it is necessary for one deanery to take over the bureaucratic work and act as contact for students. For detailed information about the formation of the master program GS and the results of the survey 2011/2012 compare Bader and Zotter (2012), Ahamer and Jekel (2010), Ahamer et al. (2011).

As at many universities worldwide, also at Graz University since around the year 2000 all bureaucratic work (e.g. enrolment in courses) is done on online platforms (UniGrazOnline (UGO), 2012). Students can choose and subscribe to their courses online, look up grades online and so on. For three or four years now various important confirmations (e.g. confirmation of enrolment) are also available online.

Methods
In order to analyse the current situation of GS students an online survey was conducted. The survey was sent out to all 299 persons who are currently enrolled in GS. The rate of return is around 20 percent (60 persons in absolute numbers) which is within the expected range.

The survey featured general questions about the situation of students (i.e. age, sex, other fields of study enrolled) as well as questions with a direct link to the master program GS (as for example why students chose this field of studies, what they would like to change about it). The other part of the survey concerned e-learning technologies for serving as a basis for this paper. In order to compare the e-learning intensity of GS (2013) with other fields of studies direct interviews were arranged with student representatives of two programs at the University of Applied Sciences in Graz (“Information Management” and “International Management”) and one program at the University of Vienna (“International Development”).

Results
The following paragraphs show the results of the survey and the interviews (survey: n = 299; the interviews were conducted with the student representatives of each field of study) starting with an overview of the overall situation of students of GS in Graz (the data is extracted from the official web administration of the University of Graz – UGO (2012)). In 2011/2012, a similar survey was conducted (Bader and Zotter, 2012) and therefore comparisons of the results will also be shown.

(1) Students of GS at the University of Graz
As mentioned above there are currently (situation as of October 2012) 299 students enrolled in GS. Figure 1 shows that there are more female than male students and that the share of foreign students is still small. Similar master programs (for example at the University of Leipzig (GSP, 2012; Bader et al., 2013, Section 1.7)) are usually Joint Study Programs and have predetermined partner universities. As GS is a field of study with international character, efforts to strengthen international cooperation and student exchange should be enforced which is expected to result in a larger share of international students.
Figure 2 shows the development of numbers of students since the beginning of the new field of studies. The left figure shows an accumulation of all students enrolled in GS since the academic year 2010/2011. As mentioned above, currently there are near to 300 students enrolled on the master program. The figure on the right side shows the number of students enrolled on GS in each semester. It is shown that the number of students enrolled is higher in the winter than in the summer semester. This is due to the fact that four out of five courses of the compulsory module (Module A) were held...
in winter. The course “Basics of GS” acts as a prerequisite course for all other courses in the chosen modules. Hence students that enrol in the summer semester only have a few options regarding course choice. Students who are allowed to study GS but with special requirements (that is if they have not completed a bachelor degree that is listed as “relevant qualified”; compare to GS (2013)) may start in the summer semester in order to fulfil the requirements before commencing with Module A.

(2) Survey about the master curriculum GS
As mentioned above, the survey’s rate of return is about 20 percent; nearly 70 percent of the given feedback is from female students whilst only 30 percent is from male students. The median age of responding students is 26 years whilst the youngest student is 22 and the oldest student 48 years old.

From all responding students 87 percent have GS as their main subject, 12 percent as their minor subject (meaning they are also enrolled in another master program). The remaining 2 percent are registered for the bundle of elective GS. The survey performed in 2011/2012 had a similar outcome: 73 percent have GS as their main subject, 19 percent as their minor and 8 percent are registered for the bundle of electives or attend courses of GS as free electives (Bader and Zotter, 2012, p. 129).

Currently the official curriculum defines 12 bachelor programs[1] that guarantee an enrolment for GS. If a potential GS master student has not yet completed one of these recommended bachelor programs other bachelor programs with relevant qualifications are also allowed to act as a prerequisite in order to enrol in GS. In case it is not obvious that a field of studies offers relevant qualifications students can receive permission to enrol in GS if at least 50 percent of all courses out of the bachelor program can be added to the modules of GS. The decision whether on is allowed to enrol is currently made by the rectorate. However, starting with the academic year 2013/2014 the leader of the curricula commission will make this decision in the future.

The survey further asked which bachelor programs the students had completed (Figure 3). The highest number of students originate from Business Studies (32 percent),

![Figure 3. Completed Bachelor programs of GS students](image-url)

Notes: Percentage; total: n = 299
followed by Sociology (11 percent), Economics (8 percent) and Environmental Systems Analysis (8 percent). What is interesting here is that all the before mentioned fields of studies are attributed to the department of social and economic sciences. A reason therefore could be that students from the same department have lower entry barriers or simply knew this new field of studies beforehand. Another reason may be that knowledge on economics is relevant within the course Basics of GS (2012) or a more critical argument could be that especially the (social and) economic sciences lack critical discourses on global connections.

As shown in Figure 3, only around 2 percent originate in each of the remaining fields of studies (Ethnology, Geography, Theology, Law and Philosophy). Approximately 30 percent of students have not yet completed one of the recommended fields of studies. Numbers from the survey of the academic year 2011/2012 display a similar outcome (Bader and Zotter, 2012, p. 123).

The next question focuses on the chosen modules. Within the master program GS, students have to choose two out of five modules (from among “Law and Politics”, “Economics”, “History”, “Environment, Climate and Technologies” and “Culture, Religion, Society and Gender”) in order to deepen their knowledge. Figure 4 shows the findings, differing only slightly to the results of the first survey. The module “Culture, Religion, Society and Gender” is the one chosen the most (33 percent), followed by “Economics” (23 percent). The modules “Environment, Climate and Technologies” and “Law and Politics” are both chosen from 18 percent of the students. The module “History” is the least one elected by the students.

The results of this question can at least to some part be explained by the number of courses offered in each module. Figure 5 shows the number of courses offered in each module in the academic year 2012/2013. Most courses are offered in the modules “Environment, Climate and Technologies” and “Culture, Religion, Society and Gender” (29 and 27, respectively), followed by “Law and Politics” (20 courses). The modules “History” and “Economics” contain the fewest courses (15 and 13, respectively). Courses attributed to the different modules are picked out newly for every academic year.
This could therefore change in the following years. As mentioned in Bader and Zotter (2012) referring to Andre Gunder Frank (1966, p. 4), being aware of historic background is significantly important in order to understand the current situation in the world. It is therefore necessary to find more adequate courses in the field of history in order to enforce students to understand the past.

The next question concerned the possible reasons for students to decide study GS. In order to receive clear information four possible answers were available as well as the possibility to answer freely. The possible answers are as follows: “Interest in developmental issues and globalisation”, “Interdisciplinarity”, “Appropriate complement to my main field of study” or “I prefer not to graduate from my primary discipline”. Most students chose GS for its interdisciplinarity (41 percent), followed by “interest in developmental issues and globalisation” (33 percent). Further 19 percent answered that GS acts as an “appropriate complement to their main field of study” and the remaining 7 percent did not want to finish their primary discipline. Five students used the blank text in order to clarify their reasons for choosing GS. The answers can be summed up as “gaining more qualifications” and “necessary complement to economic field of studies”.

In order to obtain information on the problems students face and what they would change or improve about the master program GS there was an open question targeting the opinion of students. Even if these answers pertain to the Graz curriculum, they are of general interest also for analogous curricula worldwide. Overall it can be said that all students answered absolutely differently. Some gave long and broad descriptions about what they think and would like to change whilst others only offered short answers. The answers of this question could be summed up into the four following themes.

Most students criticize the course “Basics of GS”. The criticism ranges from critics on lecturers over pedagogical comments regarding its duration (this lecture is held on Monday from about 9 a.m. to 5 p.m.) to the big exam at the end of the semester (most students demand a division of the exam from one into several parts, currently the exam covers all five modules and takes nearly five hours to complete).

A number of students demand more courses directly connected to GS (currently all courses except four are taken from other fields of studies. This causes problems as the focus is often not on global issues) and more events with a direct link to GS. The survey 2011/2012 called for more activities and students’ representatives react in offering
a kick-off event and regulars’ tables, which were attended regularly. There are more events planned for the summer semester.

Similar to the first survey in 2011/2012 some students would prefer a stronger focus on languages and international exchange. It is currently not necessary to know any other languages than German as there is just one compulsory course held in English. Most courses from the modules are held in German. Next to the focus on other languages more international cooperation is desired. As mentioned above most of the other similar programs are joint study programs with a compulsory semester abroad.

Some students asked for more cooperation with business units and are not satisfied with the collaboration between GS and local NGO. Please note that when students were asked why they have chosen GS the second largest group answered due to an interest in developmental issues and globalisation.

As mentioned earlier the focus of this paper is on e-learning technologies and therefore the survey’s questions focuses on this issue as well. When students were asked what they understood by “e-learning” answers varied considerably, ranging from web-supported courses where documents were offered online to pure online-courses where there is no contact on campus. Only some of the participants mentioned the time aspect, i.e. that courses with e-learning character reduce time spent on campus. Some mentioned online interaction instead of solely learning materials supplied online. Answers of this question indicate that all students have experiences with ICTs.

We further asked if students prefer computer-based classes to traditional learning methods. More than 60 percent answered that they like e-learning as an amendment to traditional learning methods but they prefer face to face lectures on campus. About 15 percent wished for a more intensive use of new media within classes. Slightly more than 10 percent clearly preferred traditional lectures on campus. About 7 percent answered that they prefer courses with high e-learning intensity compared to traditional lectures on campus and further 7 percent rate pure online courses the best.

Several levels of e-learning
Not only in the above-mentioned survey but already on a general level, definitions vary widely when people talk about e-learning. Some speak of e-learning when e-mails are used to communicate and literature is supplied online. Others define e-learning as courses solely supplied online with no personal interaction on campus. Within this paper we use the definition of the Organisation for Economic Co-Operation and Development (OECD) which distinguishes between five types of different e-learning intensity for a merely formal allocation into five levels. This typology (OECD, 2005, p. 36) is based on the amount of saved time which admittedly is only one of the effects of e-learning; improvement in quality being the main issue in e-learning. These are the five different intensities:

1. no or insignificant online activity;
2. web-supplemented programs (this includes the use of e-mail, online supply of learning materials, link to external resources);
3. web-dependent programs (students have to use the internet actively – this includes online-discussions, online team-work and online projects but the time on campus is not or insignificantly reduced);
mixed models (part of the course is online, for example through online-discussions, evaluations, online projects, etc. the time on campus is reduced significantly); and

(5) pure online-programs.

The authors have decided to provide their comprehensive view of e-learning as a figure featuring two correlating dimensions: student’s view and role of media. Figure 6 (along with the typology provided by Reinmann-Rothmeier (2003) can be seen as a graphical illustration of online allocation of information and can be correlated with “no or insignificant online activity”. The OECD type “web-dependent programs” can be seen as the equivalent to “E-learning by collaborating” (at right in Figure 6). Here the online interaction is more significant by using, e.g. online-discussions or review-processes. The vertical axis of Figure 1 complies with the unique feature of GS Graz, namely interdisciplinarity and multi-perspectivity (GS, 2013; Bader and Zotter, 2012, p. 119).

Blended learning or “integrated learning” is a form of learning, which includes both traditional learning methods and e-learning technologies. It includes the advantages of face-to-face-communication but also an efficient form of online learning. According to the Student Social Survey (Unger and Wroblewski, 2007) blended learning is very much accepted in practice. Up to more than 60 percent of students of social, economic and art studies use such courses.

It can be concluded that courses with an intensive use of ICTs are best suited for advanced learners with a superior learning experience at master level (Iowa State University, 2013).

The Internet Economy Outlook by the OECD (2012) indicates 47 that percent of internet users using the internet for learning. The highest number of e-learning activity

![Figure 6. Different types of e-learning](image-url)
is measured in Finland, Portugal and Iceland (nearly 80 percent). The lowest numbers are recorded in Mexico and Chile with less than 10 percent. Following Roither (2012), e-learning acts as an amendment and companionship to traditional learning methods but cannot substitute face-to-face learning.

The Karl-Franzens University of Graz currently uses two e-learning technologies, namely the WebCT (a very elaborate platform, to be substituted by its sister brand Blackboard in 2013) and the comparatively simple platform Moodle (eCampus, 2013). Currently there are about 1,400 courses on Moodle. The Department of Humanities uses Moodle the most (more than 500 courses online) while the Department of Law uses Moodle the least with just about 60 courses online. In the academic year 2012/2013 there are 734 courses on WebCT and it is Arts and Humanities which uses Moodle most while Catholic Theology uses WebCT the least (Table I).

**E-learning intensity in the master curriculum GS**

In this section, the use of ICTs within the master curriculum GS will be analysed. For detailed information about GS see Bader and Zotter (2012, pp. 119-120) or Bader et al. (2013, Section 1.1).

There are currently seven compulsory lectures in the master curriculum GS. Five out of these seven constitute module A, which is obligatory and has to be completed in the beginning of the course as it acts as a premise for further courses. The other two compulsory lectures have to be completed in the last section of the course. One is “Analysis of Practice” which concerns the analysis of the compulsory internship and therefore should be accomplished after finishing the practical training (according to the curriculum the practical training should be carried out in the third semester, however a number of students do their internship in the summer holidays). The last compulsory course is “Master Seminar”. This lecture should be attended whilst the student is writing his/her master thesis. Table II acts as an overview of the compulsory courses of GS at the University of Graz.

The next section analyses to what amount e-learning technologies are used within the obligatory courses of GS. The analysis follows the typology of the OECD (see above) which defines five different types of intensity using ICT ranging from no use of ICTs to courses fully offered online.

**Basics of GS**

This lecture (Basics of GS, 2011) can be seen as the centrepiece of GS. This is because it gives an overview of all modules that can be chosen as a major and it accounts for

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Faculties</th>
<th>Moodle</th>
<th>WebCT</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Catholic theology</td>
<td>117</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Law</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Business, social and economic sciences</td>
<td>211</td>
<td>198</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arts and humanities</td>
<td>508</td>
<td>248</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Natural sciences</td>
<td>246</td>
<td>140</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Environmental, regional sciences and education</td>
<td>219</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Others</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>1,390</td>
<td>734</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Sources:** Moodle (2013); WebCT (2013)
12.5 percent (15 ECTS) of the entire master program. It also acts as a place for communication and networking as it is the only course (apart from the lecture series GS) where all students of GS come together.

The intensity of e-learning technologies in this course is not easy to define as it is an interdisciplinary team-taught lecture series and every professor uses technology in a different way. What all have in common is the use of power point slides in order to enhance the oral presentation.

One out of the ten lecturers uses ICTs in an intensive manner. Within the module “Culture, Religion, Society and Gender” one of the two lecturers (topic: social and cultural geography) invites students to formulate a standpoint concerning developmental theories and gives them the possibility to gain extra points by doing six out of fifty exercises. The standpoints as well as the exercises are subject to a review process by other students and/or the lecturer.

Earlier experiences have suggested to use an online discussion forum [...] not only for downloading lecture notes but especially for writing and mutually reviewing students’ standpoints [...] which does pose a framework for repeating and improving students’ achievements (Ahamer, 2011).

According to the lecturer the quality of the written texts increases significantly through the mutual review process and he concludes that:

[...] students prefer a communicative structure when studying. Hence, IT-based learning constructed as dialogue is far more accepted by learners than mere “file download” – which is an embryonic style of e-learning (Ahamer, 2011).

Following the typology of the OECD the course “Basics of GS” can be seen as a web-supplemented program where communication via e-mail and the online supply of learning materials are the primary use of ICTs. Solely the part of “Social and Cultural Geography” in the module “culture, religion, society and gender” can be seen as a web-dependent program where density of cooperation can be increased as well.

**Developing Countries and Globalisation**

Within this traditional course ICTs are used for the supply of documents, i.e. simple file download. The lecturer further uses power point sheet to strengthen his oral presentation. Next to the allocation of learning materials the exam at the end of the semester is an online examination. This course is therefore also defined as a web-dependent program.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Course</th>
<th>ECTS</th>
<th>Semester</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Basics of GS</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Developing Countries and Globalisation</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fundamental Problems in History of Gender Studies</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lecture Series GS</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Introduction to International Relations</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Practice Analysis</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Master Seminar</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Source:** GS (2013)
**International Relations**
The lecturer of this innovative course uses ICTs in a more intensive way. On the one hand he uses powerpoint slides as a supplement to his oral presentation and as learning documents for the students. On the other hand, and this is what is unique in this lecture, the professor records all lectures and puts them on the Moodle platform. This procedure is very helpful for employed students and it also for students who are not that familiar with English (as the course is held in English). This course therefore can be seen as web-supplemented or, in the view of some students who are not able to personally attend to the lecture, it can be seen as a mixed model. Students can reduce time spent on campus significantly if they listen to the podcasts at home.

**Fundamental Problems in History of Gender Studies**
This course also uses ICTs in a more intensive way. In order to complete this course, students have to watch at least ten documentaries and two films with emphasis on gender issues. On-campus the lecturer also uses ICTs for example to virtually bring contemporary witnesses into the class room. As there is no time saved and there is no interaction through online platforms this course is added to the first group: no or insignificant online activity.

**Lecture Series GS**
This course, as the name suggests, is a lecture series with different lecturers in every unit. The powerpoint slides are available on Moodle. There is no interaction between users and the system or between users and users. The exam at the end of the semester is an online test. Hence this course can be ascribed to type two: web-supplemented programs.

**Analysis of Practice**
The course “Analysis of Practice” is held by different lecturers every semester and therefore it is hard to give an overall statement concerning the use of e-learning technologies. It can be said that this course uses Moodle in a more intensive way as students have to upload their reports onto the platform. Within this lecture interaction between the system and the user exists and can therefore be categorized as “web-supplemented programs”.

**Master Seminar**
The “Master Seminar GS” is similarly composed like the course “Analysis of Practise”. Moodle is used to download and upload materials but there is no interaction between users via the e-learning-tool. This course is therefore also added to type two – web-supplemented programs.

**E-learning at other Austrian universities**
The previous chapter analysed the use of e-learning-programs in the master degree program GS at the University of Graz, Austria. The focus of the following section is on the analysis of e-learning at other universities and how it is used in practice. This section refers to the University of Applied Sciences in Graz and the University of Vienna. Both fields of study at the University of Applied Sciences in Graz are assumed to have higher than average use of ICTs and “International Development” at the University of Vienna is similar to GS with regards to content.
FH Joanneum – University of Applied Sciences in Graz
The FH Joanneum was established in 1995. Its main campus is in Graz and the two other campuses are situated in Kapfenberg and Bad Gleichenberg. All three of them are located in the province of Styria, Austria. The FH Joanneum is one of the largest Universities of Applied Sciences in Austria with around 3,500 students and 180 employees in 2012. At the moment, there are 40 different career-oriented degree programs in four subject areas of “Health Sciences”, “Information, Design and Technologies”, “International Business” and “Life, Building, Environment” beside from five postgraduate programs.

The intensity of online learning within FH Joanneum varies significantly from discipline to discipline, but it is the highest in IT and management. “IT and business/management emerged as the most commonly cited disciplines making significant use of some form of e-learning, particularly in the mixed mode and fully online categories” (OECD, 2005). Therefore, these fields of study are discussed further in the following part. Information is obtained through interviews (all interviewees received the same questions) with the representatives of the field of studies.

Information management
First of all it was asked how e-learning is interpreted by the students themselves. According to the representative of Information Management, e-learning is a method of how studying at the FH has, to a certain degree, become more the personal responsibility of students. At the beginning of each semester relevant study materials is made available online. E-learning is also used by many lecturers for collecting homework or conducting surveys on the collaboration in seminars. The University of Applied Sciences mainly uses the e-learning platform Moodle. The importance of the use of Moodle in Information Management depends significantly on the lecturers themselves. Therefore, in some courses Moodle is very important, whereas some lecturers completely refuse to use this e-learning platform. Hence, not all courses are supported by Moodle, as it is the individual decision of the lecturers whether or not to use it in the courses and to what extent. Some lecturers only upload the study materials, whilst others use it to manage the whole course. In addition students’ opinion on the use of Moodle was asked. In general students have a critical point of view concerning the use of Moodle. The interviewee said that the system is not really implemented well and not reliable due to documents getting lost.

International management
The use of e-learning systems in the degree program International Management is similar to the one in Information Management. The most frequently used platform is Moodle. According to the students representative e-learning should go beyond working with the platform and include different teaching and learning tools like for example videos. In this degree program e-learning also means doing certain exercises at home and uploading them onto the platform. On every course there is also the possibility to communicate with its lecturers and other colleagues, however this opportunity is rarely used by the students in practice.

The most frequently used platform in this degree program is also Moodle but videos like for example TED are also used from time to time. It is used almost daily by students as it facilitates the communication between them and the lecturers. Here it is
mainly used to upload lecture materials, collect homework and other papers, get more information on the courses themselves and about the topics dealt with in the course and sometimes even used for multiple-choice exams.

Concerning the importance of e-learning the representative made a similar statement as already seen in the Information Management degree program: it always depends on the lecturers and their willingness to try new ways of teaching and learning methods.

Nevertheless, the interviewee assumes that up to 70-80 percent of the courses’ content are supported by e-learning if submissions of exercises are also taken into account. If submissions of exercises are not taken into account around 30 percent of the courses’ content is supported by e-learning platforms.

When the students representative was asked about students’ and teachers’ opinions and acceptance concerning e-learning he answered that in general students as well as lecturers accept e-learning to the same extent as GS students do. According to the interviewee it may depend on the age of the lecturer if he/she wants to deal with these tools or not, although new didactic ideas and further trainings are favoured and supported by the head of the degree program.

In each course there are also web-based possibilities to communicate with the involved lecturers and with other colleagues. In the course International Management Moodle is used almost every day by the students as it facilitates the communication between lecturers and students.

International development – University of Vienna
At the University of Vienna the Computer Centre (ZID) is in charge of developing and technically supporting e-learning services. Students can use the university-wide Moodle learning platform, the lecture streaming service and a university-wide wiki in academia and for cooperation. Wiki is used for collaboration at projects or working groups (University of Vienna).

The degree program International Development (IE, 2013; Bader et al., 2013, Section 1.2) has a curriculum which is similar to the one of GS in Graz and is therefore especially suitable for this paper.

The questioned students have a similar opinion about e-learning in their studies: e-learning technologies are of a particular importance to them and they perceive e-learning as practical and useful for exchanging information, documents and know-how. Another advantage is the possibility to download documents or inform themselves about a course when they are absent. The students of International Development mentioned that 80 percent of the courses use e-learning technologies. E-learning platforms such as Moodle are currently used by default as a support for individual courses especially seminars. In the last two years Moodle has prevailed and has a high priority now. Previous portals like Webster are disestablished now. Alternatively lecturers partially upload documentations and seminar schedules to their personal homepages.

The use of e-learning also depends on the affinity of the lecturer. Nevertheless, e-learning is a growing trend especially at seminars where e-learning platforms are commonly used.

The use of e-learning in the master degree program International Development is very similar to the one at other universities in Austria.
Conclusions
GS generally describes master degree programs with focus on international development and globalisation. The survey focuses on the situation of the GS students and their perception of e-learning. It is shown that most students chose GS because of its interdisciplinarity, followed by interest in developmental issues and globalisation. Therefore, the two unique features of GS are also the reasons why students chose this field of study.

Regarding the use of ICTs within the compulsory courses of GS at the University of Graz, it can be concluded that e-learning technologies are used at several instances but not yet used in a sufficiently intensive manner. Within the course “Basics of GS” only one out of ten lecturers uses WebCT in a way that can be described as a “web-dependent program”. In the view of some students the course “Introduction to International Relations” can be seen as an online course with significant time saving if the available podcasts are used instead of personally being present on campus. All other courses use e-learning technologies in a reduced manner. E-learning has a plenty of advantages – increasing quality may be the one most important. In order to enhance the quality in the compulsory courses of GS it would be desirable to increase e-learning in this courses.

Summarizing it can be stated that e-learning is becoming more and more important in tertiary education in Austria during the last years. However, e-learning is applied very differently by Austrian students. According to the Students Social Survey 2006 (Unger and Wroblewski, 2007) not only the online-communication with professors and other students but also the use of online platforms and in general e-learning varies widely within the faculties and universities. The Students Social Survey from the Institute for Advanced Studies in Vienna analyses the use and evaluates different types of e-learning and online communication methods. There is a trend that students from medical faculties and from veterinary medicine use online-communication services and internet platforms vary rarely, whereas students of social sciences (like GS in Graz) use them more frequently. According to the survey 60 percent of students of social and economic studies use online learning platforms whilst the lowest usage is recorded in medicine and art (Unger and Wroblewski, 2007).

In order to optimally implement targets of cutting-edge academic quality, the present article further encourages usage of e-learning strategies that are suitably supported by didactics of cooperative learning and teaching.

Note

References


Further reading

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