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Using Google Apps as an mLearning strategy

Issue at-hand

Mobile learning (mLearning) is more than just using a mobile device to access content and communicate with others. It is the union of mobile technology (mobile devices, wireless technology) and learning (students and instructors). mLearning involves the exploitation of ubiquitous cell phones, smartphones, handheld computers, tablets, laptops and personal media players to facilitate, support, enhance and extend the reach of teaching and learning processes. It implies the processes of coming to learn through exploration and conversation across multiple contexts amongst people and interactive technologies and the use of mobile or wireless devices for the purpose of learning while on the move.

mLearning, which in essence is collaborative in nature, has traditionally been associated with non-formal learning experiences. This type of learning has great potential also in the university. Collaboration technologies are typically used to support group collaboration; they can also be adapted to support collaborative learning. The nexus between collaborative learning and collaboration technology is related to computer-supported collaborative learning (CSCL), in which technology is used to support or better enable collaborative learning. For instance, Google Apps (GApps) for Education offers a complete management system that includes tools for reading, editing, shared thinking, and communicating in the Cloud, especially from any device connected to internet.

Consequently, several learning institutions have decided to integrate GApps in their learning communities with a view to promoting co-creation of knowledge and mutual help among students. A study presented by Rayon, Menchaca and Guenaga at the 2013 1st International Conference of the African Virtual University detailed the process followed by one such learning institution, University of Deusto, to integrate collaborative technologies in the educational

context and how it combined available technologies with competences to achieve educational objectives.

Recommendations

Using the example of the University of Deusto's Learning Model, the following strategies can be adopted by institutions to enhance mLearning:

- Use smart mobile devices and the integration of Google Apps with a constructivist learning management system such as Moodle for the improvement of flexible instructional delivery, learning outcomes and student performance.
- Promote the use of Google Apps tools as internal worktools and through training.

Implications

This study's focus on the University of Deusto's Learning Model is significant because:

- Other eLearning universities may learn from the University of Deusto's Learning Model and become part of the Forum of Universities in the Cloud created by Google to be able to use and share documents and tools.
- Creates more awareness about the potential benefits of integrating cost-effective technologies e.g. smart mobile devices in eLearning and teaching.
- It might encourage other institutions to adopt ICT tools for teaching, learning and working in mobile and flexible environments.

Conclusion

GApps are already established tools in mLearning and are particularly suitable for learning models, similar to that of the University of Deusto, which emphasize the adoption of ICT tools for teachers, learning and working in mobile and flexible environments.

Reference

Paper presented at the 2013 1st International Conference of the AVU, Nairobi, Kenya, under the session on *Instructional Technology and Information Systems*.

Title: Mobile Computer-supported Collaborative Learning: Google Apps in an mLearning strategy

Presenters: Alex Rayón, Iratxe Menchaca & Mariluz Guenaga (DeustoTech Learning – Deusto Institute of Technology – University of Deusto, Spain)

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