

Digital university: student perspective

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1. Summary

The paper presents a summary of the findings from the student digital experience insights survey carried out among students of the University of Warsaw in the summer semester 2018. It provides an overview on how students use technology at the university, for their own learning purposes and how they perceive the university digital provision as well as the digital teaching and learning on their courses.

The dataset is valuable in its potential to explore the digital experiences of students and in highlighting what exactly makes a difference to them. The findings of the survey are of use in identifying which areas of the digital education at the university should be developed as priority ones and deliver data upon which strategic decisions about digital improvements (including academic staff trainings and e-services) can be made. The findings obtained enable benchmarking for other HE institutions.

2. Background and method

University didactics is challenged by the accelerated process of digitalization in Higher Education and pervasive use of information technology for the support of teaching and learning is already a fact (Thoring, Rudolph, Vogl, 2017). Although there are studies focusing on the digitalization in the field of HE, they are often designed as a quantitative study and therefore allow only for a very general view of the subject (Dahlstrom, 2015). A broad study has been delivered by Jisc (Newman, Beetham, Knight, 2018) within 3-year project and it is of use for other European HE institutions as a reference point. However, the relevant strategic planning for and individual institution requires an insight into own existing digital infrastructure and quality of services provided.

2.1 Method: the survey

A pilot paper questionnaire has been distributed among 61 students of the first and the second year (Bachelor degree) aged 18-27. The survey contained both closed (multiple choice) and open questions referring to:

- individual digital learning habits,
- Technology Enhanced Learning in the courses they have taken, digital services & tools delivered by the university
- overall performance of the university in the Technology Enhanced Learning

The questions focused on the availability of the tools, their usefulness and frequency of use. Potential areas of improvement were asked to be indicated and all sorts of comments (open questions) were welcome within the survey.

2.2 Digital infrastructure

Digital infrastructure at the University of Warsaw includes the following e-services available for every student of the U. of Warsaw:

- Student management system (plans, marks) integrated with VLE university educational platform;

- University VLE ie. Moodle platform with e-courses for over 40 000 active users
- Student e-mail accounts within university domain under Gmail.

3. Key findings

3.1 Individual learning habits and digital experience

The students were asked to assess their own ICT skills scored from 1 (very poor) to 6 (excellent) and experiences with digital technologies (Fig. 1). The results have shown the highest excellence has been achieved in using mobile applications rating them as at least very good ones for over 85% of students and in high activity in social media (80%). On the contrary, their experience with webinars and videoconferences is very low pointing to 70% declaring it as poor. The average skills and experience (fair to good) were reported for activities such as usage of MS Office, collaborative tools like Google drive docs and on-line courses, by 50% of students.

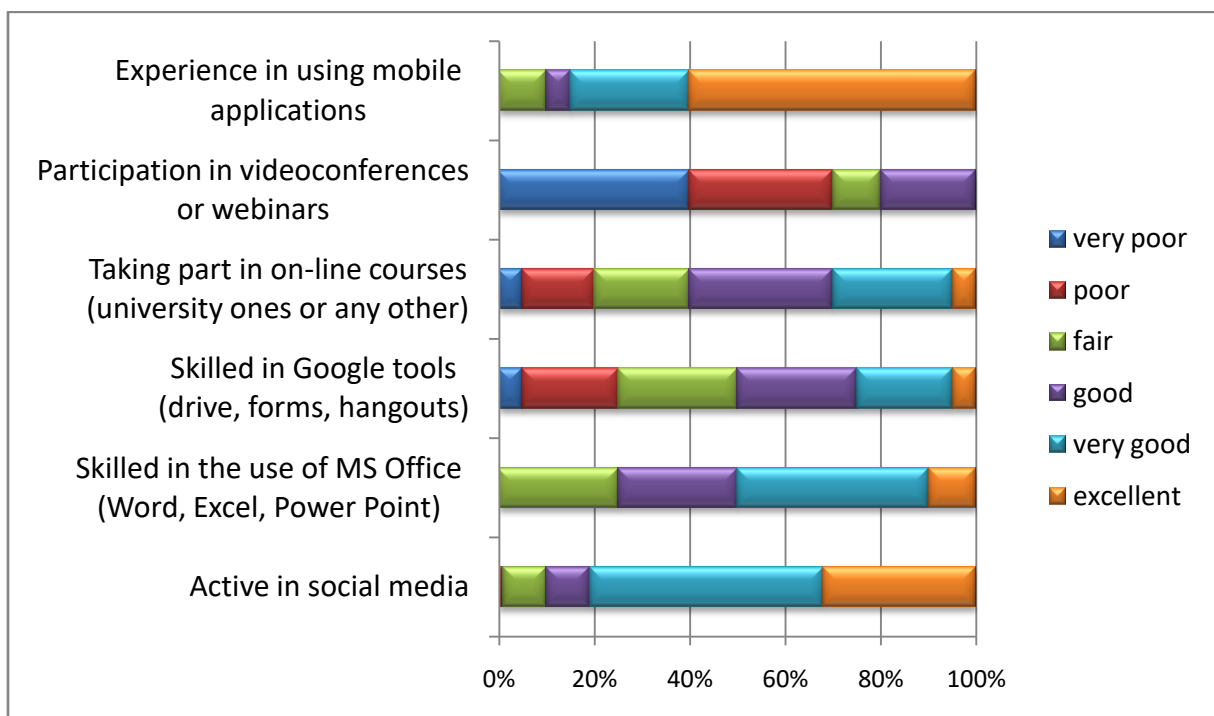


Fig. 1. How students assess their own ICT skills and experiences with digital technologies (from very poor to excellent).

Most of them (60%) have already taken part in the university on-line courses offered at the university educational platform and only 30% enrolled to MOOCs (at Coursera or edX) outside the university.

Students used digital technologies in their own learning time regularly (Fig 2).

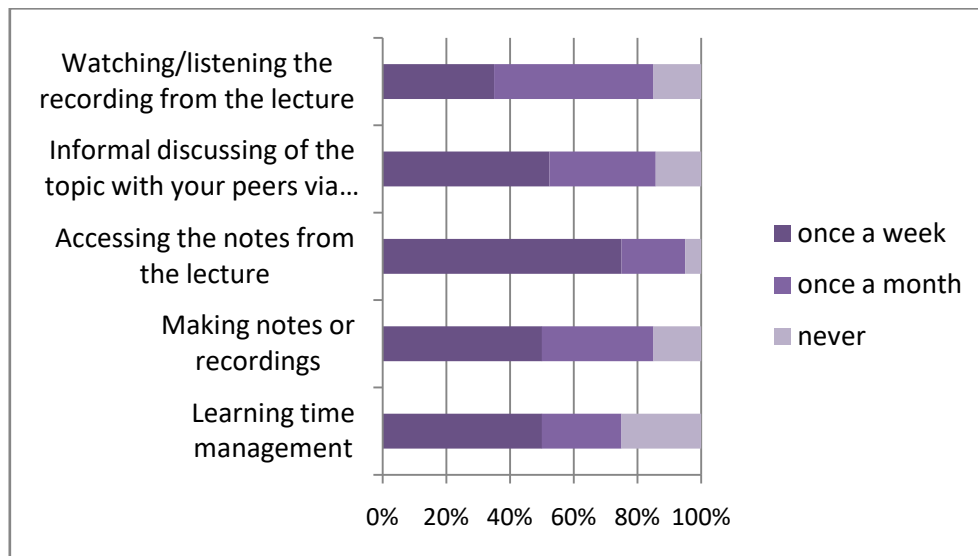


Fig. 2. How often students use digital technologies in their own learning time.

Half of them use digital devices on a regular basis (at least weekly) for learning time management, taking notes or making recording from the lectures or looking for the additional educational resources. 55% students discuss informally they learning with other students via social media on a weekly basis.

3.2 Technology Enhanced Learning at the course

Consistent use of the VLE is highly appreciated by students and more on-line courses are welcome. They increasingly rely on virtual access to learning and appreciate having lecture notes in advance and recordings they can revise from afterwards.

However, at no more than 30% of in-class courses, technology enhanced learning is applied on a weekly basis, according to the replies of students. Surprisingly, at 30% of classes the digital technologies are reported to not be used at all. The specific activities include: accessing on-line resources, on-line collaboration within the group, using educational games, quizzes and simulations (Fig.3).

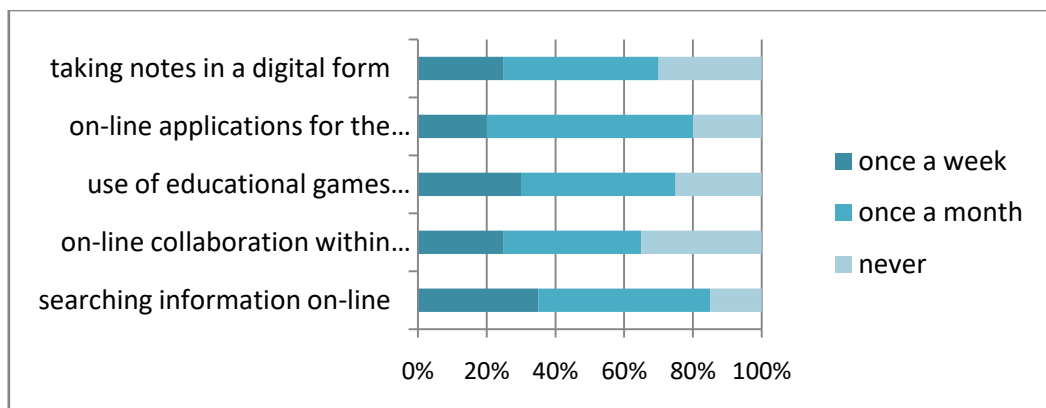


Fig.3 How often the following digital activities are undertaken during in-class courses.

The activities mentioned are exactly what students expected to explore more at their face to face classes, stating (more than 50%), that they enhance their learning experience in this way, and thus they have a chance for better understanding of the lecture content.

The emphasis is put, however, on the appropriate use of digital technologies and a proper balance between digital resources used and face to face contact with the lecturer and colleagues. A good summary is the quotation of a reply to a question: "What activities do you perceive as useful ones at your courses?": „*Just the board and a feltpen could be used more. There are too many low quality and boring Power Point presentations.*"

3.3. Digital services & tools provided by the university

Overall performance of the university in the Technology Enhanced Learning was questioned. Access to reliable wifi was pointed as a highest priority for students. A mobile app facilitating access to the university student management system (schedule, marks etc.) was also highly demanded.

Similarly to other European students (Thoring, Rudolph, Vogl, 2017), access to e-books and on-line literature as well as a free of charge MS Office package to be delivered by the university are among the services/tools students would preferably like to see within the university provision.

Over 60% of all students wanted digital technologies to be used more on their course and at the university level and 30% were happy with the amount of digital technology currently in use.

4. Conclusions

There is no doubt all the services referring to the student management system and their organisational life at the university are highly demanded, not only on-line but just mobile. The challenge is to make them in a user-friendly format.

Virtual Learning Environment is highly appreciated by students and more on-line courses are welcome. Should the university didactic be more digital? To some extent. There is no one-size-fits-all solution. The issue is to not just use the digital technologies more but in a wise and balanced manner with didactic awareness in mind.

Even though the survey was run for the University of Warsaw purposes, it can be scaled with other questionnaires. The outcomes of the survey deliver an overview of young people digital literacy skills, needs and expectations towards the digital education.

This approach goes in line with the need of increasing the digital skills and digital literacy in the society in many European countries, including Poland (Jasińska et. al., 2015), and the role of education in this area is vital.

5. REFERENCES

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Anna Pacholak, MSc, works in the Digital Competence Centre, University of Warsaw. She has managed various national and international educational projects involving e-learning and digital learning & teaching. Author of scientific papers. Her main scope of interest is digital education, motivation aspects in learning process, new technologies for education, psychology of learning, open access education.

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