

COURSE MANAGEMENT SYSTEM IN LANGUAGE CURRICULA: THE POTENTIALS FOR INDONESIAN CONTEXT

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Abstract: Course Management System (CMS), which facilitates teachers in managing their courses online, nurtures students' and language instructors' discipline. This system encourages students to be active and creative with their learning since it is possible to do various language learning activities on a CMS, e.g., chatting, surfing, virtual discussion and lecture. Using CMS, there are potentials that language practitioners can explore in order to improve the quality of language teaching and learning in Indonesia.

Keywords: Course Management System, language courses.

The Internet is not something new in Indonesia, yet it is something luxurious in the sense that it is still expensive and, thus, accessible only to some individuals and from some places. However, once we overcome this obstacle, language practitioners in Indonesia will be able to make use of this powerful mode of course delivery in improving the quality of their language teaching and learning. One online-based system potentially very useful for language course is the Course Management System (CMS). This system can facilitate teachers in managing their courses online. Moreover, the offered CMS features promote communication which is the core and goal of language learning.

Applying CMS in Indonesia brings about new challenges for language teachers and students. They are challenged with the problems of altering teachers' attitudes toward managing more transparent language curricula and also changing students' learning attitudes toward more responsible language learning. Discipline is the foundation of managing online course on a CMS. Everyone involved in the language learning process needs to be aware of what they can and should do. In addition, computer literacy on the part of both teachers and students is also one of the things that needs to be considered. Moreover, there is always the funding problem that most institutions face.

CMS has been widely used for conducting distance learning; however, it is also extensively used to support face to face courses all over the world. In this article, we are going to introduce the use of CMS

for managing language courses and explore its potentials in the Indonesian context.

COURSE MANAGEMENT SYSTEM

Computer programs that facilitate computerized learning or e-learning are identified with different terms in different countries. In the United States, these programs are known as Course Management System (CMS), which according to Clifford, Earp, & Reisinger (2003: 8) is a term used in academic computing arena to refer to the group of products that offer a standard suite of integrated course management tools. They are also known as Learning Management System (LMS), which is more frequently associated with software for managing corporate training programs rather than courses in traditional educational institutions. These programs are also recognized as Learning Content Management System (LCMS), Managed Learning Environment (MLE), Learning Support System (LSS) or Learning Platform (LP) which is education via computer-mediated communication (CMC) or Online Education (Wikipedia, 2006). In the United Kingdom and many other European countries, the terms Virtual Learning Environment (VLE) and MLE are more commonly used.

Many CMS are produced commercially (e.g. Blackboard, WebCT, Angel, etc). However, there are many others available as open source software under some sorts of license agreement (e.g. ILIAS, LRN, Manhattan Virtual Classroom, Moodle, etc.).

Open source software is usually developed by universities to help educational institutions in managing their courses.

In this article, we are using the term CMS to refer to computer programs that facilitate teachers in managing their courses online. Components of these systems usually include templates for content pages, discussion forums, chats, quizzes and exercises such as multiple-choice, true/false, and one-word-answer. Teachers fill in these templates and then release them for learners to use. The services generally provided include access control, provision of e-learning contents, communication tools, and administration of the user groups. CMS users are given a password to be able to log into their course sites. They need to logout of the site when they have finished using it.

COMMON FEATURES OF CMS

There are eight groups of common features provided by CMS: 1) communication tools, 2) productivity tools, 3) student involvement tools, 4) administration tools, 5) course delivery tools, 6) content development tools, 7) hardware/software, and 8) company details/licensing (EduTools, 2006). Applied in a language course, the first three tools will be beneficial in supporting oral as well as written communication, improving discipline and commitment, and also fostering creativity and learners participation. The rest of the tools are functionally more useful for language teachers in managing language course online.

Communication Tools

The communication tools offer a discussion forum which is a threaded online text conversation between participants. Instructor can make use of the discussion management which includes all of the accessing and scheduling associated with the running of a discussion forum. Using this tool, language instructor and students can communicate and discuss issues outside class while at the same time practice their written language. All messages posted on this forum are saved and can be retrieved anytime needed.

Another useful feature in fostering communication in the target language among students and the instructor of a language course is the internal email which is electronic mail that can be read or sent from inside an online course. There is also the real-time chat which enables conversation between people over the Internet that involves exchanging messages back and forth virtually at the same time.

When it is not possible to conduct face to face meeting, there is the *whiteboard* tool which includes an electronic version of a *dry-erase board* to be used by instructors and learners for conducting a virtual classroom (also called a *smartboard* or *electronic whiteboard*). During a virtual classroom other synchronous services such as application sharing and group browsing will also be very useful.

Sharing is one activity supported by CMS. There is file exchange tools which allow learners to upload files from their local computers and share these files with the instructors or other students. When students need to make notes, they can use the online notes/journal which can also be shared with their instructor and other students.

Productivity Tools

The productivity tools help language learners organize their learning better. These tools make available bookmarks that allow students to easily return to important pages within their course or outside their course on the web. There are also calendar/progress review tools that make possible for students to document their plans for a course. When students need to search within a course, there is a tool that allows users to find course materials based on key words. A work offline/synchronize tool facilitates students to work offline and synchronize their work into the course the next time they log-in. Sometimes students can download course content to their local computers and work offline. The provided orientation/help tools are designed to help students learn how to use the course management system. Typically, these tools are self-paced tutorials, user manuals, and email or telephone helpdesk support.

Student Involvement Tools

The student involvement tools support group work with the capacity to organize a class into groups and provide group work space that allows the instructor to assign specific tasks or projects. There are also communities networking tools that allow students to create social ties, study groups, clubs, or collaborative teams without instructor intervention. Areas also given for students' portfolios where students can keep their work in a course, display their personal photo and personal information.

Administration Tools

The CMS administration tools incorporate four features: 1) *authentication* which is a procedure that works like a lock and key by providing access to software by a user who enters the appropriate user

name (login) and password, 2) *course authorization tools* that are used to assign specific access privileges to course content and tools based on specific user roles, i.e., students, instructors, teaching assistants, 3) *registration tools* which are used to add students to and drop students from a course, and 4) *hosted services* which mean that the product provider offers the course management system on a server at their location so the institution does not provide any hardware.

Course Delivery Tools

The course delivery tools include various kinds of testing tools that can indicate which types of questions the software supports, control of when and where tests may be taken and under what conditions, and also allow instructors and assistants to evaluate and mark student work while working online. Automated testing support includes system services for importing and exporting tests and test banks as well as statistical analysis of test results. Online gradebook includes supports for keeping track of student progress and work online in support of assigning course grades. Course management tools allow instructors to control the progression of a class through the course material. There is also student tracking tool with the ability to track the usage of course materials by students, and to perform additional analysis and reporting both of cumulative and individual usage.

Content Development Tools

Content development tools include the accessibility compliance that meets the standards that allow people with disabilities to access information online. For example, the blind use a device called a screen reader to read the screen; however, Web pages need to be designed so that screen readers can be navigated easily. The content sharing/reuse tool enables the product provider to self-report that the software complies with the WAI WCAG 1.0 AAA guidelines. In helping the instructor to create the initial structure for a course, there is the course templates tool. Customized look and feel tool have the ability to change the graphics and how a course looks. Instructional design tools help instructors in creating learning sequences, for example, with lesson templates or wizards. Instructional standards compliance concerns with how well a product conforms to standards for sharing instructional materials with other online learning systems and other factors that may affect the decision whether or not to switch from this product to another.

Hardware/Software Tools

Hardware/software tools include client browser required information which is the type and version number of the Web browser (e.g. Internet Explorer 3.0, Netscape 4.0) that works effectively with the course management system. There is also the database requirements which are technical specifications for the database management software (e.g. Oracle or SQL) required by the course management system. Unix Server means the course management system runs on a server using some variant of the UNIX operating system. The Unix Server feature includes general information about hardware requirements such as disk space, memory (RAM), and CPU speed and model. Windows Server means the course management system runs on a server that uses some version of the Microsoft Windows operating system.

Company details/licensing

Company details/licensing include the company profile and costs which include information on licenses and other startup expenses. Open Source means the software is delivered with the source code and the license agreement gives the licensee the right to modify and redistribute the software. Optional extras are features or extras added to the product that may or may not add to the cost.

THE POTENTIALS OF CMS FOR MANAGING LANGUAGE COURSES

CMS has the potential for enhancing classroom management. The instructors of a course can place the course information in the course site, i.e., course syllabus, location of sessions, course schedule, basic course materials as well as additional resources, important links, details of pre-requisites and co-requisites, credit information, and also how to get help. The instructors can always go back to add and change the contents of their course site. They are encouraged to use the *noticeboard* for updating course information and putting announcements. These features can be accessed by students and instructors; therefore, everyone can get a clear picture of a well managed language course. Once we plan to have a well managed course using this system, what is important to be considered is that students and instructors have to understand their rights and responsibilities.

Using CMS in a foreign language curriculum means nurturing students' as well as lecturers' discipline. As we all know, learning a foreign language needs a strong commitment on the side of the in-

structors as well as the students. The instructors need to foster meaningful learning experience and the students need to make use of the meaningful language learning experience created by the instructors. These experiences can take place not only in face to face classroom sessions, yet they should also be created for students outside class. CMS can address this issue because it can be used to not only address classroom needs, but also learners' independent study needs. Using CMS, instructors and language learners can work on this commitment in a transparent way because every bit of information in the CMS can be accessed by the instructors and the students anytime they want. Consequently, instructors and students need to discuss their rights and responsibilities in a language course.

CMS can be used to address program-wide administrative and teaching resource issues in the entire language program. The CMS usually runs on servers and it can be used to serve the course to students and instructors as Internet pages. Students and instructors have 24/7 to access their course page which has password-protected entry into the course site. Once they are in the course site they can access the features made available there, for example, announcement, assignment due dates, exam dates, course materials, lectures, reading assignments, grades, etc. Students can also do quizzes, create collaborative projects, submit assignments or post comments on the discussion board, etc. It is also possible to use the communication tools to do synchronous or asynchronous communication among the students and instructor. In addition, most CMS comes with internal user database with the ability to track usage statistics; the system can often track the learners' progress, which can be monitored by both teachers and learners.

The benefits of using CMS in supplementing face to face courses are quite apparent. Instructors can store basic course materials in their course site and use it in class or as independent study materials which need to be finished at certain time. Instructors can set due dates of assignments, quizzes or exams to motivate students. They can also add additional materials or tasks or change any materials in the CMS to address learners' needs. Working on an online mode means that all materials are made available to students to access anytime they want and to work on those materials at their own pace. This will reduce pressure on those who need more time to learn. It will also give chance to students to review what they have learnt in class.

The use of CMS improves instruction. For fostering meaningful language learning, a foreign language course site can be set to use only the target language. Instructors can assign variety of activities for students to practice in the target language. Learning experience using synchronous as well as asynchronous communication tools within CMS can also be arranged to be conducted only in the target language. Thus, CMS can be used to promote communication among its users. Communication can be done through email or chatting. It is also possible to conduct a lecture on a CMS when the instructor is not available for face to face session.

The use of many types of multimedia is also supported by CMS. This is important for foreign language curricula since foreign language teachers are among the first and frequent users of multimedia format teaching materials which range from visual, audio as well as audio-visual formats. This will enable instructors to use CMS for any skill courses as well as content courses.

DECIDING ON WHAT CMS IS THE BEST FOR YOU

It can get a little bit overwhelming for institutions or teachers to choose the CMS which is appropriate for them. Before deciding what CMS to use, users can compare over 60 available CMS by visiting a website developed by WCET: <http://www.edutools.info/static.jsp?pj=4&page=HOME>. They can also submit reviews on the CMS they are currently using. This can help other users to learn about the available CMS and get information from current users on their experience in using a particular CMS.

USERS' EXPERIENCES ON CMS

Foreign languages teachers, who have long been accustomed to using media, computers and web-based resources in their curriculum, often, have been among those to take assistance of the tools and features a CMS offers. However, CMS proposes a great number of features which may become overwhelming and intimidating for students and instructors when they want to use it for the very first time (Clifford, Earp, & Reisinger, 2003:8). For that reason, training is not only needed but also very essential. What should be kept in mind is that training here does not mean only to sign up for a certain meeting which discusses what CMS is and how to use it, but also to gradually experience its use in real courses. There-

fore, users can be accustomed to the new system and feel comfortable in using it.

Students need to be trained because they have to know what they should and can do with CMS, for instance, that their course sites can only be accessed using a password, that they can communicate with their instructors and peers on the chat room or discussion board, that they can assess their own learning and check their own grades, etc. Since the instructors need to master how to organize materials on CMS and to learn how to get assistance with technical and conceptual issues that arise, training becomes even more vital for them. There are various issues that instructors need to be aware of, for example, (1) institutional network storage space guideline (e.g., how many audio clips I can include in my materials), (2) institutional copyright guideline (e.g., what materials I can use in my site), (3) the recommended life cycle of the sites created in the CMS (e.g., how long my site will be available), and many other issues. Hence, by taking training in using CMS, instructors will obtain a significant help to work on their courses.

There are at least three main areas which instructors and students benefit from using CMS in their foreign language courses, i.e., better classroom management, improved instructions, and easier managerial applications.

Better Classroom Management

A case in Duke University, USA (Clifford, Earp, & Reisinger, 2003) reveals that CMS has a potential to improve classroom management. First of all, it suggests that by providing a course site that serves as the 'home-base' for the class, an instructor can minimize a number of academic problems such as students losing or misplacing paper-based course schedules, guidelines, as well as assignments from their professors. Besides, it can also encourage students to take responsibility for their own learning. They have to learn to be responsible about their late submission of particular tasks or opening their course sites. Another advantage is that the document storage area can be used to post syllabi and class scheduling materials, as well as assessment rubrics and homework assignments. They can be accessed any time and anywhere, as long as the students are equipped with Web access. Furthermore, by making materials available via the CMS, the instructors can control access to any sensitive and copyrighted materials (CMS is only available to instructors and students who are enrolled in the academic course).

CMS synchronous chat tool can help them hold virtual office hours, permitting students-teachers interaction when location or time is problematical. Lastly, when students become increasingly comfortable with the tools, their understanding of 'classroom space' begins to expand, and electronic communication via CMS tools becomes a logical extension of traditional modes of students-instructors communication.

The result of a study conducted at the University of Wisconsin to examine the reasons for using CMS by faculty members within the University of Wisconsin System (USW) shows that pedagogical challenges faced by practitioners have more to do with classroom management (Morgan, 2003). Therefore, faculties adopt CMS chiefly for managing more routine tasks associated with teaching, for example, managing and teaching large classes, establishing communication with students, giving students access to class documents, and providing convenient and transparent assessment.

Improved Instructions

The first advantage is that CMS serves as a virtual space for housing important course-related documents. An instructor may load the course site with various original and/or authentic supplemental materials. CMS may also permit them to direct students to a variety of authentic online materials in the target language, such as newspapers, radio and television channels, dictionaries, and grammar review exercises. The second advantage is that instructors also have the choice of creating their own online assessment through the CMS. Commercial CMS products may provide quiz and survey tools. It should be noted, however, that they are very likely not suitable for the assessment needs of that particular lessons. The third advantage is that CMS is a suite of tools (email, virtual chat, discussion board) that allows for increased communication among students, helping to build class community outside the limited hours spent in class. There are benefits students may obtain from this standard teacher-centered writing assignment; for example, CMS gives a voice to students who may be shy or hesitant to speak in class (Clifford, Earp, & Reisinger, 2003:7). Moreover, this kind of shared atmosphere of public writing generally results in improved students' writing skills (Rubio, 2003:9).

A study in the University of Wisconsin Systems shows faculty have used CMS in teaching and learning to achieve a number of teaching goals (Morgan, 2003: 4). The most imperative objectives com-

prise supplementing lecture materials, increasing transparency and feedback, and increasing contact with and among students. Faculty have also discovered that the CMS helps them to include more interactive materials, allowing them to address various learning styles. In addition, faculty have used CMS as a means to increase the amount of feedback they are able to provide for students and to advance the promptness of the feedback.

Easier Managerial Applications

Nowadays there are more universities and other institutions of higher education which are increasingly turning to CMS because they need to economize on the time of teaching staff, especially when they are also involved in research and administration, provide a service for students who increasingly look to internet as the natural medium for finding information and resources, and facilitate the integration of distance and campus-based learning or of learning on different campuses (Wikipedia, 2006).

In addition to its wide popularity, there are at least three sites which give the most significant benefits to the management (Clifford, Earp, & Reisinger, 2003). They are the instructor resource site, which provides a secure location to disseminate program-wide materials; the students' resource site, which makes the same activities and materials available to multiple class sections and courses within password-protected environment; and the program-wide resource site, which implements course- and program-wide surveys and tests, such as placement exams.

With the creation of instructor resource sites, the program administrative tasks such as maintaining a program calendar, posting announcements, providing an e-mail distribution list, and distributing electronic copies of documents can be streamlined to the other faculty members and students. Secondly, the creation of students' resource site expands the community of learners beyond the individual class and it potentially encompasses all levels in a language program or groupings of classes according to their level, elementary, intermediate, or advanced levels. In addition to distributing authentic materials to multiple sections, this resource site may also serve as a means of displaying student-created work or electronic portfolios. Another use of CMS is its broader realization at the program level to situate and track students. A placement test, for example, will be available for students both in campus or remotely. However, instructors may also

limit the availability of the test with password or by limiting the time-frame.

WHAT HAVE INSTRUCTORS AND STUDENTS BEEN DOING WITH CMS IN FOREIGN LANGUAGE TEACHING COURSES?

This part of paper is devoted to presenting some examples of what instructors and students of language can do with CMS. The first example is the use of course management system for exchanging electronic drafts in a writing class (Rubio, 2003). His experience in his writing class shows that CMS does not simplify the correction of multiple drafts in a typical composition class, but it improves the quality and quantity of the instructors' comments and enhances the students' final product. It also facilitates the more mechanical aspects of the correction process. He further comments that he originally developed this system as a way to speed up the correcting process. Unfortunately, he has to say that this is not the case. The amount of time he dedicated to correcting a composition is about the same as he used to need with the traditional "red-pen" system. However, the computer-based system has a number of significant advantages that make it worth trying. First, it eliminates the need to deal with a mountain of papers from the multiple-draft compositions. Secondly, this system allows both the instructors and students to store an electronic copy of every piece of writing done during the course. This, later, makes both of them have a better picture of the improvement of the students' writing skills over time. Thirdly, he reported that instructors tend to write longer comments on students' compositions, and as a result, students also write more. Consequently, this procedure can decrease some of the burdens of traditional feedback. In brief, with the increased use of computers and course management programs, the field of foreign language teaching must take advantage of all new resources available to make the teaching and learning process as effective as possible.

One feature a CMS offers is computer-mediated communication (CMC) which includes chat, e-mail, and discussion boards. In a study involving an Intermediate French I class at a large, Midwestern, public university in the U.S., students are given reading passages that they are supposed to discuss over three modes of CMC, i.e., chat, e-mail, and discussion boards in groups of seven (Chism, 2003). A great majority of the students (90%) revealed the discussion board as their preferred forum of com-

munication due to several reasons, i.e., it creates easy and immediate access which motivate participation in group discussions, it makes students more responsible and active members of the discussion group, and it is also an easy way of taking turns in participating in group discussion.

Two U.S. institutions participated in a project that made use of the "Virtual Classroom" located in the Blackboard course management system for weekly online exchanges (Lee, 2003). The main purpose of arranging network-based collaboration between the two U.S. institutions was to provide the nonnative speakers from the University of New Hampshire (UNH) opportunities to use the target language outside the classroom as well as for the native speakers from George Mason University (GMU) to gain experience in using online technologies as part of the requirements for their course. Chatting presented both promises and challenges for the students from UHN. They believed that online chats help them improve their writing skills yet not their speaking skills. Students enjoy the topics and perceived them as a meaningful way to practice their Spanish and exchange ideas with na-

tive speakers; however, it's difficult to set a particular chatting time.

CONCLUSION

In Indonesia, the deployment of the Internet in supporting language courses is still in its challenging phase. Once we are more familiar with the use of online mode of course delivery in improving the quality of language teaching and learning, CMS might be one of the options to employ. The system will assist language instructors in managing their courses online and promoting various forms of online communication in their language course. However, a more responsible learning process needs to be introduced since language learning requires commitments from the students as well as the language instructors. Self discipline is definitely expected, however, at the same time more transparent language teaching curricula might also be created. All in all, there are potentials that language practitioners can explore in order to improve the quality of language teaching and learning as well as the language curricula through the use of CMS in Indonesia.

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