EFL instructors' perceptions of usefulness and ease of use of the LMS Manaba

Sean Toland

Ritsumeikan University
stoland@fc.ritsumei.ac.jp

Jeremy White

Ritsumeikan University
jwhite@fc.ritsumei.ac.jp

Daniel Mills

Ritsumeikan University
dmr11096@fc.ritsumei.ac.jp

Doris U. Bolliger

University of Wyoming
dorisbolliger@gmail.com

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Learning Management Systems (LMSs) have become important tools in higher education language instruction, which can facilitate both student learning and the administration of courses. The decision regarding which LMS a particular university adopts is a complicated process where the needs and opinions of several stakeholders, including administrators, students, and faculty members, must be considered. The researchers conducted a focus group session with faculty members at a private Japanese university regarding their usage and perceptions of the LMS Manaba. The results of this study indicate that while perceptions towards the LMS were positive overall, successful integration of the technology is hampered by a lack of institutional support.

Keywords: Higher Education, English as a Foreign Language, Learning Management Systems, Focus Group

Introduction

We are living in a technologically charged, rapidly changing world, and this fact has altered the dynamics of university classrooms in every corner of the globe. In the current era, technology-enabled learning has become more prevalent and vital in the field of higher education. Torrisi-Steele and Drew (2013) argue that postsecondary administrators are confronted with the challenge of providing a multicultural student population with cost-effective, high-quality learning experiences and the "competency demands of a digital society" (p. 378). In recent years, Web-based Learning Management Systems (LMSs) have had a profound impact on the use of information

technology (IT) and have been rapidly adopted by numerous universities throughout the world (McGill & Klobas, 2009; Schoonenboom, 2014). Not surprisingly, LMSs have become important tools in the arena of postsecondary English-language education.

In 2007, the Japanese company Ashai Net Inc. created the Manaba Learning Management System (LMS). The word comes from the Japanese words 'manabi'

(学), which means learning and 'ba' (場), which means environment. Combined, the two words translate to "learning environment." Manaba is a cloud-based LMS that is used by 190 postsecondary institutions around the world, including Stanford University and the Harvard Business School (Manaba, 2014). According to the company's website, this LMS offers educators a tool for "connecting users to various communities, participating in discussions, sending and receiving documents, and working on assignments" (para. 1). In 2013, the business and economics departments at a private university in western Japan decided to replace their current course managements system (CMS) with Manaba. The purpose of this research was to explore faculty perceptions of this newly adopted LMS as it pertained to ease of use, perceived usefulness, as well as the training structure that is currently in place.

Literature review

Learning management systems: Definition and benefits

Throughout the academic literary landscape, the term LMS is often used interchangeably with CMS (e.g., Sanprasert, 2010) or Virtual Learning Environment (e.g., Stantchev, Colomo-Palacios, Soto-Acosta, & Misra, 2014). According to Watson and Watson (2007), the myriad of acronyms and nonstandardized terms that exist have played a role in the inappropriate use of LMS in the literature. It is beyond the parameters of this paper to provide a comparative analysis of a CMS and a LMS. Both systems share a number of similar features; however, there are also some subtle differences. Ferriman (2012) believes a LMS is more dynamic than a CMS because it includes a course management function as well as learning strategies designed to improve a user's overall performance. For the purpose of this paper LMS will be used exclusively.

LMSs are defined as Web-based systems that utilize synchronous and asynchronous technologies for the purpose of delivering educational content and facilitating communication between course participants. An LMS allows instructors to share instructional resources, create tests, post announcements, and communicate with students online. Black, Beck, Dawson, Jinks, and DiPietro (2007) contend that LMSs are designed to support faculty across a range of different subject areas, teaching philosophies, and instructional methods. Students can communicate and interact with peers and work on collaborative projects. Lonn and Teasley (2009) point out that an increasing number of LMSs facilitate student learning by actively engaging students with the use of discussion tools, chat rooms, Wikis, and Blogs. These interactive tools provide today's learners with the opportunity to create and disseminate knowledge.

Stantchev et al. (2014) remind us that one of the key objectives in modern day technologically enhanced university classrooms is to involve students more actively in the learning process. There are a number of benefits to be gained if instructors create blended learning spaces – by combining online and face-to-face classroom activities. Hanson and Robson (2003) reported the use of LMSs helped to improve student learning and increased faculty productivity at three American universities. Stantchev et al. (2014) write that the

utilization of LMSs provides educators with an opportunity to enhance the learning process and management of classes.

LMSs and English-language education

In the arena of English-language education, a growing number of university educators are integrating technology to give their students greater access to authentic materials and facilitate communicative activities in the target language. In English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classes, teachers and students utilize LMSs for a variety of purposes including tracking progress, writing blogs, giving and taking quizzes, and using synchronous chat (Yu, Sun, & Chan, 2010). LMSs provide EFL educators with a way to organize online content, giving students access to learning resources at any time or place. This situation can lead to greater student autonomy, which has been shown to make learners more responsible for their own learning and provide them with the ability to critically reflect on their learning needs and outcomes (Snodin, 2013).

Although more and more language-teaching practitioners have incorporated LMSs into their courses, there is a noticeable gap in the literature in regard to how these systems are perceived by EFL instructors. Yu et al. (2010) note the majority of studies pertaining to the utilization of LMSs and other e-learning technologies in language-learning classrooms have been quantitative. This qualitative study attempts to address this gap by exploring "depth rather than breadth" (Neuman, 2014, p. 71) in the quest to develop a deeper understanding of the users' thoughts and feelings.

Theoretical framework

Technology Acceptance Model (TAM)

For the last 25 years, researchers have utilized the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) by Davis (1989) to examine how users accept and apply technology (Alharbi & Drew, 2014; Teo & Noyes, 2011). The TAM was created to describe predictors of acceptance regarding a wide range of IT across diverse populations. The TAM contains the following five elements: (a) perceived usefulness, (b) perceived ease of use, (c) attitudes toward use, (d) behavioral intention, and (e) actual use. Of these five elements, perceived usefulness, perceived ease of use, and attitudes towards use are viewed as predictors of behavioral intention and actual use. Of the three predictors, perceived usefulness and perceived ease of use are the essential elements of the model. In essence, the main idea of this model is that if individuals are more accepting of a new system, it is more likely that they will use the system (Jones, McCarthy, & Halawi, 2010).

Over the years, the original TAM (Davis, 1989) has been modified a number of times. In education, extended versions of the TAM have been applied to measure a person's willingness to integrate new technology in a variety of contexts such as mobile learning (Park, Nam, & Cha, 2012), video games (Bourgonjon, Valcke, Soetaert, & Schellens, 2010), and LMSs (Schoonenboom, 2014). According to Escobar-Rodriquez and Monge-Lozano (2012), this widely used empirically tested model is a "robust, powerful, and parsimonious model for predicting user acceptance" (p. 1086). The TAM is versatile and valuable and can be used to examine educators' acceptance of technology in the EFL teaching arena.

The theoretical framework of this research investigation features the two main elements **223**

from Davis's (1989) TAM: perceived usefulness and perceived ease of use. Both of these elements examine what causes people to accept or reject technology. Perceived usefulness can be viewed as the degree to which individuals believe that the system will assist them in their job performance. Perceived ease of use relates to the extent to which individuals believe that utilizing a certain system would be free of effort (Davis, 1989).

Purpose of the study

It was the purpose of the study to investigate faculty perceptions of usefulness and ease of use of Manaba. Additionally, by critically analyzing the elements that may influence instructors' perceptions of Manaba, the researchers explore ways in which the training structure for faculty workshops could possibly be enhanced. It must be noted that three of the researchers are "insider researcher" (Brannick & Coghlan, 2007) who examined the use of a LMS in their workplace.

The research questions are as follow:

1. What are faculty perceptions of usefulness pertaining to Manaba?
2. What are the faculty perceptions of ease of use pertaining to Manaba?
3. How can the faculty workshops be enhanced?

Methodology and methods

Background

From the beginning of the academic year 2013, WebCT was replaced with Manaba as the new LMS for the university. Training for this new system was mainly conducted in Japanese, although limited training sessions were available in English. Feedback received from non-Japanese teachers who attended the English training sessions revealed that the training sessions were too teacher centered, with the instructor not undertaking a needs analysis of the teachers in attendance, not prepared to accept questions during the lecture, and not willing to divert from the preplanned lesson. Two instructors at the university recognized these problems and developed their own English workshop for Manaba the following year to incorporate differing levels of ability and experience. The instructors held two workshops, one for beginners, and one for more advanced learners. At these workshops the instructors at first demonstrated some of the more useful functions of Manaba and then allowed the rest of the lesson for an interactive learning session, answering any questions the participants had, and demonstrating how to employ functions with which the participants were unsure of or wanted more experience. Following these training sessions the instructors realized the need to further understand the needs and attitudes of the instructors of the university in relation to the use of Manaba, and thus formulated the following research study.

Setting and participants

The research study took place in the economics and business departments at a private university in western Japan. The qualitative data for this investigation was collected by conducting a focus group session with eight EFL instructors in these departments. The total number of EFL instructors in these two departments at the time of the study was 63. This includes part-time and full-time lecturers as well as tenured professors. Since the time

the university had adopted the LMS Manaba, usage of the system among EFL faculty has varied greatly. While some EFL instructors made use of a variety of the systems functions such as assignment collection, online quizzes and resources and discussion boards, others included either no online component to their classes or used a system other than Manaba. While the university is eager to see greater adoption of Manaba, and would like to move to blended learning classes in the future, no incentive or requirement is in place to encourage use of the system by the instructors.

The participants are experienced EFL educators who teach an average of 10.25 under-graduate classes per week of English-language courses focusing on the four skills: speaking, listening, reading, and writing. Focus group participants had a combined 152 years teaching experience (*M* = 19 years) and ranged in age from 35 to 55 years. Two were *Sennin-kosʰi* (tenured professors), four *Sʰokutaku-kosʰi* (full-time contract instructors), and two *Hijokin-kosʰi* (part-time instructors). A number of factors were taken into consideration during the selection process. Participants needed to have different ranks and various levels of experience with LMSs. Because the inclusion of two tenured professors in the study had the potential to upset the power dynamic during the focus group session, the researchers discreetly inquired if this would cause a problem among any of the participants. The other members of the focus group indicated that they did not have a problem with their inclusion. In fact, their participation proved valuable to the study because they possessed inside knowledge of the administrative issues and procedures involved with the adoption of this LMS. Participants identified themselves as frequent, occasional, or reluctant users of Manaba. It was also important that focus group members felt comfortable exchanging ideas with one another.

Krueger and Casey (2009) mention that researchers should avoid including individuals who have different levels of expertise or power related to a situation in a focus group. Therefore, supervisors as well as high-level users of technology were excluded from the selection process. It should be noted, however, that the two tenured professors were in a higher position of power than the other participants. Prior to the focus group session, six participants who were not tenured were asked whether they had an issue with the participation of the two tenured professors; they did not.

All eight participants were given pseudonyms in this study. Kidd and Parshall (2000) recommend that a focus group interview should have two members of the research team present in order to enhance the analytical rigor. Therefore, two members of the research team conducted the focus group session. One person served as the session moderator; the other researcher was the observer.

Case study approach: Definition & benefits

A case-study methodology was employed to examine faculty members' perceptions of the Manaba LMS. In the last 40 years, there have been numerous definitions of a case study in the academic literature from the simple and straightforward to the highly complex. For example, Johnson and Christensen (2012) succinctly define this approach as "research that provides a detailed account and analysis of one or more cases" (p. 395). In contrast, VanWynsberghe and Khan (2007) write that a case study is "a transparadigmatic and trans-disciplinary heuristic that involves the careful delineation of the phenomena for which evidence is being collected" (p. 2).

Even though there is a lack of consensus over the most appropriate definition of a case **225**

study, there are a number of notable benefits of using it in a qualitative investigation. Cohen, Manion, and Morrison (2011) note that case study explorations are "a step to action" and the insights from this type of research approach can foster a person's self-development as well as provide evaluative feedback for an institution (p. 292). Simons (2009) argues that the evaluative process is a political one and the case study tactic can be useful in this type of environment. A case study methodology can highlight "participant and stakeholder perspectives, engage them in the process, and represent different interests and values in the programme" (p. 18). Yin (2014) tells us that a case study is a "contemporary phenomenon" that exists in a "real world context" (p. 16) and the reports are readable and accessible to a wide audience (Baxter & Jack, 2008). The final reason for using a case-study approach was that it could be effectively integrated with critical theory (e.g., Smith-Maddox & Solórzano, 2002) to create space for a researcher to examine a problematic situation in more depth and with greater understanding.

Focus groups

Definition and background. It is generally accepted that a focus group is a "dynamic discussion" (Liamputtong, 2011) with 6–12 individuals who have similar experiences or concerns and come from similar social or cultural backgrounds (Sagoe, 2012). Morgan (1996) tells us that a focus group is a "research technique that collects data through group interaction on a topic determined by the researcher" (p. 130).

Benefits and limitations. Focus groups are perceived to be a quick and economical way to conduct research because a number of participants can be interviewed at the same time in the same place (Jowett & O'Toole, 2006). According to Sutton and Arnold (2013), focus groups are an "underutilized research method in studying technology-driven phenomena despite their suitability" (p. 81). There are numerous benefits that can be realized from this research approach. The real strength of a focus group is that it is a "powerful research tool" (Huston & Hobson, 2008, p. 186) that can generate "incredibly rich, thick, and broad" data (Toner, 2009, p. 181). Krueger and Casey (2009) claim that a focus group is a useful evaluative device when researchers are examining various types of programs because it allows researchers to gain a deeper understanding "through the eyes and hearts" of the research participants (p. 8).

An effective focus group interview can ignite a formidable fire of group synergy, especially if participants feel comfortable and safe. During the session, participants can be stimulated to openly share ideas, challenge each other's opinions, and examine their own assumptions (Huston & Hobson, 2008; Kitzinger, 1994). Peek and Fothergill (2009) believe the focus group experience can invigorate persons to talk about things that they would not have disclosed during a one-to-one interview. Another important advantage of the focus group methodology is that it can help to "subvert traditional power relationships in research" by taking advantage of the strength of the peer group (Jowett & O'Toole, 2006, p. 469).

However, this technique is not without certain methodological obstacles that must be overcome. Peek and Fothergill (2009) note researchers have less control during interviews with larger groups of participants compared to limiting an interview to one or two participants. Other individuals might not want to share their actual thoughts or feelings with fellow group members or may feel pressure to conform in order to avoid conflict (Huston

& Hobson, 2008). Although focus groups are an effective way to examine group-identified issues, it is not a suitable forum to explore individual participants' biographical backgrounds. Additionally, the researcher must circumvent logistical barriers such as recruiting the participants, organizing a time and place for everyone to meet, and transcribing an audio file with multiple overlapping voices.

Procedure

Data collection

The data were collected in a classroom during the second week of the spring term. Participation was voluntary and confidential, and no incentives were provided. Before the interview began, participants were provided with information about the research project and their informed consent was obtained. All chairs and desks were arranged in a circle during the session to create a more relaxed and comfortable atmosphere. The focus group session was audio recorded, and recording devices were placed in an unobtrusive location. The interview lasted 55 minutes and 44 seconds, and participants were informally debriefed.

Immediately after the focus group session, the interviewer and observer discussed their observations. The audio recording was transcribed in full and checked for accuracy. Finally, the transcription, field notes, debriefing notes, observational chart, and reflections were coded and analyzed.

Focus group questions

Just before the session started, participants were provided with 10 interview questions (Appendix A). The success of a focus group rests on the researcher carefully cultivating well-developed questions that will allow participants to reflect and verbalize their experiences (Ruff, Alexander, & McKie, 2005). These questions were critically analyzed and piloted with two educators at another university.

Observational data

Onwuegbuzie, Dickinson, Leech, and Zoran (2009) warn that only interpreting the text from a focus group interview can be "extremely problematic" and a study can be much more rigorous if researchers analyze non-verbal elements (p. 5). The research team utilized the *micro-interlocutor analysis chart* as a tool to record who responded to each question, the order of answers, the nature of the responses (e.g., rambling), and the various types of participants' nonverbal reactions (e.g., frowning). The micro-interlocutor tool (Appendix B) was slightly modified, and the observer used it to record the aforementioned items.

Audio recordings & transcription

The focus group session was recorded, and the audio file was transcribed. According to Tilley (2003), transcription work is complex and challenging because a transcriber must untangle "knots of information" in the audio recording (p. 758). On a similar note, Richards (2003) contends that it is "methodologically indefensible" and a "dangerous exercise" when a researcher edits or cleans up a transcript for clarity (p. 201). It is important for researchers **227**

to transcribe their own focus group session data as it will assist them in the coding process and improve the quality of the analysis (Sagoe, 2012).

Once the recorded session was transcribed, both researchers verified the transcript several times (Huston & Hobson, 2008) and a member check was performed. Neuman (2014) believes that "member checks" are an important step to ensure the findings of a research investigation capture the participants' perspectives (p. 84).

Coding the data

A close reading and rereading of the transcript helped the researchers to see different themes emerge from the participants' words. A thematic mind map, created using MindNode Pro, was used to code the participants' utterances recorded in the transcript. Employing a classical analysis strategy, the researchers used open coding (Cohen et al., 2011) to reorganize the data into smaller and more manageable units. During this stage, it became apparent that there were 17 different codes. Afterwards, these items were reexamined using the axial coding process to better organize and connect the initial codes. Axial coding allows researchers to make links between a major category and subcategories (Liamputtong, 2011). Twelve distinct axial codes were identified in this study. In addition, nonverbal observational data recorded from the micro-interlocutor chart (Onwuegbuzie et al., 2009) were coded. Finally, NVivo 10 for Macintosh was used to scrutinize the findings. NVivo is software package that allows researchers to organize and analyze qualitative data that has been collected in a variety of formats.

Results

The data from the study revealed that participants used a variety of technology devices (e.g., overhead projector, computers, smartphones, etc.) in their EFL classrooms. In addition, participants believed that technologies were useful and easy to use. Jim captured this sentiment when he noted tablets are '. . . wonderful to have . . . you can put it down and just show something quickly.'

Research question one: Perceived usefulness

When the conversation shifted to the effectiveness of the Manaba LMS, there was a sharp division among the participants. The perceived usefulness component of Davis's (1989) TAM model is valuable because it highlights the degree to which the users of Manaba believe that it will enhance their job performance. Bob felt strongly that Manaba is a valuable tool for teachers to utilize in their writing classes because it allows them to collect and preview students' work before class. He noted that:

> '. . . I can quickly read through what they've done for homework . . . I can pick up the ten major issues pre-class . . . so I can actually make my next class more personal. If I set their deadline for a writing assignment two days before my class, then I can have a quick look and I don't have to do my 10 most common mistakes from five years ago.'

Ron agreed with this thought and added his own administrative consideration: 'you always have a record so there's no dispute who hasn't handed anything in . . . in terms of assessment. Having an online copy is easier to just copy and paste and look for cheating' In

addition to helping teachers organize their courses, a few participants discussed some practical benefits of Manaba. Mike claimed that Manaba is 'extremely useful for portability. I don't have to carry papers home . . . huge amounts of information are portable and I can check that at any time.' Miki liked the fact that she could redirect absent students to Manaba instead of spending time with each and every one of them highlighting the missed lesson material. She noted that, 'it's really useful for me because I usually post my lecture after class so students who were absent can go there and read the PowerPoints again.'

The data revealed that participants who perceived Manaba to be useful in their job performance also felt the system was beneficial for their learners. Victoria enthusiastically discussed how Manaba enhances her students' learning in the following words:

 '... perhaps we're not to the point where we want to be, but I think these Learning Systems will help us gain more contact hours with the students . . . where we don't have to be there face to face with them . . . but through leaving them messages . . . having them comment on things . . . interacting with each other even though they're not in the classroom . . . . Gives more contact hours where we're not having to be there face to face.'

This statement generated six 'indicated agreements' on the observational chart as well as a number of verbal agreements. Mike felt that Manaba would help facilitate his students' transition into the world of employment. He noted that:

I'm in the business faculty and the kids are going to be working in business. I can't image a company that is still going to base most of its work on paper. We're preparing our students for the future by using digital media . . . this allows for a more flexible learning environment and . . . we're no longer shackled to the classroom . . . .

There were two participants who disagreed with these comments and who clearly felt that Manaba was not useful for neither the students nor the instructors. Tom wondered aloud: 'So what's Manaba? What's the purpose? Campus Web seems to be the tool that's actually there. And Manaba is just something they've added on that can be used or cannot be used.' When the focus group was asked: 'If you had a chance to give advice to the head of your department about the Manaba LMS, what advice would you give?' Craig answered:

Get rid of it! It's a waste of time! It's . . . . You're adding to people's workload and you're depersonalizing teaching. Um . . . I really think it's the wrong direction to go. I'd say get rid of it . . . go back to traditional teaching. Teaching is about relationships and it's about interactions with the students.

Craig's polarizing comments generated a flurry of loud overlapping voices that vehemently disagreed with his idea of getting rid of the Manaba LMS. Miki offered this passionate rebuttal:

Personally, I think that traditional teaching is definitely important, otherwise, we wouldn't be here. But, technology is a must . . . it has to be . . . we have to. Technology is moving so fast. I think that some teachers are just intimidated by it. I'm not a tech-savvy person . . . . I'm trying very hard to catch up with technology. But it does . . . it really helps me with my teaching. I mean it's adding to my teaching – not substitute teaching. It's a plus.

The observational chart recorded that five participants agreed with Miki's statement and perceived Manaba to be useful in their professional practice.

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Research question two: Perceived ease of use

To what extent did participants believe that Manaba would be free of effort? There were 24 coded references that focused on the problematic issues related to using Manaba. Jim passionately injected these words into the focus group discussion: 'I don't hear a lot of glowing reports about Manaba from other people! I hear like "It's kinda a pain"' Tom agreed with this comment and added his own frustrations with using Manaba in the following way:

> 'I don't want to be in the class fluffing around with the Manaba system saying to the students, "Just a minute. I think . . . . Is this the right . . . ? Is this where I put it? Is this the one I wanted to show you . . . ? It's a waste of time trying to find stuff on the Manaba system . . . to show students . . . .'

The observational chart showed that six of participants indicated they shared Tom's concerns. On a similar note, three of the focus group members were disappointed with the functionality of Manaba. For example, Bob noted that, 'There's no access for anyone other than your students and that's the problem. You can't share files with other teachers.' Ron felt that Manaba needed an online grading book and pointed out the class attendance function did not work properly. Mike claimed that, 'You've got a bunch of assumptions that you work under and then . . . they come back and kinda bite you.' Despite these negative comments, the focus group participants indicated that Manaba's interface was easier to use than its predecessor, WebCT. Speaking about the features of WebCT compared to Manaba Bob said, 'They had the grades . . . . And some more stuff . . . . But it was clunky . . . . It wasn't easy to set assignments . . . . The interface was horrible.'

Research question three: Faculty workshops

Participants expressed frustration with the training system that is currently in place. Victoria captured this sentiment with these words: 'I think that it's just so new. Manaba hasn't thought ahead, and they don't know how to train the teachers, let alone the students.' When Manaba was first introduced at the university, Miki noted that, 'the only training was in Japanese.' One year later, Bob reminded everyone that there was only one workshop in English, and the Manaba trainers were not prepared to answer any questions. Bob also mentioned that although two of his technology-savvy colleagues attempted to fill this void by organizing a supplementary tutorial; however, there were only three time slots.

Jim believed that instructional videos would alleviate some of the 'ease of use' issues. Bob pointed out that it costs money and takes a long time for most people to travel to the campus for a LMS training session. He felt the university should provide instructors with a financial incentive to attend professional development workshops. Jim wanted Manaba to 'make the system so when I have time on my vacation, I could get into this and learn a few things step by step.'

According to Miki, the teachers' concerns about the inadequate training have fallen on deaf ears. She stated:

> I think Manaba should just ask, ah, they should have a general system . . . that they should ask each university or each faculty what we need. The last time we were in the meeting, but they didn't seem to care, they were not listening. We were raising all these, you know questions. Give me advice or suggestions . . . please . . . . we begged them.

Mike agreed with Miki and felt the university's administration was responsible for 'short-circuiting' the ideas to improve the LMS. Victoria confirmed this suspicion when she pointed out members of the Manaba team were open to new ideas. 'But somebody higher up said NO – that the university does not want us to do that. Some people, I think, are receptive but not all of them.'

Discussion

The data that emerged from the study demonstrates that many participants are using a variety of IT devices in their classrooms and believe that LMS can support their teaching practices. EFL teachers are extremely busy and do not want to invest time on a technology that will only have limited benefits. While the Manaba LMS was perceived by the majority of the instructors to be an effective learning technology, they indicated that at times it was difficult to use. In order for this perception to change, communication channels between administrators, EFL educators, and the Manaba LMS team must be kept open. In addition, training programs must be specifically tailored to fit the needs of the instructors.

One way to provide training at the point of need to the greatest number of instructors is through easily accessed instructional videos. Furthermore, when face-to-face workshops are conducted, they need to be more interactive and deal with the specific concerns of the participants. Finally, the university should provide teachers with a financial incentive to take advantage of training opportunities, if the institution desires increased uptake of the LMS and effective implementation of the technology in instructional settings.

Limitations

There are notable limitations to the study. First, only one focus group session was conducted, and the sample was small. Other researchers may duplicate the study and conduct additional sessions. Furthermore, a mixed-methods approach could have been employed in order to further triangulate the data and make the findings of this study more robust. Second, the geographical region was limited due to the fact that the study included only one university in Japan. Future research could be conducted that includes multiple sites in Japan or other countries. Other researchers may investigate the actual usage of instructors of the LMS at universities.

Conclusion

This qualitative study utilized a focus group session to provide a more comprehensive understanding of the faculty perceptions of usefulness and ease of use of the Manaba LMS. The findings indicate that the participants in this research project generally held positive views towards the usefulness of Manaba in their EFL classrooms. However, problematic issues related to ease of use were exacerbated by a lack of an adequate training, particularly for English-speaking faculty members. Successful technology integration is a complex process that hinges on a number of internal and external factors. While all the issue of successful technology integration have not and could not been solved within the context of this paper, it is hoped that this research will contribute to improvements in the support provided to faculty members in their adoption and use of the Manaba LMS.

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Author biodata

Sean H. Toland is currently a lecturer at Ritsumeikan University. His research interests include technology enhanced learning, CALL, teacher development, and critical theory. Sean is a PhD student at Lancaster University in the UK studying e-research and technology enhanced learning.

Jeremy White is an Associate Professor in the College of Information Science and Engineering at Ritsumeikan University, Japan. Jeremy's research interests include CALL, MALL, and the use of video games in language education. Jeremy is currently studying for his Doctorate in Education (EdD) at Griffith University in Brisbane, Australia.

Daniel J. Mills is a lecturer of English as a Foreign Language at Ritsumeikan University in Shiga, Japan. He is currently studying for his Doctorate in Education (EdD), specializing in instructional technology. Daniel's research interests include technology acceptance and integration, and MALL.

Doris U. Bolliger serves as an associate professor in the instructional technology program at the University of Wyoming. Her research interests include satisfaction, communication, interaction, community, and interventions in the online environment. Secondary research interests are learner-centered instructional environments and message design.

Appendix A

Focus Group Questions

1. Please tell us your name, your faculty, and how long you have been teaching English.

2. Can you please tell us about your experiences using different types of technology in your EFL classes?

3. Do you enjoy using different types of technology in your classes?

Key questions:

4. Let's talk about the Manaba Learning Management System (LMS). Do you think it is easy to use? Do think your students find it easy to use?

5. How do you use Manaba? How often do you use Manaba? (Before, after, or during class)

6. Do you think that the Manaba LMS is a useful tool to have in your class? What are the advantages of using it? What are the disadvantages?

7. Do you think that the training for Manaba is adequate? If not, how can it be improved?

Summarizing questions:

8. If you had a chance to give advice to the head of your department about the Manaba LMS, what advice would you give?

9. How can Manaba (& other LMSs) support traditional classroom teaching & enhance the students' learning opportunities?

Concluding question:

10. Is there anything else that you feel that we should have talked about but didn't?

   * Thank you once again for your time and assistance with this research project.

Appendix B

Focus Group - Data Collection -- Interview Observations

Date:

Start time:

Stop time:

Venue:

Moderator:

Observer:

Participants:

Focus Group Questions	Participant #1	Participant #2	Participant #3	Participant #4	Participant #5	Participant #6	Participant #7	Participant #8
1								
2								
3								
4								
5								
6								
7								
8								
9								
10								

A = Indicated agreement (i.e., verbal or nonverbal)

D = Indicated dissent (i.e., verbal or nonverbal)

SE = Provided significant statement or example suggesting agreement

SD = Provided significant statement or example suggesting dissent

NR = Did not indicate agreement or dissent (i.e., nonresponse)