moodle

Course creation journeys in Higher Education

Product Experience and Education Solutions team

Research Report | March 2024

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Overview

Background

With the goal of identifying opportunities for improving the current course creation in Moodle, the Educational Solutions team set out to better understand the course creation journey in Higher Education, the needs and challenges associated with that journey, and how content management fits into the larger picture.

Objectives

1. Map the course creation journey in Higher Education and identify the most critical pain points in that journey.

2. Identify where and how content management fits into the broader context of the course creation experience

3. Identify key areas for improvement in the content management experience.
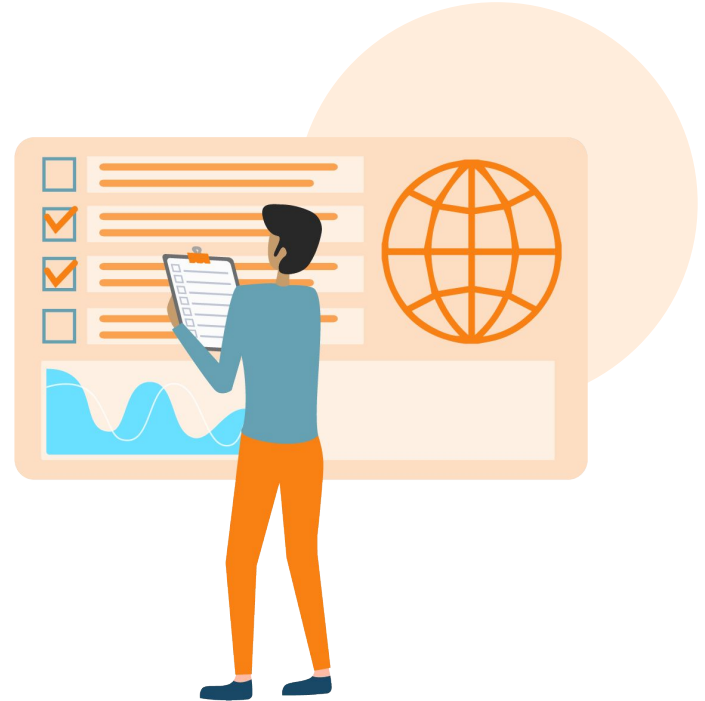
Method & Approach

Recruitment

We recruited research participants through:

- Moodle Experience Lab
- Moodle community
- 3rd party research recruitment panel

Research method

8* x 60 minute interviews and journey mapping activities

Survey of 38 additional respondents

*Interviews are a qualitative research method, and don't require a "representative sample" of participants. The priority is depth over breadth.

Data analysis

Thematic qualitative data analysis

Cluster analysis for survey data

Participants

We spoke with 8 course creators in higher education who had experience creating or recreating courses in the last 18 months. They were a mix of Moodle and non-Moodle users, with a range of experience from 1-20+ years.

Each participant identified as having one or more of the following job responsibilities:

Moodle Admin

Instructor

3

1

1

3

Learning Design, instructor support and training
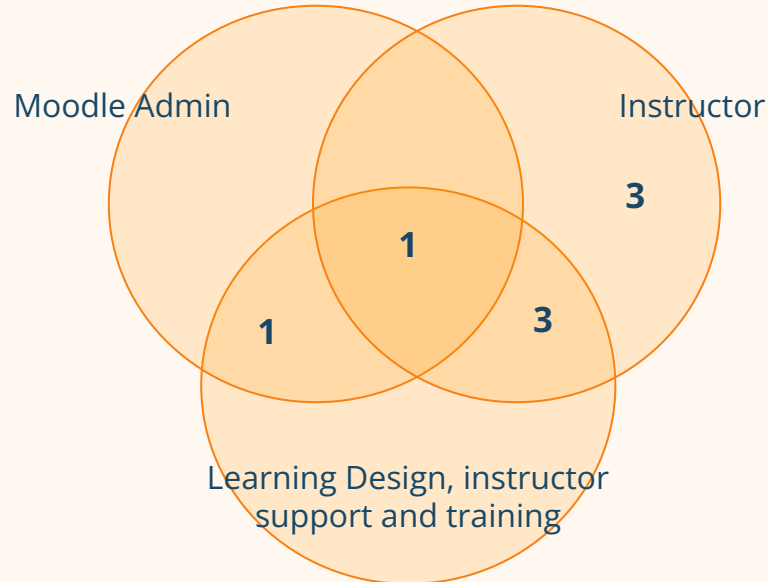
Research Findings

Summary of findings

1 The course creation journey looks very different in different scenarios (creating, recycling or re-creating).

2 Creating a brand new course from scratch is rare. The most common scenarios are "recycling" a course (copying entirely), or "re-creating" an existing course.

3 Content management (creating, sharing, reusing, editing) emerged as the biggest pain point for Moodle course creators. Other general pain points were: cognitive load, steep learning curve, and time.

4 Time was the single most limiting factor for all participants. Saving our users time with a more discoverable interface and more intuitive workflows would help unlock their creativity.

5 ChatGPT and other AI services are playing an increasingly important role in content creation and is attracting the interest of busy teachers who see it as an effective way to save time and reduce effort.

Finding 1

The course creation journey looks quite different in different scenarios.

Participants described 3 distinct approaches for course creation that require increasing levels of time and effort. From least to most effort, and from most common to least common, they are:

"Recycling" an existing course (small tweaks)	"Re-creating" an existing course	"Creating" a brand new course from scratch
Some instructors who have taught the same classes for many years will simply reset their course each year, change the dates and make very small fixes or tweaks.	Some teachers are making major changes to their own courses each year, to keep them up to date and incorporate student feedback. Courses inherited from other instructors usually prompt bigger changes, and sometimes starting over from scratch (in Moodle)	Universities aren't adding new courses to the curriculum that often. The rate of new courses added depends on the field and how quickly it's changing. Very lengthy process. More oversight and approvals needed.
3	**2**	**1**

♻️ Recycling

Many instructors reset courses year after year, tweaking dates and making minor changes to content.

They are strapped for time and may be intimidated by the complexity of the LMS.

They are less likely to seek out support, preferring to work on their own.

Top goals

- Save time
- Don't overcomplicate things, stick to what works
- Work independently

Top challenges

- Limited time
- Potentially intimidated by the LMS
- Often doesn't seek out support

How can we help?

- Make editing, adding, reusing, and sharing content simpler and faster.

✂ Re-creating

Sometimes course creators reimagine their courses, or those of other instructors. They want to share and reusing content where possible, to reduce the time spent creating things from scratch. They may also use AI to help generate content.

They know their way around the LMS, and may even be power users.

Top goals

- Keep courses fresh and up to date
- Personalise courses inherited from other instructors
- Save time, repurpose what may already exist
- Encourage students to engage with material
- Use free or low-cost resources

Top challenges

- Limited time
- Unable to share or reuse all types of content
- Content bank and question bank are confusing/ineffective
- Content management workflows are unintuitive

How can we help?

- Give people more control over what and how they share and reuse content
- Allow for sharing and re-using different types of content (activities, resources, files)
- Improve categorisation and filtering of questions in question bank
- Improve content management workflows - fewer steps, more intuitive, more contextual

🎨 Creating

Some course creators are in a role where their main focus is designing, creating, improving courses for instructors.

They have more time to dedicate to course creation and enjoy experimenting with different approaches and technologies.

They're likely LMS power users and their expertise enables their creativity. They sometimes prefer to start from scratch, vs. editing an existing course.

Top goals

- Work efficiently
- Create a good user experience for students
- Make things as easy as possible for teachers to use and maintain
- Keep up with online learning pedagogy and technology.

Top challenges

- Editing in bulk
- Navigating away from what you're doing to edit or create content
- Unintuitive workflows

How can we help?

- Improve content management workflows - fewer steps, more intuitive.
- Allow users to do things in the context of where they are, vs. having to leave and return.
- Allow for more bulk editing, and more editing in context (not in settings).

Finding 2

"Creating" a brand new course from scratch is rare. The most common scenarios are "Recycling" a course (copying entirely), or "Re-creating" an existing course.

A survey of 38* additional participants showed that "Recycling" was the most common approach, followed closely by "Re-creating". "Creating" a course from scratch was much less common.

*While 46 people isn't a *representative* sample of Moodle users, it's enough to give us some indication of how common these different course creation approaches are.

Respondents by approach to course creation

Create
10.5%

4

Recycle
50.0%

19

Re-create
39.5%

15
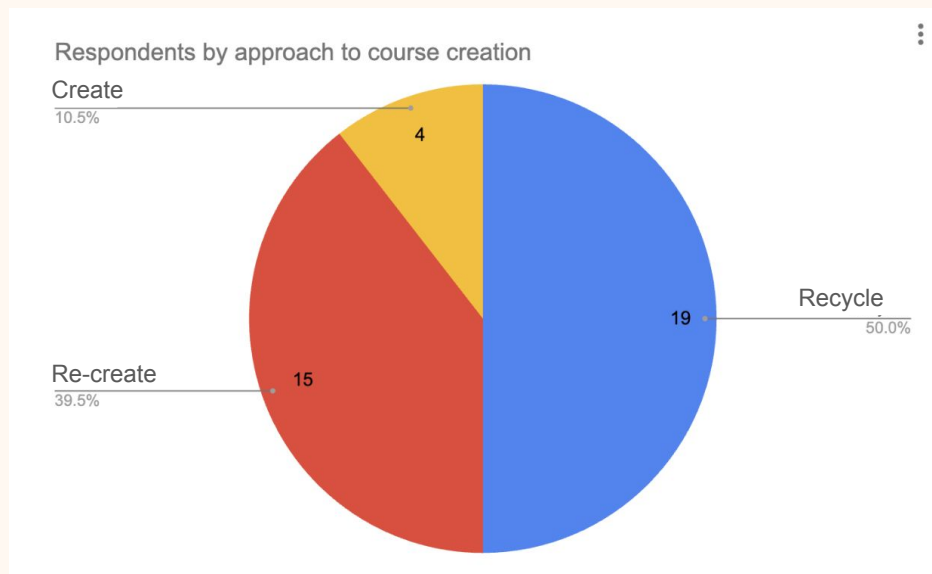
Finding 3 & 4

Content management emerged as the biggest pain point for Moodle course creators. Cognitive load, a steep learning curve, and limited time were the biggest challenges.

Most of the participants* we spoke with regularly re-create courses so we were able to create a more detailed journey map of their experience, including goals, activities and pain points.

You can see this detailed course creation journey in Miro via this link:
https://miro.com/app/board/uXjVNGBraE8=/?share_link_id=914336362876
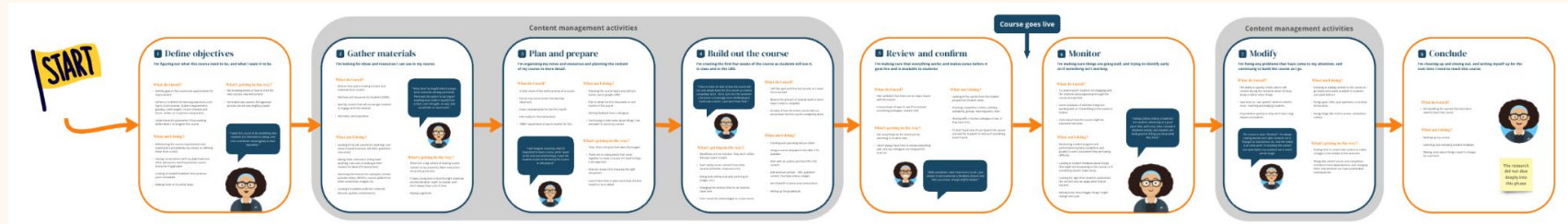
*We recognise this may not be the *most* common approach for *all* Moodle users, but it's common enough that addressing the pain points and limitations in this experience can have a significant and positive impact for many of our users.

Finding 5

AI generated content is playing an increasingly important role in course creation.

> "Over the years, I've managed to make it really, really simple but with ChatGPT it just makes it even simpler. So it just saves time."
>
> **Instructor**

AI is fundamentally changing the way people create courses. ChatGPT and other AI powered tools are being embraced by busy instructors who see it as a way to save time and reduce effort.

This topic requires more research and understanding outside the scope of this study, but here are a few ways some of our participants are using AI, or would like to use AI.

- Reading and summarising content
- Creating quiz question and assessments
- Generating images (slides, cover images, tiles)
- Writing course instructions
- Reading resources and creating activities
- Data visualisation (charts and graphs)
- Creating entire lesson plans
- Calculating grades, checking calculations

Next Steps

Next steps

1. Conduct Phase 2 of this research study, with a focus on further exploring the *course "re-creation" experience.*

2. Identify the biggest opportunities for improving existing workflows, specifically workflows related to *reusing existing Moodle course content.*

Want to participate in future research studies?

Join the Moodle Experience Lab to be the first to hear about research opportunities, and contribute to the future of Moodle.

moodle.me/lab