Messaging in Higher Education

Product Experience | Research Summary
September 2022

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Overview

Background

With messaging increasingly becoming a part of the way we move through life, it is important for us to understand and respond to the need for messaging as an integral part of the learning experience.

Objectives

Our aim was to learn about the attitudes, behaviours and needs related to digital communication in Higher Education, in order to help inform the use cases that should be supported by LMS's suite of messaging APIs.
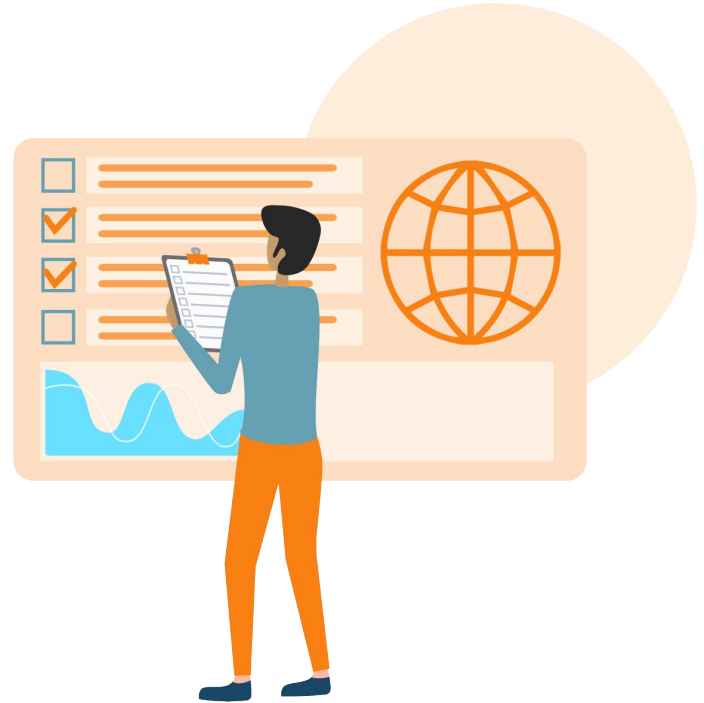
Research questions

- What are the behaviours and attitudes around messaging in higher education?

- What are the core needs around messaging and how are they being met?

- What is the experience like for current Moodle Messaging users?

- What is preventing/discouraging people from using Moodle Messaging?

- What are the most valuable aspects of messaging in a learning environment?

- Is messaging misuse an issue/concern, and if so, how is it being misused and managed?

- How important are integrations with other messaging services/platforms, and which integrations would be most desirable?

Method & Approach

Recruitment

We recruited research participants through:

- Moodle Community
- MUA
- Moodle Partners
- Higher Ed Universities

Research method

We conducted 60-minute, semi-structured interviews with teachers, students, and Moodle administrators.

Data analysis

We analysed the data using qualitative thematic analysis to identify common themes across interviews.

Participants

We spoke to 11* participants from Africa, Asia, Europe, and Oceania.

6

Moodle Admins

3

Teachers

2

Students

* Not a representative sample of our users. Insights from this research study will be considered alongside additional research on this topic.

Research Findings

Summary of findings

1 Messaging between teachers and students is not being used for learning, but for the administration and communication that supports learning.

2 Student-to-student messaging is being used for learning purposes, but Moodle Messaging isn't meeting their needs.

3 Too many communication channels and dispersed delivery methods leads to confusion, uncertainty and frustration.

4 Data privacy is a key consideration that impacts Moodle usage and communication.

5 There was no overwhelming request or need for Moodle to integrate with a particular tool.

6 Messaging misconduct wasn't a big concern or consideration for Teachers, Admins or Students

Finding 1

Messaging between teachers and students is not being used for learning, but for the admin and communication that supports learning.

Communication between teachers and students happens in 3 ways:

Teacher to many students	Teacher to single student	Single student to teacher
• Typically through Announcements and Forums • **Examples:** new assignments posted, reminders, change of date/room number, etc.	• Typically through school email, Moodle Messaging • **Examples:** personal reprimands, personal check-ins, personal reminders, etc.	• Typically through school email, Moodle Messaging • **Examples:** trouble with Moodle, requests for extensions, personal matters. • **Note:** Many teachers prefer to limit direct messages with students
1	2	3

"Messaging at the moment is never used for pedagogical stuff. It's only admin. It's a, *'teacher, I need help'*, sort of helpline, which is an important role."

Moodle Administrator

Finding 2

Student-to-student messaging **is** being used for learning purposes, but Moodle Messaging isn't meeting students' needs.

Moodle Messaging isn't meeting 3 core needs for student-to-student communication:

Group Messaging

- Privacy restrictions prevent freely viewing/adding classmates to group messages.

- Students want to message each other in the context of a course or assignment.

- Students can't effectively manage multiple groups.

1

Private messaging

- Students want to discuss ideas and collaborate freely, without teachers/admins having visibility, and they turn to popular external messaging apps.

- **Note:** Some students prefer not to share their personal contact information.

2

Experience and functionality on par with other messaging apps

- Messaging is very mature in other apps, and expectations are high.

- Students have a mental model of how other messaging apps work, and they bring those expectations to Moodle.

3

"The way that the system is working at the moment, it's clearly not [working]. It doesn't work in the way people expect. Messaging is a very mature environment and people have very strong expectations of how messaging will work."

Moodle Administrator & Educator

Finding 3

Too many communication channels and dispersed delivery methods leads to confusion, uncertainty and frustration.

- **Participants have multiple communication methods that address different needs.** There is no one tool that meets all of their messaging and collaboration needs.

- **Too many communication channels actually leads to a breakdown in communication.** Teachers and Administrators don't know how to send information so that students will see it. Students aren't always sure where they should be checking.

- **Centralised messaging, or centralised notifications, could help eliminate some of the noise.** Many Teachers and Administrators have expressed a desire to have all digital communications funnelled through to one channel

"What we quite often hear from students is, *'I can't find anything. Somebody sent a message or an announcement, and I don't know where that is. I didn't see it. I missed that thing.'* "

E-learning facilitator

Finding 4

Data privacy is a key consideration that impacts Moodle usage and communication.

Data privacy regulations are stricter than ever and a key consideration in Higher Education.

Data privacy laws can impact the Moodle experience in many ways:

- Which tools, plugins, and integrations are approved

- Students not being able to freely view or connect with other students in their course

- Certain functionality not being used/leveraged because of the data that is visible (eg. Activity Report)

- Data privacy may also be a growing concern for a more informed generation of students

"It's really a big, big concern with everything. [If] we want to use a new plugin, the first thing we have to think about is data protection."

Moodle Administrator

Finding 5

There was no overwhelming request or need for Moodle to integrate with a particular tool.
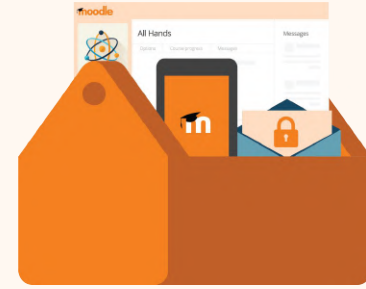
None of the administrators had a strong preference or suggestion for tools that Moodle should integrate with.

- Many had not integrated Moodle with any other messaging platforms.

- Budget constraints and IT or Legal approval were mentioned as blockers to integrating Moodle with other tools.

- A few participants felt that an integration with Matrix would be a step in the right direction.

4 participants mentioned using Microsoft teams, but none were overwhelmingly in favour.

- One school implemented Teams, but roll-out was poor and it didn't take off.

- Three schools who mentioned using Teams use it for video conferencing (along with Zoom) and chat, but didn't have anything overwhelmingly positive to say.

Finding 6

Messaging misconduct wasn't a big concern or consideration for Teachers, Admins or Students

- According to participants, bullying or harassment are rare occurrences.

- Some participants mentioned that policies, training, and the permanent evidence created by digital communication may be a deterrent.

- Some schools have internal processes for dealing with complaints. No one mentioned wanting or expecting Moodle to be responsible for monitoring or identifying misconduct.

- One teacher suggested that Moodle could detect and report key words that might indicate misconduct.

"You have a trail of messages. If I send someone a bullying message or a sexual harassment message, they can easily screenshot a ticket to the department. And those things are really taken seriously."

Student

Opportunities & Next Steps

Opportunities

How might we...

1. Encourage students to engage in more open communication in their courses?

2. Minimise the feelings of embarrassment and vulnerability in students when sharing their questions and ideas?

3. Enable students to communicate privately without the need to share personal contact details?

4. Leverage what others have done in this space to more effectively meet the high expectations and complex requirements of our users?

5. Eliminate the need to send and receive messages through multiple, disparate communication channels?

Next steps

Research

- Iterative concept and usability testing throughout Messaging project

Product

- The Platform team will be commencing API design as a part of the 4.2 release

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 Experience Lab](#)