

Moodle Research Dissemination and Exploitation

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Abstract

The objective of almost all research is its dissemination and, ideally, commercial exploitation. In this paper we describe key channels of dissemination and exploitation of Moodle research.

Keywords

Moodle, research, dissemination, exploitation

Introduction

Moodle thrives on a buzzing global community that contributes to the overall project. This is true for code contributions in the form of patches and plugins of all kinds, solutions to problems raised in hundreds of forums, and new features being discussed in the Moodle tracker. This also holds true for research contributions, but their quantity is nowhere near the aforementioned contributions.

Almost all research is funded, either internally by an employer or externally through public or commercial funding bodies. There are a number of criteria for funded projects to be approved such as technical feasibility, uniqueness, and sustainability. There are two further critical aspects that take place either at the end of a project lifetime or after thereafter: **dissemination** and **exploitation**.

Moodle Research Dissemination

Dissemination is all about telling others what has been achieved. This ranges from solving a new or existing problem using a novel approach to best practise implementations of processes or a project. Typical paths of dissemination for research output are the following:

- Publication in relevant, hopefully peer-reviewed, research journals
- As a poster or a talk at a conference in an attractive and / or remote location
- Others, such as book chapters, internal research reports, blog posts, and public speaking engagements

There are usually three types of foci of any of the above mentioned dissemination channels:

- **Education**
The majority of research falls into this category where Moodle is used as the vehicle to demonstrate new pedagogical approaches for certain aspects of e-learning. An example is a new type of collaborative authoring, which is prototyped as a Moodle activity.
- **Technology**
Some technology-driven research is being incorporated into the Moodle context. An example is a new artificial intelligence-driven algorithm for personalisation that is then being implemented in Moodle's course framework.
- **Subject-matter**
A substantial body of research is taking place in 'foreign' domains that is applied in VLEs, for instance, yet another economical model to deal with financial crises, implemented as a new Moodle Loan Calculator ;-)

Any of the above dissemination channels accounts for a valuable contribution to the overall Moodle project as it leads to new or improved functionality, better workflows, support for new technologies and standards, and, ultimately, to a better Moodle ecosystem.

While almost all research manages to be disseminated in one way or the other, the vast majority has absolutely no hope to be commercially exploited. Büchner & Patterson (2004) is a great example of such work. Now let's have a closer look at Moodle research that *is* worth exploiting further.

Moodle Research Exploitation

Exploitation is concerned about the commercialisation of the work carried out. This is often a much-debated topic as there are a number of issues that prevent this step, for instance technical shortcomings, idiosyncrasies that don't allow for generalisation, constraints imposed by the funder, and so on. In the Moodle context an additional stumbling block is present due to the open-source license of the software. Having said this, substantial revenue is being generated worldwide by different types of businesses that rely on Moodle in one way or the other. Let's look at different routes to exploiting your Moodle research:

- **Set up your own business**
A lot of Moodle-driven ventures have an academic background as has Moodle itself. This might start off as a part-time company providing a unique solution integrating Moodle with your research outcome and lead to a fully-grown business offering related services.
- **Go freelance**
If setting up a business sounds too daunting, going freelance is a viable alternative. Whether it is offering development services to Moodle users, designing themes for existing sites or consultancy to Moodle prospects, all will benefit from the Moodle-related research that has been carried out.
- **Work for a Moodle Partner**
The ultimate! Exploiting your Moodle skills acquired throughout your research can be highly beneficial to a Moodle Partner. To the researcher it provides the unique and paid opportunity to work on a wide range of challenging real-world Moodle projects inaccessible in academic contexts.
- **Engage in a joint venture**
A partnership with an established business – Moodle Partners being the preferred option, of course – will potentially provide solid research a platform for exploitation.
- **Sell your research**
Depending on ownership of the research outcome, there might be demand to acquire the technology developed and incorporate it in a commercial services or products offering.
- **Others**
There are other avenues to exploit Moodle research, such as applying for a patent or rolling your own Moodle distribution like Totara.

A note of care: whatever route of exploitation is chosen, the Moodle copyright must not be infringed.

Summary

The most dreaded section in most research papers is the one labelled “Application”; the one just after experimental results and before the long-awaited summary. This is where the boys are separated from the men. It has to be demonstrated that the entire theoretical conundrum can actually be applied in the real world.

Commercial entities on the other hand are reluctant to fund any blue-sky research, especially in a field that changes rapidly. However, there is a substantial body of research out there that is worth exploiting. Equally, there are a significant number of commercial routes that allow for commercial exploitation. Bringing these together is a key facet of the success of the overall Moodle project.

This paper presented a number of routes to disseminate and exploit Moodle research. The next step up would be a cluster of Moodle-related research activities being carried out. Maybe, as a result, one day we will see the first Moodle Business Incubation Centre.

References

- Büchner, A.G. & Patterson, W.D. (2004). Personalised E-Learning Opportunities – Call for a Pedagogical Domain Knowledge Model, Proc. 15th Intl Workshop on Database and Expert Systems (DEXA'04), IEEE Computer Society, pp. 410-414.