MOVIEDUC: An Application To Support User Mobility In The Distance Learning Plataform Of The University Of Colima

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The University of Colima has always been committed to the community both academic and general to provide technological and pedagogical resources that support the development of new technologies in the distance learning area that avoid students with limited time and resources to attend to a physical campus. In the same venue, the University offers a research program on new information and communication technologies which is the cornerstone of electronic courses that utilizes the distance learning platform called EDUC (Distance Learning Platform for the University of Colima). This platform manages all distance-learning services within the institution and its main activities are: planning, designing, developing and teaching distance-learning courses. It offers courses to teachers, researchers, students and general population, looking for quality educational services.

EDUC has an educational model that employs several tools to be on the top of the line for educational online services. Its development team includes professionals of demonstrated expertise in the areas of education and technology and its tradition of quality and leadership in different educational areas has always been recognized. EDUC has several communication tools, which includes an instant messaging system, discussion forums, online chats, e-mail, among others.

However, this communication tools due to design considerations difficult the user mobility around other places and interact with the system at the same time specifically in the discussion forums. Additionally, users of distance education systems sometimes does not have the time stay in the same room to interact with other participants in the courses because they have to move to different rooms or places. In this aim we consider the development of a computational tool that allows users of EDUC to interact with the system using mobile devices like PDAs.

The modules that we propose to include in the mobile application are:

1. Reply to the discussion forums
2. Response notification of messages in discussion forums
3. Alert messages for modifications in the whole website of the course (including but not limited to: course materials, discussion forums, announcements, changes in schedules among others).

At the same time, with this new developments and technologies we asked ourselves the following questions:

- Does MOVIEDUC (the mobile application) promotes an increase in the interaction of discussion forums participants?
- Is there any other mobile application to connect to which requires a communication standar?
- Does this application help reduce the response time employed by the EDUC online courses participants?

The programming language of the application will be Embedded Visual Basic. The software application will be installed in the PDA and will notify the users of new messages, platform alerts, changes within the discussion forums of EDUC and reply of the messages in the same forums. The project will consist of 4 modules: messages reception, replying messages, alert messages and forum changes.
The software evaluation will take place during the autumn term of 2004. Tested by the students of the online courses taught using EDUC (around 6 courses because the EDUC system is still under evaluation. The data collection techniques will be direct observation of use, number and type of interactions using the mobile technology and content analysis of interactions and messages, at the end of the evaluation we will apply some user satisfaction interviews and questionnaires.

The data collection will consist in a per user registration of interactions, number of times he uses the PDA to reply messages and as a support tool within the course and to interact with their classmates, the data from the questionnaires, the interviews and the content of the interactions

The general objective of this project is to implement and test a mobile client application that we can use as a communication medium in the discussion forums of the EDUC platform for distance learning. We also want to corroborate if the mobile application increases the number and quality of interactions among participants.