

The school web site as the communication and educational network centre

Jiří HUSA*

Institute of Communication and Education, Czech University of Agriculture in Prague

The autonomous web sites of secondary schools have been a natural part of school presentation for many years. The schools are aware of their meaning in communication with public. Internet technologies have been developing very fast and the students of secondary schools belong to their regular users. The use of internet technologies on the school web sites for the purposes of education and school management is possible, but it is not very common by now. In this contribution, a survey among 228 secondary schools in the Czech Republic is presented. There were various aspects of evaluation in this survey: means of communication, up-to-date of information, the educational content of web site, the use of web site for the school management and presentation of students' work. The survey results suggest that the use of school web site for the above-mentioned reasons is very small.

Key words: school web site, web-based technologies, communication, education, school management.

INTRODUCTION

The school web site has become a natural part of the presentation of secondary schools. The communication between secondary schools and public, especially with parents, plays a very important role. As for the web sites of secondary schools, the range, amount and sort of applied technologies vary considerably. Some schools run web sites on their own, or commercial domains. The structure of web sites ranges from very simple and static systems to advanced portal redaction system. Secondary school students are already used to using every available communication means, including those, which are based on internet technologies. In what way are schools able to communicate with their students and how to motivate students to use the school internet presentations? Is the interface of the school web sites akin to what students are accustomed to? Are the schools able to provide with educational challenges on their web sites? Do the web sites contain some elements of the school management? Searching of answers of these questions was a subject of a survey of more than 200 school web sites of secondary schools in the Czech Republic.

The web site as a part of the school curriculum

A comprehensive approach to the school curriculum also means the overall school presentation towards students, parents and public. From this point of view, the school web site creates an integral and important part of the school curriculum. The web site enables to have a closer look into the course of events at the school for non-participants as well. The school

web site, where communication takes place on different levels, is likely to contain following elements:

- the site is regularly updated by various actors,
- a wide range opinions and contributions is available
- the cooperation of teachers is apparent (on the common sites of similar subjects)
- the space for students' opinions is not only formal, their opinions can be freely expressed

The nature and specific differences of school educational program are mostly based in the lesson plan of the study field, the list of selection subjects and the offer of leisure time activities.

The role of communication

The internet technologies have been developing in a very quick pace in the last five years. In regard to the growing number of connected schools and households, new opportunities for schools to communicate with parents and public appear. A common objection that schools are relatively closed to public can be gradually changed using the communication on-line means in a larger extent. The internet-based communication is very popular among students and for the parents it can at least bring some time savings. The communication can be practiced in various forms, e.g. a discussion board, a chat, an inquiry, a survey, an anonymous mailbox to express objections, etc.

Education with the use of internet technologies

The electronic form of processing information and the readiness of their publication predestinates the use of internet technologies for educational purposes. Current students are used to searching out for different electronic sources of information. Moreover, they are also able to make use of it. There is a range of possibilities how to integrate these possibilities into the structure of the web site: a link to a verified source, an original document, instructions for processing homework (rules relevant for a presentation, a seminar paper,

*Correspondence to:

Jiří Husa*

Institute of Education and Communication
Czech University of Agriculture in Prague,
V Lazních 3, 159 00 Praha 5,
The Czech Republic

or a report), own lecture presentations, etc.

A well known saying “examples attract” well applies in this case; if sample student works are presented on the school web site, they are likely to be re-used to further educational purposes of other students.

The static and dynamic use of web technologies is going to overweight the use of full version on-line courses (Květoň, 2005).

The elements of school management

The web site can be also well used for the purposes of school management. Publishing of various documents for students and parents represents the simplest example. The publication of time schedule is the other possibility how to involve the elements of school management into the web site.

SURVEY METHODS

For the purposes of the survey, the links listed in the portal catalogue seznam.cz under the section “secondary schools” were used. The survey presupposes that the catalogue consists of representative sample of links on web sites of secondary schools. The analysis of web sites was focused on the information recency with regard to the date of survey (the beginning of September). A number of 228 web sites, out of which 115 were the web sites of secondary vocational schools and 113 were web sites of grammar schools) were put through a test. Following aspects were evaluated:

the up-to-date of the web site

the presence of students’ work on the web site

the presence or absence of educational materials

the means of communication on the web site (a discussion board, a inquiry, etc)

the elements of school management on the web site (time schedule, etc)

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The table offers an overview of results. There are presented the absolute numbers of web sites, which contained the searched element. The percentage data refer to the number of analyzed web sites in the category (secondary vocational schools / SVS – 115, grammar schools / GS – 113, total– 228 of web sites).

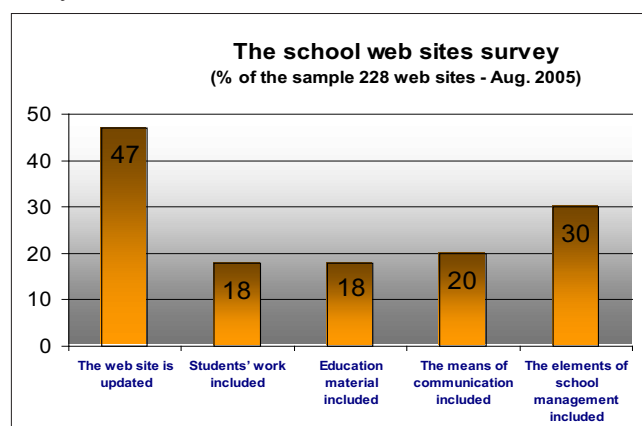
	SVS		GS		Total	
	number	%	number	%	number	%
The web site is updated	53	46	55	49	108	47
Students’ work included	15	13	26	23	41	18
Education material included	15	13	26	23	41	18
The means of communication included	32	28	13	12	45	20
The elements of school management included	30	26	39	35	69	30

From the findings, it is clear that less than a half of secondary schools practice a regular update of their web site. In the survey period (the last week in August 2005 and the first week in September 2005) more than a half of web sites contained out-of-date information. If we compare the system of upda-

ting of the sites that students normally go to, the poor updating of the school web sites as viewed by the survey could discourage students from visiting the school web site.

The educational materials and students’ work was placed on about one fifth of the web sites. The grammar schools place the students’ work and educational materials in wider range as the secondary vocational schools do. More than a complex system of educational support, the materials included educational papers of single teachers. Very exceptionally it is possible to find a few examples of on-line courses in the moodle interface. Among the most frequently placed students’ work we shall name graphic works, literal and seminar papers, presentations and students’ web sites.

The overwhelming means of communication were inquiries, guest books, discussion boards, question-answer sections, or hotline mailboxes. Their occurrence on the school web site does not automatically mean their use; the rate of their using differs. Communication channels were provided on roughly 20% of web sites. On-line information about the school results for student and parents were found rarely.



The most frequent elements of school management were the time schedule and its changes. The occurrence of time schedule on web sites of secondary schools is relatively frequent; updating can cause problems. The student’s of excuses, on-line check of presence, excuse papers and others belong to other elements of school management.

CONCLUSION

The survey of web sites of secondary schools proved that the schools are not yet fully aware of the significance and the opportunities offered by a school web. Information on the school web was frequently outdated. The use of web technologies in the study support and the school management is quite low recently.

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