

# Skills Superstore: On-Line Interactive Learning Skills System

A. E. Mahdi\* and C. Bermingham\*\*

Department of electronic and Computer Engineering, University of Limerick, Limerick, Ireland

\*E-mail: hussain.mahdi@ul.ie, \*\*E-mail: caitriona.bermingham@ul.ie

## Abstract

*This paper describes a newly developed web-based interactive learning system for helping students, particularly those in their first year of university education, develop their study and other transferable skills. The system's features, functionality and architecture were developed based on the findings of a viability study which was facilitated mainly by surveying a number of students from various departments and disciplines. The system is designed as a suite of on-line workshop and modules to be use as a flexible learning aid, in conjunction with existing learning skills resources. The contents of the system are designed to help the students explore and evaluate their own approaches to learning and to stimulate them to become active and efficient independent-learners. The interactivity of the system is facilitated by users making choices, answering questions, and completing activities related to their own experience. The system also incorporates an electronic chat feature to encourage collaborative and peer support work.*

## 1: Introduction – The Needs for Study Skills

- Students need to acquire effective study/learning skills to be successful in their courses
- The greater need is when they first arrive at university:
  - Adjusting to new life and freedom
  - Facing different educational requirements
  - Little awareness of their learning process
- They also need to acquire other basic transferable skills in order to become effective as practicing graduates. After graduation communication and organisation abilities often mark out graduates who are preferred for employment
- Solution: provision of appropriately delivered training in these skills at the very beginning of their university education

## 2: Study Skills Training Approaches

- Provision of study skills training is approached by a variety of methods. Common training approaches:
  - Preliminary modules that are part of the curriculum
  - Availability of additional classes/workshops
  - Provision of written & other multimedia materials

- Limitations of these approaches:
  - Training modules seen remedial - Not well attended
  - Seen unrelated to main discipline - No motivation
  - Lack of flexibility and appropriate scheduling
  - Study skills cannot be learnt via conventional teaching
- Our solution: a flexible study skills training system assisted by a web-based or PC-based learning environment.

## 3: System Realisation – The Starting Point

- A survey of students from various departments, courses and disciplines was conducted
- A questionnaire designed to highlight problems, needs and potential solutions regarding: study skills needed; personal habits; and help/training requirements.
- The findings of this viability study were used to design the 'Skills Superstore' system.

## 4: Skills Superstore- What is it / Who is it for?

- A screen-delivered interactive learning system
- Designed to help third level students acquire and develop study and other transferable skills
- Designed as a flexible learning aid in conjunction with existing learning skills resources in the university
- The interactivity is facilitated by users making choices, answering questions, etc related to their own experiences
- Incorporates features to encourage collaborative/peer support work and sharing of ideas between learners.

## 5: Main Features of the System

- The Study Skills Modules
- The Interactivity
- The Student Support Tools
- The Administrative Tools

## 6: Current & Further Developments

- Initial feedback has been encouraging
- Structured long-term evaluation process is underway
- Surveying faculty/academics for refinement of system
- Development of a PC-based version of the system