A PRACTICAL BUYER GUIDE

CUSTOM LMS VS MOODLE VS READY-MADE LMS

Choose a learning platform based on your workflows, budget, integrations, control, and launch timeline. Use this guide before you shortlist vendors.

THE THREE PATHS

01 CUSTOM LMS

Built around your specific business processes, learner journeys, reports, integrations, and product roadmap.

02 MOODLE-BASED

Configure and extend Moodle with themes, plugins, integrations, hosting, and support to match your needs.

03 READY-MADE LMS

Adopt a commercial platform with existing features and vendor-managed updates for a faster start.

Start with the decision

There is no universally best LMS. The right choice is the one that meets your real learning requirements without adding cost or complexity you do not need.

You need a fast launch and standard features are enough.	START WITH READY-MADE
You want an established learning platform with room for plugins, integrations, and custom workflows.	EVALUATE MOODLE
Your business model or workflows are unique, and you need deep control over product behavior.	CONSIDER CUSTOM
You need some unique features but want to retain a proven platform core.	CONSIDER A HYBRID

Important distinction: Moodle is a learning platform that can be implemented, configured, hosted, and customized by a partner. "Ready-made LMS" here means a commercial product adopted mainly through configuration. The boundaries can overlap, so compare the proposed scope, not just the label.

Before you shortlist any vendor

01 DEFINE NEEDS

Write down learner groups, goals, must-have workflows, and success measures.

02 SET THE LIMITS

Clarify budget, target launch, required integrations, data controls, and support needs.

03 COMPARE FAIRLY

Ask each provider to respond to the same scope and show a relevant live workflow.

COMPARE THE OPTIONS SIDE BY SIDE

Use this table as a starting point. Real cost and delivery time depend on learner volume, content migration, integrations, security needs, and the depth of customization.

DECISION FACTOR	CUSTOM LMS	MOODLE-BASED	READY-MADE LMS
Best when	Workflows or product requirements are distinctive.	You want an adaptable learning platform with an extensible core.	Your needs closely match existing product features.
Initial investment	Usually highest of the three approaches.	Often between ready-made configuration and a full custom build.	Usually lowest upfront; subscription and add-on fees may apply.
Time to launch	Often longest because more must be designed and built.	Depends on configuration, plugins, integrations, and content migration.	Often fastest when requirements match out of the box.
Customization	Highest control over functionality and user experience.	Flexible through configuration, themes, plugins, and development.	Limited to vendor-supported configuration and extensions.
Integrations	Can be designed around required systems and data flows.	Uses existing plugins/APIs where suitable; custom work may be needed.	Depends on supported connectors, APIs, and the vendor roadmap.
Ownership and control	Can provide high control if code, documentation, and IP terms are agreed.	Open-source core, with hosting, plugins, and custom code to manage.	Vendor controls the platform, release schedule, and product roadmap.
Maintenance	Your team or partner maintains the product and infrastructure.	You or your service partner manages updates, hosting, plugins, and support.	Vendor usually maintains the core platform; you manage configuration and vendor relationship.
Main risk	Scope growth, higher upfront cost, and long-term maintenance burden.	Plugin conflicts, upgrade complexity, and uneven plugin support.	Feature limits, recurring fees, vendor dependency, or costly workarounds.

A hybrid approach may fit

You do not always need to choose between a blank slate and a fixed product. An existing LMS can sometimes be configured or extended with targeted development. For example, a Moodle implementation may need a branded theme, role-specific dashboards, integration work, custom plugins, or migration support.

CHOOSE THE PLATFORM FIRST

Map requirements to existing capabilities before planning custom development. This can reduce avoidable scope.

CHECK THE WHOLE COST

Compare implementation, licenses, hosting, integrations, content migration, support, and upgrades over 3 years.

FIND THE BEST-FIT APPROACH

Tick the statements that describe your project. Treat this as a discussion aid, not an automatic verdict. A short requirements workshop can change the recommendation.

A. Your requirements

☐ We need unique learning or approval workflows.	☐ We must launch quickly with a standard feature set.
☐ We need deep integrations with HR, CRM, ERP, identity, or payment systems.	☐ We prefer an open-source platform we can extend.
☐ We want the vendor to manage core software updates.	☐ We need full control over product behavior and the future roadmap.
☐ We need Moodle-specific plugins, themes, or migration.	☐ We can work within a commercial product's feature limits.
☐ We have strict requirements for data handling, audit logs, or access control.	☐ We need a branded multi-tenant or white-label learning product.
☐ We have internal technical staff or a long-term implementation partner.	☐ We need to keep initial spending low and can accept some constraints.

B. Interpret your answers

OPTION	SIGNALS THAT IT MAY FIT	VALIDATE BEFORE YOU COMMIT
READY-MADE	Most important requirements are already supported, launch speed matters, and you accept the product roadmap.	Ask for a demo using your real learner journey and verify all recurring fees.
MOODLE-BASED	You want a flexible learning platform, value open-source extensibility, and can plan for hosting, plugins, upgrades, and support.	Request a plugin and integration audit plus an upgrade and maintenance plan.
CUSTOM LMS	Distinct workflows, integrations, learner experiences, or product requirements cannot be met reliably by existing options.	Run discovery first. Define an MVP, exclusions, acceptance criteria, and ownership terms.
HYBRID	Most core learning features exist already, but selected workflows or integrations need development.	Separate standard configuration from custom work in the proposal.

C. Questions to ask every provider

☐ Which requirements are native, configured, plugin-based, or custom-built?	☐ Can you show a relevant LMS case study or live workflow?
☐ Which integrations have you delivered, and how are failures monitored?	☐ Who owns source code, custom plugins, data, and documentation?
☐ What is included in testing, security review, hosting, and support?	☐ What are the change-request rules, assumptions, and exclusions?

PREPARE YOUR LMS DECISION BRIEF

Complete this page before requesting proposals. It helps vendors estimate the same scope and makes their responses easier to compare.

BRIEF ITEM	WRITE YOUR REQUIREMENTS
Primary goal	What should learners or administrators be able to do?
Learners and roles	Estimated learner count, administrators, instructors, managers, external users
Must-have features	Course authoring, paths, assessments, certificates, reports, mobile, etc.
Required integrations	HRMS/HRIS, CRM, ERP, SSO, video, payment, content tools, APIs
Content and migration	Existing courses, SCORM/xAPI, records, certificates, user accounts
Security and policy needs	PDPA considerations, access control, audit logs, hosting, retention
Launch target and budget	Target milestone, budget range, phased launch options
Support after launch	Admin training, monitoring, bug fixes, updates, SLA, roadmap

Budget context from the Singapore guide

LEVEL	INDICATIVE RANGE	EXAMPLES OF SCOPE
Basic LMS	S$10,000-S$75,000	Core courses, users, assessments, basic reporting
Mid-range LMS	S$80,000-S$250,000	More customization, integrations, dashboards, certificates
Enterprise LMS	S$250,000-S$400,000+	Advanced analytics, SSO, multiple integrations, scale and security

These are broad planning figures cited in the accompanying article, not quotes or guaranteed market rates. The guide also presents a separate Business/Advanced tier table, so category boundaries can overlap. Request an itemized estimate for your actual scope.

Red flags before you sign

☐ Quote omits QA, integration work, migration, hosting, or support.	☐ Provider cannot separate standard features from custom scope.
☐ No documented security, backup, or incident response approach.	☐ Ownership, exit assistance, and change requests are unclear.

NEED HELP TURNING YOUR LMS REQUIREMENTS INTO A PLAN?

Talk to Brain Station 23 about the scope, integrations, delivery options, and support model for your learning platform.