The 3rd International Conference on e-Learning
ICEL 2011, 23-24 November 2011, Bandung, Indonesia

Students’ Experiences on Using Blog as Learning Journals
Emelia A.Rahman Sideka* and Melor Md.Yunusa

*Faculty of Education, Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia, Malaysia

Abstract

The application of new Information and Communication Technology (ICT) tools in English Language Teaching (ELT) has allowed for the development of the latest learning methodology and this innovation has caught the attention of language practitioners who wish to experiment with blogging to enhance the teaching and learning experience. This study will discuss the Implementation of Blogs in Classroom which focused on Blogs as Learning Journals. This study will discuss on the students’ experiences in using blogs as learning journals and to what extent they would to it at MARA Professional College, Beranang. 60 students from COM2033 (Public Speaking) course participated in this study. Qualitative data were collected from observation of students’ journal entries/comments, and also interviews with 6 students to gain more perspective about their experiences in using the blogs in their learning. The findings show that students enjoyed the use of computer tools in their lesson and most of them expressed their wish to see blogging being used more widely. The findings also reveal the students recommendations to improve the use of blog as learning journal based on their own experiences. In essence, this paper was designed to explore the potential of blogs to support reflection and communication in realistic circumstances, and to explore the strength and weaknesses of current practice in order to build more effective practice in the future.

© 2012 The Authors. Published by Elsevier Ltd. Selection and/or peer-review under responsibility of i-Learn Centre, Universiti Teknologi MARA, Malaysia.

Keywords: Learning journals; Information and Communication Technology; English Language Teaching; Blogs; learning

1. Introduction

Innovative Tools in English Language Teaching (ELT): Implementation of Blogs in Classroom

* Corresponding author. E-mail address: emeliarahan@gmail.com.
In view of the increased dependence on the internet, the use of information and communication technology (ICT) has also grown manifold in education. Increasingly, there is a growing perception amongst teachers that ICT is an effective way to connect with and engage their students in learning. Increasingly, these internet generation learners will demand that schools are technologically relevant and provide technology-rich learning environments (Goh, J.W.P., Quek, C. J., & Lee, O. K., 2010). It is important to acknowledge the fact that students have become more sophisticated in terms of the IT and internet “consumption” and as such can process learning differently through constant exchange of information and discussion. Students are growing up immersed in digital media which they use for entertainment, communication, learning, and even shopping. Since web logs are a new form of technology and users are doubtful about its successful adaptation, the attitudes and intentions of writing web logs are shaped before initiating efforts begin. In order to make good use of the latest technological advances associated with ICTs, these technologies need to be integrated into teaching practice (Ana, 2010). This would facilitate the development of innovative modalities that would enable educational institutions to better cater to the needs of the diverse types of students in today’s university environment.

Glori H. Smith (2009), acknowledged that in the last few years there has been an exciting explosion of experimentation with weblogs or blogging in the school setting. Many educators think there is a possibility of engaging students’ interest using the newly available technologies. The technology specialists seem ready to help; there has been a similar explosion of education-friendly blogsites with names such as eledblog.com, echalk.com, edublogs.com and more. Much of this experimentation has been informal and gone unreported, but there has also been some research done with blogging in classroom situations. This statement also supported by Nurenzia Yannuar (2010), which stated that Blogs can be accessed freely as long as the user has a computer and Internet connection, meaning that the technology is affordable and anyone can have access to it. Thus, it is affordable to be enrolled in a blog, be a blogger, or to read a blog. The idea behind the optimism about blogging and language improvement is that a blog can serve as a medium by which language learners can practice their L2 in order to communicate with other participants. A study by Erkan Tekinarslan (2008), reports on the experiences of an instructor and an undergraduate class who used blogs in their teaching and learning environment at Abant Izzet Baysal University, Turkey. The data reflected that blogs are user friendly and convenient tools for publishing and sharing studies (Erkan Tekinarslan, 2008).

For the purpose of this paper, we have set up a blog which named “Emeliarahman Learning Blog”, (emeliarahman.blogspot.com) in January 2010 for the Public Speaking (COM 2033) course. This course is focusing on the Public Speaking Skills. It is also as a part of Active Learning that have been introduced in MARA Professional College Beranang since early 2010. Data were gathered through observations of students’ journals entries/comments and interviews regarding:a) Blog as learning journals: Evolution in Education; b) Improving the use of blog as learning journal: From the eye of the students;c) To what extent does the student would reflect to the blogs? The Journal Writing Experience.

1.1. Emeliarahman Blog : The Task

The blog (Emeliarahman.blogspot.com) was created in January 2010 as a part of requirements for the COM2033 (Public speaking Skills) course. We chose the blogger.com as the hosting provider for the blog because it provides much more reliable and faster access compared to the nearest competitor. The blog discussion theme is Public Speaking Skills. The students involved were from Semester 4 students in Higher National Diploma Programme in Computing (BIT). These students have been exposed to the Internet Learning and therefore they are already familiar with the blog. All of them, totaling 60 students, are involved in this experiment. They were told to visit the blog as frequently as possible because the blog will hold announcements, links to the development tools, discussion, notes, assignments and anything
regarding the course. The students were asked to do reflections and comments on the articles that they have read. They were also informed of the rationale and objective of the blog assignment that is to: expose students to the use of Social Networking Sites (SNSs) in learning, foster critical and reflective thinking skills, encourage self-directed learning, and encourage peer to peer learning and communication. Clear assessment criteria were given which includes clarity of content, appropriate info, relevancy of discussion; comments or references to discussion posted by other members; and reference to scholarly articles or books related to the issue or concept. The reflection task contributes 20% to the final grade of this course.

1.2. The Blog Post

The blog post is the main entry situated in the front page of the blog. Along with the title, there is also information such as the day, date, time stamp and writer of the particular posting. These appear automatically, as the blog host or software has programmed the information to appear in such a way. It can be seen that this particular blog writer has opted to use ‘Blogger’ as his blog host, and the address for the blog includes the word ‘blogspot’ which is the domain of its site. The ending of a blog post will typically be accompanied by a statement that informs the reader of who wrote the post and at what time, and how many responses were given to that particular posting. In the figure above, the information reads: Posted by Emelia at 11:52 A.M

1.3. The Comments Box

This statement marks the ending of a blog post and the previous post written will be directly underneath, as can be seen in the excerpt above. These are all cues that must be understandable to anybody who blogs. Thus, the fact that the community of readers is able to use these features, portrays their multimedia literacies via their blogging activities. The feature of the blog which enables two-way communication is the comment box which is available for every blog post. According to Hurlburt (2008), one key evidence of a successful blog is the fact that it is continuous and has a lot of comments. The blog shows all these facets. All the readers have to do is click on the link provided at the end of a blog post and they are able to write a response or reflections to what the blog writer has initiated in topic selection and what has been written in the blog post. The figure below shows a sample of a blog post comment box. When the posting has been read, all the reader has to do is click the link and a box will appear, enabling them to leave a comment, as can be seen below. This is where the students can write their reflections on the topic posted.

2. Literature Review

2.1. The Rise of Technology in Classroom : Blogs as Learning Journals

The rise of blogs in the late 90”s as a computer-mediated learning in higher education has become popular as a substitute of other types of the Social Networking Sites (SNSs) such as Facebook, Friendster or Twitter. The unique multimedia features, interactivity and ability to support cooperative and autonomous learning has welcomed the Blogs to be one of most popular ICT tools to be used in the classroom learning environment. Since 2000, when Weblogs became widely available, a surprisingly wide variety of blog uses can be observed in the higher education and research arenas (Di Zhang, 2009). Blogs are only one of many computer-mediated technologies starting to dominate blended and wholly online courses. Most people assume that using these technologies, because it is what the students want, will translate into
increased learning opportunities (Strampel, Oliver 2008). There are numerous reasons for using blogs in education, such as to provide a real audience for student writing, to provide extra reading practice for students, to increase the sense of community in a class, to encourage students to participate, to create an online portfolio of student written work (Stanley, 2005). Blogs also encourage students to write and knowing a larger audience can be reading their blogs further develops critical thinking skills, (Faril Mohan 2008).

2.2. Blogs as Online Assignment: The Use of Learning Journal to Cultivate Reflection

Weblogs offer a relatively convenient and easy mechanism for students to journal their learning processes, and if used appropriately this technology has the potential of facilitating reflective learning. Weblogs support the ability of students to record and revisit experience, which is an important part of reflective learning. Essentially, the student is stimulated with new information, in an attempt to make sense of that information, the student may use prior knowledge and past experiences to help them describe the experience or event in a detailed way and avoiding judgments while identifying others' views and perspectives and attempting to provide reason and justification for actions” (Strampel & Oliver, 2007 p.3). Specifically, many hope that blogs will help facilitate higher-order learning and reflective thinking (Farmer, Yue, & Brooks, 2008). In a study by Strampel (2007), he stated that the students perceive that the blog offered them the ability to evaluate their own learning, to revise their thinking, and, in their words, to reflect. This evidence suggests that by writing about their learning, students were better able to see and understand their thinking and change their conceptions when necessary – both important elements in higher levels of reflection and cognitive processing (Strampel & Oliver, 2007). A study by Yang, S.-H. (2009) made use of blogs as a platform to critically reflect on their learning processes as well as to gauge the impact of blogs on their own professional growth. Forty-three student teachers in two teacher-education programs at two science and technology institutions in central Taiwan participated in this study. The results showed that the student teachers actively discussed teaching theories and their implications through blogs. All of the 43 teachers who took part in this study were reflective, and some critically reflected on their thoughts and made significant comments; and the participants considered technology a useful platform for reflecting and communicating with each other. The positive implications for the use of blogs as a medium to provide and promote critical reflection for EFL teachers are discussed.

3. Method

3.1. Research Design

The study was a qualitative study of the students” experiences of using blogs as learning journals as part of their learning environment. The primary data was collected through interview with participants and observation of the students” journal entries/comments made in the blog. The significance of understanding these common experiences was to develop an in-depth understanding of the experiences, the essences of participating in blogs in real-world technologies. This provides educators and designers of learning with knowledge to develop new practices and methodologies involving social networking tools for learning.

3.2. Participants

Sixty 4th year students, 50 males and 10 females, studying for the HND in BIT diploma took part in the study. The criteria for participation included having already studied the subject entitled Information
and Communication Technology for HND, so that they possessed the basic knowledge required to use the blog. For the interview purpose, we chose 6 participants, 5 males and 1 female and conducted a 20 minutes interview session in the final semester.

3.3. Data Collection Procedure

1. Observation of blog posts and comments the research employs the qualitative research beginning with the observation of blog posts and comments done over a fixed period of time.

2. Interview with the subjects.
   The researchers selected and interviewed 6 participants in a secure setting in college. Each participant was interviewed by following the interview protocol. Each interviews lasted approximately 30 minutes.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1. To what extent does the student would reflect to the blogs? The Journal Writing Experience

More than 300 journal entries/ comments were analyzed according to the topics. Each entry was at least two or three paragraphs of text, ranging from a minimum of 50 to a maximum of 200 words. Although no quantitative analyses are presented here, the word count is considered an indication of the elaboration of thoughts in each entry (Davis, 2006). As such, most entries included in this study were fairly well-developed. During the 10-week lectures, all 60 students posted more than 100 comments altogether. Furthermore, we explored into the types of reflection whether it is descriptive or critical. The reflective journals submitted by students varied – a few demonstrated deep and critical reflection, but most focused on describing events, with little or no analysis, and in turn, no evidence of learning, explanation, or plans for future action. In the reflective journals, most students’ reflections were at the first level of description, providing often shallow narratives of tasks and activities. For example, in March 7, 2010, I posted a clip from YouTube entitled ‘Bad Public Speaking Examples ‘by Barn 007’ to talk about some mistakes and errors that can be done unintentionally when doing Public Speaking. It can be seen that 112 comments were posted regarding the clips. These are some students’ excerpts from the blog that can be categorized as descriptive and critical reflections.

Figure 1 shows that this student, Afiqah seems to like this clip so much and being positive in her online learning. She commented that even if there is no mark for the assignment, she would be happy to share her comments because she enjoys watching the video. She loves the clip because it creates a ‘fun learning’ environment for her. She added her experiences together with suggestions on some tips on Public Speaking. Her comments can be described as critical because she seems to relates her own experiences with the clip. In her reflections, she stated that this clip is a ‘creative invention’ and she also described it as ‘effective teaching tool and learning method’. It shows that she had done some reading and she could also reflect what she had learned with the teaching pedagogies. She also stated that from her own experience ‘people tend to remember what they have seen and listen much longer compared to what they read’. This statement shows these students had reflected wisely even though she didn’t quote her statements.
From Figure 2, it can be seen that this student, Siti, had reflected critically and this can be seen from her writings about the clip. She started her comments by saying something that related to her own experiences in doing the Public Speaking presentation. As she described in her comments, she sometimes do the same mistakes as the clip without she realizes it and she stated some examples to share it with her friends. She felt embarrassed of herself but she stated that she will try her best to avoid the same mistakes in the future. She also honestly shared her fear when it comes to give her speech. This shows that the students were not afraid to share their feelings and thoughts even though they knew it will be published online.

March 7, 2010 11:47 PM
just FICK said...
NAME: AFIGAH BINTI MOHAMED KAMAL
ID: BHD08-07-860
SECTION: HND1 SECTION3

First and for most, I would like to state here that, even not for the 5% I will still give my comment on this clip. This is a very creative invention that I believe is also a very good and effective teaching tool and learning method. That is because people tend to remember what they have seen and listen much longer compared to what the have read.

Fig. 1. Critical Reflections

March 8, 2010 9:19 PM
syarifahhussin said...
name: siti nursyarifah bt hussin
id: BHD08-07-793
class: hnd1 section 2
Everybody make a mistake in their life but when i watched this video we can try to avoid this mistake again in the future speech. I will try my best as i can. When i look out this previous mistake that are given, something can happen while doing a public speaking. I might afraid to doing a public speaking but i think it might be happen something wrong if i forgot what i'm to say...and i become blank mind...my face start blushing and all of the point are lost. That's time,

Fig. 2. Critical Reflections
From Figure 3, it can be seen that Noor Fadilah found the video was very interesting and captured her attention. She also commented on her new knowledge about how to give good presentations. This reflection is more to the descriptive types because she only give examples which relates her experiences with the clip. This may be due to the lack of time to do the assignment or maybe she feels that it’s not important to do any research before posts her reflections. She also mentioned that some of the things are new to her and that she happy to share this new information with her friends.

![Image](image.png)

**4.1.1. Types of reflections involved in the students’ journal writing**

It can be concluded that the number of descriptive reflections far exceeded the number of critical ones. It shows that some of the students did their research and reflected wisely on the selected topics while some of them just rephrase or summarize the articles just for the sake of doing the assignments. This findings may be due to the fact that these students know they are going to have an audience by publishing their writing on the Web, they often produce higher quality work than students who write only for the teacher or for others in the class. Most of the students were also seems encouraged and were not afraid to share their feelings, opinions and their experiences when doing the Public Speaking. This may be due to the facts that the blogs have motivated them to write and express themselves, knowing that they were not alone having all the problems. Most of them also tried to encourage each other, and some of them were also gave their responds to their friends posts and comments.

**4.2. The Interviews**

**4.2.1. Blog as a Learning Tool: Technology replacement in face-to-face language learning**

From the findings, Ali mentioned that through the use of blog it helps him to improve his thinking skills because he needs to think about what to write. This shows that the blog encourage them to reflects and to study the materials before they can comments or write their reflections on it. This is because they learn that other people can also comments and studies their post all the time. Ahmad agreed that it really helps him in learning because he can learn from other students’ posts /reflections. It shows that the blogs is a great tool in information sharing. This statement is also supported by Kamal which stated that the blog seems to be able to promote a sense of belonging for some of them and increased their self-confidence. This findings supported the study by Nadzrah (2008) which stated, ‘Discussions online can be interesting when students understand the objective of doing discussion online instead of face-to-face
discussion’ In her study, she concludes that students gave a positive feedback of their involvement in participating on blog discussions, as most of them agreed that they were able to practice their communication skills in English such as they were able to give their suggestions freely because they felt comfortable expressing their ideas and were more confident expressing themselves on blog than face to face (Nadzrah, 2008).

Rahman commented that he likes when the lectures blended the traditional method of learning with the technology. It shows that students nowadays preferred the new way of learning because it is more challenging and provide them with unlimited knowledge while Azhar stated ‘It kind of made me pay more attention because I wanted to have something to write about. I didn't want to end up writing about something I didn't know.’ It also help the students to less their fears when talking in public because they do not have to worry about their friends judgments. Afiqah commented, ‘People don't have to recognize me when I made comments’. In a way, it offers an alternative avenue to express their opinions minus the embarrassment of speaking bad English in front of the class. The experience is less traumatic and less risk, therefore creating a safer environment for making mistakes and taking chances.

4.2.2. Improving the Use of Blog as Learning Journal: From the Eye of the Students

Most of the students feel it’s easy to learn this subject using the blog. It should be noted that the students are already familiar with the computer skills and therefore responded positively when asked about ease of use. They also indicated a relatively high level of appreciation for the application of Blog as a learning tool. Ali and Kamal feel that this method of learning is very interesting and he recommended that all subjects or course should use this method. In a traditional classroom not every student gets to share his/her thoughts. This is mainly due to time limitations and curriculum constraints. Therefore, the students enjoyed the mix approach of traditional (lectures) and technology (blogs) learning. Ahmad feels that it’s exciting to learn with ICT but the college should improve the facilities. eg: Internet connection, lab. This was due to the problems that occurred in the college in which the Internet connection was not available all the time. This makes it difficult for the students to do their assignments which need internet connection. Rahman and Azhar wanted the instructor to post more articles, clips and give more feedback to their comments. This will improve and help them more in their own learning. Afiqah wanted more time to the assignments because she feels that if more time were given then the comments or reflections might be better because they have more time to study and do research on the topic.

5. Conclusion : Pedagogical Implications of Educational Blogging

It can be concluded that the use of journal writing as a teaching tool in this study provides substantial evidence of the student meaning making process as they reflected individually in journals and in collaboration with others. Participants also reflected in their interviews about the value of the blog as learning journals in helping them to gain strength and self-confidence, that enabled them to engage more deeply with others both inside the classroom and outside in the community. It shows that students enjoyed the use of computer tools for the conduction of the lesson and most of them expressed their wish to see blogging being used more widely for their learning. This statement was strongly supported by Angelique D.(2007) which said ‘One concern about using technology in the classroom is that students who arrive with greater sophistication and experience with computers and the Internet will adapt more easily to the blog than those who are less sophisticated and experienced. At the same time, there is a concern that students with stronger verbal skills will feel more comfortable about expressing their opinions and questions in written form for the entire class to observe.’ This show that students are very interested in learning using these new tools. The study also proved that the blogs managed to gain
students’ attention and interest and motivated them to work on the activities, ask questions and participate in both online and in-class discussions. The students seemed to be in favor of educational blogging. They considered this kind of technology to be an effective educational aid since it provides students with opportunities to collaborate and be actively involved in the learning process. According to M. Ferreira (2010), the incorporation of computer technologies into higher education has led to the development of a variety of formats for education where practices of teaching and learning have been expanding to include the use of the latest technologies. Under the general rubric of integration of information and communication technologies (the so-called ICTs) in teaching and learning several classifications of these new forms of education have been suggested in research and emerged in discourse, from e-learning to virtual education.

In conclusion, throughout this study, the blog was meant to be a safe place for students to explore their own learning. It also allowed the students and instructor to interact in a way that may otherwise not be possible. This interaction may have encouraged unseen and unwritten learning. Perhaps by having students write in their blogs, reflecting was taking place but not being documented. Perhaps the instructor’s feedback prodded the students into action that was not shared. However, blogging should not replace face-to-face interaction, but it may provide a practice environment where students can think, reflect, and create language slowly for a real-life audience. Its value as a pedagogical tool appears to be in its authentic, interesting and communicative nature. Furthermore, its popularity outside the foreign language classroom may be a motivating force for technologically savvy young learners. For this reason, educators are interested in motivating their learners to communicate and learn beyond the classroom may benefit from incorporating blog projects into their classrooms.

References


