

JOURNAL CRITIQUE

Blogs: A qualitative investigation into an instructor and undergraduate students' experiences

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TITLE PAGE

Australasian Journal of
Educational Technology

2008, 24(4), 402-412



TITLE

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Blogs: A qualitative investigation into an instructor and undergraduate students' experiences

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**INSTITUTIONAL
AFFILIATION**

Title should < than 15 words long

Clear and catchy

ABSTRACT

121 words

810 characters

Problem
Definition

Research
Procedure

Results
obtained

This study reports on the experiences of an instructor and an undergraduate class who used blogs in their teaching and learning environment at Abant İzzet Baysal University, Turkey. Qualitative data were collected from observation of students' activities when working on blogs in the classroom, analyses of students' blog documents on the web, and interviews with 42 students. Most students reflected that blogs are user friendly and convenient tools for publishing and sharing studies. Moreover, blog implementations contributed positively to students' information searching and writing skills, despite the limited opportunities that many students had for Internet access outside the university. However, students' ignorance regarding copyright issues and their tendency to copy information from online sources and paste it into their blogs was a common problem.

Background?

Conclusion?

should :

background

results

Aim/purpose

conclusion

Methods

1 paragraph

Term Definition

Relevant previous study

Introduction

Web 2.0 technologies such as blogs (weblogs) and wikis have become popular social networking tools all over the world. Specifically, a blog is web publishing software which allows users to create and edit the content of a web page with a minimum of technical expertise (Holtz, 2006). A typical blog site consists of "a single page of entries which are accessible by the public, arranged in reverse chronological order, containing hyperlinks to other blogs or web sites, and written by a single author" (Guenther, 2005, p. 53).

Although most of blogs on the Internet are personal and journalistic, there has been increasing interest in applying blogs in education in recent years (Godwin-Jones, 2003). According to the related literature (e.g. Achterman, 2006; Godwin-Jones, 2003; Ray, 2006), blogs have the potential to be used as supplementary communication means, collaborative tools, and instructional resources in educational environments. In addition, blogs can be used to improve students' writing skills, as discussed in prior literature (Godwin-Jones, 2003; Hernández-Ramos, 2004; Johnson, 2004; Huffaker, 2005).

Relevant previous study

Finally, related literature (e.g. Winder, 2006; Williams & Jacobs, 2004) shows that blogs have been used by an increasing number of individuals in variety of fields such as business and education. Business people have been quick to benefit from blogs, followed by educational institutions (e.g. universities), libraries and research facilities (Winder, 2006; Williams & Jacobs, 2004). The purpose of this study is to report on experiences of an instructor and his undergraduate students in the Faculty of Education at Abant Izzet Baysal University, Turkey, who applied blogs in their teaching-learning environment.

Purpose Statement

Relevant previous study

Statement of the problem

According to the literature about blogs (e.g. Achterman, 2006; Godwin-Jones, 2003; Williams & Jacobs, 2004; Ray, 2006) these easy to use web publishing tools have considerable potential for communication and educational purposes. However, most studies about blogs in the literature were conducted in English speaking countries (e.g. Australia, USA) which have higher Internet penetration rates than Turkey. Besides, blog experiences of Turkish instructors and undergraduates have not been investigated sufficiently. Therefore, this study concentrates on blog experiences of a Turkish instructor and his undergraduate students in two groups, who encounter lower Internet penetration and lesser opportunities to access online information sources outside the campus. In particular, this study reports on the teaching and learning experiences they had during educational uses of blogs in Turkish, and the advantages and disadvantages of using these new technologies in an educational environment in Turkey.

General statement of Research question

Limitations of the study

Structure of the course and learning outcomes

In regard to wikis, the instructor expected to achieve learning outcomes related mainly to online collaboration of students. However, the instructor used externally hosted wiki systems for which authentication and tracking features were administered by the external provider. Therefore, he was not able to effectively monitor the online or wiki collaboration of students as it was planned. As a result, this paper reports only on experiences of the instructor and his undergraduate students with blogs.

The instructor expected to achieve the following learning outcomes concerning blogs at the end of the course:

1. Students will be able to create, edit, and publish their own blog pages.
2. Students will have improved their information search and literature review skills while developing contents for blogs.
3. Students will have improved their academic writing skills (e.g. referencing, paraphrasing) while reporting literature review results through blogs.

Learning outcomes

Participants

Number of participants

Methods

Participants

The participants in the study were an instructor and undergraduate students (n=55) who took the elective *Computer Usage II* in two groups (n=27 and n=28). The students (25 female, 30 male) were third and fourth year students in the department of elementary education. Moreover, 42 students (20 female, 22 male) from the same cohort voluntarily completed an interview form to provide additional data about their blog experiences.

Voluntarily participants

language used in information found through Internet search engines. Specifically, the students were asked to undertake the following four tasks:

1. Conduct a literature review by benefiting from at least four printed and online resources (e.g. books, journals, electronic journals, web sites, etc) to develop the content for your blog.
2. Choose a topic related to education or educational technology as the content of your blog.
3. Report the literature review results with at least 500 words through blogs with appropriate citations and references.
4. Submit your blog content with its URL address in two weeks.

Research Procedure

Research Instruments

Data collection

A qualitative research approach, called fieldwork, formed the methodological framework of this investigation (Bogdan and Biklen, 1992). The fieldwork approach incorporated a number of data gathering techniques including interviews, document analysis, and participant observation to analyse experiences of undergraduate Faculty of Education students with blogs.

Participant observation

The researcher was the instructor for the course in which undergraduate students in two groups were taught educational applications of various software (*MS Access, MS FrontPage*) as well as Web 2.0 technologies including blogs. After the students learned how to create blogs and examined various previous blog applications on the web, they were required to build up their own blogs with educational content. The researcher recorded notes about students' blog activities. Moreover, he noted his notable experiences and observations while the students were working on their blogs in the computer lab.

Document analysis

The documents analysed in this study comprised blog documents created by students and their email attachments concerning their blogs. Students emailed the instructor about the contents and URL addresses of their blog pages. The email attachments and students' blog contents were documented for analysis.

Research Procedure

Research Procedure

Interview

An interview form containing six questions was administered at the end of the semester to ascertain views and thoughts of the students about blogs. Students were not obliged to provide personal information on the interview form. A total of 42 students participated voluntarily in the interview process. They submitted their interview forms electronically by floppy disk or USB disk (n=9) at the end of the last course or by email attachments (n=33) within two weeks after the end of the course. Students answered the following questions in the interview form:

1. What do you think about the easiness and difficulties of publishing blog pages on the web?
2. Do you think writing in a blog environment contributes in any way to your writing skills?
3. Do you think preparing blog content contribute in any way to your research skills?
4. What are the advantages of submitting assignments through blogs in comparison with the traditional methods?
5. What are the disadvantages of submitting assignments through blogs in comparison with the traditional methods?
6. What are the other advantages and disadvantages of blogs in educational environments?

Interview questions

Analyses Procedures

Procedure 1

Procedure 2

Data analyses procedures

The data were analysed during the 2007 summer semester. Initially, the researcher printed out the collected digital data (i.e. blog documents, email attachments, observations, interview forms) and assigned pseudonyms to the interview forms of the participants. Then, a category construction approach comprising organisation of the data sources, reduction of the text, and generation of conceptual categories by coding units of the data, was applied in order to analyse the printed data (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992). Specifically, when reading the data the researcher assigned coding categories as codes (e.g. teaching experiences, learning experiences, advantages, disadvantages, etc) to the units of data. Unrelated data were reduced or eliminated during the coding process. After that, the coded data were placed in folders under the appropriate categories (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992). The findings were reported based on the categories generated during the analysis of data. The coursework and interview activities were in Turkish and translations were made by the author into English as necessary.

Procedure 3

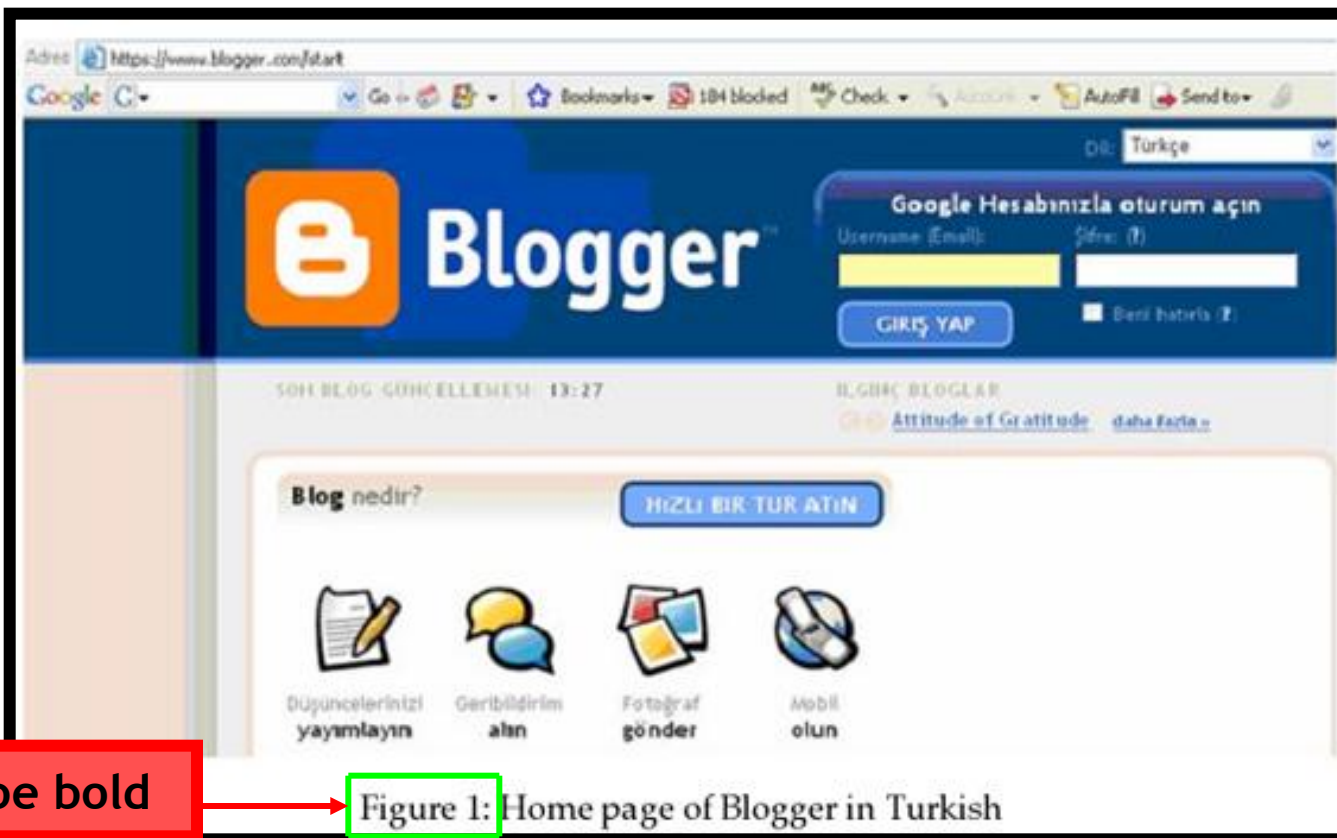
Procedure 4

Results

Teaching experiences with blogs

Teaching students how to create a blog is an easy and straightforward activity. A blog is created in three steps: 1. Creating an account, 2. Naming the blog, and 3. Choosing a template. The teacher showed the students these three steps on the Turkish version of *Blogger* (see Figure 1) through a data projector in the computer laboratory.

Result
obtained



Should be bold

Figure 1: Home page of Blogger in Turkish

Result obtained

Learning experiences with blogs

The students did not have any significant difficulty when learning how to create their blog pages on the web. Moreover, nearly all interviewed students (39 out of 42) thought that publishing a blog page on the web is an easy and straightforward activity when they were asked about its easiness and difficulties. Besides, a considerable number of the students (n=8) reflected that publishing a blog page does not take so much time when compared with publishing a web page through other web composers. For instance, one of the students, Ebru (names are pseudonyms) stated that:

Blogs are user friendly programs and publishing a web-blog is a quite simple activity that takes place through three steps. In particular, use of existing templates helps a lot when developing a blog page. Otherwise, it would have been an extremely difficult activity. I spent just 15 minutes for creating a blog page in *Blogger*, including publication part on the web. However, I remember it took me almost two days just to design a web page in *FrontPage*.

Interview response

Result
obtained

Although publishing a blog page on the web was a quite simple task, content development for blogs was a difficult and sophisticated task for many students. The instructor's observations and document analyses indicated that the students had difficulty in deciding on a topic for their blogs (n=21), searching the related online literature (n=17), paraphrasing the literature (n=11), citing online (n=20) and written resources (n=12). An interviewed student, Tekin, expressed his opinions in regard to publishing a blog page and the content as follows:

Creating a blog page was a very smooth and straightforward activity for me. I set up a frame for my blog page in 20 minutes by using existing frames in the *Blogger*. However, filling out the frame, I mean developing the content, was a more detailed and sophisticated job. I had to decide on a content topic, review the literature, paraphrase and cite the literature, and find various visuals related to the blog content. These things required a lot of work and took at least a week. But, I improved my literature review, paraphrasing and referencing skills while I was doing these works for my blog.

Interview
response

**Result
obtained****Advantages of blogs**

Most interviewed students reflected more than one advantages of blogs in educational environments. The advantages of blogs for students were found to be their contribution to students' writing, information searching and literature review skills, as well as their easy to use features, and convenience for submitting assignments electronically.

The interviewed students reflected that writing in blog environments contributed to their writing skills in terms of organisation (n=5), paraphrasing (n=9), and referencing or citation (n=28). One of the interviewees, Elif, stated her opinions as follows:

Preparing blog content contributed greatly to my writing skills. I just focused on the content writing since I didn't have to worry about web design and publishing skills in blogs. So, I feel my writing skills related to organisation, paraphrasing, referencing have been improved by writing the blog content.

Moreover, nearly half of the interviewed students (18 out of 42) stated that preparing blog content contributed to their information searching and literature review skills. For Many students (23 out of 42) thought that blogs were more convenient and cost effective tools for disseminating information than traditional methods such as using folders and printed copies. For instance, Cemre stated that:

Many times I had to print out the assignments, put them in a folder and go to campus in order to submit my assignment. This traditional way of submitting assignments is time consuming, expensive and requires too much work in comparison to electronic way of submitting assignments such as blogs and email.

**Interview
response**

Disadvantages of blogs

The most common disadvantage of blogs was related to students' limited opportunities to access the Internet outside the campus. A considerable number of students (n= 22) complained that electronic or digital assignments such as blogs are not convenient for students who do not have enough chance to access to a computer outside the course in the computer laboratory.

Result
obtained

Furthermore, according to a few students (n=4), blogs are not sufficient to develop more sophisticated web sites, and some other programs (e.g. *Flash*, *Dreamweaver*) are needed to add more advanced applications such as animation and interactivity. One of the students, Ianer, complained that:

Blogs are handy tools but they are insufficient to develop more complex and dynamic web sites. For example, when I want to develop and add an animation or counter for visitors, I need to use other software such as *Flash* and *FrontPage*.

Interview
response

Purpose of study

Findings

Discussion and conclusions

The purpose of this study was to report on the experiences of an instructor and his undergraduate class who constructed blogs in their teaching-learning environment at Abant Izzet Baysal University, Turkey. Analyses of qualitative data indicated that blogs are quite easy to use tools for students to publish and share their studies with others. Similar to the findings of previous studies (e.g., Hernández-Ramos, 2004; Williams & Jacobs, 2004), most students were able to set up and publish their blogs without facing any significant difficulty related to technical issues. However, the students had notable difficulties in developing and writing the content of their blogs at the beginning. Moreover, the instructor realised that some students plagiarised by copying and pasting from the online resources without paraphrasing and without citing any references when creating the content of their blogs. According to the students, their inappropriate and unethical actions (e.g., uncited references, unparaphrased text) occurred because of their limited citation skills and unawareness about terms of use for online information sources. These findings suggest that all students should be warned about terms of use and copyright issues before writing content for blogs, to avoid unethical and inappropriate behaviors such as plagiarism.

Connection with Previous study

Recommendation

Findings

The biggest disadvantage of use of blogs for about half of the Turkish students was related to their limited opportunities to access computers with Internet connection outside of the campus. However, despite the students' difficulties in searching the literature, paraphrasing, citing online and written resources at the beginning, and despite their limited opportunities to access computers, most interviewed students agreed that blogging helped them to improve their skills in information searching, literature reviewing and writing. According to the interviewed students, blogging contributed to their writing skills in terms of organising, paraphrasing, citing or referencing, similar to the findings of related literature (e.g., Johnson, 2004; Huffaker, 2005; Hernández-Ramos 2004). Therefore, based on the findings of this study and related literature, it can be stated that blogs can be effective tools for students who want to practise and advance their skills in writing. Another advantage of blogging was its contribution to the students' information searching and literature reviewing skills when creating the content. This finding is consistent with the prior literature (e.g. Williams & Jacobs, 2004; Embrey, 2002) which suggest that blogs can be used to build information search and retrieval skills.

Connection with
Previous study

Brief summary of the results

In conclusion, the consistency between the findings of this study and related literature suggest that blogs, as easy to use web publishing tools, can be used to promote writing skills of students in different societies. Students can improve their information searching and literature review skills while developing content for blogs. However, students should be warned about terms of use of online information and copyright issues before starting their content writing for blogs, to limit the problems of plagiarism and inappropriate actions.

Concluding
paragraph

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The researcher included a list of 15 references.
But there are 2 comparatively old

Thank you...