

IDENTIFY LEARNERS' ATTITUDE REGARDING THE IMPLEMENTATION OF READ WRITE WEB, BLOG TOOLS: CASE STUDY IN HIGHER EDUCATION

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Abstract:

The aim of this paper is to identify the current perception and attitude of learners' regarding the use of the blog tools within their learning environment in higher education. Qualitative, applied questionnaire and interview techniques were used by adapted pre/post data collection to measure the differences been occurred before and after the study. The learners' attitudes in this study toward the implementation of blog tools within their learning environment were mixed and contrast. Their views could be divided into twofold phases; the first phase: their attitude before the implementation, in which most of their responses focused on their expectation of the blog with showing positive attitude. That is something that they had wished to gain despite their lack of knowledge regarding blog services. Most issues were considered in this phase by learners that could affect their attitudes are the 'Skills' and the 'Beneficial'. The second phase, their attitude after the implementation of the blog, which indicate that most learners showed positive attitude but in two different ways and concepts: first: positive attitude with acceptance of the utilization of blogs but with conditions and, the second, showing positive attitude with giving a justification. Generally, 'features' of blog and 'communications' were the important factors that could affect the attitude of the leaners, but the main factor considered by learners was the interactivity between the participants.

Keywords:

E-learning, Read/Write, Blog, Attitude, Interactivity

1. INTRODUCTION

In recent times, internet services have become one of the most decent application used in higher education, additionally, widely utilized for improving and developing the learning environment (Grosbeck 2009). More particularly, the potential of blog include the utility to support individual learning experiences and interaction (Lin, Liu, et al. 2006), further it could be used to encourage and develop critical thinking, improve the communication between learners and instructors, develop cooperative learning and, assist learning environment (Alhojailan 2012; Lin, Liu, et al. 2006; Tan 2009; Kim 2008; Ocker & Yaverbaum 1999). Some studies claim that blog is valuable because of its' "reflective nature" (Sim & Hew 2010, p.151). To date, there is much research in favour of the use of blog services for a diversity aims (Kim 2008; Williams & Jacobs 2004). Nevertheless, studies investigating the attitude of learners regarding these tools are rare (Sim & Hew 2010). This paper is focused into identifying the learners' attitude that could influence the adaptation of blog services in higher education through the application of an experiment study. The learners endeavored to express their feeling, opinion and, reflection regarding blog services before and after their course.

2. THE PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The purpose of this paper is to study the attitude of learners in higher education

regarding the implementation of blog tools. The main aim is to gain a more thorough understanding of the learners' attitude of blog tools integration. It also aimed to highlight the main issues that the learners would concern when using blog with their learning environments.

3. BLOG IN HIGHER EDUCATION, READ/WRITE APPLICATION (WEB 2.0)

Educational institutions have been attractive for adapting read/write web application. Higher education gained a significant development in the field via these application (Alhojailan 2012; Wang et al. 2008). Moreover, e-learning via adopting web technology has a benefit of permitting to assist learning systems (Anderson 2007).

Read/write web application refers to the second generation of web-based services such as Facebook, Blogging, Flickr and, Twitter etc. However, these new applications via internet provide and emphasizing online facilities in two main ways: collaboration and sharing (Sim & Hew 2010). More particularly, Baltaci-Goktalay & Ozdilek (2010) adapted and categorized five mains strategies that could affect the way of interacting by utilized web 2.0 application: (1) for sharing content , where the learners can share his thoughts, idea and experience, (2) for developing content via learners as a group, (3) "for large sets of user contribute content" (ibid, p.4738) and, (4) for providing content trend to be contribution (Baltaci-Goktalay & Ozdilek 2010 in Howe 2006) and, (5) ability of creating virtual world in learning environment. The fifth strategy mentioned above, has been recently studied further, and it has been found that learners can express their thoughts and experiences with the instructor via communication by posting and comments regarding the course materials via web 2.0 (Maag 2005).

Improving and developing the skills/knowledge via cooperative learning could be possible with integrating technology such as web services in class room, for example: integrating blog as learning environment where the learners are able to be interactive and exchanging their experience (Lei et al. 2012, Weller, et al. 2005). According to recent reports therefore, the new innovation of web services i.e. read/write web has a powerful for improving learning environment, especially in higher education (Lei et al. 2012; Kim 2008; Anderson 2007; Wu 2006; Schiano et al. 2004).

Practically, blog interactivity provides a wide range of space where the learners can expand their knowledge outside the class (Betts & Glogoff 2004). Moreover, Williams & Jacobs (2004) claim that blog has a possibility of providing the learners with exchanging experience and thought via blog, in terms of intellectual change. Nevertheless, Lin et al. (2006) argue that blog is beneficial even with the learner who is usually being less interactive with their colleagues, for example in some context, the learners are able to read through posts and comment where they will benefit from reading the others' posts and comments. The interaction of "reading"

In addition, there are no major differences in views on the value of the read/write web in education, Grosbeck (2009) claims that "there is a general consensus on the positive aspects of Web 2.0 in teaching" (p.481), he added more that, the educators still have ignorance in terms of the adaptation, nevertheless, one main point that the educator has to consider when they should adapt blog services is the learners' attitude, as that the learners' attitude concept is a new circumstance in education. Moreover, the educators should re-examine the way of teaching via read/write web with having in mind -seriously- the behavior of learner 'attitude'(Ibid 2009).

In addition, Learners' perception regarding their attitude is one main key for driving the integration for technology in education i.e. web services; however, the perception of learners "probably" changing from time to time (Venkatesh & Brown 2001). This paper focused on learners' perception and attitude, as it focuses to explore the attitude of learners toward utilizing blog services to classify the factors that would affect their responses (i.e. wither positive or negative).

4. STUDY PLAN

This paper describes the implementation of the use of blog services in ? It discusses the details of the study. It intends to identify the learners' attitude and gather the data before and after the study through pre-post questions, interviews and, observation. Particularly, after the course started, the researcher has created blog assisting all learners to be interactive and share their ideas and thoughts. In addition, the learners are allowed to voluntary participate by posting and comment on blog that is related to the modules' syllabus with no future structure.

The course was seventeen weeks, pre-questionnaire and pre-interviews were gathered at second week, with the pre-interview, the post-questionnaire were collected at the 18th week, observations were running during the course.

4.1. Methods and Instruments

Qualitative methods were used in order to collect data from the learners to pre/post - test the learners' attitude. However, the data has been collected via questionnaire i.e. general question of the acceptance of the blog, unstructured interviews and, unstructured observation during the course.

Triangulation has been used for collecting the data; the term 'triangulation' indicated when the researcher used more than one instrument for collecting the data (Meijer et al. 2002). Nevertheless, it has been argued that triangulation is most likely to be the main technique for assisting the researchers in ensuring that analysis is rigorous and the data is carefully scrutinized so as to validate the literature (Elliot & Adelman 1974; McNiff & Whitehead 2002; Elliot 1991). For that reasons, three instruments utilized in this study i.e. questionnaire, interview and, observation.

In addition to that, for this study, interviews were utilized because it involves social with common and insider perspective of the situation where the researcher are able to be involve deeply with the participants' 'feeling' (O'Hanlon 2003). Using a questionnaire enables the collation of specific date from the learners in a 'e-learning environment' and, observation helps to compare what actually happened in the research setting to that of the perceptions of the learners. This method is particularly suitable for this study as without triangulation, judging the actions of the e-learners (subjects) via one method 'could' not provide all the data required from the participant. Triangulation will allow to access to their knowledge to understand respondents' genuine attitudes (Cohen et al. 2007).

4.2. Data analysis

The data were analyzed using thematic analysis, followed Miles & Huberman (1994) model, see (Figure 1). Thematic analysis has been used for data analysis in this study, however, it provides a comprehensive analysis process, where the researchers are able to identify more cross-references between the evolving themes

with the data (Hayes 1997).

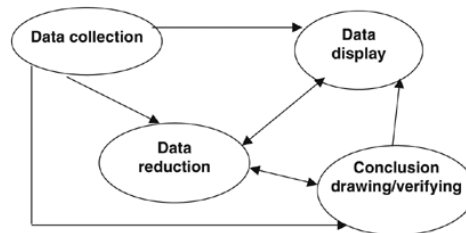


Figure 1: Miles & Huberman (1994) model for thematic analysis approached

In addition, after collecting the data, the Data reductions has been applied, this refers to the process of selecting, focusing, simplifying, building and transforming the data (Miles & Huberman, 1994). During this stage, new thoughts and ideas are developed in terms of what should be included in the context of data display. Notably, 'data display' is recognized by Miles & Huberman (1994) as 'an organized, compressed, assembly of information that permits conclusion drawing and action' (p. 11).

Importantly, these stages focus on visualizing the data; the data will use diverse display techniques, such as quotations, narrative text, figures, the tabulating of differences and similarities, and clarifying the relationship and its associated complexity (Gibbs, 2002; Miles & Huberman, 1994; Yin, 2011). The advantage of utilizing such different data display techniques makes the description of the comparison and similarities clear (e.g. tabulating). In addition, it also increases the overall reliability of the research so as to make it valid for other researchers. In addition, displaying quotations aims to provide evidence and support and valid interpretation (Gibbs, 2002; Miles & Huberman, 1994; Paton & Paton, 1990).

The final stages of the data analysis process are linked with arranging and organizing the study concepts and thoughts, which is probably achieved through building coherent findings and drawing the structures of the results from the data displayed. During this stage the meaning of contradictory and identical data needs to be clarified (Creswell, 2007; Miles & Huberman, 1994).

4.3. Participants

This study was completed during the second semester 2010-2011. All the participants [30 learners] were from Saudi Arabia, studying a subject entitled "Computer Application in Education", in teachers' college, King Saud University, Riyadh. The main aim of the module was to make the learners able to design and evaluate programs in education using specific recourses such as using web services with the learners for educational purposes. The duration of the course was 17 weeks. The study was designed to collect data from 30 learners [all participants].

5. RESULT AND CONCLUSIONS, RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1. Result

5.1.1. The result of the pre- questionnaire

The pre/posts-questionnaire included a question concerning the ability of learners'

acceptance of utilized blog. The question was: “If you or your friend were offered an online-course via blog’ activities, would you take it or recommend it to your friend or not? Please explain why and why not?”, (Williams & Jacobs 2004; Al-Arfaj 2001).

Twenty four learners responded to the pre-questionnaire, most of them showed positive attitude. Nevertheless, the analysis of the pre-questionnaire shows that, there are two main issues concerned by learners before the implementation of blog, which are: (1) how Beneficial the blog is, i.e. whether blog is useful or not, and (2) the Skills i.e. what type of skills they need to use it in education purposes. However, their consideration comes with different linked variables as in Figure 2.

Some learners indicated to the lack of personal knowledge in terms of whether they possessed the necessary or appropriate tools to utilize or not i.e. blog services , mainly, with their level of education, such as: how to choose a topic to communicate with others? For example what is the best action that can be done, and so on. With that, they have given varieties of perception regarding the acceptance of blog.

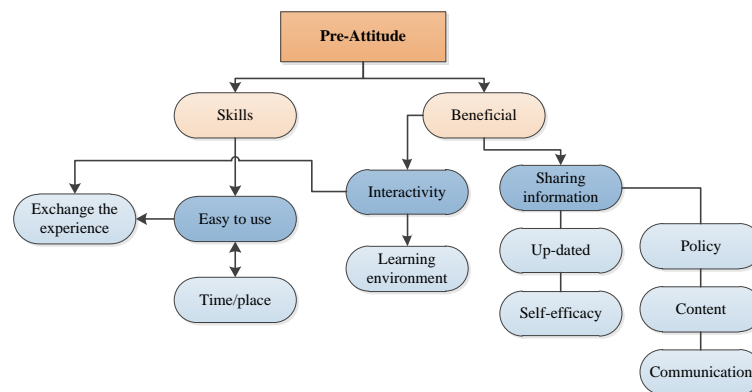


Figure 2: Pre- factors influencing the attitude of the implementation of blog concenter by learners

In regard to that, most learners claim that the skills when utilizing blog could be considered as a factor that would affect their perception. For example, one learner said: ‘I accept it, but I need to know how to create a blog and to interact with others’. Which is showing a positive attitude but with lacking of knowledge. With regards to the Beneficial aspect, however, some learners showing their acceptance of using blog in their learning environment, for example: one learner stats: “Yes, I will acceptif it is useful ..., we should use blog continuously during the course”. In addition, ease of use, interactivities and, sharing information become as secondary level factors that could influence the learners’ usage.

Some learners however assert that sharing information is important, especially, between the learners and instructors, for example: one learner answered the question by saying:

“Yes, [will accept to use blog again]; if it allows the learners to be socially interact by providing the right and cooperative environment where both educator and learner can share thoughts and experiences’.

Nevertheless, interactions with sharing information were significant variables provided in the learning environment. , Those could affect their attitude, for instance: one learner said:

‘Yes; if it allows the learners to be socially interact by providing the right and cooperative environment where both educator and learner can share

thoughts and experiences.'

5.1.2. The result of the pre-interviews

Fourteen learners have been interviewed before the implementation of blog; however, most of the data were gathered is compatible with the pre-questionnaire data, we can conclude and summary the results of the pre- interview into three main points, as following:

Most of the learners were concerned of the way of utilizing blog, they have given a positive attitude –as in pre-questionnaire- despite their confession of their lack of knowledge regarding blog services, for example: “It is my first time to use the blog. I don't think it is disadvantageous, I expect that it is good and useful as it entails discussion and dialog”.

Most of the learners indicated that blog is a good idea within their learning environment; conversely, they were curious to know more about how to use it in terms of the way, the different ways, which type of information and so on. This leads one to believe that, they gave their opinion based on what they were expecting from the blog, not based on any previous misconceptions or biases.. For instance, “I believe that the most advantages is exchanging of the experience for one concerned subject as our module, with knowing very little about blogs”

The analysis of the interviews comes up with a number of factors that been given by learners, but none of them was justify why of agree or disagree. So their opinions tend to be generally as group meeting talking about blog. that will show in next conversation:

“Learner: What are the causes and means that you think have made the blog good in utilize?”

Learner: as i mentioned before, there is no much room of freedom whenever the targets are precisely defined.

Lecturer: what do you mean by specific targets?

Learner: the rules of participation, yes, there might be an idea outside the circle you have drawn but it may open new horizons for you.

Lecturer: are you talking about our blog or blogs in general?

Learner: generally, the blogs have specific and regularized purposes in education, in my opinion”.

The result of the pre-interviews is showing that, the learners have presented positive attitude. Nevertheless, they were exciting to the implementation of blog, waiting to interactive, and to share their information; however, they were aware of few points, but the main point that, the learners are welcoming to integrate any type of read/write web as it is a new innovation that mostly will be beneficial “their expectation”.

5.1.3. The result of the Post-questionnaire

Learners were asked to answer the same questions that they answered in the pre-questionnaire, however, all learners responded [30 learners]. In addition, the result of

their perceptions can be found in **Error! Reference source not found.**

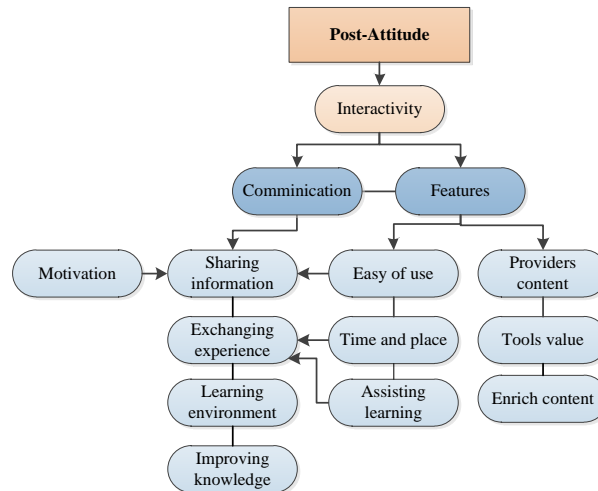


Figure 3: Post- factors influencing the attitude of the implementation of blog conceder by learners

Communication and the Feature of blog were the two main issues that affected the learners' attitude regarding the implementation of blog during the course, however, most of the learners offered positive attitude regarding their experiences with blog services. In regards to the factors, the learners considered communication as providing the ability to exchange experiences, ideas and sharing thoughts. Furthermore, they claimed that blog services present a good way of connecting and communicating between participants -especially- between learners and instructors. For example, one learner said:

'Based on my experience in this course, I have found connected [communication] and exchanging ideas and thought is value'.

The feature of blog (i.e. ease of use, updated information, comments, content, tools value and, engaged in any time and place), were considered via learners as an issue that makes these features as a main factor.

In addition, one learner indicated to the importance of the communication in terms of providing an opportunity to use technology and to participant in a place where they can participant with colleagues and instructor, he said:

'Yes I will accept it because; 1) it is a good methods to communicate between learners and teachers. 2) Via these tools, students will used to deal with technology. 3) Students will be participating with the subject'

Also, the learners considered communication as providing the ability to exchange experiences, ideas and sharing thoughts.

5.1.4. The result of observation

The result of the observations shows that, the learners were so excited and showing a positive attitude during the course, however, few issues emerged during the implementation study that reduced some of learners' positive attitude, we can determined it in three main points:

Most of learning showed their resentment from the ways of some post, especially when the writer was transmitted from different websites. However,

they prefer to read original text “contributed content”. Basically, most of the post at the first five week was posts from other website, which made most of the learners see no point to create our own blog; they claim that we can indicated/using hyperlink instead. Nevertheless, they were excited to read others’ experience and information rather than copying others’ experiences.

Long posts were issues, some of learners showing their dissatisfactions for this type of posts; where the writer goes on to explain in long words for any issues. In regard to that, some learners being less interactive. Moreover, this may have caused a slight change in their attitude regarding utilizing blog in education and may have negatively affected their perceptions.

The structure of the way of utilizing blog ‘the rules of blog’ was concerned, when we started the blog, there was no rule for posting and comment, only one rule which is: any posts should be related to the modules’ syllabus, however, some learners prefer to add few rules to manage the interactivities to avoid some “disturbing behavior”, e.g. long post, reduced thankful comments, transmitted contents and, the kind of content, here the learners meant to determine the activities with the modules’ syllabus.

5.2. Lessons learned, conclusion

Generally, before the implementation, most responses tend to be under the expectation regarding the implementation of the blog tools as an e-learning tool for learning purposes, which is indicated clearly throughout the answers. Some of their responses show that they have no idea of the utilization, and so the reality of the expression tends to be concerned with giving information regarding their expectations. Means that there were excited and they are positivity coming towards blogs’ services.

After the implementation, almost all the respondents tended to provide an optimistic review based on their experience during the course. Nevertheless, there are few issues that were notices during the analysis and they considered as “unsolicited” behaviors when using blog, these issues being raised since the learners started to engage with blog, we can summaries these issues as following:

- 1- Most learners prefer original posts, i.e. they reject any posts that have been copied from other websites,
- 2- Unfavorable long posts; only three learners do not mind to read through any long post, especially, if it does not converted from websites,
- 3- Most of learners agreed that, interactivity is very positive, also it encourages to engage and participant by giving contribution, especially, then it comes from the instructor.
- 4- Only three learners wished if the activities through blog have clear rules or [structures] e.g. the way of post, make the contents related to the modules syllabus and, include extra credit in the final mark of the modules, and
- 5- *Communication* and the *features* of blog is main factors that driving the attitude of the learners under the perspective of interactivities.

At the end, it seems that the learners enjoyed participating in this experiment, however, the teacher [myself] has a key to give directions for learners enabling them

to gain a clear initiative of how to best use the blogs, provide the basic tools that require in order to enable them to construct and start their first step with these internet application. It was realized that through the use of blogs, certain skills and abilities that may not necessarily be shown in class environments may be realized and promoted. Moreover, this research studied the cultural effect on the learner attitude toward blogs and the impression gained was that cultural attitudes towards sharing and using e-learning can affect the impact that blogs can have in higher education.

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