

Exploring Perceptions and Experience of Educational Blogs in Higher Education of Bangladesh

Sabbir Ahmed Chowdhury¹ Sanjida Akter Tanni² Mohammad Salman Ibn Mamun²

1. Assistant Professor, Institute of Education and Research (IER), University of Dhaka, Dhaka-1000, Bangladesh

2. M.Ed., Institute of Education and Research (IER), University of Dhaka, Dhaka-1000, Bangladesh

Abstract

The purpose of the research was to explore perceptions and experience of educational blogs of the students of higher education. The study followed a mixed method research approach. Supporting the research approach, the study followed both quantitative and qualitative instrument for better understanding of the research problem. First an open-ended questionnaire was supplied for 160 students from different institutes and departments of University of Dhaka, followed by six semi-structured interview with the teachers and finally a FGD was also conducted with students. The study reveals that most of the students and teachers are familiar with blogs. Both teachers and students expressed that they can perceive the intensifying role of blog in teaching –learning process. In addition to this, students find Blogs as a trendy digital platform to exchange views through collaboration with teachers. Teachers perceived a positive view on it pointing that genuine blogs can help to develop creative platform for transferring contemporary views although their use of blog is not satisfactory. Different factors like inauthenticity of sources, inaccessibility to internet, unpreparedness and unwillingness of senior teachers to use blogs have been identified as challenges of using blogs in education arena.

Keywords: Educational Blogs, Digital platform, Challenges

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I. Introduction

Web 2.0 applications, including blogs, wikis, social networking, media sharing, podcasting, etc. provide opportunities for shared content and resources, self-directed learning, collaborative learning, ubiquitous and lifelong learning. Social networking sites, web applications and web blogs are part of Web2.0 technologies which are experiencing emerging trend in higher education (Halic, Dee, Paulus, & Spense, 2010).

Moreover, instructors can use blogs in blended and online learning to facilitate some strategies: posting student work, exchanging hyperlinks, fostering reflective approaches to educational genres, forming and maintaining knowledge communities (Oravec, 2003)

Literature review on educational blogging revealed a lack of a complete and consistent framework in context of Bangladesh for studying and assessing students' engagement and the impact of blogging on students' learning. This study may help us to understand the effectiveness of educational blogging in tertiary level education of Bangladesh.

The purpose of the study is to examine the potentiality of the blog environment for supporting the development of learning of higher education students' through collaborative interaction.

The following research questions are going to address the above purpose of the study:

1. What is the nature of students' interaction in educational blogging practice?
2. How does the blog-based learning activity contribute and facilitate way of students' learning?
3. What are the challenges of educational blogging practice?

II. Literature Review

Blogs promotes collaborative learning by helping to generate and exchange reflections of students within a safer learning group" (Robertson, 2011, p. 1628. A study of develops skills among active participants in critical thinking and argument creation (Williams, 2004). A study reveals in Churchill (2007) that, blogs can be effective educational technology and useful blog-based activities for learning are: reading blogs of others, receiving comments and previewing and reading feedback received in relation to these. Encouragements for students to blog were: regular learning tasks which require students to present outcomes in their blogs, blogs being an assessment requirement and regular blogging of a teacher (Churchill, 2007). Through blogs, a teacher can create an ambience in which students feel themselves to be important parts of the classroom community and that their needs and opinions are recognized and addressed.

Study reveals that blogging has the potential to be a transformational technology for teaching and learning (Williams & Jacobs, 2004). Blogs have the potential, at least, to be truly transformational technology in that they provide students with a high level of autonomy while simultaneously providing opportunity for greater interaction with peers (Williams & Jacobs, 2004).

Blog's technological appeal is that it works as an instinctive medium for publishing and posting comments

on the web and thus provides readers with updated information (kim, 2008). Needless to say, this the age of information and blogs creates ways for contributing on the web through active participation (Hsu, Ching, & Grabowski, 2009). Besides, blogging provides essential pedagogical skills for learners to improve their writing, reflection and critical thinking expertise; hence, knowledge is produced, exchanged, revised and passed along (Mason & Rennie, 2008, p.10).

Many students even do not have previous experience of blogging. Angelaina & Jimoyiannis (2011) reveals in a study that despite that the students had no previous experience in using blogs; they demonstrated enhanced interest for the project and willingness to participate in the blog activities (content and resources sharing, ideas interchanging, discussion topics, etc.). Students provided one another with social and emotional support which created a continuously growing and evolving through collaboration, dialogue and encouraging students' autonomy as self-directed learners.

Additionally, It was found in a study by William and Jacobs (2004) that students from two university (Harvard Law School and Queensland University of Technology) showed positive perception to the learning through blogs. Halic, Lee, Paulus and Spence (2010) found in their research that significant number of students believed that blogs facilitated their learning by providing a sense of community. Additionally, according to (Chu, Kwan, & Warning, 2012), undergraduate students identified blogs as effective learning space for sharing knowledge.

III. Methodology

This study was conducted in two phases. In the first stage, data was collected through teachers from interviews and then data also collected from questionnaire supplied to the students. An FGD had conducted among students of different faculty to crosscheck the data from questionnaire. In this study 6 teachers were selected from 6 different departments of University of Dhaka through convenience and purposive sampling. Respondent students of this study were selected purposefully by maximum variation sampling. Ten students from each faculty/institute were selected from the classes which were supplied questionnaire. The students to conduct FGD were selected on the basis of gender, classroom participation, and classroom performance. In this study for collecting data, an interview schedule was/were used for 6 participant teachers. Questionnaire was used to collect data from 160 students of 6 different departments. For this study data were analyzed using both quantitative and qualitative data analysis technique. The quantitative data from the questionnaire were analyzed using simple descriptive statistics. Thematic data analysis was conducted for interview schedule. Before collecting data from participants, permission has been taken informing them the purpose of the research and total anonymity will be maintained.

IV. Findings

A. Teachers and students view about blog based learning

Teachers thinks that blog based learning is a new idea for sharing knowledge and collaboration. But most of them agreed that they do not use blog in regular basis but they except it positively and assume it as a new platform of teaching learning. They think that blog based learning is guided and it enhance creativity and better learning. They added that, the teacher should be more updated in this method of teaching.

Besides, most of the students think that blog based learning is a new idea for interaction and sharing knowledge, they perceived it as a "helpful" idea for updated information and knowledge. They think that blog based learning is very joyful learning method and a different approach for increasing knowledge. Some students think that blog is an extra option for learning and students also opined that through blog they can know different points of view and ideas.

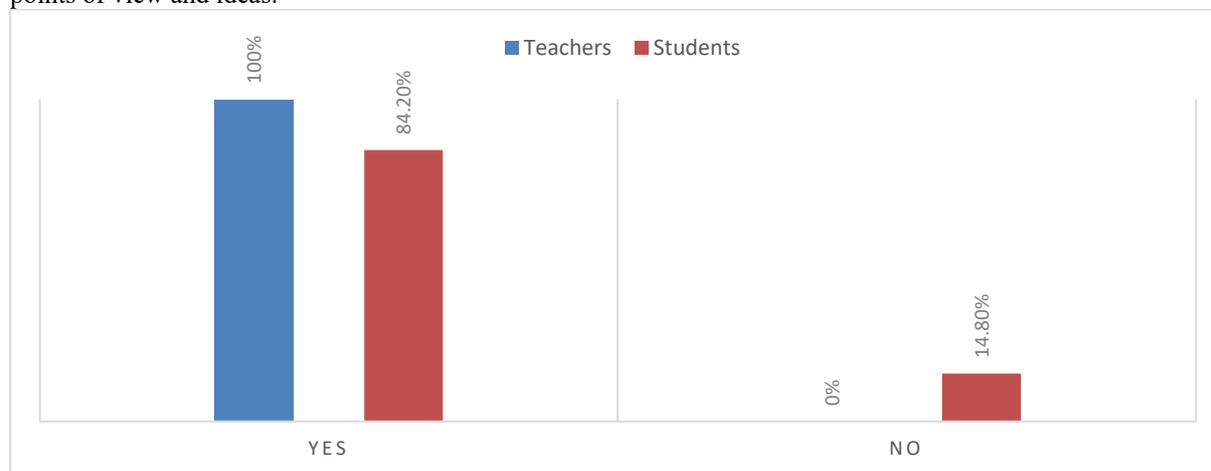


Figure 1: Percentage of teachers and students on their familiarity with blogs

It is evident that about 100% teachers are familiar with blogs while 84.2% students are acquainted with blogs and 14.8% are unfamiliar with it (Figure 1).

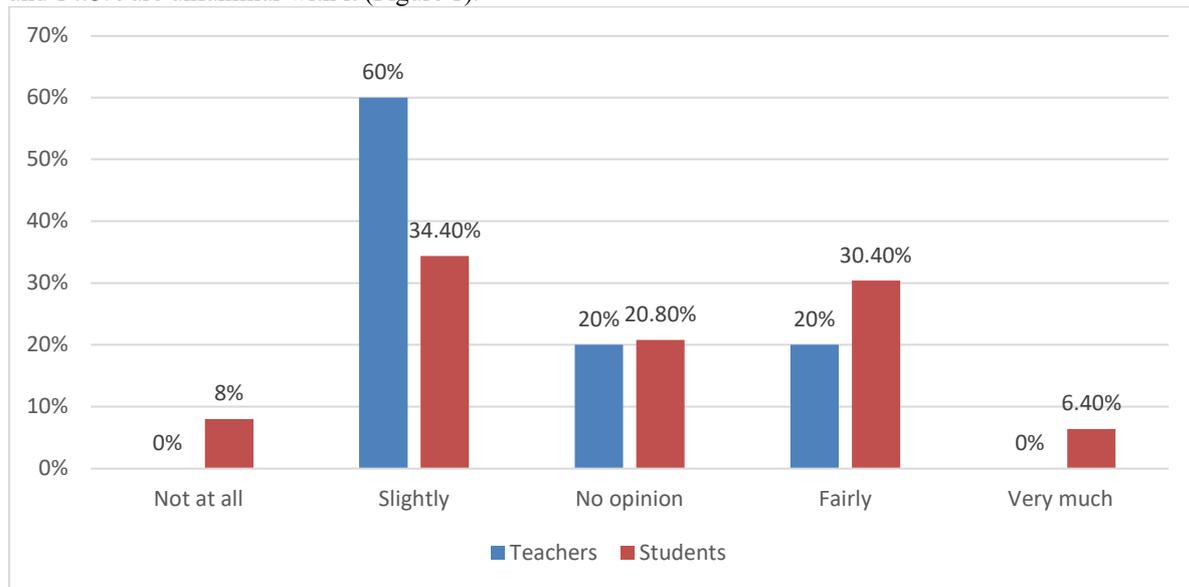


Figure 2: Percentage of teachers and students perception on using blog in their study

It can be seen from Figure 2 that 60% teachers use blog slightly as a part of their study while the proportion for students is 34.40%. Almost equal number of teachers and students has no opinion about using blog as a part of their studies. Fairly 30.4% students and 20% teachers use blog as a part of their study. It is interesting to note that 10% students never use blog as a part of their study.

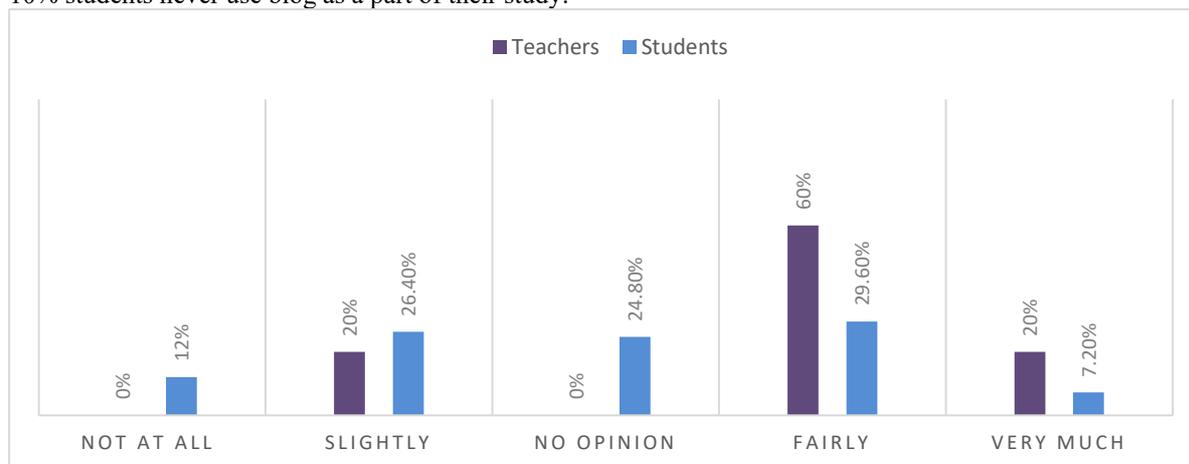


Figure 3: Teachers and students perception on using blog in politics, culture and life styles

According to Figure 3, about 12% students never used blog as a part of other personal use like politics, culture and life styles. Slightly 20% and 26.4% teachers and students respectively use blog as a part of other personal use. 24.8% students have no opinion about using blog for politics, culture or life styles purpose. 60% teachers fairly use blog as a part of personal use while the percentage for students for this is 29.6%.

Students felt that blog based learning gave them an opportunity to process their thoughts. The blog is a non-threatening and safe space where the students could ask any questions which they want. Students indicated that in classroom it is very tough to know opinions of all students specifically so may one has a “unique” thoughts and different “point of view” which they could not get in class but in blog based learning they can get it easily.

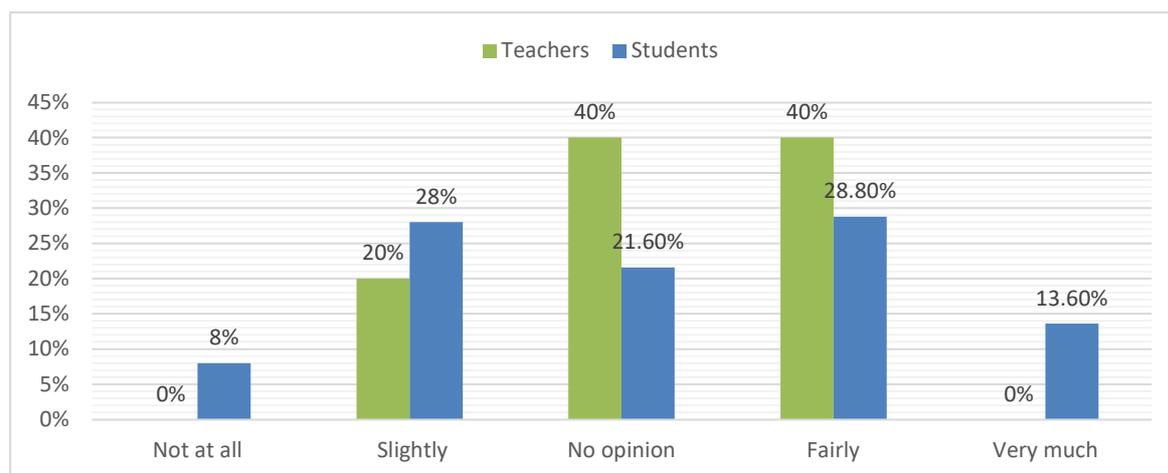


Figure 4: Teachers and students proportion of perception on role of blog in study

100% teachers see the role of blog in their study, whereas 8% students are disagreeing to find any contribution of blog in their study. 28% and 20% students and teacher respectively see slight role of blog in their studies (Figure 4).

B. Student's opinions about blog-based learning activity and facility

Students' opine following responses regarding blog based facility and their usage of blogs.

Table 1: Student's opinion about blog based learning activity and facilities

Topics	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree
1. Blogs discussion helps to share knowledge and experience	0%	1.6%	11.2%	62.4%	24.8%
2. Student's comments on blog post are important	0.8%	8%	28.8%	43.2%	19.2%
3. Blog discussion helps to understand others' point of view	0%	0%	15.2%	50.4%	34.4%
4. Blog helps to make connection between teachers and students.	1.65	12%	33.6%	36.8%	16%
5. Blog stimulates to do additional readings or research on topics.	2.4%	4.8%	20%	57.6%	15.2%
6. Blog helps to increase interaction among students.	2.4%	14.4%	24.8%	45.6%	12.8%
7. Blog contributes to preview completed tasks to students and to get feedback	0.8%	12.8%	33.6%	41.6%	11.2%
8. Quality of interaction has increased due to the blog in compare to regular face to face classes.	8%	28.8%	30.4%	26.4%	6.4%
9. Blog facilitates constructivism	1.6%	8%	35.2%	51.2%	4%
10. Blogs help to develop new skills and knowledge from other members in the group.	0.8%	4%	18.4%	58.4%	18.4%
11. Blogs help to develop problem solving skills through peer collaboration.	3.2%	6.4%	23.2%	52.8%	14.4%
12. In future, I will use blog if it is required by teachers	1.6%	7.2%	24.8%	45.6%	20.8%
13. In future, I will use blog if it is a part of assessment.	0.8%	7.2%	17.6%	48%	26.4%
14. Using blog in teaching-learning activity is time consuming	10.4%	26.4%	24%	30.4%	8.8%

It is noticeable that students expressed positive opinion about blog based learning activity and facility. About 64.2% students are agreed on the topic that blog discussion helps to share knowledge and experience. Also, 24.8% are strongly agreed on this topic. On the other hand only 1.6% is disagreeing with the statement. For the statement 2-7, majority of the students are agreed while few are disagreed with this statement. Among them 34.4% students are strongly agree with the statement 3 which is the highest in this scale. It is noteworthy that for the statement 8, the neutral opinion of the students (30.4%) outnumbered all other opinion's proportion. In addition to this highest number of students (28.8%) among all the item are disagreeing with the statement that quality of interaction has increased due to the blog in compare to regular face to face classes. On the other hand almost the same numbers

of students are agreeing on the statement 9 and 11 (51.2% and 52.8% respectively). 20.8% and 26.4% students are strongly agreed to use blogs in their future purpose or in case of assessment (statement 12 and 13). Highest number of students are disagreeing (26.4%) with the statement that using blog in teaching-learning activity is time consuming though 30.4% students are agree with this item (Table 1).

C. Challenges of blog based activity

Most of the teachers perceived that the main challenge of educational blog is authenticity; mindset for blog based learning is not positive always and in addition accessibility and physical support is also a big concern. Some teachers are also concerned about extra time which they have to manage for blog based learning. One teacher was really concerned about students' knowledge noting,

“Students lack of knowledge about blog is another point to be noted. Our digital infrastructure needs to be modified to utilize blog based learning activity fully.”

Students think that authenticity of blog information is often a challenge. They also pointed accessibility; mind set and preparedness are also issues. In addition, students think privacy in blog based learning should be maintained for making learning unbiased. One female student pointed “systematic” blog can be a motivation in regular learning.

Students think that commenting as anonymous is a better option, because if they comment as anonymous, they can express their thinking and search for required answer more easily. Some students mentioned that blog learning can help introvert students to make question if it maintain anonymity. However, some students noted that they have no experience of educational blogging at all. In addition, students marked following issues as challenges of using blog as a part of their study.

Table 2: Student's opinion on the challenges of using blog

Topics	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree
1.Difficulty in logging to blog	8.8%	26.4%	33.6%	26.4%	4.8%
2.Internet connection problem	12%	28.8%	19.2%	28.8%	11.2%
3.Do not know how to use	13.6%	33.6%	14.4%	28.8%	9.6%
4.Difficulty in posting comments	12.8%	28.8%	25.6%	27.2%	5.6%
5.No experience of blogging	11.2%	16%	14.4%	41.6%	16.8%
6.Small number of students and participating	1.6%	8.8%	20%	48%	21.6%
7.Language barrier	8%	21.6%	28.8%	27.2	14.4%

Students find several issues using blog as a part of their study. Equal number of students agreed and disagreed with the statement that difficulty in logging to blog and internet connection problem. The percentage is 26.4% and 28.8% for the statement 1 and 2 respectively. 33.6% students are disagreeing that they know how to use blog whereas 28.8% are agreeing with the statement 3. For difficulty in posting comments 28.8% students do not find it as an issue, though 27.2% agree with the problem. Also a substantial proportion of students (25.6%) are neutral with this statement. 16.8% students are strongly agreed that they have no experience of blogging. On the other hand 41.6% are agreed while 16% are disagreed with the statement. Majority of the students are agreed that small number of students are participating in blog and the percentage is 48% while 21.6% students are strongly agree with this item. Most of the students are neutral about considering language barrier as a challenge although 14.4% are strongly agrees that it is an issue (Table 2).

V. Discussion

It is evident from our findings that most of the students and teachers are familiar with blogs. It can be seen that almost half of the teachers use blog slightly as a part of their study while the proportion for students is one-third of the sample. Besides, more than half of the teachers fairly use blog as a part of personal use (politics, culture and life styles), while the personal usage of blog is limited to around one-fourth student. So, introduction into curriculum may play vital role to improvise educational blogs. According to Ellison and Wu (2008) introduction earlier into the curriculum is important to develop competency in using blogs and in reflective writing and practice. Similar issues have been raised in other studies where blogs have been used to promote learning and discourse in higher education (Top et al. 2010; Farmer et al. 2008). As blog activity is not guided by the existing curriculum, one-third of the students still perceive that using blog in teaching-learning activity is time consuming.

According to our participant teachers think blog based learning is guided and it enhance creativity and better learning. Besides, most of the students think that blog based learning is a new idea for interaction and sharing knowledge for updated information and knowledge. According to Garrison et al. (2000), blogs could be a starting stage of the teaching category of building understanding, because students shared personal meaning and expressed agreements or disagreements.

Difficulty in logging to blog along with difficulty in posting comments and internet connection problem may hamper the blogging practice. Significant numbers of students feel that technological resources should be available

In order to use blog smoothly. According to Shirley Ayao-ao (2014) lack of opportunity to computer or internet access results in poor number of participation in blogging practice. Similarly, Harris and Rhea (2009) identified that presence of technological resources are prerequisite for having a better practice in the classroom setting.

Another challenge faced by students is language hindrance. Admittedly, blogs are such a tremendous way for increasing interaction and sharing view, ideas, information. But, students may be discouraged when they feel inefficiency of language compared to classmates. This problem was also supported by Hung et al. (2011) stating that absence of sufficient skills for commenting and questioning are intimidating for the students. Leslie and Murphy (2008) indicated that students compelled to limit their responses to classmate's comments due to linguistic inability which causes low level of encouragement among students.

On the other hand, majority of the students are disagreed with the statement that they do not know how to use blogs. It indicates that students have adequate idea about blogs. Alternatively, Yu-Hui Ching and Yu-Chang Hsu (2010) found that students were not comfortable using blogs and seemed to be confused about using blogs due to inadequate instructions.

VI. Conclusion

Using a blended learning philosophy, Blog has the capacity to integrate three categories of education-Formal, Non-Formal and informal in the context of higher education and it can diversify students learning area beyond traditional classroom settings. Thus, appropriately modified blogs enable students to acquire knowledge and skills whether they are in home or in personal environment.

Overall, the results of this study depict positive perception of the students about blogs and they recognize blogs as an advantageous and constructive medium as well as a reflective and communication tool.

Blog is a creative platform for enhancing better learning through collaboration. Consequently, properly modernized blogs according to subject demand can spread up valuable knowledge and experience among teachers and students. In addition to this, blogs pave the way for performing further research by providing necessary resources to teachers and students according to their field of interest.

Undoubtedly, blog has enormous role to play in higher education though the issues related to it should be resolved first. Like, blog commenting should be anonymous to ensure impartial phenomenon in teaching-learning process. Genuineness of blog along with internet availability is exigent requirements to extend its usage in educational arena.

Our future research will focus on confirming this exploratory result with a larger study group and assessing student perception about how blog affordances may be pedagogically used to meaningful and collaborative learning.

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