The Systematic Development and Implementation of a Blog in the Teaching and Learning of a Religious Verse

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Abstract
Religious teaching has predominantly been taught using the traditional method of rote learning. This paper outlines the systematic development and implementation of an instructional design platform (i.e., a blog) for the teaching and learning of a religious text, *surah* Al-Fatihah. The development of the blog went through five different phases of analysis, design, development, implementation and the evaluation. Qualitative and quantitative feedback indicated that the blog was well designed, with good and relevant contents. Thus, the blog will likely to engage the students' interest and sustain their motivation in learning to recite the *surah*. It is concluded that the blog is a useful teaching aid for teachers and students in the teaching and learning of Koran reciting skills.
Keywords: Instructional design, teaching, Islam, learning

1. Introduction

Learning and reciting the Koran verses is a fundamental duty of all Muslims. The teaching of religious text in the Koran (or *surah*) has always been conducted via traditional methods such as *talaqqi musyafahah, tasmi' and tikrar. Talaqqi musyafahah* is the method in teaching hafazan (or memorizing) of Koran verses. This method involves a 'face to face' meeting between teacher and student, where the student learn by observing the teacher's lips movement and subsequently following the teacher's recitation. *Tasmi'* is the method where the students recite the surah in front of the teacher. The teacher then corrects the student's fasohah (fluency) during the recitation. *Tikrar* implies repetition. This method is where students recite the surah repeatedly until they are able to memorize it. This method is akin to drilling and rote learning without any inputs from the students.

These traditional methods of learning the Koran verses whilst somewhat effective, clearly is outdated and does not suit the learning profile of the "modern" students. For example, it has been shown that the traditional methods failed at attracting and motivating students to learn to recite the surah (Purwanto, 1990).

Students, in particular those with lower academic abilities, who are easily bored, and de-motivated to follow the lesson when being taught using the traditional methods (Sidin, 1998). Such issues with learning will clearly affect the student's achievement as behavior and motivation are two important aspects that influence student's learning performance (Abdulrohman, 2010). Further, a recent study showed that student's ability in reciting the Koran increased by only 62% after the teacher has used the previously mentioned traditional methods (Abdulrohman, 2010). The cited study's finding clearly indicated that the traditional teaching method is not optimal and was not able to attract and sustain the student's interest to learn and recite the Koran.

In response to this less than ideal scenario, Ismail and Zakaria (2010) suggested that religious teachers should consider utilizing a more modern teaching aids that use the current technology such as websites, videos and compact discs in their classroom teachings. Such methods clearly possess the ability to stimulate the students' interest and engage their senses better than the traditional methods (Ajil Jasim, 1980). It was further argued that religious teachers should use the computer as teaching aid during lessons (Yusoff et. al., 2003). Many educators believe that computers can help the students learn the correct recitation in an interactive manner (Ismail and Zakaria, 2010). Indeed, a previous local study found that the subject's content can be effectively delivered through the application of animated pedagogical agents (APA) as it managed to enhance the students' involvement in the learning process (Md. Ghalib, 2006).

Subsequently, this led the current investigators to develop an instructional design platform which might be useful for a more effective teaching and learning of the Islamic Koran verses. Thus, this present paper aims to describe the systematic development and implementation of the instructional platform design, i.e., a blog.

2. The Instructional platform

The instructional platform design was developed based on the ADDIE model. The ADDIE model is a basic instructional model that has commonly been used in the development of a teaching and learning tool (Dick and Carey, 1996). The model consists of five different but interrelated phases: analysis, design, development, implementation and evaluation phase. The details of the five phases were elaborated further in the development phases below.

2.1 Analysis phase

It was decided that the instructional platform design was to be in the form of a blog and the religious verse, *surah* Al-Fatihah, as the primary topic of learning for the instructional design. This is primarily because *surah* Al-Fatihah is one of the most important verses for Muslims. For example, Muslims are compelled to recite this *surah* correctly during the Salat (prayer) as the inaccurate recitation of this *surah* might deem the prayer to be invalid. Moreover,karia, 2010).

In this phase, the researchers conducted a pilot study consisting of an observation of the teaching of the surah at one typical primary school at southern part of Malaysia. The purpose of this observation of a religious class of students who were learning the surah Al-Fatihah was to provide the researchers with some hands-on knowledge of the issues in regards to the teaching and learning of the surah. From this pilot study, the researchers were able to appreciate the level of proficiency in reciting surah at the grass-root level. The researchers were also informed that the primary reason for the low competency level in reciting the surah was because the students do not have much interest in learning the surah. Based on the observation, the researchers further realized that teaching of the surah was non-interactive and the religious teacher adopted a single-direction (i.e., teacher to student) learning process. It was apparent that the students blindly repeating and reciting the surah after the teacher. All these could have resulted in the poor motivation in the students. In addition, in the same pilot study, three religious teachers (RT) were interviewed to obtain their views on how to further improve the learning of the recitation of the surah. The RTs were further questioned on the possibility of how modern technology can complement their lessons. They willingly provided some suggestions for the development of the instructional design. Below are some of their pertinent comments:

RT1*: "animated APA that will be able to recite the Koran verses and also sing", "the latest local cartoon animation figures such as Upin and Ipin and Boboiboy can be used to attract the students to engage the blog".*

RT2*: "there should be a two-way communication between the blog and the students", "information content should suit the student's different level of abilities", "the visual and representation designs should be colourful and attractive".*

RT3*: "the instruction design should portray the values such as the benefits of reciting Koran, and the manners of reciting Koran which can be represented through animation".*

2.2 Design phase

The design phase involves the process of transforming the idea and concepts into something that is tangible and visual. Thus, the blog was developed based on the three aspects of blog design which are: interactional, information and representation. The details of each aspect were represented in the Figure 1 below.

Design	Details
Interactional Design – involves the process of designing the software structure and determining how the users gain controls of the software.	Banner as focal point Navigation bar Links to related websites Link for comments and …

Information Design – deciding on how the information are to be presented to the users.	
Representation Design - planning the layout of the blog with regards to three elements: color scheme, font and graphic	

	Font type: Play
	Font type: Arial
	Font type: Georgia
	Unity element – the used of same font colour in each page

APA Development		Character of the agent or 'ustaz' (or religious teacher) is chosen as an agent in delivering the content of the lesson. The agent is responsible in guiding the students in menu and sub-menu pages through the audio prepared. The APA developed only have the eyes, lips and face movements.

Figure 1. Design phase of the blog involving the interactional, information and representation aspects

Based on the information obtained from the pilot study, the researcher then commenced to draft the outline of the blog. At this stage, the entire framework and architecture of the blog was thus constructed and designed. Figure 2 depicts the framework and navigation structure of the designed blog. All the contents in the blog were presented in Bahasa Melayu. The Bahasa Melayu is the primary language of communication in the Malaysian education system. The top menu bar was filled with links to the content pages. The main menu page was filled with welcome messages (in the form of text) from the researcher and two APA. The top menu bar was also filled with links to the content pages like Notes, sample of recitation, *Khatam Quran Doa* (Koran seal prayer), Discussion, Messages from *ustaz* (religious male teacher) and *Tentang Mudarris* (details of the religious teacher and the blog).
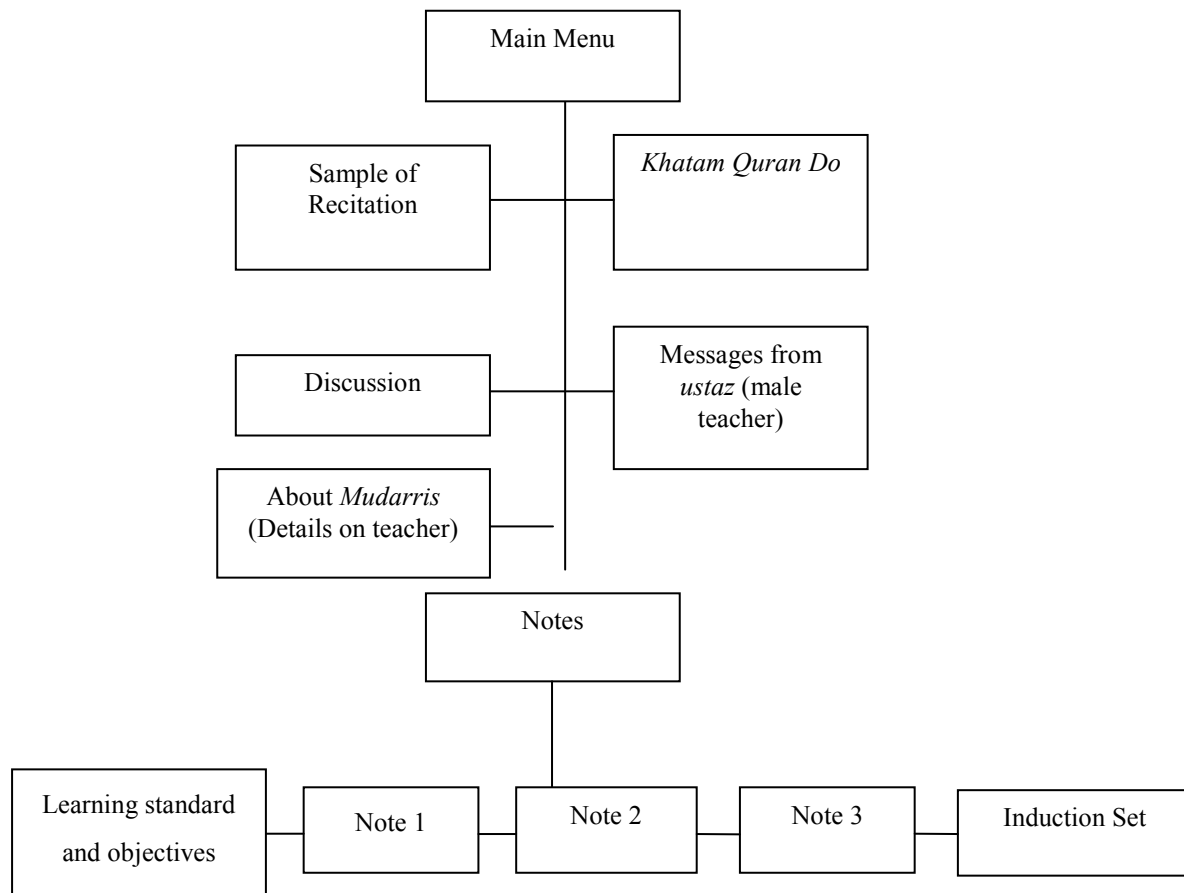
Figure 2. The blog architecture

The Notes link was also filled with other five sub-links to the content pages which are: learning standard and objectives, induction set and Note 1 until Note 3. The link displays the standard and objectives that need to be achieved. This is to ensure that all the learning problems can be solved by the learning strategy used. The induction set link displays the induction set which to attract the student's attention and interest in the blog's teaching and learning activities. The APA in this induction set invites the students to sing along with him. The notes are presented using video, graphic, and audio elements. The contents of Note 1 until Note 3 are presented from increasing level of complexity, commencing from simple to more difficult concepts.

The sample of recitation link displays several samples of good *surah* Al-Fatihah recitation in video, audio and graphic whilst the *khatam Quran doa* (Koran seal prayer) link displays the recorded video of *khatam Quran doa*. The next link which is the discussion link gives opportunities for students to share their knowledge and experience after completing the activities of the blog in the instructional design. Messages from *Ustaz (male teacher)* link displays the APA, which aims to provide motivation for the students. This link is important because it is one of the reinforcing techniques to cultivate the student's positive self and enhancing the confidence level. Lastly, the *About Mudarris* link displays the details information on the instructional design developed.

This blog is designed using the hierarchical navigation structure. All links are only one click away from the main menu page. The layout of the pages is similar between one another so this will allow the user to directly go to a page with just a click on the links on the menu without having to return to the home page. The blog can be used in either direction as users can access any page in whatever order they want and allow them to access to the page they wanted upon returning to the site.

2.3 Development phase

This third phase of development of the blog involves the actual process of writing and preparing the teaching materials for the blog. The details of the topic content presented in the blog were further elaborated in the Table 1 below.

Table 1. The learning content in the developed blog

Learning content	Details
Main Menu	It consists of six other sub-menu which are: Note, sample recitation, Khatam Quran's prayer, discussion, Messages from Ustaz and Tentang Mudarris. This main menu app applied two APA who recites the surah and wished welcome to the users.
Notes	It is one of the learning strategies used in order to achieve the learning standard and objectives outlined. It consists of five other sub-menus which are: learning standard and objectives, induction set and Note 1 until Note 3.
Learning standard and objectives	Displays the learning standard and objectives that need to be achieved. This is to ensure that all the learning problems can be solved by the learning strategy used.
Induction set	Displays the induction set which to attract the student's attention and interest towards the teaching and learning activities. The APA in this induction set asked to students to sing along with him.
Note 1-Note 3	Displays the learning content that suit the learning standard and objectives that need to be achieved. The notes are presented using video, graphic, and audio elements. The contents of Note 1 until Note 3 are presented from easy to complex.
Sample Recitation	Displays several sample of good Surah Al-Fatihah recitation in video, audio and graphic.
Khatam Quran's Prayer	Displays the recorded video of Khatam Quran's prayer
Discussion	This sub-menu gives opportunities for students to share their knowledge and experience after doing the activities in the instructional design.
Messages from Ustaz	The APA gives motivation as one of the reinforcing techniques in cultivating student's positive self and enhancing the confidence level.
About Mudarris	Displays the details information on the instructional design developed

2.4 Implementation phase

Implementation phase involves the process of putting the developed blog into the real world. The blog was trialled for the alpha test and beta test. Alpha test was done by the blog's developer as a self-check while the beta test was done by a professional group and the focus group. The latter tests were to obtain feedbacks in regards to the content, strategy, graphic, audio and text of the blog.

2.5 Evaluation phase

To determine the effectiveness of the instructional design platform, responses were obtained via questionnaires and interviews conducted on two selected group of individuals. For the questionnaires, six postgraduate students who were web-based multimedia major in a local university were surveyed. In addition, religious teachers ($N = 3$) were also interviewed to seek their opinions and feedbacks on the developed blog after they have used it in classroom for teaching surah Al-Fatihah.

The questionnaires were specifically designed to obtain feedback on four aspects of the blog. These were the blog's APA and its characteristics, interactional design, information design and representation design (see Appendix 1). The responses to the questionnaires study used the Likert scale classification for the rating (Abd. Majid and McCaffer, 1997): 'Extremely disagreed' = $1.00 \leq$ mean score < 1.50; 'Disagreed' = $1.50 \leq$ mean score < 2.50; 'Moderately agreed' = $2.50 \leq$ mean score < 3.50; 'Very agreed' = $3.50 \leq$ mean score < 4.50; and 'Extremely agreed' = $4.50 \leq$ mean score ≤ 5.00. The scores for each of the question were analyzed and reported as mean score for that section; and results are tabulated below (Table 2).

Table 2. Results of the evaluation of the blog

Section	Description	Mean score
B	APA and its characteristics – To seek for participants' opinion on the suitability of the APA developed to be applied in the teaching and leaning process and its ability to attract the student's interest and to motivate them in the teaching and learning process.	4.6
C	Interactional design – To seek for participants' opinion the blog navigation, organization and interactivity.	4.3
D	Information design – To seek for participants' opinion on the presentation of message, target, purpose, background and structure of the blog.	4.4
E	Representation design - To seek for participants' opinion on color scheme, font choices, typeface choices, layout, graphic choices and multimedia effect used in the blog.	4.4

The results showed that the developed blog manages to stimulate the student's interest in learning. Indeed, these views are supported by Andre at al. (1999) who indicated that the lesson will become more enjoyable with the presence of the animated agent. Table 2 also showed that participants responded 'extremely agreed' with the statement regarding the information presented in the blog. All the participants felt that the information on the *surah* were well presented and the topic contents within the blog were easy to understand and they were able to navigate smoothly through the "body" of the blog. The mean score of 4.4 implies that the combination of various multimedia elements like text, video and graphics and animation would likely to help to strengthen the learning stimuli and indirectly enhanced the students learning process. The six participants (P) also provided some qualitative feedback and comments on the blog. Their suggestions and comments supported the view that the blog is well-suited for the teaching and learning of the *surah*. Below are some of their comments:

P1: *"graphic and animation can still be improved", "attract the student's attention".*

P2: *"suggest the researcher to develop a choice of agents so that the students can choose".*

P3: *"manages to help the students during teaching and learning", "can be one of the teacher's teaching aids that can be used to vary their teaching method", "can use this blog at home as reference without the presence of teacher".*

P4: *"very interesting, it can sustain the student's interest in learning Surah Al-Fatihah", "the combination of text, video, animation and graphic manage to help the students understand the content of the lesson", "APA developed is also interesting and manageable", "blog design also suits the children's learning."*

P5: *"manages to help the Standard One students master the surah Al-Fatihah", "the animation used is also suitable".*

P6: *"suitable to be applied to secondary school students", "able to help the students in their Koran lessons", "it would be better if this project continues with other surah as well".*

In addition, religious teachers (*N* = 3) were also interviewed to seek their opinions and feedbacks on the developed blog. They were interviewed after they have used it during their classroom session on the teaching of the surah Al-Fatihah. They were asked whether they feel the software was able to to attract the student's interest and possibly enhance the students' motivation in learning how to recite the surah. The data from the interviews were manually transcribed and their responses were coded in relation to the questions posted earlier. Qualitative feedback from the religious teachers were generally positive and encouraging. The blog is deemed as a useful teaching aid in their teaching of the surah by providing a good demonstration and examples of the proper recitation to the students, as highlighted by their comments below:

RT1: *"very useful"... "However, the way of reciting the surah is very important. The students sometimes, did not manage to recite after the APA used in this blog but when the teacher herself recite the surah, the students are willing to follow. I had tried using various voices of imam for students to follow but the students did not manage to recite after him but when I used my own voice, the students can recite after me".*

RT2: *"very useful and suits the students"..."very suitable for all students' levels".*

RT3: *"very suitable; however, the APA's lip movements were not similar to the actual movement. It might be confusing for the students"..."the notes given were very interesting and useful".*

Besides usefulness, the religious teachers firmly believed that the blog also serves as a motivator that attracts the students' interest in learning and reciting of the surah Al-Fatihah. Below are excerpt of their opinions:

RT1: *"agree". "The students will be very attentive when I used this kind of aids for teaching"..."very eager to know more even after the lesson has ended".*

RT2: *"agree"..."managed to attract the students' interest and give them motivation during the lesson"..."very*

useful to support or to give added value to traditional teaching method".
RT3: *"Yes, traditional teaching method makes the students feel bored to learn"..." motivation can be increased with the used of the method that integrates technology".*
The overall findings from the interview of the religious teachers indicate that the blog is appropriate and suitable for use during the teaching and learning of the surah session.

3. Conclusion

This paper details the systematic development and implementation of an instructional design platform, a blog, for the teaching and learning of a religious verse, the *surah* Al-Fatihah. This developenet of the blog consisted of five interrelated phases: analysis, design, development, implementation and evaluation. The overall findings of this study indicate that the blog was well designed, with good and relevant contents. Qualitative and quantitative feedback indicated that the blog will likely to engage the students' interest and sustain their motivation in learning to recite the *surah*. It is concluded that the blog, is a useful teaching aid for teachers and students in teaching and learning the *surah* Al-Fatihah, respectively. It further encouraged that more modern teaching aids or tools are to use in the teaching and learning of religious teaching that is more suited to engage the modern students' learning profile.

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Appendix 1

Section B. APA and its characteristics

Item
The APA developed is able to attract the students' interest in learning.
The APA developed is able to motivate the students in learning.
APA developed is able to make the students learn enjoyably.
APA developed able to encourage students to learn.
The used of APA gives opportunities for the students to learn on their own.
The used of APA engages the students at all times and students are not easily bored with learning.
APA developed used comprehensible language.
The APA gives comprehensible explanations to queries.
APA guides the students to follow the lesson better.
The APA is easily manage and control.

Section C. Blog's interaction design

Item
This blog encourages students to provide feedback.
Students can access the relevant information easily.
The navigation structure of this blog is simple.
The information presented in this blog are easy to follow.
Electronic communication facilities (e.g. comments and e-mail) are available.
There is more than one way to access all the information and content in this blog.
Navigation bar that appears on every page works accordingly.
The blog structure allows the students to focus on what the teachers want them to achieve in learning.
The link to the main page can be found easily.
The banner used in the blog plays a role as focal point that reflects the entire contents of the blog.

Section D. Blog's information design

Item
Learning strategy used manages to attract the students' attention that sustains the student's learning.
Learning strategy used in the blog helps the students to master the content of the lesson.
The information presented is in accordance to the standard and learning objectives of the lesson.
The discussion column assists the students to easily interact with fellow students for further discussion.
Learning standard and objectives were clearly written.
Learning standard and objectives can be achieved effectively.
Learning strategy used is capable in sustaining the students' interest to follow the lessons through.
Learning strategy used is capable in motivating students to follow the lessons.
Learning strategy used is suitable for all levels of students' abilities.
The structure of information are effectively presented.

Section E. Blog's representation design

Item
The blog used a readable font.
The blog screen's design is in accordance to the leaning media.
The choices of colours for background, text and link are appropriate and attractive.
The video used in this website is suitable according to the needs of the learner.
The blog does not have spelling errors.
The graphics used in this blog are interesting and facilitate the learning process.
The animation used is appropriate.
The combination of text, video, graphics and animation reinforced the learning process.
The blog's layout is interesting.

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