Attitude and Usage of Blog as a Determinant to Pre-Service Teachers' Academic Achievement

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Abstract

Blogs are popular form of easy-to-use personal publishing that has attracted millions of bloggers to share their personal thoughts, opinions, and knowledge on the web. The versatility of blogs as a communication medium has attracted interests from educators. Blog service offered to learners and teachers through Internet is an important instrument to provide learners with effective activities and social interaction. Blog technology provides the users with opportunities to create web pages without any design knowledge, write their ideas on these pages, and add comments on the pages. This paper investigates the attitude and use of blog by pre-service teachers as a determinant of their academic performance. The result shows a significant relationship between pre-service teachers' academic performance and the usage of blog. It is therefore pertinent that educator begins to introduce blogging to their classroom activities.

Keywords: Blog, Academic Performance, Attitude, Pre-Service Teachers.

I.   INTRODUCTION

The use of information Communication technology (ICT) is no strange to the average Nigerian child. The issue is how much of ICT is utilized in Nigerian learning institutions. The world is experiencing a wave of social and technological transformation as the society is becoming more oriented to the usage of ICT. Today, we live in a society in which instantaneous worldwide communication through electronic media (internet, computer etc.) have become common. The pervasiveness of these technological devices in our lives, however, tends to obliterate the developing countries. These Information Communication Technologies (ICTs) have blurred the boundaries of our personal worlds. People, though living as citizens of a single nation are now culturally, materially, psychologically and especially, engage with the lives of people in other countries as never before (Gana and Osuji, 2005).

Over the past years, the rapid changes of information and communication technologies have brought the innovations in communication and information sharing. These innovations have contributed to further enhance the teaching and learning process in higher education. Time and space problems have been eliminated through these changes and communication, interaction and information sharing between individuals have also become easier.

Education has been experiencing an increased interest in using Internet and Information Communication Technology (ICT) tools. While ICT has been widely used in distance and online mode of education, its being increasingly used along the face-to-face lectures to augment and support classroom learning, the use of online discussion forum has emerged as a common tool and effective way of engaging students outside the classroom (Balaji and Chakrabarti 2010).

These rapid advances in ICT have brought about activities that serve as a replacement for face-to-face instruction (e.g. virtual course) or as an enhancement of the face-to-face learning experience (i.e. online learning activities that are part of a course given face-to-face). Online learning, web based learning or e-learning according to Khan (1997) is an innovative approach of delivering classroom instruction to a remote audience, using the web as the medium. Ascough (2002) opined that online instruction has the following features:

- It provides a learning experience different than in the traditional classroom because learners are different.
- The communication is via computer and world wide web
- Participation in classroom by learners are different
- The social dynamics of the learning environment is changed and discrimination and prejudice is minimized.

Several more applications are being developed to increase the flexibility of web technology. These applications (Web 2.0) are been adapted into teaching and learning to support asynchronous and synchronous communication, carry multimedia elements and are easy to use (Abimbade , 2011). This Web 2.0 applications has however, opened up new learning possibilities for educational programs and blog is a promising example of these new applications.

Blog was proclaimed "word of the year" in 2004 by Meriam-Webster online dictionary. A blog, short for "weblog", is a web site in which items are posted on a regular basis and usually displayed in reverse

chronological order. Like other media, blogs often focus on a particular subject, such as education, technology, or politics (Pitler, 2007). A blog is "a frequently updated website consisting of dated entries called posts arranged in reverse chronological order so the most recent entry appears first" (Brownstein and Klein, 2006).

There are many types of blogs such as library and education blogs. Altun (2005) classifies blogs with regards to their purposes as follows; Personal, Group, Press, Project management, Library, Institutional and Instructional. The contents are available online and users who have subscribed to blog will write new post, visitors can read the post and submit their comments. Most blogs are primarily textual but there are also audio, video and photo blogs (Wang, 2008).

Since the advent of blog, Blogs offer several potential benefits to the process of teaching and learning. They have a main role in higher education as they motivate learners to explore academic topics more fully. There are many assignments that teachers can use to create meaningful blog activities. These activities are built around skills such as analysing, brainstorming, chronicling, collaborating, communicating and comparing (Lamb and Johnson 2006).

The applications of weblogs in education are almost endless. They are recommended by professors and educators for a number of reasons. Gray and Prahalad (1996) stated that using blogs for instruction

1. Makes learning independent of time and space;
2. encourages learners to be active throughout the
3. course period;
4. helps learners improve their writing;
5. captures changes in thinking;
6. invites people to collaborate;
7. makes education more informal;
8. also involves external people;
9. facilitates the use of images;
10. reduces costs;
11. encourages people to try out things;
12. self-publishing encourages learners to be more responsible and thoughtful.

Zare-ee, Shekarey and Vajargah (2009) indicated the following benefits:

- Blogs can contain links, images, sound tracks and the like, making them much more interesting than traditional textbook;
- They spread ideas rapidly, making them an efficient tool for information transmission in the current rapidly changing world;
- They provide room for the right of freedom of expression, which is a crucial element for any democratic educational system.

Blogs in the classroom are sometimes used as "online diaries" where students write about their own experiences or share their ideas related to course topics. However, the power of the blog comes when others interact with an individual's posts, creating a forum for discussion and conversation. Blogs may contain the written word, but more blog providers such as blogger.com offers services such as posting pictures and hyperlinks to other websites or uploading multimedia files.

In contrast to more traditional forums for online discussion, blogs are open to the world to see. This provides visibility for students to share their ideas with the larger world. Quible (2005) states that blogs are natural in business communication courses because they enable students share their writing with a larger audience. Glogoff (2003) noted that students used the class blog for a purpose other than from what is initially intended, causing them to create a new blog for a more general audience. Blogs also have the facility to provide readers with the opportunity to interact with the page, which is not a common feature of standard web pages. Readers become the co-authors of blogs through adding their opinions and comments.

Instructional activities supported with blogs provide democratic environments where learners can present their opinions and comments freely. In traditional instructional settings, negative implications stemming from the attitudes of teachers, course contents, student characteristics and number of students interfere with students' ability to deliver their ideas efficiently. Gülbahar (2005) claims that students prefer the virtual environment in order to pose their questions and comments, as they consider in-class discussions insufficient. In this respect, blogs can be used as interactive tools where individuals have equal opportunity to share their ideas and experiences, and present themselves to the social environment efficiently.

Instructional blogs can be used as tools to provide students with constant feedback outside the classroom. Feedbacks concerning students' in-class activities include significant messages which could affect students' future learning endeavours. Since blogs are independent of time and place, they serve as efficient tools to provide students with feedback outside the classroom as well.

Another important feature of blogs is their structure enriching social interaction among teachers and students. In Abdullah (2007) According to many cognitive learning theorists, assigning meaning to information

is efficiently realized through individuals' interaction with the social environment. Researches on case where blog have been used in the classroom suggest that blog can enhance a variety of courses in different ways. Glogoff (2003) incorporates the use of blog in communication distance learning courses whose participants were scattered across the country. Students claimed that the use of blog in the course helped them to learn more about technology and also made the material in the course more relevant to them. Likewise in a foreign language class, writing and reading blogs are one way in which students can gain different perspectives about the target culture which they are studying (Ducate, 2005).

Despite the many advantages, Al-hebaishi (2012) stated that blogs also have some disadvantages:

- Limited opportunity to access the Internet outside the campus, some learners may go to an Internet café to work on their assignments;
- The frequent need to develop more advanced computer programs in order to make full use of the content published in a certain blog;
- Technical problems due to Internet downtime service such as poor connection speed and difficulties to log onto the blog or post other types of files like pictures, videos…etc. ;
- Lack of feedback and correction as they increase instructors' workload when making corrections and comments, especially in the case of large classes;
- The poor language used by some learners who are unable to write down their ideas in a compelling, correct and clear manner;
- Lack of privacy, learners should be instructed neither to post personal photos or information, nor to leak private matters to the public;
- The issue of accuracy, blogs are created and produced by individuals, so they may include biased or inaccurate information;
- The issue of accessibility, blogs is publicly accessible, strangers are able to read messages or leave inappropriate comments.

Attitude and blogging

Student attitude towards educational blogging is a well-researched topic. Based on the premise that attitude determines behaviors and on the work of Everett Rogers in Abimbade (2011), O'Malley and McCraw (1999) suggest that attitude towards blog is determined by three factors: the prior educational condition, characteristics of students and perceived characteristics of the blog. Students will then act in accordance to their attitude towards educational blog.

According to Adedoja and Abimbade (2013), the acceptance of blog depends on the attitude of students and the instructors towards it. In Kun, Jamie, David and Niamboue (2013) various studies have attempted to investigate learners' attitudes toward the use of blogs in higher education (Coutinho, 2007; Ellison and Wu, 2008; Halic, Lee, Paulus and Spencer, 2010; William & Jacobs, 2004). William and Jacobs (2004) reported that a majority of MBA students at the Harvard Law School and Queensland University of Technology indicated a positive attitude toward the use of blogs in teaching and believed that the use of blogs contributed to their learning. Teachers and pre-service teachers also show a positive attitude toward the use of blogs in teaching and learning. Yang (2009) found that Taiwanese English as Foreign Language (EFL) teachers appreciated the use of blogs for promoting critical thinking skills, reporting that the use of blogs for discussion was more effective than face-to-face discussion. Coutinho (2007) and Zeng and Harris (2005) obtained similar results.

Gender and Blogging

Gender appears to be a fundamental category for ordering and classifying social relations in the world (Evans, 1994). Over the years, researches have shown that male dominate in the use of computer even in a situation where male and female are given equal access, men are more likely to be the main user of ICT than women (Pitler, 2007). However, recent Research have found out that the original gender gap in computer and Internet use appears to have narrowed to the point of nonexistence, DiMaggio, Hargittai and Celeste (2004), Hargittai (2008), Feller B. (2006) suggest that men and women use these technologies in different ways. Fallow (2005) suggest that men are more avid consumer of online information than women, while women and more enthusiastic communicator. A quick survey of some others sources suggests that male and female bloggers and now more visible on the internet.

II.   STATEMENT OF PROBLEM

Although blogs are considered to be one of the best ways of combining Information Communication Technology (ICT) with teaching and learning methodologies in a classroom, The application of academic blogging in higher education, particularly in Nigeria is still at its infancy. The majority of Nigerian pre-service teachers are neither familiar, nor skillful in employing this tool in the process of learning. Exposure to this tool during pre-service

preparation program is thought to be helpful in promoting willingness to use it for classroom activities and also to enhance their academic performance. It is in light of this that this study attempts to examine the attitude and usage of blog by pre-service teacher as it affects their academic performance.

III.   HYPOTHESES
- There is no significant difference between male and female pre-service teachers on the usage of blog for instruction.
- There is no significant relationship between attitude and pre-service teachers' usage of blog
- There is no significant relationship between usage of blog and pre-service teachers' academic performance.

IV.   METHODOLOGY
An ex-post facto research design was adopted for this study. Two hundred 400 level pre-service teachers of the school of language of Adeyemi College of Education Ondo, participated in the study. The pre-service teachers are offering DET 402 (Radio, Television and Film Utilization) course. The course blog for DET 402 is an elective course in the teacher preparation program and was created in the 2011-2012 academic session. The course is a 10 week syllabus. The participants attended face-to-face lectures and they were engaged in blogging which was used as an alternative for classroom discussion and submission of assignments and comments. The primary purpose of the blog was to examine how the usage of academic blogging affects students' academic performance in the course. The blog name for the course was "DET 402: Radio Television and Film Utilization". The course blog was developed by the instructor who provided participants with up-to-date issues which were integrated into the course content in a comprehensive way. All blogging activities were assigned. Participants were encouraged to comment on the posts and to print out the course contents.

V.   RESEARCH INSTRUMENT AND DATA ANALYSIS
The research instrument used for this study includes students' achievement test in DET 402 and Blog utilization questionnaire (BUQ). Data collected was analysed using t-Test and Pearson Product Moment Correlation to determine relationship between variables. The level of significance for the study was set at 0.05.

VI.   RESULT
A total of 200 surveys were distributed to languages pre-service teachers. All participants responded resulting in a 100% response rate.

Hypothesis 1: There is no significant difference between male and female pre-service teachers on the usage of blog for instruction.

Table 1: T-test on gender utilization of blog for instruction

	Gender	N	MEAN	STD DEV.	T	df
Utilization	Male	86	47.3529	14.10649	1.625	198
	Female	114	43.7807	16.19557		

Table 1 reveals non-significant difference between male and female pre-service teachers in the usage of blog for instruction (t = 1.625 > 0.05). Therefore, the null hypothesis is not rejected.

Hypothesis 2: There is no significant relationship between pre-service teachers' usage of blog and attitude

Table 2: Pearson Product-Moment Correlation Analysis on students' usage of blog and attitude

	N	MEAN	Deviation	R	Remark
Attitude	200	45.325	15.36652	.295	Not sig
Usage	200	44.525	8.44666		

Table 2 shows that there is no significant relationship between pre-service teachers' usage of blog and their attitude (r = 0.295>0.05). Therefore, the null hypothesis is not rejected.

Hypothesis 3: There is no significant relationship between usage of blog and pre-service teachers' academic performance.

Table 3: Pearson Product-Moment Correlation Analysis on Students' usage of blog and academic performance

	N	MEAN	Deviation	R	Remark
Usage	200	45.325	15.36652	0.013	Sig.
Achievement	200	10.65	3.59054		

Table 3 reveals a significant relationship between usage of blog and pre-service teachers' academic performance ($r = 0.013 < 0.05$). Therefore the hypothesis is rejected.

VII.   DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

This research investigated the attitude and usage of blog as a determinant of pre-service teachers' academic performance.

Gender and Usage of Blog

The study reveals there is no significant difference between male and female pre-service teachers in the usage of blog. This finding agrees with Hurley and Vosburg (1997), Kiano and Salani (2004), and Kay (2006) that there is no significant difference between male and female students' use of technology. Both male and female are moderately willing to use the technology for their learning experiences.

Attitude and Usage of Blog

The study reveals there is no significant relationship between pre-service teachers' attitude and usage of blog. This goes to show that pre-service teachers know the importance, benefit of the technology such that these demographic variables in this day and time no longer stand as issues that affect their attitude. This finding contradicts a study by Gregory (2007), who examined how effectively students in various faculties use blog and the predominate factors that influences the use of educational blogs. The result of the study shows perceived ease of use and relative advantage on students' attitude towards blogging. However, this study supports the findings of William and Jacob (2008) that attitude do not affect students usage of social media for instruction.

Usage of Blog and Students' Performance

The study shows there is a significant relationship between the two variables. The result indicates that the use of academic blogging is an important factor to the eventual performance of students in classroom activities. The more Nigerian schools embraces the usage of blog, the better the performance to be expected. Effective utilization will avert what Ige (2009) described as a "great danger and bleak landscape for poor and non-existence use of ICT applications in school. Further studies also reveal that the use of technology relies on the attitude towards such technology. According to Abimbade (2011), the acceptance and use of blog depends on the attitude of students towards it and this in turn affects their learning outcome.

In Conclusion, although it could be argued that the results cannot be extrapolated to reflect the views of the entire population, the findings of the study provides a degree of guidance for educators and stakeholders to taking advantage of the benefits of blogging and its positive effect on students achievement.

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