

**ТІЛ БІЛІМІ**

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**BLOGGING: EDUCATIONAL TRANSFORMATION TO SELF-DIRECTED COOPERATIVE LEARNING**

**Abstract:** Blogs provide a good number of advantages over the word-processed documents. These include the ability to share the elements widely, receive feedback via comments and to provide hyperlinks to a wide range of digital artefacts such as podcasts, videos, photographs and digital documents. Blogs enable special features such as tag clouds which enable blog readers to easily navigate themselves on the blog and identify whether the post is of interest to them. Blogs are, also, easy to access everywhere and anytime as long as the Internet is available. Finally, blogs are invaluable means to publish continuous, up-to-date information online about ideas, progress and development which can be essentially effective in teaching.

**Key words:** blogs, communal constructivism, constructivism, digital literacies, ICT technologies in learning, learner-centered learning, paradigm shift, Web 2.0.

The incorporation of Web 2.0 technology in Educational context is a gradual process. Everyday, more and more educators acknowledge the value it can offer. A highly digitised world requires more skills to be acquired in order, not only to survive but also to make the most of it. With the reference to the opportunities of Web 2.0 technologies in teaching, Wheeler [1, p. 107] endorses the following viewpoint:

“Blogs and wikis and other hosted services enable users to generate and broadcast content, share resources, connect into communities of interest, and generally communicate more effectively to a potential worldwide audience. The potential of this “architecture of participation” is gradually being harnessed by teachers worldwide to promote deeper and more engaging learning within socially rich and collaborative online environments”.

Having accepted this view this article is devoted to provide more understanding on blogging as a new pedagogical strategy to integrate into teaching and learning. Moreover, the post aims to recognise the potential blogging has in educational transformation by presenting and evaluating some empirical evidence.

Before the discussion of the opportunities the Web 2.0 platforms and the use of blogs in education, it might be useful to connect them to Digital Literacies. The definition of being literate appears to have a different meaning

in the highly prevailing digital age. Therefore the idea behind being literate presumably means that one should develop technological skills along with being able to write, read and calculate. The immense and rapid growth of ICT revealed new opportunities in education, therefore there is a potential for the transformational change in the Teaching and Learning process with the help of digital literacy and digital literacies. It is important, however, not to conflate these two terms since they have different purposes.

The attempts to reach a consensus in the definition of Digital Literacy have been practiced since Gilster first mentioned it in 1997 [2]. Yet, it has to be acknowledged that a complex term has its echoes in such definitions as information and computer literacy. As for example, when we talk about the importance of digital literacy we would mention that in order to participate and thrive in a digital world one should be equipped with skills such as using ICT tools and a good understanding of media literacy to use the online content skilfully[3]. The same could be said about ICT literacy. Therefore, digital literacy, I would maintain is not only being an expert in the usage of digital devices and information it is also about being critically aware of the advantages a pervasive computing age discloses as well as disadvantages it causes. Moreover, understanding the influence digital innovations have made on the functions of the society we live in is crucial, we now do things we could not do before.

Digital Literacies are pivotal skills to acquire in order to be an active player in a digital society distinct with the prevalence of technology [4]. When talking about the future of education it is important to acknowledge that it can absolutely be diverse from what it is now. In this respect, Prensky[5] maintains that the kids being educated today should be more future-oriented; this can also refer university students, with them being taught with their future-employability in mind. Therefore, there seems to be much Web 2.0 can enable educators to do in this sense.

The definition of the World Wide Web 2.0 can be excessively broad, most importantly it is a platform where users can generate content, communicate, collaborate, construct knowledge, reflect on one's idea, enrich the content and navigate the information [6].

While researchers in the education community maintain the importance of a learner-centred environment, it seems that classrooms today look the same as they did years ago with the teacher as a knowledge-deliverer [7]. Therefore, considering the fact that it has almost been two decades since such prominent authors as Barr and Tagg[8] argued about paradigm shift: from instruction giving (teaching paradigm) to discovery learning (learning paradigm) the question raises 'why do teachers not take the advantage of blogging and foster a collaborative student-centred learning environment?'

Because emerging Web 2.0 software applications allow users to get actively involved in creating content or reflecting on one's content by critically analysing it, students are exposed to interactive learning [9], as for example, blogs urge readers to comment, add ideas or criticize the content if necessary. This encourages collaborative knowledge sharing which in turn brings about social constructivism when learners' take ownership of their own learning [10]. In essence, as scholars suggest with the help of blogs, students are likely to learn from each other as much as they learn from their instructor and textbooks [11]. Put simply, blogs have a potential to cause fundamental shifts in the educational paradigm from instruction giving to facilitating the knowledge construction.

The theory of knowledge creating by refashioning traditional transmission of information from teacher to learner permeates a wide range of literature [see 12; 13].

The knowledge construction along with cooperation can be encapsulated in the term of communal constructivism [14]. Communal constructivism is characterized not only by the construction of shared knowledge in an interactive environment, but also by contributing to the knowledge of other members of the community: 'learning with and for others' [14; p. 4]. The authors also state that being engaged in these processes students will not simply create their own information but also actively participate in building the knowledge that is beneficial for other learners and teachers as well as triggering intellectual exchange.

Looking from the scope of communal constructivist theory it seems that *blogging* can be beneficially utilized for knowledge building. It is, perhaps, widely accepted that Weblog (blog) is a digital space that enables immense collaboration online [9] and that there are a number of benefits of using blogs as an educational medium. It is essential here to indicate the term of *blogging* as a continuous phenomenon that practices reflective writing with a deep understanding of the content for the potential audience in mind [9]. While reading someone else's blogs and posting one's own blogs in a non-reflective way does not define the *blogging*.

An interesting fact is that a published blog post has a state of being unfinished and stays as a published draft, because blogs tend to encourage reflective writing when the readers provide feedback the blog continues [9]. Therefore as long as the post stays in the blog it has a potential to be enriched with the expertise and understanding on respective content. The blogs are also beneficial in that they allow time to write [9]. This encourages students to think more profoundly on the given topic, critically analyse it in consequence as a result of what out of classroom domain activities can be thus fostered.

Some educators maintain that *blogging* in a learning and teaching context can make a teacher's job easier as it makes learning visible and builds a space

‘where a greater understanding of student meaning making can be gained’ [15, p.13]. Paulus et al. propose three strategies with the help of which communication on blogs benefits the instructor to ‘contextualise instruction’ [15, p.13]. The foremost point is that by reading students’ blogs a teacher is able to recognise the issues a particular student is struggling with and subsequently learning goals to use to overcome the constraints. Further, since it is not possible to answer all the questions students may raise during the traditional lecture, the teacher is able to provide the answers in blogs. Finally, the teacher as an instructor is able to keep track of a students’ perception about expert knowledge.

It is believed that blogging opportunities for self-representation and social interactivity will empower students to own their learning, on the one hand, and reinforce shared learning community on the other [16]. Technology literate students’ being ready to adopt such tools explains the appeal of blogs in educational discourse [17].

Having listed a range of opportunities blogging can offer as a Web 2.0 platform it would be important to have a glimpse of the evidence based on empirical research studies.

Immediacy and commentary based systems in blogging encompass the ideal environment for the development of reflective and analytical thinking [18]. Accordingly, blogs as one of the Web 2.0 tools can be an essential complement for other pedagogical strategies varying the traditional way of teaching and learning by encouraging students to participate and develop critical thinking and writing [16]. In their extensive report on new paradigms in the teaching and learning of accounting Joshi and Chugh[16] claim that the blogs offer an unique opportunity for authentic learning that helps to develop generic analytical and problem-solving skills. The authors provide ample understanding of how educational blogs can be used in an accounting context by proposing the strategies for the assessment and formative feedbacks. They also highlight the usefulness of blogs for the educator to track the communication between members, to organise the course content, keep archives of course materials. They also comprehensively outline the potential limitations blogs have: some problems may hinder learners’ reflectiveness such as interpersonal issues, irrelevant information provided in the blog which has a potential to misguide participants. Therefore, although blogs appear to boost a high order of learning it is an educator’s responsibility to effectively facilitate the process, moreover intervene when necessary.

By receiving reflective comments on published posts in blogs students gain more insights about the topic they are exploring [11]. This opinion emerged from the empirical research study conducted on a MBA course in Harvard University where students were to use blogs as an educational tool and were formally assessed in the end. The twofold measurements including

questionnaire (quantitative) and written comments on each question (qualitative) enabled them to collect substantially meaningful data that further culminated in extensive findings. The results of analyses suggest that, overall, the MBA blog increased interactivity between students. Interestingly, the participants admitted that the experience was so beneficial that they would take part in such an activity even if they would receive only formative feedback from the lecturer. Apparently, blogs serve as a learning aid and create an environment for self-directed learning where students participate actively in their own knowledge construction. However, as authors admit, the serious weakness of the study was that there were not enough instructions on the blog use in the beginning of the study, therefore some students failed to comply with the blogging requirements of the course.

Another empirical research study proves that blogging encourages peer-to-peer interaction, and that there is a positive correlation between peer comments on blogs and academic achievement in the course subject [19]. The quasi-method experiment carried out in Taiwan employed undergraduate students majoring in Electronics aged 20 to 26. The participants were surveyed twice, in the fall 2006 (n=71) and the spring 2007 (n=83). The aim of the study was to investigate the use of blogs in peer learning academic achievements, gaining motivation and community interaction.

In order to test the proposed hypotheses the study comprised of an experiment and a control group, those who kept their blog for interactive writing and those who used solitary writing respectively. The use of control-groups adds on a clear strength of the used methodology that allows researchers to overcome the confounding effects of uncontrolled variables (Schneider et al, 2007). Quantitative data of the research was collected by the Likert-scale questionnaire to explore students' attitudes towards blogging as a supplementary learning tool. In order to check whether blogging helps in developing reflective writing the content analysis was conducted based on the produced comments from each student's blog. It was revealed that some comments did not comprise of analytical evaluation, therefore a proportion of more than a half carried reflective sense. Overall, findings suggest that learners have a positive perception about the use of blogs. Interactive use of blogs in HE compared to solitary use is more beneficial, however as the results imply interactive blogging did not influence the motivation of the students. In essence, the report by Yang and Chang [19] benefits from rigorous research with the application of measurements such as t-test to assess the statistical difference in the means of two groups, multivariate analysis of variance allowed them to view the whole picture of possible joint influence that independent variables (years of computer experience, daily usage of computer, web experience) have on dependent variables (solitary blogging, interactive blogging) [20]. These facts ensure the robustness of the derived findings.

Limitations of employed design lay within the constraints of quasi-experiment design, which is tailored to the availability of participants and location, therefore the study may lack replicability.

Making an assumption that students' perceived learning and sense of community in blogging affect the actual comprehension Halic and her colleagues [17] investigated the supportiveness of blogs as a tool. Their survey research findings suggest that blogs facilitate students' learning; moreover it was revealed that authenticity of learning is fostered with the help of blogs because learners think about the concepts outside the classroom domain. It seems, therefore, as a result of the study, that the sense of community has a considerable role in student perception of learning: the stronger the feeling of being part of the education community the higher perceived learning is. Even though nothing about the use of the blogs sense of community has been proved to have a positive correlation for the higher order of learning [21], most of the study participants agreed that conversations in a blog helped them to extend their understanding of special concepts outside of the classroom and to share and learn diverse perspectives on the content from peers. However, the results are contrary to that of Yang and Chang [19], they show that although students admitted to blogs being useful in learning, the comments on the blog provided by students were not so much valuable. The researchers explained this behaviour, as students may have perceived the main content of articles and videos as a central learning source. This can refer to one of the risks of using a blog as it can become the same route of learning but with a new medium, which does not foster self-direction, and constructive learning. This means that students will only consume the information provided in blogs without the engagement in the content instead. Therefore, it seems important to have clear pedagogical strategies whilst seeking to integrate blogging into learning. Having a clear-cut objective in using a blog is important: whether to keep it as a repository of materials or facilitator of reflective thinking and writing.

Importantly the study is a noteworthy contribution to the understanding of students' expectations when using the blogs. However, there are some limitations to mention concerning the research design. Although sampling technique is not explicitly indicated it is apparent that researchers used convenience sampling which underscores the external validity of the research. That the study was implemented adopting a truly positivistic approach, taking the process of blogging as a natural world built up of facts, confines the research findings to be focused on the meanings of social interaction between people in their context [22]. The research findings would have carried more insights if the participants were treated more holistically allowing examination at a deeper contextual level [22].

The purpose of presenting empirical research studies was to briefly outline how blogging is being used as an educational tool in Higher

Educational context. However, as it was mentioned in each study there are some limitations to consider, still that the use of the Web 2.0 technology is just emerging the research studies carry substantial value by providing insights into how effective blogging phenomenon could be beneficial in integration into teaching and learning.

As any educational tool blogging has its limitations. The pocket study skills on Blogs by Andy Pulman[23] mentions that blogs can have inaccurate information which can misguide readers who would assume the post as factual knowledge, while it can be the opinion and ideas of the blogger. Therefore, it is important to keep in mind that the information on the blog is checked on accuracy to mitigate negative ramifications of unreliable information. Since the teacher becomes an initiator of using blogs in classroom context it is her/his responsibility to have control over the infringement of copyright due to incorrect attribution of information. Although blogging seems so easy to incorporate into learning it should not be simplistically assumed that the use of the blogs is always successful. The teacher's role of keeping a track on students' blogs and fostering the communication there becomes that of connector, not just the assessor. The instructor as blog facilitator should sometimes forge ahead by commenting to drive the further discussion within a blog community [9]. Moreover, it has been proven that active participation in blogs can be hindered due to some intrapersonal issues, participants failed to understand the meaning of blog integration into their learning [24]. Therefore, the meticulous analysis of potential impediments whilst using blogs with a target group in mind should be implemented before its incorporation. Moreover, it is essential for design of the blog to be thoroughly planned with prepared resources, arguments to be proposed and a formative/summative assessment to be done [16]. These complexities may appear difficult to overcome, however ample evidence and comprehensive arguments show that blogging is an essential practice to be integrated into learning process.

Nonetheless, despite listed obstacles, it can be acknowledged that having clear reasoning behind blogging processes with established pedagogical goals that align with educational practices is an unique advantage to use in facilitating knowledge creation.

It is undoubtedly true that in the last decade there has been a rapid innovation in technology which caused Web 2.0 platforms to be so easy to use, including Weblogs, Wikis, podcasts which reveal a broad spectrum of opportunities in educational context. As it was discussed earlier blogging encourages students to assimilate their previous existing knowledge with new concepts by linking unfamiliar sources to familiar ones. Some studies have also proved that blogging is a valuable approach in enhancing writing skills in a foreign language. Although it is out of the scope of this discussion, the research

carried out in Spain [25] has given an insight of how blogs can be integrated in language learning, especially writing in a collaborative environment.

Overall, as it was discussed earlier in the post *blogging* encourages a high level of autonomy and peer interaction at the same time. With all the opportunities in mind, blogs could have a potential to serve as a transformational learning tool that will enable genuine student-centred learning where students take responsibility for their own learning, academics in education have been aspiring to achieve throughout the decades.

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**БЛОГ ЖҮЙЕСІН ҚОЛДАНУ: ӨЗІНДІК КООПЕРАТИВТІК  
ОҚУДЫҢ БІЛІМ БЕРУДЕГІ ТРАНСФОРМАЦИЯСЫ**

**Аңдатпа:** Блогтардың дәстүрлі электронды құжаттардың қолданысынан бірқатар артықшылығы бар. Бұлардың ішіне оқу

материалдарын оңайшылықпен тарату, жазылған комментарийлер арқылы оқушылардың түсініктемелерін алу, сондай-ақ бейнелер, фотосуреттер және сандық құжаттар сияқты сандық артефактарды кең ауқымда гиперсілтемелер арқылы қамтамасыз ету мүмкіндігі кіреді. Блогтар бірқатар ерекшеліктер ұсынады, солардың бірі блог ішінде керекті құжаттарды навигация жасау үшін құрылғантегтер бұлты. Сонымен қатар, блогтардың қолжетімділігінде де айтарлықтай артықшылық бар -интернет желісі бар болған жағдайда оңайшылықпен қолдануға болады. Жалпы, блогтар ілгері, қазіргі заманғы ақпаратты таратудыңбағажетпесқұралыболыптабылады .

**Кілт сөздер:** блогтар, коммуналдық конструктивизм, конструктивизм, сандық сауаттылық, оқытудағы ақпараттық технологиялар, оқушыға бағытталған оқыту, парадигма ауысымы, Web 2.0 платформасы.

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### **БЛОГИ: ОБРАЗОВАТЕЛЬНАЯ ТРАНСФОРМАЦИЯ К САМОСТОЯТЕЛЬНОМУ КООПЕРАТИВНОМУ ОБУЧЕНИЮ**

**Аннотация:** Блоги имеют множество преимуществ над текстовым процессом. Они включают в себя возможность делиться ресурсами в широких пределах, получать обратную связь через комментарии и предоставлять гиперссылки на широкий спектр цифровых артефактов, таких как подкасты, видео, фотографии и цифровые документы. Специальные функции блога позволяют использовать специальные возможности, такие как облако тегов, которые, в свою очередь, позволяют читателям блога легко ориентироваться и находить то, что им интересно. Блоги, также, легко-доступны везде и в любое время при подсоединению к Интернету. И, наконец, блоги являются неоценимым средством для публикации непрерывной, актуальной информации в Интернете, что может быть существенно эффективным в обучении.

**Ключевые слова:** блоги, коммунальный конструктивизм, цифровая грамота, информационные технологии в обучении, индивидуально-ориентированный подход в обучении, изменение парадигмы, платформа Web 2.0

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### **CONTEMPORARY TRENDS IN TRANSLATION AREA**