Emerging Issues in the Utilization of Weblogs in Higher Education Classrooms

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This paper examines the emerging issues in the utilization of weblogs in Philippine higher education and how these issues affect the performance of students. This study used a modified Delphi method. The Delphi panel consisted of 12 experts in the integration of technology, particularly blogs, in their teaching. The study yielded the following issues: (a) limited time and access to computer and Internet; (b) tedious preparation, maintenance and management of blogs; (c) technological difficulties of students; (d) low level of interaction among students; (e) digression in comments posted; and (f) not used to online teaching. These issues may curb the optimized benefit of weblogs as a teaching-learning tool. The results of this study also highly recommend the use of standardized assessment tools for richer academic contributions of weblog activities. The study presents enlightening insights on the place and function of blogging in the academe.

Learning is eclectic. It is not confined inside the four walls of the classroom. In our contemporary time, there are other unconventional learning platforms that teachers may explore and utilize to make learning meaningful for students. Tong and Trinidad (2005) observed that in the innovative classrooms, technology facilitated the interactions and connectedness between the students and the worldwide community.

Technology is ubiquitous in today's generation. Inevitably, it lends its mechanical arms to almost everything, including education. Technological advancements have provided the impetus for facilitating learning outside the typical classroom and for allowing more opportunities for skills development. Saeed, Yang, and Sinnappan's (2009) findings suggest that today's learners are flexible in stretching their learning styles such that they are able to accommodate varying instructional strategies including the use of emerging web technologies. They point out that the learners of this generation are flexible enough to explore varying technologies and that their technology preferences are not limited to a particular tool. Lending (2010) also recognized the importance of dealing with individual differences of students when she asserts that the learner-centered educational philosophy, which underpins the use of wiki in the classroom, puts the responsibility of learning on the students themselves.

With the emergence of Web 2.0, tools such as wikis and blogs, among others, have become unconventional learning media. Gunawardena et al. (2009) have identified that the essential features of Web 2.0 tools foster interaction, collaboration, and contribution. The study of Ennis and Gambrell (2010) revealed that majority of the students want to use blogs and podcasts for school-related purposes. In fact, Quible (2005) asserted that the use of blogs in the educational world will undoubtedly continue to expand rapidly. He adds that blogs will become a rich educational tool to create classroom activities.

Andergassen (2009) identified four major points that motivate students to blog, namely: writing and publishing on the web, testing the new technology, communicating with friends/family, and making social contacts in web platforms. Pineda (2007) mentioned some of the merits of blogs: they are used as springboard to tap student opinions and insights, as an extension of class recitation, and as a teaching/reference material. He specified that blogs are a rich instructional tool for the following reasons: ease of creation, accessibility of equipment, clear authorship and ownership of ideas, cost-effective overall outputs and a high level of participation among students. Other studies mentioned the following benefits: "weblogs and podcasts enhance . . . learning experience" (Ennis & Gambrell, 2010, para. 33); "blogging is an efficient approach to learning" (Goh, Quek, & Lee, 2010, p. 96); and "it helps in learning and thinking and offers a space outside of the class where students could 'meet,' creating a sense of community" (Sharma & Xie, 2008, p. 141).

Despite the many benefits, research has revealed that there are issues that need to be addressed in the utilization of blogs. One of these issues pertains to the competency of the educators in using weblogs. According to Quible (2005), the slowness with which blogs are being integrated into the classroom is probably not a result of instructors' reluctance to use them; rather, it is more likely a result of instructors' unfamiliarity with blogs and their almost unlimited use in the instructional process. Greener (2009) mentioned that the reluctance of role-modeling effective e-learning is about fear and anxiety, especially of being shown as incompetent in a class comprised of the net generation.

The unclear and varying purposes of weblogs also pose challenges in their utilization. The study of Leslie and Murphy (2008) revealed that the distinction between social and instructional purposes is often not clearly defined when using weblogs. They noted that in

many cases, students used blogging for social purposes and these were highly motivating in terms of continuing to blog; hence, considerable overlap exists between social and instructional purposes. Hemmi, Bayne, and Land (2009) found that along ways of writing and presentation of identity, the tutors were concerned about the nature and purpose of pedagogical blogging while the students had issues on the negotiation of identity and voice within the blog. They concluded that the volatile modes of online interaction enabled by the new social media perhaps sit uncomfortably within existing higher education practice.

Students' behavior toward the use of weblogs is influenced by the limitations emanating from the technology itself and by their educators' strategy in preparing them for online activity. The study of Sharma and Xie (2008) identified that the negative experiences of students in using blogs were attributed to lack of privacy and lack of structure in blogging procedures that resulted in frustration and decreased motivation to engage in the activity. Similarly, the research of Chuang (2010) revealed that students were faced with the dilemma of opening their work to a broader audience for the purpose of rich social discourse or of keeping their work within the safer closed network community. Students' unfamiliarity with the medium of blogging may have limited most of their reflective posts to sharing what may be considered surface statements about their learning (Leslie & Murphy, 2008). Huang, Huang, and Yu (2011) concluded that students were not able to meet the expectations in some online cooperative activities due to unfamiliarity with some functions. They asserted that, to achieve effective learning from online cooperative setting, some basic skills need to be taught and developed by educators. While Hanson, Thackeray, Barnes, Neiger, and McIntyre (2008) recognized the advantages of using Web 2.0 environment for health educators, they emphasize that there are still challenges as evidenced by disparities in Internet access and poor quality information.

This paper attempts to identify the emerging issues of utilizing weblogs among higher education classrooms by teachers. Specifically, this study aims to address the following problems: (1) the issues encountered by higher education teachers in the utilization of weblogs in the classroom and (2) the effect of these issues on the performance of learners in the class activities. It also includes relevant insights to educators on how blogs can be maximized in their teaching.

The theory of social constructivism and the concept of scaffolding are important considerations for this research. Powell and Kalina (2009) elaborated that social constructivism allows learners to construct ideas through interaction with the teacher and other students and that scaffolding, on the other hand, is an assisted learning process that supports Vygotsky's zone of proximal development, or getting to the next level of understanding, of each student with the assistance of teachers, peers and other adults.

Orienting newcomers to technology, tools, and conventions of discourse and structuring participation for success can help them strengthen their efficacy and can make them more successful in their interactions (Gunawardena et al., 2009). If educators are confidently engaged with students as they integrate technology tools in their teaching, students will find more meaning and relevance in their learning activities. It is tapping into their interest; thus, it can propel forward their motivation to learn. Sim and Hew (2010) recommended that there is a need for continual effort to study participants in other countries to better understand how different geographical and socio-cultural contexts may influence the use of blogs.
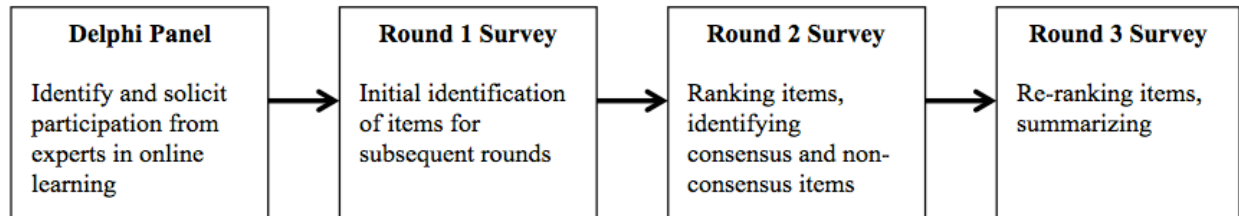
Method

Research Design

This study employed web-based modified Delphi method to capture the judgment of experts in the utilization of weblogs. The Delphi method is an iterative process to collect and distill the anonymous judgments of experts using a series of data collection and analysis techniques interspersed with feedback (Skulmoski, Hartman, & Krahn, 2007). The web-based survey tools used in this study are Google Drive and Gmail. The process suggested by Wilhelm (2001, as cited by So & Bonk, 2010) involves three rounds of information and consensus gathering. This is shown in Figure 1.

Selection of the Panel Members

Experts from selected higher education institutions in the country who have been integrating Information and Communications Technology, specifically blogs, served as the panel members. In their literature review, Baker, Lovell, and Harris (2006) observed that there is a limited consensus as to what an expert is. They added that defining people as experts may not be about who they are but what attributes that they possess. Adler and Ziglio (1996) proposed the following criteria in the selection of experts: knowledge and experience in the issues under investigation, capacity and willingness to participate, sufficient time to participate in the Delphi, and use of effective communication skills. The panel members were identified through the assistance of the Foundation for Information Technology Education (FIT-ED), a private, non-profit organization based in Makati City, Philippines, whose mission was to help people and communities in harnessing the information and communication technologies for learning. The

Figure 1
Delphi Rounds

Delphi Panel	Round 1 Survey	Round 2 Survey	Round 3 Survey
Identify and solicit participation from experts in online learning	Initial identification of items for subsequent rounds	Ranking items, identifying consensus and non-consensus items	Re-ranking items, summarizing

initially selected panel members made the referrals. Because expert observation was sought, a purposive sample was employed. There were 12 teachers who participated in the first round. According to Skulmolski et al. (2007), where the group is homogeneous, a smaller sample of between 10 and 15 may yield sufficient results. In the second and third rounds, there were only nine and 10 participants, respectively, who committed themselves as panel members. Nworie (2011) stated that attrition can be a major issue in the Delphi method due to the time involvement.

Procedure and Data Analysis

For the first round survey, it purposely identified the various emerging issues in utilizing weblogs among higher education classrooms by teachers. The responses were thematically organized and served as the basis for the subsequent rounds. The survey was sent through Google Drive to maintain anonymity and confidentiality of responses. The questions were constructed through the form application of Google Drive after which these were sent to the participants through their e-mail addresses. When the participants finished answering, they submitted their forms without the researcher's knowledge of the sender since Google Drive organizes the answers in a spreadsheet right after a participant clicks the "submit" button in the form, hence, the anonymity of responses. For background purposes, the survey includes information about the respondents on the following: respective departments in the university; courses where they have integrated blogs; and the number of years that they have been using blogs in their teaching. Particularly, the panel members were tasked to answer the following questions: (a) "What challenges/issue have you observed in the course of the utilization of blogs?" and (b) "How did these issues affect the performance of the students?" This was the major framework of the study. They were also asked to state the purpose of blog use, to identify the factors contributing to the emergence of the issues,

and to cite ways of addressing the issues. The responses were used in the discussion of results.

The panel members were initially given four weeks to complete and to return their responses, but the time frame was extended for two weeks to enable all 12 panel members to accomplish the form. The first problem generated 22 statements while the second problem had 12 responses. The statements gathered from the first and second problems were qualitatively "analyzed by grouping similar items together" (Hasson, Keeney, & McKenna, 2000, p. 1012). The recurrent words used in the responses helped the researcher in grouping these responses. After a thorough scrutiny of the combined statements, initial themes were generated from these organized responses with careful consideration of the words used by the panel members in their replies. The statements that did not belong to any of the other groupings were still included in the list. A summary table of the initial themes and independent statements generated was prepared. These findings were reported back to the panelists for their review in the second questionnaire (Franklin & Hart, 2007).

In the second round, the summary of the statements generated in Round 1 was e-mailed to the 12 participants to give them the opportunity to verify their responses and to change or expand their Round 1 responses (Skulmolski et al., 2007). The panel members were given four weeks to evaluate the result of Round 1, but the time was extended again for 2 weeks to give them more time to accomplish the task. They were asked to carefully evaluate the items under each area of themes provided; afterwards, they ranked the areas, with 1 (*most pressing issue*), to 5 (*least pressing issue*). According to Powell (2003), the second and subsequent rounds are more specific, with the questionnaires seeking quantification of earlier findings, usually through the rating or ranking techniques. The panel members were invited to add to the list of statements if they perceived the need and to include the item in the ranking. The given rankings were added to get the total for each item. The item that has the lowest total was ranked as the first, and the highest total was ranked last. Comments were also encouraged from the participants.

However, the second round had only 10 participants who returned their responses, resulting in a decrease of the number of responses for the second and third rounds. Kalaian and Kasim (2012) stated that experts who do not return some of the mail questionnaires are excluded from the panel of experts for further data collection. The researcher tried to reach out to all the original participants to remind them of their responses; however, three of them were not able to submit.

The responses from Round 2 were used to finalize the Round 3 questionnaire. The 10 panel members from the second round were asked to evaluate again the rankings, to propose some changes in the ranking if there was a need, and to include their justifications for any changes or disagreement to rankings made. Out of the 10 panel members, only nine returned their responses to the survey. Further analysis and discussion of the data gathered were done only after all the panel members had expressed their agreement to the final list of themes that was organized.

Results and Discussion

The demographic information asked from the 12 participants during the first round of the survey shows that most of them are connected with the Teacher Education department in their respective universities as indicated by the seven participants from Education; one of the participants did not indicate his/her department. When asked about the courses where they integrated blogging, the participants identified the professional education courses such as Educational Technology, Assessment, Research, Field Study, and Practice Teaching. Incidentally, Practice Teaching emerged as the most recurrent in the responses, showing 13 out of the 19 courses that were enumerated by the respondents. The other courses identified were from general education such as Natural Science, Math, Analytic Geometry, and Philosophy and Religion in Asia. With regard to the number of years that they have been integrating blogs in the courses, the information data show that six of the 12 participants have been using it for 1-2 years, five participants for 3-4 years, and one participant for 5-6 years. The final consensus of the participants from the three-round survey on the problems pertaining to the issues encountered in the utilization of blogs and the effects of these issues on the performance of the students was given interpretation.

Issues in the Utilization of Blogs

In terms of the utilization of blogs in the classroom, six key areas emerged in the following order of importance: (a) limited time and access to computer and Internet; (b) tedious preparation, maintenance, and management of blogs; (c) technological difficulties of students; (d) low level of interaction among students; (e) digression in comments posted; and, (f) newness to online teaching.

Limited time and access to computer and Internet. With the heavy subject load taken by tertiary students in a semester, it is not surprising to have this as an issue. Students have to negotiate their schedules and the completion of requirements in their subjects. One of the teachers shared, "My students have difficulty blogging because of their schedules. We have limited time in our laboratory, so they need to go out in internet café to be online."

Blogging activities are not the only requirements that students need to accomplish in a semester. One teacher stated that students need "additional time for the blog." Before posting comments on a blog post, the students are required to have a careful reflection and organization of their ideas. As such, they need ample time to compose their comments that will satisfy the expectations of their teachers and classmates who will be reading their comments. The studies of Yu-Chih (2010) and Shoffner (2009) indicated the problems on lack of access and lack of time as factors in the reduction of pre-service teachers' blog entries. Primary to the accomplishment of blogging requirements is enough time. Wang and Hsua (2008) posited that blogging is time-consuming because it requires a great amount of reading, writing, responding, and thinking outside the required participation time in class and that it adds extra homework. Hence, it is very helpful for teachers to do a survey of the load and schedules of students during a semester to make accommodations for students.

Another teacher added, "To top [all the issues], the students have no access to a computer at home." This predicament of students all the more limits their time to accomplish their blogging activities. Comments on blogs are posted only when there is a computer and Internet access; consequently, without these technologies, students fail to participate in the blogging activities. This implies that teachers have to conduct a survey of the students' technological provisions before blogging activities are made part of their instruction. Alternatives can be planned so that all students including those without computers and Internet access may realize the objectives of blogging. To alleviate this issue, Yueh-Min, Yu-Lin, and Tien-chi (2009) suggested mobile blogging, which their study found to provide not only blogging application for students but also the convenience with no limitation in time and position. This can be very plausible since most of the students nowadays use mobile phones with an Internet connection.

While there are provisions for computers and Internet in schools, these may not really accommodate all the students' needs. More often than not, students

only get to use these facilities when they are enrolled in computer subjects. One respondent said, "Students who have no access to Internet will just answer during the time schedule for the subject." The teacher attributed the limited access to computer and the Internet to the students' financial difficulties. Most computer-based tasks extend beyond the class time, so students are compelled to go to computer shops outside the campus. This means additional financial burden on the students. Harris and Rhea (2009) identified that the availability of computing resources as a requirement is one of the disadvantages of using Web 2.0 technologies in the classroom. They clarified that this is a major disadvantage for students who cannot afford or do not have computer access.

Tedious preparation, maintenance, and management of blogs. The integration of blogs in the courses taught by teachers requires careful planning since this is an innovation in the repertoire of teaching strategies. Pollacia and McCallister (2009) stated that online instructors have embraced the use of blogs because of the simplicity of creating and maintaining the blog. However, teachers still find difficulty since they handle several subjects with large class sizes in a semester. This poses a challenge in the preparation of the different lessons. Mulryan-Kyne (2010) affirmed this when she claimed that there is sufficient evidence available to suggest that as class sizes increase at tertiary level, teachers often face new issues and problems. One of the respondents shared, "It is difficult to maintain since preparation and maintenance of the blog is time-consuming especially so that I handle at least seven classes. Thus, topics are not always updated so we resort to the traditional." Studies conducted on the use of blogs in teaching are consistent with the issue in the current study (Makri & Kynigos, 2007; Mullen & Wedwick, 2008). Teachers must find what works best for their students and their classroom blogging (Mullen & Wedwick, 2008).

Besides the teaching loads, teachers have other school-related responsibilities. Consequently, it becomes an additional burden for them to prepare and maintain their blog. Kenney and Newcombe (2011) found that the re-designing and administration of a blended approach in courses taught was a major challenge since teachers did not receive any workload reduction. They also added that the online portion of the course required more time than originally anticipated for grading and providing feedback. The heavy workload of teachers usually does not allow them to maintain the timely provision of feedback to the comments of students on the teachers' blog post. To sustain interaction with students in blogs, teachers must maintain the thread by responding to the comments of the students. Archambault, Wetzel, Foulger, and Williams (2010) expressed that the benefit of social

networking tools is allowing greater access and communication so that students can receive more immediate and ongoing feedback through their use.

The respondents of this study recognize the benefits of Weblogs as an innovative approach, so they try to integrate this technology in their classes, albeit this requires time for teachers to fulfill this task. Mulryan-Kyne (2010) declared that time for designing, implementing, and testing new active teaching approaches can put additional pressure on faculty members who are also trying to meet other institutional demands.

For teachers who have students with no computer training, they need more preparation because they need to adjust their lessons to accommodate these students. One of the respondents stated, "Considering that the students have no prior knowledge and skills for basic computer literacy, it is an additional burden for me to go back to basic." Students cannot participate in blogging activities if they are not taught how to manipulate the technology in the first place, which reduces the time of the main content of the course being taught. Another teacher said,

> On my part as a facilitator of the blog activities, I am very much challenged by my students' lack of initiative to learn the "hows" of doing activities posted especially in the research class. Instead of giving time to help them do their research activities, time is sometimes spent in addressing their lack of skills in using the computers.

The foregoing discussion does not only relate to the issue of tedious preparation on the part of the teachers but it is also a clear indication of technological difficulties by students.

Students' technological difficulties. Although most of the students are computer literate, this does not necessarily lead to online technological literacy. Generally, students finish a three-unit course in computer education as part of their general education subjects but they only get an orientation on the basic computer applications. Bennet, Maton, and Kervin (2008) asserted that questions must be asked about the relevance on education of the everyday ICT skills possessed by technically adept young people. In this study, the respondents observed that students have difficulty in using online tools. These are two teacher observations about the difficulties of students: "Students were not so comfortable yet in using blogs"; and,

> For my educational research class, a lot of my students who are not competent in using the internet or the computers do not participate and will have the tendency of submitting their answers in hard copy instead of posting it through the blog

site. They will even have the tendency to ask if it is possible for them to see me personally in the office because of the difficulty of opening the blog site or of anything that has something to do with the technicalities of opening the site.

These difficulties indicate that students will engage themselves better in blogging if they are equipped with the technological skills. Hung (2011) identified in his study of the pedagogical applications of blogs that technical capability constituted one advantage in using blogs. A deficit on the entry level skills required for the use of enhanced technologies can be a barrier to effective learning (Banyard, Underwood, & Twiner, 2006).

These observations imply that students need further instructions or technological assistance from the teacher to enable them to participate in their blogging activities. It will require more time from the teacher but the students will be more confident in the succeeding assignments required. An orientation and demonstration sessions on the use and purpose of weblogs to support consistent and appropriate use are recommended (Sharma & Xie, 2008; Wang & Hsua, 2008). It is therefore important that some basic skills will be taught and developed for online learning (Huang et al., 2011). Sim and Hew (2010) suggested that educators should implement measures to help students overcome their lack of understanding or unfamiliarity with the technology. They recommended the provision of demonstrations and hands-on practice as well as guidelines and reference notes on how to blog to increase the students' confidence in using the technology.

Students use computers and the Internet for various reasons. Apart from the academic reason, they mostly use these technologies for entertainment. Studies show that majority of students use Web 2.0 applications such as blogs for social or leisure purposes (Levy & Hadar, 2010; Leslie & Murphy, 2008). Integrating blogging in the academic courses may pose some challenges to the students since this is not their usual environment. Teachers need to refocus the students' consciousness on the purpose of the blogging activity by including this in the training sessions (Wang & Hsua, 2008).

Low level of interaction among students. Blogging entails interaction among students and teachers. It is an opportunity for students to construct and share their ideas and learn from their peers or teachers. Powell and Kalina (2009) claimed that Vygotsky's social constructivism is based on social interactions along with a personal critical thinking process. Blogs allow this kind of interaction even outside the classroom. Rhode (2009) conjectured that interaction is a key component to the development of the distinctive social context to online experience. In his study, he found that not all forms of interaction that may be equally valued by learners are effective. This current study reflected this as low level of interaction and emerged as one of the issues. However, this finding is contrary to the study of Huang et al. (2011) that found blogging to be encouraging participation from students who are not used to speaking up and criticizing in public. Other research established that blogging increased students' motivation to learn from peers (Yang & Chang, 2012; Sujud & Abd Rahim, 2013). The blogosphere is a public area where anyone can have access to articles posted on blogs, and this nature of the blogosphere can inhibit students from being more candid in interacting with their classmates online. Studies have identified the issue of privacy to be contributing to the negative attitude of students toward blogging (Andergassen, 2009; Harris & Rhea, 2009; Sharma & Xie, 2008; Yu-Chih, 2010). In this current study, teachers observed that students are "uncomfortable in expressing themselves online" and "fearful of being ridiculed online." Students are aware that their blog posts or comments are open to other people besides their classmates, widening the sphere of online exposure. This feedback from the students necessitates the identification of strategies that will help students in altering their negative attitude toward blogging activities. Williams and Chinn (2009) articulated that increasing opportunities for students to become active learners has the potential to create more dynamic classroom environments that bring excitement and energy to the process.

While the purpose of blogging is promoting interaction and sharing of ideas, students may be intimidated by classmates who have better language skills. This issue was also observed by Huang et al. (2011) when they stated that the students' concerns include lack of questioning and commenting skills. The work of Leslie and Murphy (2008) pointed out that the students' lack of linguistic ability is one of the reasons students limit their responses to comments made by their classmates. This may cause other students' lowered enthusiasm. As two teacher respondents commented, "Students are still not used to learning collectively and discussing through blogs and other interactive media" and "Some students are not gifted with literary skills." These statements imply that it is important then for teachers to initially ensure that students are prepared to engage themselves in learning activities involving blogs to facilitate more interaction among students. Williams and Chinn (2009) found that the initial experience level of the students was one of the challenges that arose in the experiential learning activities using Web 2.0 tools.

Another teacher attributes the low level of interaction among students to the students' attitude toward blogging activities. Two of the participants stated, "Students lack the initiative to learn things on

their own; they are used to spoon-feeding" and "The challenge with them is their initiative to give comments or feedback to issues raised by their classmates or by me as their instructor." These observations seem to contradict what other researchers have found (i.e., that students have a favorable or positive attitude towards the integration of blogs into learning; Avci & Askar, 2012; Halic, Lee, Paulus, & Spence, 2010). In a study conducted by Kenney and Newcombe (2011), they identified the issues of students' skepticism and their inexperience with taking responsibility for their own learning. The lack of initiative can be brought about by the issues on access and time, which were discussed under the first issue identified in this study.

Digression in comments posted. Responding to blogs brings about diversity in opinions. It is similar when teachers ask questions in the classroom for which students give divergent answers or even digressive responses. But unlike in the classroom where responses can be directed back to the topic, students are left on their own to write their opinions or responses in blogs. One teacher mentioned, "Some of the comments they gave are not helpful." This can pose a problem since teachers may not be able to respond right away to these blogs. Leslie and Murphy's (2008) study showed that the "lack of teaching presence" (para. 38) affected the way that the students engage themselves in blogging. Blog posts are open to different text interpretations because the comprehension of text is left solely to the students at the time of blogging. Students need to be oriented on the manner or structure of response to the blog posted by the teacher. This can guide students to respond appropriately to blog posts. Scaffolds such as provision of a checklist on how to write on a blog can be helpful especially if this activity is initially introduced to students as part of their learning activities.

Clear and specific prompts are helpful for students to be directed properly to the issue at hand. Teachers are the primary support of the students as these students venture into online activities of which they are not yet proficient as revealed in the previous issues presented. Clear instructions with examples should be given before the blogging assignments commence. Hungerford-Kresser, Wiggins, Amaro-Jiménez, and Amaro-Jiménez (2011) particularly highlighted the need for more instructor guidance and for prompts to make blogs less laborious.

Not used to online teaching. This particular item was added in the list by the teacher respondents in Round 3. They stated that students have a hard time accomplishing online requirements due to lack of experience in blogging activities and unfamiliarity with the technology. One teacher respondent said, "Some, although familiar with blogging and are computer-literate, are not familiar with online teaching." Sim and

Hew (2010) suggested making blogging a compulsory requirement to ensure that students become familiar with the technology for a start because unless they try it, they may not embark on using blogs at all. While the format of blogs is relatively user-friendly (Hanson et al., 2008), this blogging technology is still relatively new in third world countries such as the Philippines. According to Sim and Hew (2010), blogging is an emerging trend. Hence, students need some scaffolding in posting their blogs. Powell and Kalina (2009) stated that a support system will help a student in accomplishing a difficult task. Fluckiger, Vigil, Pasco, and Danielson (2010) suggested the use of criteria-specific templates developed for each blogging assignment that serve as both anchors and guides for the assigned descriptive narrative. Providing scaffolds will help students to focus on what they need to do when blogging. Bennett, Matton, and Kervin (2008) argued that while technology is embedded in young people's lives, their use and skills are not uniform. It implies then that the kind of scaffold given to students may vary depending on their individual needs.

Effect of Issues on Performance of Students

In terms of the effect of the issues on the performance of students, five key areas emerged in the following order of importance: (a) few benefited from the blog activities, (b) non-compliance with requirements on time, (c) quality of work not complying with set standards/ criteria, (d) not certain about the effects of issues on student performance, and (e) no effect on performance.

Few benefited from the blog activities. Most of the teacher respondents indicated that they use blogs to let students share their ideas about an issue/question. However, there are students who are not able to participate in or maximize the benefits of blogging due to the problem of access to computer and Internet. As one teacher respondent shared, "Because of the limited internet access, very few will be able to accomplish the blogging exercises. However, in the Graduate School, the students can accomplish the task considering that most of them can afford to have a laptop." The lack of access to computer and Internet greatly undermines the performance of students in blogging activities. Moreover, the technological difficulties of some students as discussed earlier hamper their maximized participation in blogging activities. Wang and Hsua (2008) discerned that the unfamiliarity of students with the blogging procedure affected their willingness to read or post articles. According to a teacher respondent, "Some of the students did not benefit from the activities done through blogs because only those who fully participated essentially benefitted." Another teacher respondent shared,

The above-stated issues in some way limited the participation of students. Blogs are meant to welcome participation among students who cannot share their insights in class due to classroom limitations but because of the issues raised, some students were also restricted to share.

This low level of interaction has limited the benefits of students from blogging activities.

Non-compliance with requirements on time. The teachers mentioned that they use blogs to upload and showcase the outputs of students. This study revealed that this is not fully realized because the primary requirements are not met due to the issues on computer and Internet access and on technological difficulties. These issues are undoubtedly great barriers to the students. As a result, students are deprived of points for the graded requirements. One teacher stated, "Despite the leeway I am giving my students to give their answers on blog activities, there are students who still cannot meet deadlines because of internet access problem. . . . Not complying on time will mean significant deduction in their evaluation." This particular teacher obviously gave a corresponding grade to the blogging activities of students. Students who did not have access may have failed to meet the objectives of the activity. From the statement, it can be deduced that she helped the students to meet the requirements by giving them more time to accomplish their tasks. But the technical assistance needed is the more pressing need, that is, teachers need to find ways to ease Internet access problems.

Nonetheless, for a teacher who does put a grade equivalent to blogging activities, she still observed that students do not comply with the requirements. She shared, "Though blogging is not a measure of student performance, most of my students lag in complying with this requirement on time." This can mean that grades for blogging activities are not the only motivating factor for students' participation. Levy and Hadar (2010) suggest that students can be motivated by designing creative assignments that require collaborative work within the virtual environment and rewarding students for their active participation.

Quality of work not complying with set standards/criteria. With the students' trepidations in blogging activities, they are inhibited to participate more fully as expected. Blogging entails construction of ideas about a topic started by a teacher. In addition, students need to read and react to the ideas of their classmates. If students are anxious about what they write in blogs, they may not be able to bring out their best. This can also be brought about by their inexperience in blogging as part of their academic course. Kenney and Newcombe (2011) cited the difficulty of students with the online format in their course as one of the challenges in using a blended approach to teaching.

When students have a limited time to do work online, it is tantamount to poor quality of blogging. Since blogging means an additional time for students to spare within their heavy academic load every semester, most of them accomplish tasks for compliance. One of the respondents said that she gives a rubric to evaluate the students' output, but she is not able to sustain the making of rubrics for every blog activity since it is time-consuming. This supports the issue of teachers on the tedious preparation and maintenance of blogs, which also affects the kind of output students submit online. The heavy responsibilities of teachers can be a factor for them to not fully monitor the blog requirements of students. Hanson et al. (2008) stressed educators' competence in using Web 2.0 applications and ability to evaluate website usage as requirements in taking advantage of these applications.

Not certain about the effects of issues on student performance. From the informal interview with one of the respondents, the teacher attributed the uncertainty of the effects of the aforementioned issues to unclear instructional goals or purposes of the blogging activity. She said that since blogging is new, she wanted to try exploring the novelty of this activity. This means then that the teacher is using the blog for innovation purposes. Two teachers commented on this item saying, "Blogs are only one of the means for getting a grade" and "I don't grade blogs. I use blogs more as an assessment of instruction delivery, and not of student performance." These statements imply that the effects of the issues on performance are not clearly identifiable since the teachers did not have a specific purpose regarding assessing student performance. Rhode (2009) posited that the primary focus for many instructional designers and instructors continues to center around improving student outcomes within the online learning experience. The study of Hemmi et al. (2009) also showed that students perceived blogging as valuable when the purpose of using the blog is more directed at pragmatic concerns such as acquisition of learning skills and knowledge.

No effect on performance. This item was ranked the least among the five issues on blogging. This can be attributed to the absence of assessment tools prepared by the teachers to measure the performance of students in their blogging activities. One teacher openly admitted that blogging activities are not really part of the grading of students. She stated, "I don't grade blogs. This is part of their class participation (to include active class participation, attendance and blogging) which gets only 10% of the class requirement."

When assessment is integrated initially in the blogging activity, teachers are able to determine the consequent level of student performance. This suggests that teachers need to be more conscious of finding ways to assess students' blogging

participation even if this does not form a major part of the students' grades. Assessment does not only mean looking at the output of students, but also checking into the other processes or areas that may hinder students' participation such as the issues identified in this study. In the validation study of Dray, Lowenthal, Miszkiewicz, Ruiz-Primo, and Marczynski (2011), they were able to develop a self-assessment tool that determines the readiness/preparedness of students for online learning. This instrument measures four areas of ICT engagement: basic technology skills; access to technology including ownership of technology and connectivity to the Internet; usage of technology, such as nature and frequency of use; and relationship with ICT, such as beliefs, values, confidence, and comfort with technology. These areas incorporated in the tool can help teachers to address the challenges of students early on. Another teacher said, "It did not affect the performance of the students really." One possible reason for this is the lack of purpose for utilizing blogs in the teaching-learning process. As stated earlier by one respondent, the use of blogs is basically to try the new technology. There is then a requisite for teachers to also be acquainted well with the pedagogy before integrating it as part of instruction.

One teacher, however, disagreed with this item, and stated, "I don't really think the above issues did not affect their performance." This response implies that the issues presented have an effect on the students' performance. Blog activities remain an open-ended teaching-learning strategy.

Conclusion

The issues in this study observed by the teachers are mostly student-oriented. This suggests that the teachers themselves did not encounter many problems as they integrated the use of blogs in their teaching activities except for the tedious preparation, maintenance, and management of blogs. This calls for administrators to look into the needs of teachers who are integrating blogging or other online experiences to produce better student learning outcomes and also for teachers to assess the needs of students that will enable them to maximize their participation in blogging activities.

This study, however student-oriented, did not include students as respondents since the purpose was to generate the perspectives of the teachers who serve as the main implementers of blogging activities in the classroom. Further study on the empirical effects of blogging in the performance of students can be conducted involving the students as the main respondents.

Further, the results of the study suggest that there is still a dilemma in identifying the effects of the blogging on student performance since there is no standard assessment or evaluation tool for the blogging activities. The evaluative possibilities in blogging activities can be explored in time.

The integration of weblogs in the classroom to cater to student learning needs purposeful and careful planning to deter the occurrence of the issues/challenges that have surfaced in this study. The research of Sim and Hew (2010) revealed that self-report studies suggested that the use of blogs can help student learning. Harnessing the blog as an instructional tool can prove very productive since it caters right into the interests of these learners. With careful planning of the blogging program, the whole academic community—administration, teachers, and most especially students—can definitely benefit richly.

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