

## INITIAL EXPERIMENT IN USING BLOG AS A LEARNING-AID

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### **Abstract**

This paper is to report an initial study on the students' satisfaction in using blog (weblog) system as a learning-aid. For the purpose of this study, the authors had prepared a blog for the subject of Web Programming. This blog is a place where the lecturer posts the syllabus, lecture notes, presentations slides, lab manual, assignments, discussions, code samples and also announcements. The students are required to visit the blog to download the notes and to participate in the discussions. This study is to investigate the students' experience of using blog as a learning tool. It is a quantitative survey to find out whether the students having a good or bad experience in using the blog. The authors also would like to know the students' experience in using the blog; flexibility, content presentation or arrangement, communication, experience through blog, update medium, navigation and overall experience.

**Keywords:** blogging for education, blog.

### **1. Introduction**

Blog is one of the Web 2.0 applications to disseminate information in the Internet. It is actually small-scale website, usually composed of some brief and frequently-updated postings in reverse chronological order (Ma & Wang, 2008). Blog is very popular because it is normally free and has the ability to gather feedback. Now everybody can have their own blog, like we have our e-mail. Thanks to the free services from blogger.com, wordpress.com, live.msn.com, 360.yahoo.com and a lot of other blog providers in the internet.

Blog is no longer a personal belonging where you write your own journal (diary), and read only by the writer. The fact that blog is a medium of knowledge sharing (Chuang & Shen, 2008) and is no longer a private belongings has become inevitable. It even becomes a news portal (Schroeder, 2005) where the information is provided by the net citizen. Due to the easiness of using the blog, people can do almost anything; even the lecturers can share their learning materials to the students and to the masses.

### **2. Blogging for Education**

In the education activities, blogs are used to disseminate notes, a medium of communication where announcement and discussion between teacher and students take place (Demirel et al, 2008). There are ample of free blog providers to choose, even a special blog provider tailored for education blogging called Edublog (<http://edublog.org>). Special awards are also given out the best educational blogs (<http://edublogawards.com/>) in different categories.

One of the educational bloggers directories is International Edubloggers Directory, which has 686 members from all over the world, and variety of fields. It can be found at <http://edubloggerdir.blogspot.com>.

Blog is used as a teaching resource, disseminating specialist information, and a place where information interchanged (Gomes, 2007). It can also be the teachers'/lecturers' digital portfolio, which is important for carrier growth (Wang, Ma, 2008).

### **3. How it is done.**

We decided to use free blog hosting and tools, free file hosting, free image hosting and free chat box. Why, because we do not want to think about acquiring grants, or pays the hosting services. However we do choose reliable solutions. The blogging tools and hosting are provided by blogger.com, which is one of the Google's companies. Image hosting is provided by picassa.com, also a Google's company. The file hosting is provided by the skydrive.live.com, a Microsoft's brain child, which provided humongous 26 gigabytes of free online storage. The article editor is also provided freely by Microsoft; named as Windows Live Writer.

#### *3.1 The Blogging System*

The authors chose the blogger.com as the hosting provider for the blog. One of the reasons we chose blogger.com is the fact the system and the hosting provider is Google Inc, which is accompany well known for high quality services. We found out that blogger.com provides much more reliable and faster access compared to the nearest competitor. We have tested the Wordpress (also a blog hosting provider) to host the blog. However it did not impress us in term of the access speed. This finding is only applicable during the earlier time when we were surveying for the best free blog provider.

Blogger.com provides the blog hosting, and the administration tools. The blog administrators can post entry, change the blog's layout, template, and moderate comments, add widgets, and so on. The reader could add comment (as feedback). Depending on the setting, the administrators can allow anyone to post comment or only selected few.

#### *3.2 Article Editor*

Windows Live Writer is provided freely by Microsoft (<http://windowslivewriter.spaces.live.com>). It's actually an article editing software that's available offline, and capable of storing our blog posting in the local storage. It is a very useful tool for blog devotee to edit an article, and posting it without using the online

editor provided by blogger.com. Compared to the editor provided online this offline editor is much more user-friendly and easier to use.

It's a WYSIWYG (what you see is what you get) editor, and has a lot of plug-ins to help you do a specific task. For example, the Source Code formatter helps us produce programming code that has several different color based on the code syntax category. This kind of tool helps us a lot in presenting programming codes in such a way that the user will find it more interesting, rather than a single-colored text. Such plug-in brings a great convenience for us since the nature of our blog is programming. The default editor does not provide this tool.

### *3.3 File Hosting*

All the notes, presentation slides, lab manuals, assignments, past-year exam samples, students' assignments and projects, development tools and compilation of source codes need a place to be available online. Thanks to Skydrive (skydrive.live.com) that generously gives the user 25 gigabytes of free storage. We put all these materials in Skdrive, and provide the download links from the blog.

## **4. The Experiment**

The main author created the blog (**kerul.blogspot.com**) long before the class started. The blog discussion theme is web technology and web application development. At the beginning it was intended to publish tips and tricks acquired from the author's experience related to the discussion theme. On August 2008, the author decided to make the blog as the main web resource for his favorite subject, the Web Programming.

The Web Programming course is basically separated into two different courses; Web Programming 1 and Web Programming 2. Web Programming 1 covers HTML and the basic parts of server-side programming lessons. While Web Programming 2 covers advanced topics on server-side programming and web-based database application development. The students are from Diploma of E-Commerce and Bachelor of Business Administration and E-Commerce. They must pass Web Programming 1 before they can sit for Web Programming 2. All of them, totaling 75 students, are involved in this experiment. 50 of them are students of Web Programming 1 and the rest are Web Programming 2.

On the beginning of the class (September 2008), the blog is announced to the students of Web Programming as the main resource page for the whole semester. They are told to visit the blog as frequently as possible because the blog will hold announcements, links to the development tools, discussion, notes, lecture slides, students' presentations, assignments and everything regarding the course.

The main page contains the hyperlinks to the files on the program syllabus, notes, manual, software download, exercises and final exam samples, refer Appendix 1. The lecturer posted at least one article per week. The articles are related to web programming; be it latest web technology, code samples, recent events or seminars, forums, web tools,

interesting websites and etc. Most of the articles are out of the syllabus, purposely for their additional knowledge.

There are few articles they must post a comment. Any voluntary comment is encouraged. The compulsory comments got very responsive feedback. However the voluntary comment is very few. We can conclude that the students are not interested in posting comments, unless it is compulsory.

## 5. The Survey, Result

The authors distribute an online survey, and there are only 30 respondents (population is 75). The authors decided to publish the result although the response is not sufficient (Krejcie & Morgan, 1970). We are providing the initial findings, but we do not want to elaborate much. This experiment will be repeated during the other semester (which is during May 2009 until August 2009). The questionnaire will be refined and a new survey will be conducted. The discussion of the findings will be published later (after August 2009).

The research is to find out the students' experience in using the blog. Is the blog useful to the learning process, user friendly enough, and improving their learning experience?

### 5.1 Demography.

57% of the respondents access the Internet everyday with 97% of them accessing it more than 2 hours per session. Most of the students access the blog more than 3-4 times a week (77%), which means they access the blog quite often.

Table 1: Number of Internet access per week.

Item	%
Everyday	57
3-4 times	33
1 time	10

Table 2: Duration of accessing Internet per session.

Item	%
1 hour	3
2 hours	20
3 hours	33
4 hours	13
5 hours or more	30

Table 3: Number of blog access per week.

Item	%
Everyday	20
3-4 times	57

1 time	23
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### 5.2 Purposes of accessing the blog.

From the total students who access the blog, 27 chose that the main purpose is to download the learning materials, 16 to get the latest announcements, 15 to answer the assignments given, and not many who really want or involve in the discussion.

Table 4: Purposes to access the blog.

Item	%
To download learning materials.	27
To get the latest announcement.	16
To answer assignments.	15
To participate in the discussion.	5

### 5.3 Questions on the blog's features and criteria.

Table 5 is the summary of all the questions on the blog's criteria. The categories are the element of flexibility in blog, the content, blog as communication tool in teaching and learning, the proper way to inform the students about the blog update, navigation and overall perspective on the blog.

Table 5: Questions on the blog criteria and features.

	Question	Disagree %	Neutral %	Agree %
	<b>Flexibility</b>			
1	Time flexibility to download learning materials.	0	23	77
2	Personalized learning support.	0	17	83
	<b>Content</b>			
3	The blog content is useful.	0	10	90
4	Sufficient learning materials.	0	10	90
	<b>Communication</b>			
6	Personally communicate with lecturer and friends.	13	33	53
7	Easy to discuss questions/problems with other students.	6	63	30
	<b>Medium to update</b>			
8	Update new content or announcements through email.	7	40	54
9	Update new content or announcements through SMS (to mobile device).	7	50	43

	<b>Navigation / Content Arrangement</b>			
10	Easy to search a specific article.	20	33	<b>47</b>
11	Easy to answer assignments posted in blog.	13	33	<b>53</b>
12	Easy to use.	0	17	<b>83</b>
13	Code samples are easy to locate.	3	20	<b>77</b>
14	Do you prefer a forum-style discussion?	3	43	<b>53</b>
	<b>Overall</b>			
15	This blog is successful.	0	10	<b>90</b>
16	Enhanced education experience.	0	13	<b>87</b>
17	Suggest each lecturer to have own blog.	3	7	<b>90</b>

## 6. Conclusion

Although this is just a preliminary study, we hope the info that we share can be used for further study. We failed to gather sufficient samples, but this study will be enhanced and repeated in the near future.

## 7. Acknowledgement

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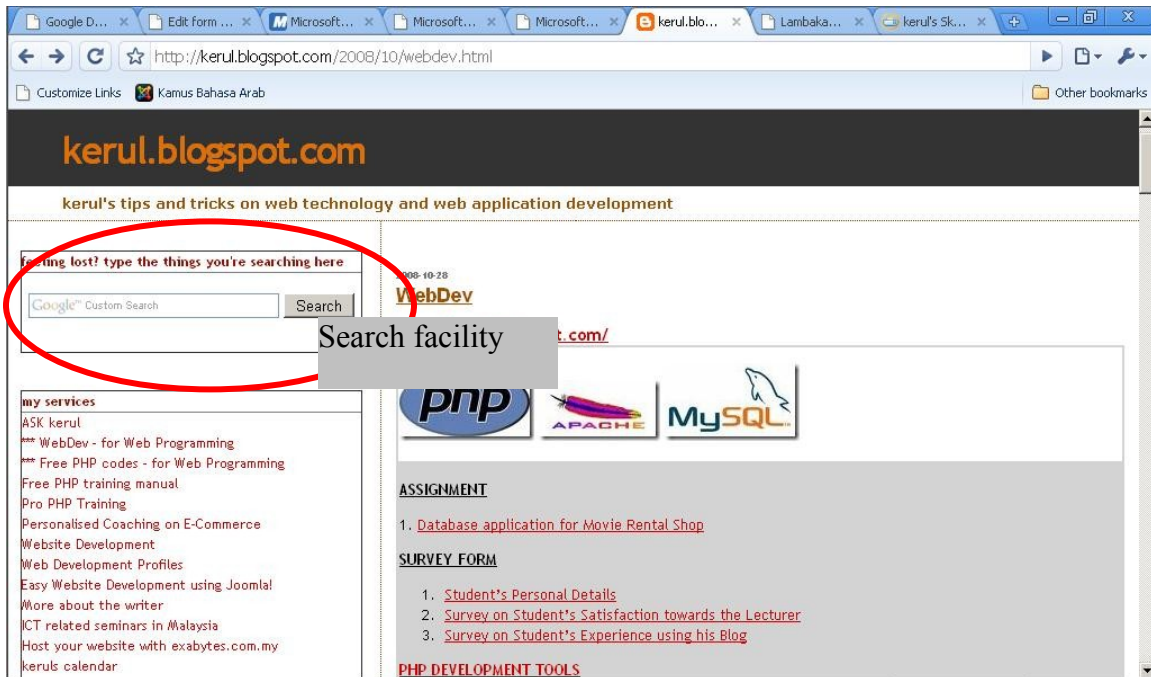
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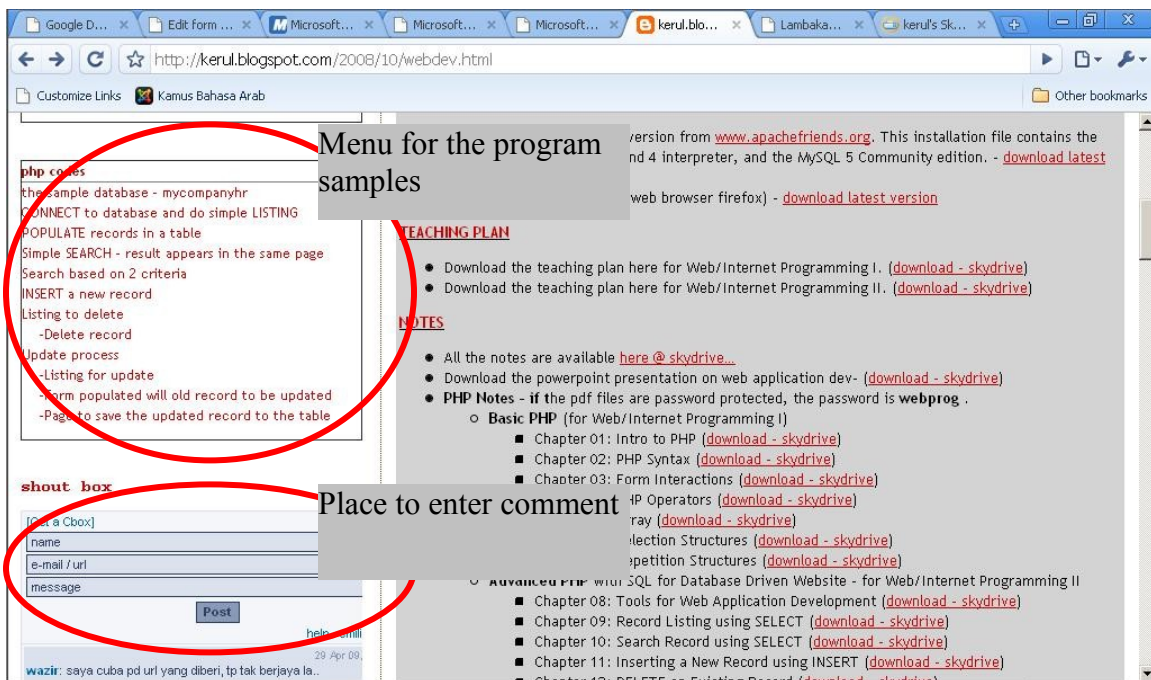
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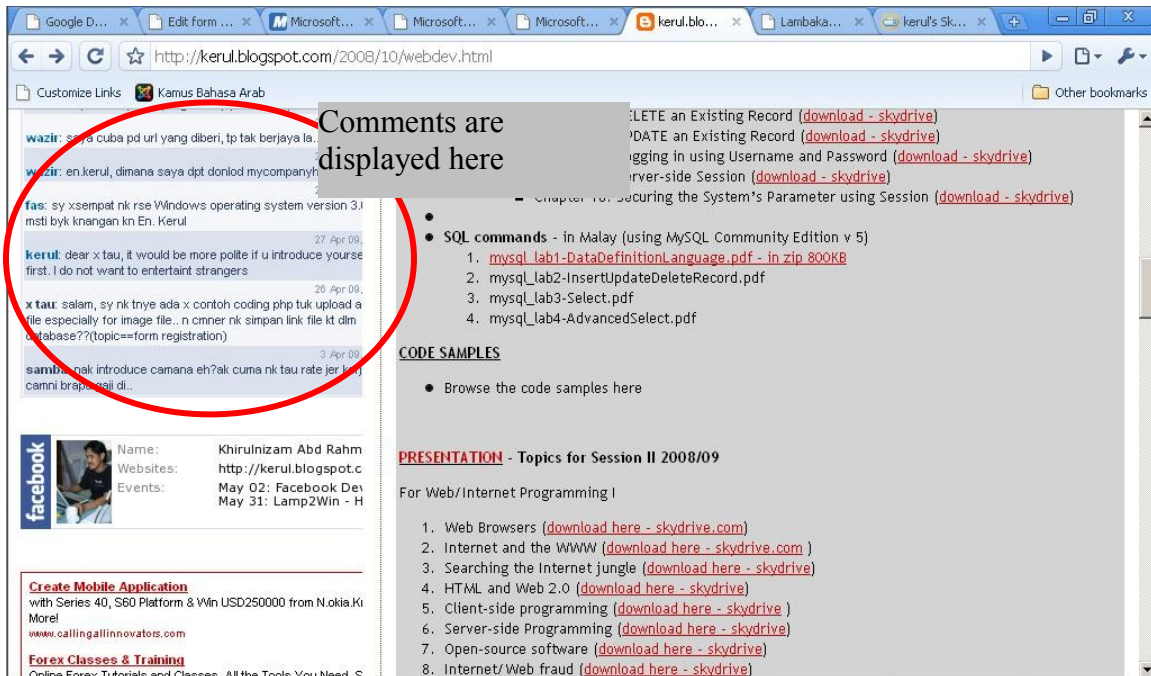
## Appendix 1: Screenshots of the blog (kerul.blogspot.com)



The main resource page. The search facility is on the left.



The menu for the samples code and the place to enter general comments.



The place where general comments are displayed.



Article comments or feedbacks are shown at the end of the article.