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Teaching Economics**

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A case of using “EconBlog” in Teaching Economics

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ABSTRACT

Blog has become a powerful and interactive tool for people to share their thoughts and resources online. Given the recent financial crisis, a community of blog relating to economics and finance, so called “EconBlog”, becomes an essential tool for economists to share their views with others. This paper reports a case of using EconBlog in enhancing students learning in higher education. Questionnaire survey will be used to collect feedback from 69 third year university students who were required to do an international finance project with the use of EconBlog. The project involves developing an EconBlog to share their analyses of daily exchange rate fluctuation. Every week, students are required to review and discuss their EconBlog in class. In order to establish a learner-centered constructivist environment, student interactions are the core. The EconBlog applications offer opportunities for expanding and enriching the communications among students and teachers. In addition, EconBlog also brings student to a real world situation, sharing their works with the public. The feedback from the students show that they appreciate the learning activities and think that the learning experience will facilitate their self-learning capacities, help them to explore their inner potential and build up their confidence in getting success in the information society. The spearman’s correlation provided empirical support for the effectiveness of the EconBlog in enhancing learning.

1. Introduction

Blog has become a powerful and interactive tool for people to share their thoughts and resources online. Literature has discussed the use of Blog in different ways and in different subject. Mullen and Wedwick provided examples of actual classroom practice. blogs and proposed that blogs can easily be used together with simple Web 2.0 tools that any teacher can use at any grade level. Caverly et al (2008) reports that students demonstrated useful perceptions about blogging for academic purposes, like presenting of ideas, providing evidence, weighing other points of view, and illustrating of academic language in postings. .Naval (2007) reported that students considered his blog as a learning tool in the language class. Imperatore (2009) discussed the use of wikis and blogs to strengthen reading and writing skills. Flatley (2005) discussed the use of blogs to enhance teaching and learning. Quible (2005) demonstrated the use of blogs in business communication courses. Davis and McGrail (2009) proposed that teacher had to create a purposeful learning environment for blogging and build a community that fostered respect and inspired students who want to continue to learn. Higdon and Topaz (2009) argued that blogs and wikis can be used gather students responses to questions that can promote the Just-in-Time Teaching (JiTT) methodology.

Given the recent financial crisis, a community of blog relating to economics and finance, so called “EconBlog”, becomes an essential tool for economists to share their views with others. One of the typical examples would be Paul Krugman, who won the Nobel Prize in economics in 2008, writes blogs hosted by the *New York Times* (<http://krugman.blogs.nytimes.com/>). RegionFocus (2008) reported that “The authors of

the best-selling *Freakonomics*, for instance, write a blog hosted by the *New York Times* that bobs around in the top 60.” (RegionFocus, Spring/Summer 2008). Indeed EconBlog can also be used to enhance teaching and learning. Goffe and Sosin (2005) proposed that students can maintain their own blog and receiving comments from others. Teachers can run a class blog to start some discussion topics for student comment. Students at Harvard Business school created a blog called Economic Policy Review (<http://www.econblog.org/>).

2. Research Methodology

The direct way to investigate the effect of using blogs in teaching economics is to ask the students perception on a designed blogs experiment. Churchill conducted a blog used experiment with a class of postgraduate students and reported some useful blog-based activities for teaching and learning such as reading others’ blogs and receiving feedback. Dippold (2009) investigated the perceptions of students and teachers on their teaching and learning blogs using questionnaires and focus groups. Following the literature, this paper reports a case of using EconBlog in enhancing students learning in higher education. Questionnaire is used to collect feedback from 69 third year university students who were required to do an international finance project with the use of EconBlog. The project involves developing an EconBlog to share their analyses of daily exchange rate fluctuation. In order to establish a learner-centered constructive environment, student interactions are the core. The EconBlog applications offer opportunities for expanding and enriching the communications among students and teachers. Every week, students are required to review and discuss their EconBlog in class.

2.1 The Questionnaire and Statistical Result

The questionnaire consists of two main parts. The first part collects the background information of the experience of the students in using Web 2.0 and their study motive. With the data collected from this part, this paper is able to investigate whether experience in using Web 2.0 and/or study motivation have any correlation with student's perception on the effectiveness of their learning using EconBlogs in the experience.

Table 1: Students' Experience of Using Web 2.0

	No	Yes	
1. Have you use Blog before doing this project?	24.64%	75.36%	
2. How would you describe yourself in the use of Web 2.0 (e.g. EconBlog, Wiki, Blog and other similar information communication technology)?			
Never Use	Beginner	Regular user	Professional
2.90%	43.48%	46.38%	7.25%

Table 1 reported the statistical results of question 1 and 2. The results show that Blogs are quite popular among the students; over 75% of the students had experience in using Blogs. Indeed nearly all students had experience in using some type of Web 2.0, only 2.9% of the students had never use any Web 2.0.

Table 2: Study Motives

3. How would you describe your learning motive for the course International Finance?			
Getting a Pass	Getting a high Grade	Achieving an A grade	Learning More
4.35%	40.58%	27.54%	27.54%

Table 2 reports the statistical result of question 3. It shows that over 68.12% of students are motivated by the grade. About 27.54% of students can be classified as deep learners whose learning motivate is trying to learn more. The rest of the 4.35% of the students have very low motive in learning.

The second part collects students' perception of the effectiveness of the EconBlogs project in enhancing their learning. The responses to the questions was rated using a four-level ordinal scale (1=Certainly Cannot, 2=Cannot, 3=Can, 4=Certainly Can).

Table 3: Students' perception of the effectiveness of the EconBlogs project in enhancing their learning

	Certainly cannot	Cannot	Can	Certainly Can
4. Do you think that the EconBlog project as a whole can enhance your learning in the course of International Finance?	0.00%	8.70%	78.26%	13.04%
5. Do you think that process of writing the Blog can enhance your learning in the course of International Finance?	0.00%	14.49%	63.77%	21.74%
6. Do you think that the process of sharing your EconBlog with others in the classroom can enhance your learning in International Finance?	0.00%	18.84%	71.01%	10.14%
7. Do you think that the EconBlog project can enhance your skill in using information communication technology?	0.00%	23.19%	56.52%	20.29%
8. Do you think that the EconBlog project experience can enhance your future career?	1.45%	27.54%	56.52%	14.49%
9. Do you think that the EconBlog project experience can enhance your general self-learning ability?	1.45%	21.74%	56.52%	20.29%
10. Do you think that the EconBlog project experience can enhance your confidence in using information communication technology in the future?	1.45%	27.54%	56.52%	14.49%
11. Do you think that the EconBlog project can help you to explore your inner potential?	0.00%	28.99%	57.97%	13.04%

Table 3 reported the statistical result of question 4 to 11. Data collected from Question 4 showed that over 90% of the students feel that the EconBlog project could (can or certainly can) help them to enhance their learning of the course. Data collected from Question 5 and 6 showed that some of the students do not support the writing and the class sharing activities of the project as a way to enhance their learning in the courses. 14.49% of the students do not feel that the writing process can enhance their learning of the courses. 18.84% of the students do not feel that the sharing process can enhance their learning of the course. Question 7 to 11 intended to collect student's feeling of the Econblog project in enhancing some of their transferable skills. Generally, the data collected show that over 70% of the students think that the EconBlog project can enhance their skill in using ICT in the future as well as their self-learning ability.

2.2 Correlation

This study has used Spearman's correlation test for investigating the correlation between students' perceptions of the effectiveness of the EconBlog project in enhancing their learning (i.e. data collected from question 4) and the data collected from other questions. Spearman's correlation is a nonparametric statistical tool that is popularly used by researchers in exploring the relationship between ordinal data. Brinkman, Rae and Dwivedi (2007) examine students' behavior, Web-base learning strategies, attitudes and performance using Spearman's correlations test and significant Spearman's correlation was found between the midterm grade and the deep learning approach. Swan (2001) investigated the relationship between student satisfaction and online learning courses using Spearman's correlations test.

Table 4: Spearman's correlation between students' perceptions of the effectiveness of the EconBlog project in enhancing their learning (question 4) and the data collected from other questions (i.e questions 1 to 3 ad 5 to 11).

	4. Do you think that the EconBlog project as a whole can enhance your learning in the course of International Finance?
1. Have you use Blog before doing this project?	0.127
2. How would you describe yourself in the use of Web 2.0 (e.g. EconBlog, Wiki, Blog and other similar information communication technology)?	.243(*)
3. How would you describe your learning motive for the course International Finance?	0.056
5. Do you think that process of writing the Blog can enhance your learning in the course of International Finance?	.516(*)
6. Do you think that the process of sharing your EconBlog with others in the classroom can enhance your learning in International Finance?	.251(*)
7. Do you think that the EconBlog project can enhance your skill in using information communication technology?	0.145
8. Do you think that the EconBlog project experience can enhance your future career?	.506(*)
9. Do you think that the EconBlog project experience can enhance your general self-learning ability?	.334(*)
10. Do you think that the EconBlog project experience can enhance your confidence in using information communication technology in the future?	0.148
11. Do you think that the EconBlog project can help you to explore your inner potential?	.370(*)

* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

Table 4 shows that student's perception on the effectiveness of the EconBlog project spearman correlated with student's ability of using Web 2.0. Students that are familiar with Web 2.0 are more likely to feel that the EconBlog project can enhance their learning. However, table 4 shows that the learning motive and experience in Blog do not spearman correlated to student's perception of the learning effectiveness of the EconBlog project. Therefore it seems that it is worth providing Web 2.0 training the students instead of just providing the training on the use of Blog.

The learning effectiveness of the EconBlog project also spearman correlated with students' feeling about the writing process and the class sharing session. Students that have positive attitude toward the writing process and the class sharing session are more likely agree on the learning effectiveness of the EconBlog project. This provided an evidence to support that interaction between students in class sharing and/or in writing Blogs can enhance learning effectiveness, at least from the point of view of the students.

Consider the transferable skill (i.e. data collected from question 7 to 11), table 4 shows that as students feel that the EconBlog project can enhance their future career or their self-learning ability, they are more likely to agree on the learning effectiveness of the EconBlog project. In addition, students that have positive attitude towards the learning effectiveness of the EconBlog project also feel that the project can enhance their inner potential. This reflected that bringing the students to the real world through Blog application can enhance student's transferable skill and confidence in learning.

3. Conclusion

The experience reviewed that in order to establish a learner-centered constructivist environment, student interactions are the core. The learning effectiveness of the EconBlog project correlated with the class sharing and writing process. Both processes are the core of interaction in the Blog application. It can be concluded that the EconBlog applications offer opportunities for expanding and enriching the communications among students. In addition, the learning effectiveness of EconBlog tended to correlate with student's Web 2.0 skill, thus, provide training on the Web 2.0 skill can enhance the learning effectiveness.

In addition, EconBlog also brings student to a real world situation, sharing their works with the public. The feedbacks from students show that they appreciate the learning activities and think that the learning experience will facilitate their self-learning capacities, help them to explore their inner potential and build up their confidence in getting success in the information society.

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