Educational blogs and their roles in supporting the educational process for the undergraduate: survey study

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Abstract— **The age in which we live is characterized by rapid development and continuous change in all aspects of life. Educational institutions are also characterized by their ability to absorb the existing scientific development. Thus, they are characterized by their ability to face social and economic changes through the rapid development of education systems and methods. They are required to take advantage of the technological and information revolution the world is witnessing, which has become a prerequisite for achieving development and progress; i.e. education using advanced information technology is the only way for us to fill the knowledge gap, strengthen education and achieve development and progress. Many countries have depended on social networks as a means of education in virtual world. Thanks to the features that characterize blogs, they have become one of the most prominent social media networks that can support the educational process. From this perspective, this study attempted to review a series of studies and scientific research related to the subject of the current study: Educational blogs and their roles in supporting the educational process for the undergraduate. Current study has adopted descriptive analytical method using four-wheel analysis (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats) SWOT, which specialized in identifying the strengths and weaknesses of educational blogs in enhancing the educational process from the point of view of experts and determine opportunities and threats for that blogs. Accordingly, the most prominent of the findings of the study is that educational blogs have increased the effectiveness of university education through the multiple advantages and applications that enrich the educational process as the educational blogs positively affect 64% in supporting the educational process. Current study has concluded a set of recommendations, notably the need to use blogs in teaching courses for its effectiveness in the development of critical thinking skills among students and in the educational process.**

Keywords: Blogs, Social Networks, Hypermedia instructional programs ،E-Learning ،online learning, Web 2.0, University education, Academic achievement.

I   INTRODUCTION

Knowledge and learning have occupied a place in the heart of the current era as a source of wealth and a measure of power among nations. Using Digital Technology represented by internet and international information network has become a necessity of the success of any education system in providing knowledge and learning. The Internet achieves several advantages, including: enormous abundance of information sources, increasing knowledge and cultural outcome of the learner, filling shortfalls the curriculum faced by, fasting access to information providing the excitement and thrill and providing flexibility in education and the independence of the learner. Thus, it contributed to change the features of the educational system with its various components. Many countries depended on social networks as a means of education in virtual world. [1]

Weblogs are considered as one of the most important Web-based E-learning techniques that have gained great fame recently as they allow subscribers to express their opinions by audio and video and access to all Internet subscribers around the world, even became termed as the second revolution in the world of the Internet after e-mail, and now along with e-mail and Wiki are one of the most prominent Internet services. [2]

Therefore, current study interested in knowing the relationship between the use of educational blogs and effectiveness of the educational process to undergraduate as the study is based on four-wheel analysis, which is interested in identifying strengths and weaknesses as well as the diagnosis of the opportunities and threats facing the use of educational blogs in the educational process. The study recommended a set of recommendations which serves as a solution to these threats.

II   PREVIOUS STUDIES

Researcher was able, through a survey conducted by her for the intellectual production of its forms, types and various languages, to obtain a reasonable balance of knowledge-based research and studies published on the subject of using educational blogs to support the educational process for undergraduate. Weblogs technique was selected for examination and analysis because they contain many features, notably the "interactive and flexible" which would be passed by education to learn, and make student as a recipient, sender, interactive and participant not just a passive recipient. It also contributes effectively to make education as a "cooperative and complementary" among students. Everyone participate in editing, publishing, adding and commenting. All of

these features the educational process shall be needed at the university which considered as one of the most important educational institutions interested in e-learning to support the goals of education and research. This is what the current study trying to know and detect through the use of SWOT analysis for eight scientific studies related to the current study. These studies will be reviewed as follows:

A.   *The purpose of the study [1]* is to identify the effectiveness of a Weblog in the collection of teaching techniques curriculum and the trend of the students of the Faculty of Education at Al-Aqsa University in Gaza towards this Weblog. The sample is consisted of (80) students, divided equally into two experimental groups that are studied using the Weblog and a control examined in the normal way. A test before and after has been applied for both groups and a scale of trend towards the Weblog and using them in teaching the experimental group. The results showed a statistically significant difference in both dimensional applications in favor of the group that studied using Weblog and that there is a statistically significant difference in the pre and post application for the scale of the direction for the experimental group in favor of the dimensional application and that the experimental group students outperformed female students in achievement and in the scale trend. Weblog has achieved significant efficacy in achievement and direction according to the equation of Mac Jojian [3].

B.   *The study [2]* has expanded to know the reality of the use of blogs in the field of educational teaching library science by knowing the direction of faculty members of the Library Science Department, University of Mentouri - Constantine, towards the use of this technique in the field of teaching as the study was based on the questionnaire, which was distributed to the permanent professors of this Department. The study concluded that the trends of the teaching staff in the Department of Library Science were marked by negativity, in general, towards the use of this technique. The proportion of using blogs among the professors of this Department was only 5.37%, and the proportion using Web 2 applications doesn't exceed 75.43%. As we see, the proportion of 5.37% shows that the effectiveness of their use in teaching the curriculums of library science was medium in general. The study also revealed that the most important reasons for non-using them by professors involved in the research (respondents) lies in their ignorance of how to use them on the one hand, and the lack of necessary facilities such as enough Internet and computers in labs of this Department. The study recommended the need to hold training courses to educate faculty members in this Department and encourage them to take advantage of blogging technology to facilitate and improve the learning process [4].

C.   *The purpose of the study [3]* was to identify the impact of using blogs in the university education, and what it can add to the learning environment in the classroom, and how it can develop students' experiences. The study sample consisted of 24 students from the postgraduate students (master) in the Faculty of Education at the University of Hong Kong during the on academic semester. The blog was used to discuss the related decision of the topics (the use of information technology in learning). The study outcomes referred that using blogs resulted in developing academic achievement of the students. The best thing, which enjoys the students while using the blog, is reviewing other people's posts and receiving others comments on what they write. The participants in the study agreed that the blog contributed to facilitate their learning, and contributed to their learning to new thing after reviewing of the others actions. Most of the students expressed their desire and willingness to create blogs in the future [5].

D.   *The purpose of the study [4]* was to identify the impact of the integration of blogs in ten chapters within five semesters on students' skills and the grades achieved in the final exams in those classes by comparing the academic level of those students before using blogs and after the subscription. The study concluded that although the students have begun to use blogs as a sort of school obligation because of assigning grades for participating in the blog, that participation benefited their Academic achievement and strengthen their association with each other and the course they were studying, since they became more enjoyable of their course compared to using the traditional methods of education [6].

III   STUDY PROBLEM:

Due to the contemporary interest of the modern techniques and the attempt of its using in the educational process service and solving some of its encountered problems such as (Increasing of the number of the students applying for the study year after year, the plenty of courses' topics with the difficulty of opening the door in front of the students to choose the suitable topic for them, the negativity of the students during the lecture, low level of their motivation towards the learning, considering the shyness and hesitation as obstacle in front of the participation of many of them and their reaction during the educational situation and the absence of the sufficient time for interaction and discussion between courses' Professors and students and between the students themselves) and in line with the modern educational directions towards the using of the E-learning and its tools in the educational process, in particular at the Undergraduate Level which aims to focus on the development of the research process. At these points, this study comes to try to discover the role of using the blogs in the

effectiveness of the educational process at the undergraduate level. Therefore, the current study problem could be formulated in the following question:

What is the role of the Educational Blogs in supporting the Educational Process for the Undergraduate Level?

IV STUDY APPROACH:

The current study used the descriptive and analytical approach due to being fit with the nature of this study, as it depends on the study of the phenomenon as exists in the reality, interested in describing it accurately and expressed it qualitatively or quantitatively for studies interested in the study of the relationship between the educational blogs and learning at the undergraduate level using the SWOT Analysis which interested in determining the Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats in the subject of the current study.

A. SWOT Analysis (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats):

The main step to know the role of the educational blogs in supporting the educational process at the undergraduate level is carried out through the study and analysis of the vital actors of the educational blogs in terms of the internal environment analysis (Strengths and Weaknesses) and the external environment analysis (Opportunities and Threats), as follows: -

1. The Internal Environment Analysis:

a. Strengths:

Through the access to and analyzing the previous studies [3-6] which addressed the relationship between the educational blogs and educational process for the undergraduate level; some of the strengths were turned out, which are as follows:

- The educational blogs have helped to solve educational problem represented in that the e-learning is lack to the humanitarian aspect "Hard Learning", as they added the humanitarian form through the participation and interaction of the human element with the educational process, which helping to attract the learners and increase the desire in the learning.
- The blogs are deemed an easy to install and use technique; as anyone who doesn't know the programming and designing of websites could create a blog for him within minutes due to there are websites providing the service of hosting and creating blogs freely. So that the blogs are deemed distinctive communication tools with the students, and it can be used in the educational process effectively whether for the professor or the student as well as using it in delivering the requirements and instructions of the lessons for the students or communicating with the professor outside the framework of the school places.

- Blogs are effective means of communication which operate in great efficiency in dissemination of information better than the traditional hard versions (Textbooks).
- Blogs are cooperative tool, through which the opportunity is available for the students to work together on the same projects. Also, students can cooperate with students and professors from other schools and other countries.
- Blogs eliminate the shyness problem of the classroom participation for some students through their participation in the blog.
- Students use the blogs as a comprehensive reference to solve homework assignments and training exercises of the subject, as professors could prepare a blog for each school subject in which students solve the exercises and assignments of the school subjects of each chapter separately and posting it in the blog till the blog then becomes a comprehensive reference for the subject exercises and the students can refer to in the coming years.
- Blogs were able to open and produce a new language between users themselves, which differs from Arabic and English.
- Blogs became a part of the Student daily life; they have invaded all fields as they provide training, educational and recreational services.
- Blogs transform the educational process from education to learning, where each student learns self-learning which suits his abilities and potentials.
- Blogs stimulate the students on the creative thinking with different patterns and ways because the communication and interactions occur between persons and intellectuals of different environment.
- Blogs help to break the barrier of the time and place, as the blogger can blog in anytime of the day or night and from anywhere. All he needs is a device, network and thought only.
- Blogs achieve a lot of recreation and entertainment for learners. Meanwhile this recreation is for an educational purpose determined by the professor, such as educational games especially those games used in learning the English as a second language, as these games will increase the stock of terminology in English for students.
- Through blogs we can follow the latest developments in the Specialty, where the professor assigns his students to search for the latest developments in the field of the scientific material which he teaches, thus he maintains the connection of the students with the new information in the specialty.
- Blogs are working on raising the "Students' Aspirations" and "Encouraging them for participation the education and learning" more strongly through participation in the available events of the Electronic Blog.

- There is very important note monitored by professors which is the students are learning new technology through the blog as they add new applications such as video or audio clips which encourages then on the continuing education process.
- Through using the blogs, it can be shared the parent participation and continuous following-up, where the students' blog provide an outstanding opportunity to share with the family the achievements of their children, seeing their works and following-up the development of their performance. Also, the blog increases the possibilities of the connection between the family and professors, discussing matters which are to be studies and determining the intervention elements, making the family participated in the education process of their children.

b. *Weaknesses:*

There are many weaknesses in using the educational blogs in the Higher Education which were turned out to use through the analyzing and studying of the previous studies [3-6] which can be listed as follows:

- Students may feel annoyed of the existence of the professor in their own pages, they find in that infringement on their personal liberty.
- The professor may face problems in maintaining the property rights due to the information and activities to be circulated.
- Some students can't distinguish between what is academic and what is personal talking.
- Using the blogs in communication reduces undoubtedly the direct and personal confrontation between the professors and his students, which sometimes are important to create a strong and lasting relationship between them.
- Stealing the presentations and ideas between the students, as it facilitate on the student to transfer the information from his colleague and attributed them to him.
- Violating the privacy, as there is a personal profile for each student containing his data, place of living, activities and tendencies. The usage of this information may be misused in case of disclosing them to unreliable people.
- A lot of professors apologize to respond the questions and queries of the students due to their preoccupation and their rejection to disseminate their personal blogs because they consider it websites have much of privacy.
- The students can't be protected from linking relationships with strangers or viewing the inappropriate content through these blogs.
- The disadvantages of the blogs are that the information provided in the blogs may be right and wrong. The topics provided are not subject to the severe monitor, which may form warning under certain circumstances.

2. External Environment Analysis:

The opportunities and threats are shown as follows:

a. Opportunities**:**

In order the educational blogs to achieve its role to the fullest in supporting the educational process for the Undergraduate Level, it is necessary to exploit the following opportunities and work on its support and activation:

- In the classroom management, blogs can be used as electronic gateway helping in forming learning community for students. The ease of handling with blogs to use it in delivering the requirements of the lessons and its instructions for students can be exploited, to inform the students with importance notes or to determine certain duties or home functions. Also, it can be used as boards specialized for the Question and Answer activities.
- In the Undergraduate Management, where blogs can be used in creating electronic pages concerning every scientific department in the University, as the websites for Universities are not often updated regularly. But when every department in the University possesses its own blog, it becomes possible to enter modifications on these pages without the need to wait the person in charge of the website to add and update these modifications daily [7].
- Students' Achievement Files (Electronic Bags), Electronic blogs can be easily used to show and organize the students' achievements and to protect the student ownership of it through the date of sending them to the blog. Then, the skills of the student can be evaluated and developed during the semester better; in addition to that the student will show greater interest of his productions distinctively, because he knows that it will be published through Internet in his name [8].
- It helps the emergence of digital generation from students depending on the techniques in all aspects of life, as it keeps pace with the requirements of the modern technical era.

b. Threats:

There are some risks which face the using of the educational blogs in the Higher Educations, from which it should take care and wok on processing it, as shown through the previous studies [3-6], which are represented in the following:

- Technical Obstacles are represented in that some of the students and member of staff are not having the skills of using the computer in general and the skills of using blogs in particular.
- Social Obstacles are represented in that some professors don't respond to communication and participation with the students.
- Moral Obstacles are represented in misuse the educational blogs by some students and infringement on the professors without moral restrictions.

- Legal Obstacles are represented in the loss of the rights concerning the intellectual property and committing number of crimes of the intellectual theft between students.
- Security Obstacles are represented in the security breaches for the devices, accounts, pages and personal blogs.

V   OUTCOMES:

The present study has addressed the issue of educational blogs and their role in supporting the university educational process, through clarifying the most prominent strengths and weaknesses and identifying the opportunities and threats that educational blogs may face in the university education.

Analytical side: In order to find the percentage of educational blogs use to support the effectiveness of the university educational process, we should use system effectiveness equation [9] described as follows:

$$\text{System effective.} = \frac{\text{Strengths no.}}{\text{strengths + weaknesses}} \times 100$$

Current study concluded to (16) strenths, whereas the number of weaknesses were (9) that can be calculated based on the equation no (1), as follows:

$$\text{System effective.} = \frac{16}{16 + 9} \times 100 = 64\%$$

This means that the educational blogs affecting by 64% in their support for the educational process. Effectiveness of educational blogs should be measured regularly, Thus the lack of effectiveness of educational blogs in supporting the educational process is 25% (100% - 64% = 36%). Enhancing the importance of the outcomes of the current study that confirming the role of education blogs in supporting the effectiveness of the university educational process is that many world universities have realized the importance of educational blogs in promoting university education, so they started to embrace blogging technology and integrate them into the educational process in the those universities. This was clear in the previous studies [3-6].

Many studies and scientific research conducted in this area have proved the effectiveness of educational blogs in the university education. One of those studies, a study presented by (Duta, 2015) to define the extent of using blogs in the University of Barcelona (Spain) and the University of Bucharest (Romania). The significance outcomes of those studies are that the students at the University of Barcelona believe that blogs have contributed as a motivation tool (average 3.71 more than 5), and to learn their own concepts (average 3.83), while blogs as a tool develops their skills was at the highest rate (average 4.32), as shown in the following figure:
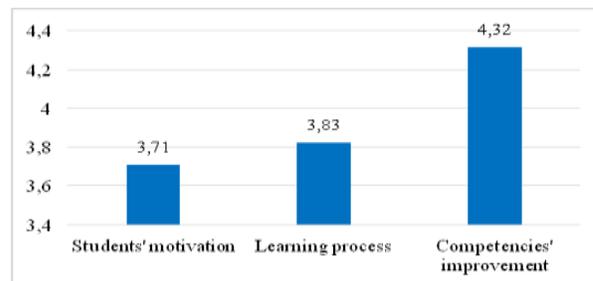

Figure 1. The University of Barcelona students' opinion about experience with blogs [10]

The same study showed that the experiences gained by the students in University of Bucharest (Romania), from their use of the blogs, were: to increase the motivation for learning (first place), improve competences (second place), and receive feedback from the teacher and the students / colleagues (third place) as shown in the following figure:
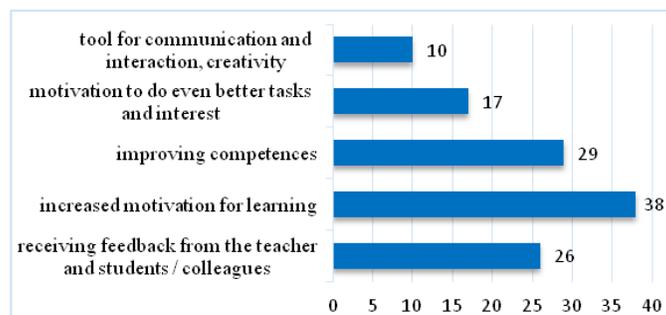

Figure 2. The University of Bucharest students' opinion about experience with blogs [11]

In a study conducted by (Yang, 2009) about using blogs among students to learn English as a second language in Taiwan, the outcomes indicate that students have improved their English significantly when using blogs, which helped them to verify the correct of their writings before they are published, as shown in the following table:

Table 1. Topics and number of student teachers' discussions on the blog [12]

Topic category	Total number	Descriptive	Critical
Theories of teaching	324	243	81
Approaches and methods	06	3	3
Evaluation teaching	25	3	72
Self-awareness	54	02	52
Questions about teaching	8	1	37
Total	77	02	75

Number of students = 43

* indicates where the number of critical reflections was greater than the number of descriptive reflections

This was a review of results of some scientific studies and research, which confirm and indicate the effective and significant role of use the educational blogs in supporting the university educational process.

VI CONCLUSION, RECOMNDATIONS and FUTURE PERFORMS:

Role of educational blogs in support and increase the effectiveness of university education has been reviewed. Through analyzing the topic as quadrilateral analysis that is identifying strength and weaknesses points, opportunities and threats, the current study has concluded results as follows:

- Blogs have helped with providing a learning environment characterized by freedom, not abide just the classroom or hours of study and learning at any time or place.

- Providing meaningful educational opportunities in which students feel self-control in their learning and progress academic.

- Shifting the student from passive reception method to learn through self-directed.

- Changing traditional teaching methods, which helps to find a class full of vitality and activity.

- Increasing opportunities of professional development for the professor to become as a guide or a leader.

- Providing the students with positive skills while dealing with the blog such as leadership skills, communication skills with others, problem-solving skills, creative thinking and critical thinking.

In light of the previous outcomes, the current study recommends with the following recommendations: -

- Using blogs in teaching courses because of its effectiveness in the development of critical thinking skills among students in the learning process.

- Using blogs to provide opportunities for the professor to assess the extent of the students' development in various performing skills as the blog on web 2 contains E-Portfolio.

- Using blogs creates learners able to invent new things and do not repeat what the previous generations achieved.

- Providing necessary training courses for students as well as faculty members at universities to develop the technical skills in order to use blogs in the educational process.

- Developing standards and laws to help preserving intellectual property and the university administration has its responsibility.

- Developing encouraging incentives which arguing faculty members to use educational blogs, integrate them into university education and link those incentives with assessing the academic performance of faculty members.

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