

## Blogs in Distance Education

Weblogs, which are also known as blogs, first appeared on the Internet in the middle of the 1990s (Allanson, 2013). A weblog is defined as a website with an author or group of authors who post information online at regular intervals. Blog is a short form of the word weblog (Pang, 2009). This essay focuses on the strengths and weaknesses of students and instructors using blogs in distance education. There are more benefits than disadvantages to using weblogs in distance teaching and learning. Weblogs can be used to improve personal reflections and group work in a distance education course. The strengths of a weblog are that it is an asynchronous technology, has a variety of uses, is user-friendly, and is a tool for collaborative learning.

Weblogs are an asynchronous technology which are available on the Internet anytime and from anywhere. Weblogs are made up of short, updated posts which are arranged in reverse chronological order (Pang, 2009). Blog posts can be read by anyone around the world and they provide an authentic audience for writing by a student or an instructor (Allanson, 2013). Blogs are convenient for students; because, they can be accessed anytime through the Internet (Allanson, 2013). The students, instructors, guest speakers and the general public can leave comments on the blog after they read the postings. Blogs, which are asynchronous, can also have many uses in distance education.

Weblogs can be used by the author for many different reasons. Blogs have versatility because they can be used to express the interests of the blog's author (Hammond & Bourget, 2011). There are many types of blogs which include blogs for an individual, a group, a family, a

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community group or a corporation. Weblogs can be used for putting personal reflections or journals on the internet. People use blog as an online publishing tool to express their hobbies, likes, dislikes and interests (Allanson, 2013). A blog website can be used to present various types of writing for comments such as sport, debates, reviews and stories (Towhidi, 2010). A blog is typically text-based; but it can be enhanced by graphics, videos and links (Pang, 2009). Finally, blogs can also be used by the author to increase his or her personal or professional network.

Weblogs are easy for the average person to use; because, blogs do not require the author to know a lot of technical knowledge. The author can add content to the blog without knowing any programming languages (Kurtz & Porath, 2012). Blogs are free personalized publishing tools that can be created by anyone and are not subject to any editing instructions or other formal constraints (Kurtz & Porath, 2012). Blogs are not restricted by physical limitations of pages and sheets of paper (Kurtz & Porath, 2012). Each blog post is usually 1,500 words or less and focusses on a specific topic (Allanson, 2013). The content of the blog has an author or a group of authors who can be identified (Hurst & Maykov, 2009). Weblogs can also be used by students and instructors to develop a personal or professional network.

Weblogs can be a useful tool for collaborative learning between students in distance education classrooms. Blogs can be used for sharing information between students and instructors. Weblogs are useful for students involved in the online conversation because they gain a wider perspective (Raeth & Smolnik, 2010). A student's work on the blog can be read by anybody who finds the blog on the Internet. People who have a weblog have a written record of the comments by the visitors to the website. Blogs are also a way for students to negotiate

information and discuss complex problems (Hammoud & Bourget, 2011). In short, blogs can be used for encouraging interaction and communication between the students.

Although there are several advantages to using weblogs in distance education courses, there are also some disadvantages to using this technology. Some students find the technology challenging, and experience difficulty when creating and maintaining a weblog (Pang, 2009). Blog postings are limited to the author or group of authors who create the blog (Allanson, 2013). When a blog is created by a person or group of people, there is an initial lack of content on the website (Raeth & Smolnik, 2010). A student's blog might include sensitive information such as personal data, disputes with other students, and political opinions (Pang, 2009). Blogs are an asynchronous technology, so it can take hours or days to receive comments on a posting. There is no guarantee that other people will write any comments to respond to the author's posting. Despite the disadvantages, weblogs have the potential to improve distance education.

In conclusion, there are more advantages than weaknesses to incorporating weblogs in distance education courses. Weblogs have the potential to improve distance education; because it is an asynchronous technology, has various uses, it is user-friendly and a tool for collaborative learning. Weblogs, on the Internet, provide an authentic audience for the students' writing and opportunities for feedback. Blogs are an effective tool for collaborative learning; since students can use them to improve their personal reflection and critical thinking skills. When students respond to comments written on their blogs, they will improve their critical thinking skills. A weblog is an important vehicle for self-expression which allows students to have closure after each lesson or course. Weblogs are a user-friendly technology, which are easy for instructors to learn and incorporate into distance education courses.

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