

Enlightening blogs

Although there may not be many related to the topic, Malaysian education blogs cover a wide spectrum of perspectives from personal commentary to advice from first-hand experience.

SO, what can you find on the Internet about Malaysian education?

A quick search using the phrase on the Google search engine produced 5.36 million results.

Ranking first and second were the Education in Malaysia blog (<http://educationmalaysia.blogspot.com/>) and the Wikipedia entry on Education in Malaysia respectively.

Below those websites were the Malaysian Education Ministry website, followed by a few commercial education-related sites.

The ranking of the first two websites, as gauged by Google, gives an indication of the popularity and regard the two sites have within the Internet community.

Both websites are not "official" sites of any sort, but instead, individual or community efforts to provide information and/or opinions on Malaysian education and issues related to the Internet community.

While there does not seem to be as many websites or blogs that focus solely on Malaysian education, as compared to say, food or politics, there are certainly a few websites out there that offer information and food for thought on the subject.

Offering opinions

Blogs can come in many forms, but those on education generally seem to come in two categories.

They are: blogs that serve as a personal commentary on educational issues, and blogs that collect and share articles related to educational issues.

The latter can be sub-divided further into those blogs that collect all sorts of articles relating to education, and those that focus quite specifically on scholarships and/or public exams.

As noted above, the most popular blog in the first category (as ranked by a few of the more popular Web search engines) is the Education in Malaysia blog.

Started in 2003 by current Petaling Jaya Uluara Member of Parliament Tony Pua, the blog soon gained two more contributors — Dr Ong Kian Ming, then at the start of his PhD programme at Duke University, USA, and more recently, Dartmouth University, USA, undergraduate John Lee.

Dr Ong, 35, explained: "At that time, Tony was in the process of transferring to a new company being a CEO of an IT company) and active politics."

He started the blog because he's passionate about education."

Dr Ong added that he was invited to come onboard as a contributor a few months after the blog started.

Both are passionate about education, and we felt that there are a lot of things worth with the education system, especially at the tertiary level."

"Our angle is about trying to put out critical positions on education."

"We make no apologies for our view; they are out there for everyone to see."

As it stands to the present day, the three bloggers are quite frank on their views of what

is wrong with various aspects of the Malaysian education system.

Hot topics can garner up to around 2,000 - 2,500 unique page hits, and the blog has quite a loyal following, said Dr Ong.

However, as each blogger's time get taken up by other interests and duties — Pua, by his political duties; Dr Ong, by his new job as lecturer in UCS University's — the blog is not updated as regularly as it used to be.

According to Dr Ong, it is possible that the blog may be winding down in terms of activities, but it will be maintained as resource for those interested in Malaysian education.

An alternative pathway

Tara Shaifu, 24, was inspired to start



A couple of students checking out the scholarship forums on the Reborn Community (ReCom.Org) website. — NORAFI EHSAN / The Star

her blog EducateDeviate (<http://educatedeviate.wordpress.com/>) because of her passion for alternative forms of education.

"I was very frustrated and disillusioned with school, especially towards the later years."

There was too much emphasis on grades and following the norm, and nothing about living your life the way you want to.

"When I started hearing about alternative methods like unschooling, alternative schools, etc. I was charmed and very enthusiastic!"

"Then, in 2005, I travelled across the world with the global education non-profit organisation Up With People for half the year and that trip expressed everything I loved about alternative education — being experiential, diverse groups of

people, lots of creativity and social good."

"After my trip, I decided to start a blog about my thoughts, and it grew into a resource for other young people like me who wanted something different that school couldn't provide for them," she explained via e-mail.

The blog is a mix of her personal learning experiences in alternative education and youth empowerment, with information on various education-related topics that interested her.

Tara, who is currently a performance artist in Brisbane, Australia, shared that her blog got around a couple of hundred readers a month.

While her audience consisted mostly of students — either in upper-secondary or in the transition between school and university, she also received responses from young adults working in social enterprise and youth development, as well as adults interested in education as a social topic.

"What I did get with some regularity were school students asking me for advice."

"One e-mail that I got, however, remains open for those interested in Tara's past postings, and can be used to get in touch with her."

"By students for students"

After finishing his SPM at the end of 2005, Kuanbin boy Chong Wei decided to start up a blog because he "had nothing else to do," but instead of a personal online journal, he

or had just finished SPM (Sijil Pelajaran Malaysia).

"She really wanted to do media studies, but her parents were



DR ONG: The blog grew quite organically — we wrote on whatever issues that pleased our interest. — RAJA FADAL HISHAM / The Star



TIARA: I believe that young people need and deserve all sorts of alternative pathways of education, not just the traditional ones.

adamant about her pursuing medicine. She was so stressed that she was seriously considering killing herself."

"I think she mostly needed someone who could empathise with her, and wouldn't say, 'Do medicine or else!'"

"She did cheer up considerably afterwards, however, as time went by, the effort to maintain the blog became a chore as she developed a keener interest in the creative arts," he said.

"I did have plans to turn EducateDeviate into a more developed resource site, but my heart truly wasn't into it any more."

"By early 2009, I had moved on to performance art and production, which I'm currently loving and found my interest waning."

"I didn't want to force myself to update a blog just for the sake of it, so I decided to give it a break."

"I do still hold to my original opinions and politics — that young people need and deserve all sorts of options for their education, and that they should be regarded as people first and foremost — but my life passions come in waves and phases, and right now, I'm more interested in creative expression," she said.

"The blog, however, remains open for those interested in Tara's past postings, and can be used to get in touch with her."

After finishing his SPM at the end of 2005, Kuanbin boy Chong Wei decided to start up a blog because he "had nothing else to do," but instead of a personal online journal, he

opted to make it a blog for students looking for information on tertiary education, as well as exam tips.

"After my SPM, I tried to search for information on higher education, especially those written by students, but couldn't find much."

"So I thought, why not develop a blog for this kind of information?" he explained.

Chong, 22, added that since he had just finished his SPM, he also wanted to share his study tips with others.

"As I was a straight A's student, I felt confident enough to share my knowledge with my juniors," he said.

The blog called Malaysia Students (<http://www.malaysia-students.com/>) offers posts on a range of topics from SPM and STPM (Sijil Tinggi Persekolahan Malaysia) exam tips to advice on what to do after those exams, scholarships, life in local universities and National Service.

Blog entries are submitted by a team of volunteer students to Chong, who edits and then posts them.

"The blog is for students by students. All the information is from our own first-hand experience," he said.

Chong hopes to get more contributors to the blog, which has 8,056 readers on its mailing list, more active.

"I want it to be more active, for example, one post a week, but it's more like one a month, because all our contributors are very busy."

He added that now they have introduced

guest blogging where contributors can just send in one or two posts, rather than blogging on a long term basis.

"I hope to post more information like scholarship interview experiences, life in public universities and what certain degree programmes are like," he said.

For Chong, who is currently a third-year computer science student at Universiti Malaysia, the blog is a way of giving back to society, and passing on knowledge to new generations of students.

Chong edits and posts blog entries submitted by his team of volunteer student contributors.

— SHARIF CHAM / The Star



Chong edits and posts blog entries submitted by his team of volunteer student contributors. — SHARIF CHAM / The Star

MORE ONLINE RESOURCES

Malaysia Link - Scholarships for Malaysians
<http://malaysialink.com>
A blog that compiles information on scholarships for Malaysians.

Blog Claps Blogging in Malaysia
<http://www.blogclaps.com>
A Bahasa Malaysia blog on topics related to teachers, students, schools and teaching, written by Claps James, a primary school teacher at SK Catur Avenue, Ipoh, Perak.

Education Talk
<http://www.edu-talk.net>
A blog compiling various news articles on Malaysian education, as well as information on education events.

Malaysia Scholarship Centre
<http://malaysiascholarship.net>

A blog that compiles information on scholarships for Malaysians, and also has a few posts with tips on how to get scholarships.

School Matters To Me
<http://schoolmatters2me.com>
A non-profit blog primarily for Malaysian school teachers with resources for teaching and learning, currently funded by a group of SMEs in the US.

Tao-Education.com
<http://www.tao-education.com>
A blog that compiles articles from various sources on a wide variety of topics relating to Malaysian education, put together by UNIRAZAK Sabah Regional Centre, Kota Kinabalu, lecturer and former Sabah Education Department assistant director Teo Eng Seng.



A screen shot of the Education in Malaysia blog. — NORAFI EHSAN / The Star