

FOSTERING WRITING SKILL IN ESL STUDENTS THROUGH USING BLOGS

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ABSTRACT: The use of blogs in language instruction is redefining the discipline by allowing EFL students to improve their writing abilities through self- and peer-reflection. These online journals enhance critical thinking and critical thinking skills by promoting reflective and group learning. Planning assignments, fixing mistakes, and posting frequently on the blogs are all encouraged activities for the students.

KEYWORDS: EFL learners, Critical thinking, Collaborative learning and Blog projects.

INTRODUCTION

Blogs are being used in education more and more to support students in exploring and assimilating new concepts while connecting accepted and unaccepted worldviews. This kind of writing gives students new chances and rewards for writing about themselves while also assisting them in shaping and interpreting their meanings in writing.

Statement of the Problem: Blogs along with other social tools are quickly making their way into educational settings, and even into the area of foreign language (FL) teaching. But how and to what extent do these applications promote social interaction, in addition to the development of reading and writing skills is still uncovered. To that end, this paper investigates more closely the use of blogs, and their relative importance to human interaction, virtual community and private and public spaces. Specifically, this paper describes two blog projects implemented over the course of an academic year in intermediate French and German university level language classes. The blog projects allowed students to serve as readers of native speaker blogs (first semester) and then become blog writers (second semester), where they maintained and published their own blogs. The goal of this year-long project has been to examine the steps through which students progressed as blog readers and writers, their reactions to blogging, and how self-expression is characterized in the blogosphere by nonnative speakers of a FL. The participants, during the first semester, were 20 third semester German and 9 fourth semester French students ($n \approx 29$); and during the second semester of the study, they were 10 fourth semester German and 11 fifth semester French students ($n \approx 21$). The data for this study consists of pre- and post-semester Likert type questionnaires worksheets, a presentation each student gave on the Blogger s/he followed plus a written report to accompany the presentation, students' blogs and comments, and focus group interviews that were conducted at the end of the study with students from both language classes.

Analyses of Data: Data were analyzed qualitatively based on blog data, focus group interviews, and questionnaires. The researcher applied text analysis, which allowed grouping of findings into description of themes. The qualitative perspective of analysis revealed a specific pattern of steps through which students progressed during a year of reading and writing blogs.

RESULTS

The researchers have identified eight steps of blogging strategies: exploring the blogosphere, selecting the Blogger, getting to know the Blogger, connecting with the Blogger, articulating the identity of the Blogger, exploring blogging in the FL, establishing identity as FL Blogger, and forming a blog community. According to the survey, over half of the students reported that they enjoyed reading the blog, most reported that it helped them to improve their reading skills and vocabulary in the target language, and they felt it slightly increased their knowledge of popular culture in the target culture. Findings of focus group identified that students had both positive and negative comments about the project as well as suggestions for how to improve it in the future. While the researchers had hoped to create a community with the blogs, they found the blogs functioned more as a private space for students to describe, explore, and express their own ideas and feelings in the TL without needing input from other students. Researchers found this project to be quite beneficial to the students. The blogs promoted ownership and creativity, allowed students to experiment with the FL and express themselves in a relaxed environment, and provided students with a window into the target culture that they would never get from their textbook alone. Having had this opportunity to guide students' own learning in the blogosphere will make students more technically and linguistically competent and confident. As the blogosphere continues to grow and teachers search for the most pedagogically sound applications of blogs, the results of this study suggest that they should be used as they are outside of the classroom: a forum for expressing oneself and one's opinions, similar to a diary, where the topics are mostly self-selected. writing skills and proficiency have shown improvement by active participation in blogs than by using traditional teaching; the students in the experimental group obtained higher scores than their scores on pre-testing and then the control group's scores on post-testing. The results of the questionnaire section dealing with different aspects of writing on the blogs as they affect students' attitudes towards writing showed that the majority of students were positive about Weblog use: this consequently confirms the second hypothesis of the study. Overall, the findings of this study confirm the assertion that blogging promotes favorable learner attitudes, through a learner-centered approach which encourages students to read and write for communicative purposes, in which they can find and make meaning in what they are doing. Weblogs can provide an exciting and motivating learning environment where they can be used to enhance student analytical and critical thinking skills, create social interactions between students and the instructor, students and their peers, and students and a global audience.

CONCLUSION

The study investigates how blogs might improve writing abilities, promote peer feedback, and develop collaborative abilities. It draws attention to their value as a teaching tool for both

students and teachers. Students' motivation is increased by blogs' interactive features, and they can comment on each other's posts to enhance their linguistic proficiency.

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