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# Importance of Blogging in Language Teaching

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**Abstract**

It is widely acknowledged that teachers should support student autonomy and encourage learners to develop foreign language skills outside the classroom to keep learners motivated enough to show the possibility of using languages in the immediate future outside class. Incorporation of technology in classrooms is considered one of the effective tools that brings a lot of opportunities and fun in language teaching and learning. However, applying technology in language teaching shouldn't be only fun. Following paper introduces how blogging can be used as an instructional tool for language learning and teaching considering several important basic benefits such as effects on building intercultural competence, enhancing student interaction and communication , improving basic language skills, boosting learner motivation and language authenticity, as  effective assessment technique and a great learner autonomy builder. Wrede (2003) states that  if teachers  want students to become autonomous, creative, and cooperative individuals, educational institutions must actually allow them to practice exactly these skills by incorporating blogging into curriculum since it fosters dynamic motivation for learning through authentic practice of language learning.

**Keywords:** Autonomy, authenticity, blogging, communication, computer-mediated communication, computer assisted learning, critical thinking , dynamic , e-leaning, engagement, facilitate, fluency, higher order thinking. intercultural competence, interaction, instructional tool, language skills, motivation, pedagogical benefits,  peer review, self-presentation, writing skills

## Introduction

21 century classrooms require educators a lot of creativity and the integration of asynchronous computer-mediated communication in the language teaching. Blogging has already emerged as a teaching and a language learning technique which creates both cooperative and autonomous learning atmosphere. Consequently, the ultimate purpose of language teaching is to get learners to use the language to communicate and be able to express themselves in different real life situations with other individuals who speak the language ( Yang & Chen, 2007). However, blogging does not simply happen. Teachers have to prove to students that they really have a positive attitude towards blogging,  perceive blogging as a valuable language learning tool and convince them that blogging is more than improving language skills. Therefore,it is very important for  teachers to effectively incorporate blogging into their curriculum as an instructional tool to facilitate foreign language learning by improving students' digital literacy as Warschauer notes its effectiveness is greatly dependent on how it is applied. Technological advancements have had a significant impact on current learning styles and new methodologies are closely connected with computer assisted learning to develop learners'  language skills (Kern,1995). However, how teachers effectively incorporate blogging as an effective instructional technique still remains challenging since it is not just choosing a topic and writing anything but it is more about promoting autonomous, cooperative and meaningful learning both inside and outside the classroom (Sun, 2009). Current paper presents a review of the research on the effectiveness of using blogs in language teaching. Research mainly focuses on how blogging can be used as an instructional tool considering several important basic benefits and tips including effects on building intercultural competence, enhancing student interaction and communication , pedagogical benefits, boosting learner motivation and language authenticity, and a great learner autonomy builder.

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### Why blogging in a language classroom?

Since classrooms are becoming more paperless , Computer- Assisted Language Learning can effectively facilitate language teaching (Betts & Glogoff, 2005; Bloch, 2004). Recent surveys show that blogging can best serve students in language learning as its potential is growing parallel to the Internet, and its popularity in language teaching has already  become a 21 century language teaching tool.   According to Huffaker (2005:94): "In the classroom, students can have a personal space to read and write alongside a communal one, where ideas are shared, questions are asked and answered and social cohesion is developed". Nevertheless, blogging allows teachers to build rapport with students who find it difficult to expose themselves in face-to- face communication. Using blogs in a language classroom can successfully promote a positive, both  collaborative and individualistic learning environment (Rourke and Coleman, 2009), since blogs are the best tools to destroy language barriers so that language learners can  "become part of a discourse community in a complex multimodal setting" (Raith, 2009:276).  So, blogging creates "collaborative spaces" where people negotiate and construct meaning and texts as a result students develop higher order thinking skills to establish successful conversations.

### Blogging as a motivational tool

One more fact about blogging is that they can provide deeper engagement into the learning process and more chances for learners to demonstrate developing skills (Alrubail, 2015). Usually students are actively engaged in blogging since they do not have the control over the organization of their ideas so learners develop their creative thinking  by choosing the content in their own ways.

Additionally,  it must be noted that  passive language learners can effectively benefit from blogs as it successfully promotes student interaction virtually. Also, Arena (2008) considers that students who are inactive in face-to-face classroom might become "brilliant bloggers". Consequently, it can be noted that blogging gives a chance to all students to explore their learning skills, potentials and higher order thinking whether they are introverted or extroverted learners.

### Intercultural competence builder

Moreover, as the learners are aware that they have a real audience of their blogs (coursemates, teachers, parents, etc.) they make extra efforts on enhancing the quality of their writing by working on their grammar and vocabulary aspects (Badusah et all, 2009). Similarly,  Arena (2008) also notes that "in order to fully engage in conversations through blogs, students will have to reflect on the quality of their writing and the language being used, be more attentive to their audience, and more selective of their sources". Thus , it promotes learners' cultural awareness and serves as one of the effective tools to increase cultural knowledge as noted by  Lara and Lomicka's project  (2008), which showed positive improvement on learners' creativity, allowed language practice, facilitated expression and increased awareness of the target culture of  students  who come with different L1 backgrounds. Similarly, Pasfield-Neofitou (2011) researched  the use of computer-assisted language learning  by Australian university students who practiced  Japanese as a second language efficiently. The results of the study show that the use of blogs created opportunities for language acquisition, interaction with native speakers and access to observe culture and authentic materials.

### Pedagogical benefits

As Glogowsky (2008) notes,  "Blogging is not about choosing a topic and writing responses for the rest of the term. It is about meaningful, thoughtful engagement with ideas" (para. 2). Thus, language teachers should consider the pedagogical benefits of blogging and use it as a valuable tool to foster dynamic language teaching. In fact, blogging is considered as a web- based e-learning tool that enhances learners' language proficiency considerably. There have been many studies on the effect of blogging to improve learners' language skills. For instance, as obviously blogs can easily be  integrated into a virtual writing classroom as noted by (Murray & Hourigan, 2008) and it is a best tool to enhance writing since blogging does not only boost student writing but also helps learners to become better writers since blogging requires monitoring  ideas , considering cultural norms and choosing appropriate grammar and vocabulary. As a result,  learners enhance their overall writing

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performance, improve writing accuracy and fluency, and motivation. The use of target language extensively helps them to become autonomous writers. Also , several researchers prove that blogging improves  narrative, persuasive and argumentative writing that enhance learners' writing competence  as Godwin-Jones (2006) supports that blogs encourage peer feedback where learners consider the articulation of their ideas and actively engage in collaborative discussions which result in the development skills of  persuasion and argumentation.

Researches suggest several writing tasks that can be effectively used in computer- assisted writing:

1.      E-portfolios (Klages and Clark 2009).

2.      Weekly summaries, journals, describing pictures, posts on cultural topics     ( Ducate and Lomicka 2005).

3.      Reflective entries

4.      Online debates

5.      Student forums

6.      Essays and peer feedback

Above mentioned activities help foster language ownership, create the awareness of the target culture  and boost writing  creativity by using language in a relaxed environment as Ducate and Lomicka (2008) stated. In fact there are many cases that students became more media literate  as Richardson (2006) states, "this is a world where literacy is changing, where readers need to be editors" (para. 18). As in order to become proficient writers, students need to be careful on the quality of their works considering accuracy, appropriateness and become more selective of their sources considering the target culture.

While there is little evidence on the positive effects of blogging to improve reading skills, still learners can positively benefit by reading blogs since blogging develops literacy, critical thinking skills and the level of engagement (West,  2008). Most importantly , blogging fosters real communication as writing and reading takes place in an authentic environment considering a real and active audience.  So, blogging facilitates collaborative approaches in writing and reading (GodwinJones, 2003; Alexander, 2006; Ševelj, 2006).

Many claim that there is very little regarding the effectiveness of blogging to improve speaking skills since many believe that blogging has nothing to do with learners' fluency, pronunciation, accuracy and language complexity.  However, several studies indicate that blogging is an effective tool to develop learners' conceptualization skills, brainstorming, articulation, monitoring, evaluating, self-presentation and information exchange skills (Sun,2009). Furthermore, improvement of listening and speaking skills is closely related to the learner's ability to comprehend and use written languageAlso, audio blogs and podcasts positively result in improving learners' listening skills and oral performances (Sindoni, 2009; Hsu et al. 2008).

**Learner autonomy**

It must be noted that blogging integrates the improvement of several skills and is one of the effective tools to facilitate language learning inside and outside the classroom.   Also, blogging contributes hugely to the improvement of learners' motivation, positively affects the attitudes towards ELT learning with the help of computer assisted activities , creates authentic space to language learning, encourages to learn target culture, facilitate working habits both for teachers and learners , promotes autonomous learning by providing a supportive environment to encourage learners in creative and authentic learning learning. For instance, Arena (2008) outlines the benefits of blogging in ELT as "the choice of more appropriate language on the part of the learners, the addition of new perspectives to the learners' thoughts, and the motivational aspect of realizing that one's voice echoes in distant parts of the globe and is heard by others" which increases student interest and motivation, promotes learner autonomy (Pinkman, 2005; Zhang, 2009). Most importantly blogs constitute a dynamic forum that fosters extensive language use, improves learners' digital fluency,authorship and is one of the most beneficial tools to navigate in classrooms of the future.

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## Conclusions

Above mentioned factor help both educator and students to engage in meaningful learning and teaching since use of blogs both in and outside the classroom promotes authenticity, improves learner autonomy and motivation, targets building intercultural competence, and more importtanly effectively assists language learning and teaching. To conclude it is very important to outline the following tips. Though people are becoming more digitally literate, it is not an easy track for teachers to create and manage informative and effective blogs. Therefore, an author of one of the informative teachers' blogs Pappas (2013) provides 11 useful tips that can serve as a guideline for teachers in order to create and use blogs for educational purposes:

1. Guidelines and Expectations. Teachers should set written guidelines and expectations in order to make sure that both sides (educators and learners) have a clear understanding of the rules before starting the blogging. For instance: whether allowing to post the photos including students or signing the consent forms with the parents.

2. Integrate Classroom Curriculum. Blogging can be indicated in the curriculum.

3. English is for Everyone. This tip can be useful for non-English teachers, or the ones who do not teach SL or FL. As blogging requires good writing skills, thus teachers may dedicate 5-10 minutes to go over the key points that students might need while doing the assignments.

4. The How to of Commenting. It is like the rules of the classroom but on the web. Teachers should provide criteria of commenting for the students in order to have quality comments and avoid put downs and inappropriate language. Hence, provision of feedback for the comments will be helpful for the instructor to monitor the comments.

5. Be Realistic. While building a blog you should know that it is a long process, thus set achievable goals. Moreover, while selecting the topic for a blog consider the curriculum and the interests of the audience. Be creative, and create new blogs once the other becomes exhausted.

6. Read Other Blogs. Reading other classroom and student blogs help to widen your creativity and have a clear picture of what to do with your own blog.

7. Be consistent. Blogging takes commitment for both teachers and students. Therefore, publish the blogs once in two weeks (for example) and then progressively increase the number of submissions for learners as they get more experienced in blogging.

8. Plagiarism. Avoid plagiarism and cite the authors or websites. Explain to the learners that cheating will not be tolerated.

9. Network with Other Bloggers. Network with other local and global bloggers. Make the students collaborate with other student blogs by giving them a chance to select which blog they want to follow.

10. DIve into social media. If you want to make your blog public, then you can link your blog with other social sites such as Facebook, Twitter, Pinterest and others. It will help you to get more readership and currently it is the best way of advertising.

11. Hang in There. As blogging takes a lot of your time you may assign learners to control the comments section and monitor blogs. You can let them practice managing blogs for a certain period of time. It can motivate learners who are eager to take more responsibility, and push them to the new ideas for making blogs more engaging.

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