

TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS OF USING BLOGS IN EFL CLASSES IN PORTUGAL

Project Report

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Leiria, setembro 2017

Mestrado em Utilização Pedagógica das TIC

ESCOLA SUPERIOR DE EDUCAÇÃO E CIÊNCIAS SOCIAIS

INSTITUTO POLITÉCNICO DE LEIRIA

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Juggling between a full-time job as a teacher and family duties as well as this master's has not been easy and has had its ups and downs. To accomplish this report that often looked like a herculean task, I was surrounded by some special people whom I would like to express my gratitude to:

My supervisor, Mark Daubney, for his unwavering support, insightful comments and thorough review work;

My family, in particular my two mothers - my biological mother and my mother-in-law - whose support and assistance have always been precious;

My two wonderful boys for their invaluable encouragement and understanding the reasons I was unable to spend more time with them while working on this project;

My dear friends, Guida and Lena, for their constant support and motivation.

Last but not least important, respondents in all questionnaires and phases of the research design of this study, and APPI staff for disseminating the main questionnaire.

Thank you so much!

RESUMO

O presente relatório faz parte dos requisitos do Mestrado em Utilização Pedagógica das TIC na ESECS-IPL.

Blogging é o ato de publicar conteúdo numa plataforma online, com o qual muitos utilizadores da Internet estão já familiarizados. No entanto, tem sido subutilizado em Inglês como língua estrangeira (LE) em Portugal. Assim, este estudo explora e examina as perceções que os professores de inglês a lecionar nos 2º e 3º CEB, bem como no nível secundário, em Portugal, têm relativamente aos benefícios e constrangimentos de trabalhar com *weblogs* (vulgo, blogues) nas suas aulas. A inclusão de objetivos relacionados com *blogging* nas Metas Curriculares da disciplina de Inglês e em outros documentos oficiais emanados do Ministério da Educação, bem como a crescente importância das literacias digitais na educação em todo o mundo, subjazem ao objetivo deste estudo de fazer uma modesta contribuição - no contexto português - para as formas como os professores de Inglês LE percebem o uso de blogues, e como os alunos podem beneficiar com o seu uso.

Depois de definir as minhas motivações pessoais e profissionais para este estudo e seus objetivos no Capítulo 1, o Capítulo 2 abrange uma extensa revisão da literatura onde discuto o aparecimento de blogues, seguidos dos seus benefícios e constrangimentos quando usados em contextos de sala de aula, conforme identificados na literatura.

O Capítulo 3 apresenta a fundamentação e metodologia do projeto de pesquisa, antes de explicar o procedimento de recolha e análise de dados através de questionários exploratórios aplicados aos professores de Inglês LE em seminários organizados pela Associação Portuguesa de Professores de Inglês (APPI) e um questionário piloto aplicado a todos os professores de Inglês a lecionar numa escola de 2º e 3º CEB na região de Leiria. Estas foram fases que me permitiram refinar o questionário principal, o instrumento primário de recolha de dados do estudo.

O Capítulo 4 é uma análise e discussão dos resultados e padrões a partir dos dados obtidos com o questionário principal, usando uma abordagem essencialmente quantitativa, embora as questões abertas sejam analisadas a partir de uma perspetiva qualitativa, com enfoque tanto nos benefícios como constrangimentos dos blogues conforme identificado pelos inquiridos no questionário acima mencionado.

O Capítulo 5 aborda as questões de pesquisa e até que ponto elas foram respondidas. Para facilitar esta tarefa, são apresentados constrangimentos ao nível macro e micro que os professores entendem como impactantes no uso pedagógico das TIC e ferramentas da Web 2.0 - incluindo blogues. Em seguida, são analisadas as implicações decorrentes do estudo, incluindo sugestões pedagógicas para o uso de blogues. Finalmente, as limitações do estudo são abordadas antes de possíveis projetos futuros, tendo este estudo como referência.

Palavras chave: Blogging, blogues, Inglês LE, literacias digitais, Portugal

ABSTRACT

The current report is part of the requirements for the Master's in the Pedagogical Use of Information and Communication Technologies at ESECS-IPL.

Blogging is the act of posting content on an online platform, with which many Internet users are already familiar. However, it has been underused in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classrooms in Portugal. This study therefore explores and examines the perceptions that EFL teachers in the 2nd and 3rd CEB as well as Secondary level in Portugal have in relation to the benefits and constraints of working with weblogs (commonly referred to as blogs) in their classes. The inclusion of blogging-related goals on the Portuguese English Curriculum objectives and other official Ministry of Education documents, and the ever-increasing importance of digital literacies in education worldwide, underlie the aim of this study to make a modest contribution – in the Portuguese context – to the ways in which EFL teachers perceive the use of blogs, and how pupils may benefit from using them.

After setting out my personal and professional motivations for this study and its objectives in Chapter 1, Chapter 2 covers an extensive review of literature where I discuss the rise of blogs, followed by their benefits and constraints when used in classroom contexts, as identified in the literature.

Chapter 3 details the research rationale, design and objectives before explaining the procedure of collecting and analyzing data through the exploratory questionnaires applied to EFL teachers in seminars organised by the Portuguese Association of English Teachers (APPI) and a pilot questionnaire applied to all English teachers in a 2nd and 3rd CEB school in the Leiria region. These were phases that allowed me to refine the main questionnaire, the principal data collection instrument of the study.

Chapter 4 is an examination and discussion of the findings and patterns found in the data of the main questionnaire, using a largely quantitative approach, though open-ended questions are analysed from a qualitative perspective, with a focus on both the benefits and constraints of blogs as identified by respondents of the aforementioned questionnaire.

Chapter 5 addresses the research questions and to what degree these have been answered. To facilitate this task, constraints on a macro and micro level which

teachers perceive as impacting on the pedagogical use of ICT and Web 2.0 tools - including blogs – are presented. Next, the implications arising from the study are examined, including pedagogical suggestions for using blogs. Finally, the study’s limitations are addressed before possible future projects, taking this study as a reference, are put forward.

Keywords: Blogging, blogs, EFL teaching, digital literacies, Portugal

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....	ii
RESUMO	iii
ABSTRACT	v
TABLE OF CONTENTS	vii
LIST OF FIGURES	ix
LIST OF TABLES	xii
ABBREVIATIONS.....	xiii
CHAPTER 1 - INTRODUCTION	1
1.1. Setting the Scene.....	1
1.2. Problem Statement and Research Questions	4
1.3. Structure.....	5
CHAPTER 2 – REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE.....	6
2.1. From Web 1.0 to Web 2.0	6
2.2. From CALL (Computer-Assisted Language Learning) to BALL (Blog-Assisted Language Learning) Methodology.....	8
2.3. (We)Blog.....	9
2.4. Educational Blogs.....	12
2.4.1. The Pedagogical Benefits of Edublogging.....	14
2.4.1.1. Blogs as a Constructivist Learning Tool	14
2.4.1.2. Blogs Allow Voice and Choice for Different Learning Styles at Pupils’ Own Pace	15
2.4.1.3. Blogging to Improve Language Skills.....	18
2.4.1.4. Blogs to Foster Metacognition	23
2.4.1.5. Blogs for Intercultural Competences Beyond the Classroom Walls.....	24

2.4.1.6. Blogs, New Literacies and Skills.....	25
2.4.2. Constraints of Edublogging	26
2.5. Edublogging in Portugal	29
CHAPTER 3 – RESEARCH RATIONALE AND DESIGN	37
3.1. Research Methodology	37
3.2. Implementing the Research Design	39
CHAPTER 4 - DATA ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION OF RESULTS	44
4.1. Biodata	44
4.2. You and Your School.....	46
4.3. You and Blogs.....	53
4.4. Teaching English in Portugal.....	72
4.5. Respondents’ Input.....	75
CHAPTER 5 – FINAL THOUGHTS	79
5.1. Pedagogical Implications	83
5.2. Limitations and Further Research Studies.....	86
REFERENCES	89
APPENDICES	1
Appendix 1 – Exploratory Questionnaire (Arcozelo)	2
Appendix 2 - Exploratory Questionnaire (Vila Nova Sto André)	4
Appendix 3 – Results of the two Exploratory Questionnaires	6
Appendix 4 – Pilot Questionnaire	10
Appendix 5 – Results of the Pilot Questionnaire.....	19
Appendix 6 – Main Questionnaire / Online Questionnaire	27

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1: Cover of Time Magazine, December 2006	7
Figure 2: Mind Map with Blogging Educational Uses (Gomes & Lopes, 2007)	30
Figure 3: Mind Map of Different Educational Blog Uses (Gomes & Silva, 2006)	31
Figure 4: Outline of Educational Blog Uses	31
Figure 5: A Detailed Representation of Educational Blog Uses	32
Figure 6: Stages in the Research Process	38
Figure 7: Distribution by Gender	44
Figure 8: Teaching Experience	45
Figure 9: Teaching Location	45
Figure 10: Teaching Areas / Levels	45
Figure 11: The Profile of Respondents' Schools – European Projects	46
Figure 12: The Profile of Respondents' Schools – Innovative Practices	47
Figure 13: The Profile of Respondents' Schools – Collaboration	47
Figure 14: The Profile of Respondents' Schools – Professional Development (PD)	48
Figure 15: The Profile of Respondents' Schools – Schoolboard Role	48
Figure 16: The Profile of Respondents' Schools – Technology and Changes	48
Figure 17: The Profile of Respondents' Schools – Parents and School Innovation	49
Figure 18: The Profile of Respondents' Schools – Parents and Tech Awareness	49
Figure 19: Classroom Equipment	50
Figure 20: Technology Use	51
Figure 21: Hours of English Teaching per Week	51
Figure 22: Classroom Use of Tech	52
Figure 23: Use of Technology Versus Years of Experience	52
Figure 24: Blog-Related Topics of Interest	53
Figure 25: Blogging in an Educational Context	54
Figure 26: Use of Blogs in EFL Classes	54
Figure 27: Frequency of Blog Use in EFL Classes	55
Figure 28: Blog Use and Classroom Time for Technology	55
Figure 29: The Use of a Blog in Class	56
Figure 30: Blog Use Frequency and Type of Use	57
Figure 31: Creation of Educational Blogs for EFL Purposes	57
Figure 32: School Location and Edublog Creation	58

Figure 33: Number of Edublogs Created	58
Figure 34: Kinds of Blogs Created by Respondents	59
Figure 35: Blog Content	60
Figure 36: For Collaboration	60
Figure 37: To Foster Pupils' Autonomy	60
Figure 38: For Audience	61
Figure 39: To encourage Speaking and Listening	61
Figure 40: As a Digital Portfolio	61
Figure 41: To Develop Digital Literacies	61
Figure 42: To Extend Teaching/Learning	62
Figure 43: As an Alternative Assessment	62
Figure 44: To Share Resources	62
Figure 45: To Motivate Pupils	62
Figure 46: Length of Time Using Blogs at School	64
Figure 47: Introduction of Teaching Topics	64
Figure 48: Improvement of Technology Skills	64
Figure 49: Reading and Writing Proficiency	65
Figure 50: Cross Curricular and 21st Century Skills	65
Figure 51: Variety in Assessment Practices	65
Figure 52: Knowledge about Pupils	65
Figure 53: Closeness Teacher / Pupils	65
Figure 54: Reading and Writing Improvement	67
Figure 55: Pupils' Interests and at Their Own Pace	67
Figure 56: Autonomy and Responsibility	67
Figure 57: Improvement in Technology Skills	67
Figure 58: Improvement in 21st Century Skills	67
Figure 59: Mind Opener	68
Figure 60: Preparation for the World of Work	68
Figure 61: Academic and Personal Growth	68
Figure 62: Motivation to Learn English	68
Figure 63: Team Building	68
Figure 64: Too Time Consuming	69
Figure 65: Too Much Schoolwork	69
Figure 66: Lack of Confidence	70

Figure 67: Lack of Tech Support	70
Figure 68: Lack of Training in ICT	70
Figure 69: Large Classes	70
Figure 70: Teachers' Scepticism	70
Figure 71: Lack of Good Internet Access	71
Figure 72: Social Media and Networks	72
Figure 73: Available Time to Implement Innovative Practices	72
Figure 74: Competences Best Developed Through the Use of Technology	73
Figure 75: Assessment Regulations and Competences	73
Figure 76: Class Size and Classroom Equipment	74
Figure 77: Training on the Pedagogical Use of ICT	74
Figure 78: Classroom Practices	75
Figure 79: Macro and Micro Factors Identified in Teachers' Perceptions	80

LIST OF TABLES

Table 1: Quantitative versus Qualitative Approach	38
Table 2: Overview of Data Collection Methods and Research Objectives	43

ABBREVIATIONS

APPI	Associação Portuguesa de Professores de Inglês
BALL	Blog Assisted Language Learning
BBC	British Broadcasting Corporation
CALL	Computer Assisted Language Learning
CEB	Ciclo do Ensino Básico
CERN	<u>C</u> onseil <u>E</u> uropéen pour la <u>R</u> echerche <u>N</u> ucléaire
DC	Development Course
DGE	Direção-Geral de Educação
EFL	English as a Foreign Language
ELT	English Language Teaching
ERTE	Equipa de Recursos e Tecnologias Educativas
ICT	Information and Communication Technology
IBM	International Business Machines
L1	Language 1 / First language
L2	Language 2 / Second language
NCTE	National Council of Teachers of English
PDC	Professional Development Course
PISA	Programme for International Student Assessment
PLN	Personal Learning Network
PTE	Plano Tecnológico da Educação
TDC	Teacher Development Course
WWW	World Wide Web

CHAPTER 1 - INTRODUCTION

The Element is the meeting point between natural aptitude and personal passion. When people are in their Element, they connect with something fundamental to their sense of identity, purpose, and well-being.

(Robinson & Aronica, 2009, p.21)

1.1. SETTING THE SCENE

This research project focuses on blogging in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classes in Portugal. So that readers can better understand my own motivations for the chosen study, this *Setting the Scene* aims to provide an overview over the last few years concerning my professional development and experiences. This first part is, therefore, a personal account of blogging, the human dimension, which I believe to be crucial to understand my close connection to this research project.

Back in 2008, I enrolled in a Teacher Development Course (TDC) and, for the first time ever, it was online. This was not the only novelty that it would bring me, though. Besides other google functionalities, one of the course requirements was to create a blog¹. Now, in 2017, almost a decade later, I can clearly see what a powerful and life-changing experience that has been: how a seed was planted, blossomed and how it has thrived since then.

To begin with, I was not even very familiar with the concepts of blog, blogging or blogosphere² – they were vague, unclear and, until then, inconsequential terms, but, as an avid reader, that was about to change. I created a blog³ on November 10th, 2008, and I was immediately hooked and have been ever since. At first, I struggled about what to post for the TDC. However, my interests began to take shape as I grew more comfortable with new technologies while reading other blogs and sifting through large amounts of content on the Internet.

Shortly after my first exposures to the Web, I started to appreciate giving my thoughts and activities a home and a voice as well as having some precious feedback from colleagues and like-minded readers. As a consequence, I became aware of the real reasons I was blogging.

First, I unearthed my true interests as being technology, namely free digital tools and their implementation in the classroom; reading, too, has long been a favourite hobby, and, altruistically,

¹ www.blogger.com

² “The totality of blog-related websites is often called the *blogosphere*.” (Crystal, 2006, p.15)

³ <http://clubinglesoure.blogspot.pt/>, last accessed June 15, 2017

instilling pupils' reading habits, and promoting them by using free Web 2.0 tools. While reading, selecting a group of fellow educators to follow and building my Personal Learning Network (PLN) have been time-consuming, they ended up challenging and inspiring me to far more interesting and updated issues and ideas than I had ever been before, including my own professional development. This has become a vibrant part of my own professional learning and growth, driven by my own interests.

Second, and to pursue these passions, I approached writing from a different perspective. I had never aspired to become a blogger, much less a writer, but as I gained experience, I had to keep in mind that blogging implies reflective writing, and though it is independent and free, allowing us to reach wide and diverse audiences, we are exposed to the world as soon as one hits the keyboard to publish. Therefore, as Blood (2002a) puts it, weblogs are a training ground for writers, or as Brian Switek (2016) explains, quoting Jennifer Ouellette, a blog is a "writing laboratory" because it helps bloggers to become better writers by continually improving their text production and developing their ideas to become more articulate and confident. It has certainly worked for me, as I regularly posted entries of varying length and topics, including my musings over free tools and their implementation, school activities and pupils' creations.

Some have referred to blogging as navel gazing (Fleishman, 2002; Graham, 2002), others narcissistic (Wilcox, 2016), others still, in a more pessimistic tone, shameless self-promotion and exhibitionism (Keen, 2012). Irrespective of these comments, I am positive that this first experience as a blogger has changed me as a person and has become a vital part of my continuous professional development as an educator. As Will Richardson (2006), wrote about a decade ago "The most profound learning experience has been the ongoing education I have received by blogging and being in contact with other bloggers." (p.128)

In the Winter of 2014, as the recipient of an E-Teacher Scholarship Program awarded by the United States (US) Embassy / Lisbon and the American English Institute of the University of Oregon / US, one of the assignments was to create a reflective blog⁴ and for a 9-week period, I had to update it⁵, "adding ideas and reflections about how the information you learned can be used in your local school or setting"⁶, as well as post comments on other participants' blogposts. Unlike my previous experience, this academic blog was assessed, had to be updated on a weekly basis and was explored

⁴ <https://sites.google.com/site/webskillsuo/home/refletive-blog>, last accessed June 15, 2017

⁵ <http://alex-webskills2014.blogspot.pt/>, last accessed June 15, 2017

⁶ <https://sites.google.com/site/webskillsuo/home>, last accessed June 15, 2017

as a tool to develop an educational digital portfolio. As Gomes (2008) highlights, this learning portfolio

...can support and stimulate personal and reflexive learning and be a useful tool to register, organize and report learning moments and experiences. Being a kind of “log” of the learning trajectory of each individual student, the learning portfolio can also be an important and significant assessment tool. (p.224)

Such benefits are further increased if we consider that the 14 participants on this programme were representative of five continents. This position is also consistent with other Portuguese authors (see Costa, Peralta, Rodrigues, & Raleiras, 2008) for whom digital portfolios contribute to displaying growth over a period of time and particularly to stimulating critical thought on educational practice. Again, having my voice heard, this time as a student, was a very rewarding and enriching experience as a lifelong learner.

Being a far more experienced blogger and a firm believer of the blogging potential, I embraced yet another challenge, this (third) time, by setting up a class blog, that is, myself as the administrator and my form class of 7th graders as contributors, as co-creators of its content⁷. This was in the school year of 2013/2014 and I needed a publishing and sharing platform to showcase my pupils’ projects for the University of Oregon / USA. As the pupils were approximately 12 years old, I considered them too immature to create and maintain a blog of their own in a foreign language, which is why I opted for a class blog: this way I believed there was greater likelihood that pupils would read and comment on each other’s posts thus guaranteeing some reader audience; other reasons included the expectation of developing a sense of collaboration and team spirit, and even for me, the teacher / administrator, a class blog would be easier and faster to manage than over 20 pupils’ blogs.

In hindsight, my choice of giving a voice to this group proved to be a wise one, not only because I successfully completed the course but also because it marked the beginning of a three year-long period of effective class blogging. As far as I know, in Portugal, it is the only one of its kind, too.

Blogs, then, have been part of my life for almost a decade as blogging deeply resonates with me in an educational and professional context; this is the key reason for focusing my dissertation on this powerful pedagogical Web 2.0 tool.

I also hope that this recent study makes a modest but valid contribution to understanding the perceptions and uses of Educational Blogs (henceforth edublogs / edublogging) in a country where

⁷ <http://shiningasoure.blogspot.pt/>, last accessed June 15, 2017

research on class(room)⁸ blogs and English Language Teaching (ELT) blogs in particular is still relatively sparse.

1.2. PROBLEM STATEMENT AND RESEARCH QUESTIONS

As a Portuguese teacher of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) for more than 20 years, I have always strived to make my classes, teaching and learning more appealing and engaging, by reinventing myself, my resources and tools. It seems only natural then to integrate digital literacies (see Dudeney, Hockly, & Pegrum, 2013), which contemplate blogging into my classroom practices on a regular basis. The research questions of this study, then, have arisen from my longstanding interest in this issue, and are as follows:

1. What are the perceptions of Portuguese EFL teachers of the benefits and potential benefits – for teachers and pupils – of using blogs?
2. To what extent are blogs being used by Portuguese EFL teachers in their English classes?
3. What are some of the constraints on EFL teachers using blogs for learning?
4. How can teachers and pupils be encouraged to use blogs more as part of their EFL teaching and learning respectively?

The focus of this study is on Portuguese EFL teachers' perceptions, hence this project has attempted to include a diverse range of voices, with differing levels of experience, mainly from members of the Association of Portuguese English Teachers (*Associação Portuguesa de Professores de Inglês*) (APPI⁹) both from the mainland Portugal and islands, but also other Portuguese teachers with registered blogs in English in *Portal das Escolas*¹⁰. This choice has to do with the fact that I am a member of APPI and it comprises an active, committed and large group of Portuguese teachers of English who have shown their willingness to get involved in professional development, projects and research.

This is particularly pertinent because although the number of educational blogs and publications at an international level has consistently increased, in Portugal there are still relatively few studies. Data provided by *Catálogo de Blogues Educativos*, for example, in relation to blogs in English aimed at the 3rd Cycle of Basic Education (*3^oCEB*) for English as a Foreign Language, demonstrate that Portugal still lacks a certain tradition in edublogging even though it has long been

⁸ Used mostly outside of the classroom and not necessarily within the classroom itself.

⁹ See the APPI website at: <http://www.appi.pt/>, last accessed June 15, 2017

¹⁰ http://portaldasescolas.pt/portal/server.pt/community/04_catalogo_blogs/284), last accessed June 15, 2017

acknowledged that they are a teaching resource and a pedagogical strategy (Gomes, 2002) with countless advantages, and increasingly transversal to different subjects (Richardson, 2006) and age groups. With this research, it is therefore my goal not only to make a modest contribution to this field, but also to better understand the reasons why there are not more class blogs in English and why greater pupil participation in these is not evident.

1.3. STRUCTURE

The current report is structured in 5 chapters, with the first chapter setting the scene, in other words, the motivation for undertaking this study on blogging in Portugal. This is followed by a description of the problems and the research questions, and ends with a description of the organisation of the report, that is, how it is structured.

The second chapter consists of the review of literature on blogs, in general, and educational blogging, in particular. It is subdivided in several parts, starting with an historical framework: firstly, a brief depiction of the evolution from Web 1.0 to Web 2.0 is set out; this is followed by considerations of Computer Assisted Language Learning (CALL) to the Blog Assisted Language Learning (BALL) methodology; then a definition of blogs is put forward, before this chapter ends with a consideration of educational blogging, the benefits and constraints of edublogging respectively, and ends with a focus on blogging in Portugal.

The third chapter contains the rationale and research design of this study, whilst Chapter 4 is a consideration and discussion of the findings. Chapter 5 constitutes the final thoughts of this study, including its pedagogical implications, limitations and indications for further research.

CHAPTER 2 – REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

“We lived in farms, then we lived in cities, and now we ‘re gonna live on the Internet!” Movie, *The Social Network*¹¹

This chapter considers some of the key developments of online use including some historical landmarks leading to Web 2.0 and blogging, followed by a consideration of the benefits and constraints related to educational blogging: given the context in which this present research project was carried out, blogging in the Portuguese context is also examined and reflected upon.

2.1. FROM WEB 1.0 TO WEB 2.0

Unlike so many other technologies such as the printing press, the light bulb, or the telephone, to name just a few, the Internet cannot be credited to a single inventor as it was rather the contribution of several dedicated inventors that led to its evolution over time. Its initial development took place in the United States in the aftermath of World War II as a government weapon against the Russians. The Internet, as defined by Berners-Lee (2000), a British scientist at CERN (*Conseil Européen pour la Recherche Nucléaire*),

...is a very general communications infrastructure that links computers together. (...) a network of networks. Its essence, though, is a set of standardized *protocols*-conventions by which computers send data to each other. The data are transmitted over various carriers, such as telephone lines, cable TV wires, and satellite channels. The data can be text, an e-mail message, a sound, an image, a software program-whatever. (p.18)

The Internet is therefore not to be confused with the World Wide Web, (WWW) created by Tim Berners-Lee in 1989, in order to link and share information which was “originally conceived and developed to meet the demand for information sharing between physicists in universities and institutes around the world.” (CERN, n.d.) Its impact was so overwhelming that just four years later, in 1993, CERN announced the release of its software into the public domain, thus ensuring the dissemination of a free, open web¹².

¹¹ This film, made in 2010, is based on the rise of Mark Zuckerberg, CEO of Facebook.

¹² The document that officially put the World Wide Web into the public domain on 30 April 1993. (2009, March 02). Retrieved June 15, 2017, from <http://cds.cern.ch/record/1164399>

As Berners-Lee (2000) himself comments, “The web is more a social creation than a technical one” (p.123), later expressing his wishes that “the dream of people-to-people communication through shared knowledge must be possible for groups of all sizes, interacting electronically with as much ease as they do now in person” (p.157). Yet, by then, the WWW, with its large amount of available information, was only readable once it simply allowed users to passively receive information with limited interaction between sites and web users; the information displayed on the screen was static and the data was updated from time to time – this became known as Web 1.0. Berners-Lee’s visionary genius runs through his book as he dreams and envisions the web’s future. Indeed, it took just a few years for the emergence of the second web generation, labelled Web 2.0, a term coined by O’Reilly (2005). This shift to Web 2.0 profoundly changed the way we use the Internet, interact with others and even with information and knowledge. This (r)evolution, with the Web 2.0 as a tool for bringing the small contributions of users and making them relevant, was even more widely acknowledged in 2006, when TIME magazine (Grossman, 2006) elected the millions of anonymous users who had contributed to this very different web as the Person of the Year (see Figure 1).

In December of that year, Lev Grossman, one of TIME magazine’s editors, justified the choice:

Who are these people? ... Who has that time and that energy and that passion? The answer is, you do. ... Web 2.0 is a massive social experiment, and like any experiment worth trying, it could fail. ... This is an opportunity to build a new kind of international understanding, not politician to politician, great man to great man, but citizen to citizen, person to person.



Figure 1: Cover of Time Magazine, December 2006

In fact, whereas in 1996 Bill Gates proclaimed “Content is King”¹³, twenty years later, this no longer holds true given that having access to the internet - already deemed a human right (Estes, 2011; Fitzpatrick, 2012) - , choice and the ability to create content are now the rulers.

In education, the essential difference between both web generations is that while in the past the content creators were scarce and the majority acted as consumers, now the web is dynamic and virtually all users can become creators due to the existence of so many different web tools and platforms allowing this democratic use. Such a shift is very important for this project because from

¹³ Archived information at <http://web.archive.org/web/20010126005200/http://www.microsoft.com/billgates/columns/1996essay/essay960103.asp>

the point of view of using blogs in the classroom, both pupils and teachers can take an interactive and creative role in blogging activities.

The Internet is now a ubiquitous and pervasive aspect of our lives and the WWW does not show any signs of slowing down, with so many new and varied tools and platforms appearing almost daily. In relation to education, Richardson (2006) pointed towards its potential over a decade ago:

The social connections that students are now making on the Web, the ability to truly extend the walls of our classrooms...these ideas are at the core of this new Web. As educators, it's imperative we understand the implications of these capabilities for our classroom. (p.viii)

In the following section, such implications are examined as the focus moves to the application of technology in educational settings.

2.2. FROM CALL (COMPUTER-ASSISTED LANGUAGE LEARNING) TO BALL (BLOG-ASSISTED LANGUAGE LEARNING) METHODOLOGY

In this section, I will look at how technology has been incorporated into classroom methodology, with particular reference to language learning.

Computer-Assisted Language Learning (CALL) is defined by Levy (1997) as “the search for and study of applications of the computer in language teaching and learning” (p.1). He goes on to explain that it “...has been made possible by the invention and subsequent development of the computer.” (p.1) In the last few years, it has entered “the mainstream of foreign and second language teaching” (Hubbard, 2008, p.175) as the number of teachers using CALL and the sheer number of articles written about its applications may attest (see Busà, 2008; Gong, 2002).

With the advance of the Internet and Web 2.0 technologies, educators can provide pupils with many choices and flexible learning alternatives (Ariffin & Yaacob, 2014), particularly in relation to language teaching and learning for the creative use of technology to generate interaction.

For a significant number of English language learners, the challenge to read, write, speak or listen in English is often overwhelming and a cause for embarrassment. Yet, with the advent of the Web 2.0 a whole new world with a vast array of options has opened up in education, including blogging, which may help to reduce inhibitions and alleviate cases of embarrassment, and, with it, a new field of research and practice (Lin, Groom, & Lin, 2013), Blog Assisted Language Learning (BALL) as coined by Ward (2004). For Ward (2004), and for the purposes of this report:

BALL will be understood in general terms as covering any teaching and learning activities that involve the use of blogs as a computer-mediated platform (1) where interactions both within and beyond the classroom take place between teachers, students, and even (in principle, at least) members of the general public, and (2) where language learning activities are observable. (p.130)

In other words, blogs are innovative in that they require learners to interact with one another, not just the computer, which is simply the medium for communication (Pinkman, 2005).

Despite being a relatively recent phenomenon (Lin et al., 2013), barely over a decade old, BALL has attracted substantial attention from language teachers who have incorporated blogs into their classes and courses, as well as from academia as the pedagogical applications (Campbell, 2003, 2004; Lin, 2015; Pinkman, 2005; Richardson, 2006; Sun & Chang, 2012; Ward, 2004), the potential pros and cons have been researched and discussed. Indeed, the potential and constraints of blogs are a central concern of this report, and will be discussed in 2.4, but in the following section the notion of a we(blog) will be examined more closely.

2.3. (WE)BLOG

What exactly is a weblog? The expression weblog was first used by Jorn Barger in 1997 in his blog¹⁴, now only accessible through the Wayback Machine Internet Archives¹⁵. In his own words:

A weblog (sometimes called a blog or a newspaper or a filter) is a webpage where a weblogger (sometimes called a blogger, or a pre-surfer) “logs” all the other webpages he finds interesting. The format is normally to add the newest entry at the top of the page, so that repeat visitors can catch up by simply reading down the page until they reach a link they saw on their last visit.

This means that a web page is usually updated by its author(s) or contributor(s) and appears in reverse chronological order – with the most recent entry on top. A unique feature is that blogs foster comments (unless blocked) from any reader. Downes (2004) therefore claims that blogging is something “defined by format and process, not by content.” The term “blog” – the reduced form of the original weblog – was coined around 1999 when one blogger, Peter Merholz, jokingly altered weblog into “we blog” and, as he recalls, it stuck (Merholz, 2002).

A community of bloggers rapidly emerged and in 1999 Brigitte Eaton compiled a list of every blog she knew in what is known as the Eaton Portal¹⁶ (Blood, 2002c), a blog directory organised by

¹⁴ Originally at <http://www.robotwisdom.com/>

¹⁵ <https://web.archive.org/web/20000817093828/http://www.robotwisdom.com/weblogs/>, last accessed June 15, 2017

¹⁶ <http://portal.eatonweb.com/>, last accessed June 15, 2017

categories. Unsurprisingly, its greatest boost was when Pyra Labs released Blogger¹⁷, a free blog publishing software, in 1999. Its web interface, accessible from any browser, consisting of an empty form box into which the blogger can type anything (Blood, 2002c), together with the fact that it does not require programming languages or server knowledge by bloggers, has contributed to an ever increasing rate of blog creations. It is no wonder, then, that this phenomenon quickly swept the Internet and led to the announcement of “blog” as word of the year in 2004 by the prestigious Merriam Webster dictionary¹⁸.

In a broad sense, “a Weblog is an easily created, easily updateable Website that allows an author (or authors) to publish instantly to the Internet from any Internet connection.” (Richardson, 2006, p.17) For this reason, the use of blogs has spread quickly to many professional areas in society, including journalism, marketing and education. In journalism, the use of blogs has seen a shift in power from readers being mere consumers of news to active contributors to daily news, and readers have used their own and others’ blogs to aid the rapid spread of major news events around the world. Yet, this growing participation and huge increase in information has led to a concern with the credibility of information.

This concern has had a significant influence on educational initiatives and curricula. Especially relevant for us in the educational field, is the recognition that it is urgent to promote media literacy skills, an important aspect of these skills meaning that learners need to be educated to identify accurate and reliable information.

This need for media literacy has become greater as social media sites have become incredibly popular and powerful. Yet, whilst blogs represent the earliest form of social media (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010), their popularity – in terms of Internet search trends – has gradually declined since 2005. Indeed, by 2011, several news outlets were predicting the death of blogging, and blaming Facebook (or Twitter) for this (Kopytoff, 2011; Owyang, 2011)¹⁹.

However, blogs have evolved and morphed to adapt to new realities. Social Networks, like Facebook or Twitter are, in fact, complementary to blogging, a combination that supports a new reality, an “always on”, ubiquitous teaching and learning environment: reflective and serious content is published as a blogpost / an entry and, for distribution, promotion and to extend its impact,

¹⁷ <https://www.blogger.com/>

¹⁸ <http://www.merriam-webster.com/press-release/2004-word-of-the-year>, last accessed June 15, 2017

¹⁹ Also see Internet search trends between 2004 until present at <https://trends.google.pt/trends/explore?date=all&q=blogging> and <https://trends.google.pt/trends/explore?date=all&q=Facebook>

the links are often shared on social media. Furthermore, mirroring its strengths and affordances, a blog often ensures a niche away from the many distractors such as invites, games, ads and never-ending status updates. This is reinforced by the co-founder of the women's blog network²⁰, Elisa Camahort Page, who says, "If you're looking for substantive conversation, you turn to blogs. You aren't going to find it on Facebook, and you aren't going to find it in 140 characters on Twitter." (Kopytoff, 2011). Mutmainna (2016) also agrees that "These sites are not primarily meant for sharing long posts expressing thoughts and opinions of the users. In comparison, blog is the only tool that includes almost all the features of the other tools and a lot more." (p.28)

The "Like" simplicity is not what bloggers seek: a blog is a tool to connect and communicate with like-minded people, to reflect and share, to challenge ourselves and others. Bloggers are content creators who look for meaningful interaction, not just the digital wisdom "I update, therefore I am" (Keen, 2012). Therefore, the intellectual and interactive nature of blog posts is what makes them a particularly suitable tool for language teaching and learning (Chen, 2015).

In academia, too, the potential of blogging, is still very much a live issue. Considering the latest news around the amount of time spent by scholars researching and writing an article that nobody reads (Lattier, 2016)²¹, there are those in higher education who advocate that blogging should be embraced by academics to share their work-in-progress, their research and further publications and to encourage discussions. In a candid text for a blog called *Writing for Research*, Professor Patrick Dunleavy (2015) illustrates how easy it is and why researchers should blog about their work:

You've put eighteen months or two years of your life into doing research in your article. You've devoted months more to writing the paper and sending it to journals, dealing with comments, doing rewrites and hacking through the publishing process. Why would you *not* spend the extra couple of hours needed to pull out from your journal article the key bits for a good blogpost?

Avoiding jargon and opaque writing, making academic papers more accessible would be the next step; blogging about one's research work and findings may lead to a greater reach, visibility, dissemination and interaction, as well as 'offline' recognition, such as academics being offered other opportunities (Brookshire, 2016) – a win-win situation. In 2008, American professor and blogger Scott Mcleod raised the question "Why would anyone who wishes to actually reach educators and hopefully influence change in schools not be blogging?" (Mcleod, 2008); Eight years later, in 2016

²⁰ <http://www.blogger.com/>

²¹ Also see Eveleth, R. (2014, March 25). Academics Write Papers Arguing Over How Many People Read (And Cite) Their Papers. Retrieved June 15, 2017, from <http://www.smithsonianmag.com/smart-news/half-academic-studies-are-never-read-more-three-people-180950222/>

(McLeod, 2016), he revisited this issue, and illustrated his point further by comparing articles and citations, with page views and comments from his top 20 posts. He concludes that:

No comparison in terms of reach, visibility, interaction, and (hopefully) impact. The percentage of university faculty members who are blogging – although better than it was 8 years ago – is still incredibly low. We pay the price in terms of public and policymaker awareness of and attention to our work.

Many researchers have been sharing their publications in academic social networks like ResearchGate, Academia, Mendeley, among others, to disseminate their research and thus achieve more visibility and impact. From this perspective, blogging may be critical for communicating with an even wider audience, complementing citations for academics' papers published in journals, thereby helping to engage with both academic and non-academic communities and maximising the outreach of their publications.²² Whilst writing about research may not be an objective for some, it is, nevertheless, essential to establish a close relationship with your audience by making one's voice heard as Scott Thornbury²³, David Crystal²⁴, Scott McLeod²⁵ or Nik Peachy²⁶ - all brand names in the English Language Teaching (ELT) landscape and digital education – do.

In the following section, we shall narrow our focus and look more specifically at educational blogging.

2.4. EDUCATIONAL BLOGS

In the final sections of this chapter, I start by discussing educational blogs, go on to examine the pedagogical benefits and constraints of blogging as identified in the literature – especially those related to foreign language teaching – before briefly looking at blogging in the Portuguese context to better contextualise the empirical study that follows.

²² Please see this other entry: Dunleavy, P. (2014, December 28). Shorter, better, faster, free: Blogging changes the nature of academic research, not just how it is communicated. Retrieved June 15, 2017, from <http://blogs.lse.ac.uk/impactofsocialsciences/2014/12/28/shorter-better-faster-free/#author>; other publications instilling dissemination of scientific research in blogs include, for example, McKenzie, D., & Ozler, B. (2011, November 17). Academic blogs are proven to increase dissemination of economic research and improve impact. Retrieved June 15, 2017, from <http://blogs.lse.ac.uk/impactofsocialsciences/2011/11/15/world-bank-dissemination/> and Green, D. (2015, October 29). An antidote to futility: Why academics (and students) should take blogging / social media seriously. Retrieved June 15, 2017, from <http://blogs.lse.ac.uk/impactofsocialsciences/2015/10/26/why-academics-and-students-should-take-blogging-social-media-seriously/>. There is also a very recent blog entry and a book extract by Mollett, Brumley, Gilson, & Williams (2017)

²³ <https://scottthornbury.wordpress.com/>

²⁴ <http://david-crystal.blogspot.pt/>

²⁵ <http://dangerouslyirrelevant.org/>

²⁶ <https://nikpeachy.blogspot.pt/>

If the earliest blogs were lists of sites – web logs -, over time, and in order to create more engaging blogposts, besides text, the entries started including different media such as images, videos, hyperlinks, and other features²⁷.

The growing popularity of blogging has led to a diverse range of genres. There are blogs on virtually every topic – from recipes to photography, pets to hobbies, fashion to sports, from health to education, these last being often referred to as educational blogs or simply edublogs.

In fact, after the emergence of the first blogs, it did not take long for educators and teachers worldwide to apply the promising potential of this new tool to their own school practice (Bartlett-Bragg, 2003; Aaron Patric Campbell, 2004; Downes, 2004; Godwin-Jones, 2003; Luján-Mora, 2006; Ward, 2004).

In a groundbreaking article, Campbell (2003) acknowledged the ease and the potential of authoring blogs, creating spaces to support EFL classrooms and identified three distinct types: the tutor weblog, learner weblog and class weblog.

According to Campbell (2003), the tutor blog is run by the tutor for the learners and serves different purposes, such as giving (daily) reading practice to learners; promoting exploration of English websites; encouraging online verbal exchange through use of comment buttons; providing class or syllabus information as well as resources of links for self-study. As for the learner blog, the same author (Campbell, 2003) acknowledges two possibilities: either run by individual learners or by small collaborative groups of learners. The third and last blog type identified by Campbell (2003) – and the one which is of greatest relevance for this report – is the class blog which is the result of the collaborative effort of an entire class. In this case, its functions may comprise a free-form bulletin board for learners to post messages and any other material related to classroom discussion topics, including homework assignments; class blogs might also be useful for facilitating project-based language learning or as a virtual space for an international classroom language exchange.

In June 2017 a platform with bespoke education blogs²⁸ alone counts for 4,378,396 educational blogs created since 2005; some years on, an increasing number of educators, teachers and professors around the world have implemented edublogging projects – not necessarily on the aforementioned platform - with different age groups, from kindergarten to high school and higher education as reported, for example, by Amir, Ismail, & Hussin (2010); Duarte (2015); Huang (2016);

²⁷ See, for example, the well-known blog site for its recent innovative additions: www.blogger.com

²⁸ <https://edublogs.org/>

Hungerford-Kresser, Wiggins, & Amaro-Jimenez (2012); Montero-Fleta & Pérez-Sebater (2010); Sun (2010); Sun & Chang (2012).

Blogging teachers quickly realise the potential of educational blogging. In a recent article, Kochoska & Petrovski (2017) argue that blogs can serve at least four basic functions: for classroom management because they can be used to inform learners about class requirements, post handouts, notices, and homework assignments; for collaboration, as blogs provide a common space where teachers and learners can work together to further develop writing or other skills, taking advantage of an instant audience; for discussions, especially out of the classroom, giving an equal opportunity to all to share their thoughts and opinions; for student portfolios given that their entries are archived and can be monitored and progress can be analysed.

It is therefore relevant that pupils learn about quality posting, commenting, net etiquette, online safety and blogging terminology amongst other things (Kochoska & Petrovski, 2017). Morgan (2015, p.30) suggests rubrics which “can be modified according to the learning goals of the blogging project”.

2.4.1. THE PEDAGOGICAL BENEFITS OF EDUBLOGGING

In 2005, many teachers were already into blogging. Gomes (2008) explores a range of possible uses of blogs in an educational setting both as a teaching resource and a pedagogical strategy.

According to the same author, blogs can be educational when they are teaching resources, a space to access specialist information, as long as the teacher assesses its content accuracy and age suitability beforehand, and a space for teachers to make updated and relevant information available; as a pedagogical strategy, Gomes (2008) refers that blogs can be a digital portfolio also as an alternative assessment tool, a forum for interchange and collaboration namely for projects, a space for debate and role playing – as a follow-up from class activities - a space for integration, for example, with multicultural classes or for absent students and, therefore, a very valuable asset.

This panoply of possible edublogging applications, when used appropriately, may lead to the effective development of specific skills (Li, Bado, Smith, & Moore, 2013) among our 21st Century Learners (Abbott, 2016). I will now look at some of the further benefits:

2.4.1.1. Blogs as a Constructivist Learning Tool

For Noel (2015), educational environments that support the tenets of constructivism are particularly beneficial for pupil / student learning. Accordingly, blogs incorporate various features that make them valuable platforms for social constructivist principles, based on Vygotsky's (1978) theory that learners construct knowledge and develop through interaction with others just like in their own lives (Albaugh, 2013). Richardson (2006) also argues that blogs are truly a constructivist tool for learning "Because the content that students and teachers create is on the World Wide Web, it is content that becomes part of the wider body of knowledge that the Internet represents. It is searchable (p.27)", and easily extended and applied in different situations.

In the literature there are several studies (Kochoska & Petrovski, 2017; Noel, 2015; Sousa & Silva, 2009) that indicate that blogs have the potential to support cognitive engagement and have a positive influence on pupil motivation not only to learn but also to produce better quality material because they are not just sharing it with their teachers or classmates, but with the whole world as soon as they "push button" publish (Ward, 2004). More than in any other blog type (Campbell, 2003), within a class blog, all learners are expected to publish blog posts and comment on their peers' entries, which further motivates them for, at least, this guaranteed audience. This sense of authorship, participation and collaboration in a student-centred environment provides the right ingredients for constructivism as they are given control over their learning. Furthermore, once everything is online, learners can access their information in order to build on prior understanding and make new connections between ideas (Noel, 2015). It is also relevant to highlight that blogs provide an easy-to-search archive of the work published by the teacher and pupils, and which is always easily accessible.

Capitalising on learners' interest in the Internet (Sawmiller, 2010) and making our classrooms technology-rich environments with blogging can be far more engaging for some of our tech-savvy pupils than, for example, reading a book, a potentially lonely activity. According to Noel (2015), blogs support collaboration among peers and their teacher thus incorporating constructivism: pupils co-construct knowledge by sharing information and points of view and progressively restructure and develop their understanding (Deng & Yuen, 2011; Meinecke, Smith, & Lehmann-Willenbrock, 2013).

2.4.1.2. Blogs Allow Voice and Choice for Different Learning Styles at Pupils' Own Pace

As mentioned before, the integration of different media in blogging makes it easier to engage and reach all pupils, all learning styles or the differences in individuals' learning; class(room) blogging can also be differentiated to meet the pupils' needs (Sawmiller, 2010). Though transferable to foreign language teaching and learning, this author speaks as a science teacher when arguing that with a blog, the assignment possibilities are endless:

Students can reflect through a journal (solitary), write about evidence of science in their life (logical), create a podcast and upload it to the blog (verbal and auditory), conduct an experiment at home and post the findings to the blog (kinaesthetic), or post graphs or pictures of science in the real world (visual). (p.46)

Moreover, by using a class blog, language teachers give every learner the opportunity to explore a subject / topic in a way that is individually adapted to each one's needs (Sawmiller, 2010) – as Mutmainna (2016) puts it, blogs invite participation and have the potential to democratise a classroom since all learners are given the chance of equal participation.²⁹ Asadi (2016) also defends that a possibility for dealing with heterogeneous classes and addressing pupils' individual needs is to improve learners' autonomy by using blogging. This is consistent with her study results that showed that the use of daily blogs improved the quality of writing essays as compared to the traditional paper-and-pencil writing.³⁰

Teaching is not always necessary for learning to occur; furthermore, asynchronous tools can be accessed by anyone, 24/7, and from anywhere which is a valuable asset for learners who cannot attend face-to-face classes (Pop & Martinez, 2003) for health or professional reasons, for example. There are quieter, introvert learners, too, who are shy or because of the social pressures³¹ of adolescence (Sawmiller, 2010) feel uncomfortable in front of peers in a classroom setting to engage in face-to-face discussions (Albaugh, 2013; Richardson, 2006; Sidek & Yunus, 2012). For such learners, blogging and commenting support them in having their voices heard and in socially constructing meaning in a nonthreatening and responsive environment (Albaugh, 2013; Sidek & Yunus, 2012). When using a foreign language, this is particularly important.

²⁹ Following this line of thought, this reminds me of Sugata Mitra's experiments with his "Hole in the Wall" and SOLEs (Self-Organized Learning Environments) which can also be read about at Daly, J. (2015, August 25). Sugata Mitra: Learn to Think Like a Kid. Retrieved June 15, 2017, from <https://www.wired.com/brandlab/2015/06/sugata-mitra-learn-think-like-kid/>.

³⁰ As far as I see it, pupils cannot be asked to simply give answers which would not make any difference from a traditional face-to-face setting; they are supposed to participate with their own opinions, creations, research to extend the topic approached or discussion.

³¹ According to research published by the American Psychological Association, "Blogging may have psychological benefits for teens suffering from social anxiety, improving their self-esteem and helping them relate better to their friends". American Psychological Association. (2012, January 4). Blogging may help teens dealing with social distress. Retrieved June 23, 2017 from www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2012/01/120104115104.htm.

Others still lack the confidence to interact orally or in written form with their peers, especially in crowded classes (Özdemir & Aydin, 2015; Pop & Martinez, 2003), and avoid feeling embarrassed and frustrated in front of more proficient peers. With time on their hands and the possibility of practising, self-editing³², or even looking for additional material (Meinecke et al., 2013) - sometimes even an extra help from more skilful language learners - as Pop and Martinez (2003) argue, given the appropriate asynchronous tools, namely a blog, these learners can work in a safer environment at their own pace and make relevant progress. Having prepared beforehand, the teacher may even use blog entries as a springboard for classroom discussions which, in turn, can also improve the overall quality of the blog entries (Albaugh, 2013). On top of this, Pinkman (2005) calls our attention to the fact that blogs give learners the feeling of control and ownership, not easily attained in a face-to-face setting.

Ward (2004) also offers compelling arguments for blogging communication "...without the inhibitions and preconceptions that accompany most face-to-face interactions" (p.4) and provides examples: the students who were more vocal online were the most inhibited ones in class; some of his quietest students had the loudest blogs in terms of opinions and insights and use of colours and images, thus concluding that "Through anonymity, online environments can liberate the students that are intimidated in the classroom." (p.5)

That said, blogs can be employed as an alternative out-of-class tool able to stimulate (written) communication (Pop & Martinez, 2003), and for Sawmiller (2010) and Zawilinski (2014), they bring a further advantage: blogging is the bridge spanning the gap that exists between at-home and school experiences of learning regarding the use of technology as well as pupils' work. No less important is the fact that being easily accessible, parents can follow the teaching and learning process closely, check their children's learning, tasks, assignments, deadlines, and progress³³. As Richardson (2006) suggests, this is a chance to go paperless, when blogging with pupils and teachers, by posting their work online. Blogs are windows into classrooms that teachers should use

³² Word signals our spelling mistakes which allows pupils to correct their errors and therefore improve their writing quality and boost their confidence.

³³ As research (<https://www.education.gov.au/parent-engagement-research> and http://www.gallup.com/businessjournal/186026/crucial-element-successful-schools-parent-engagement.aspx?g_source=parent+engament&g_medium=search&g_campaign=tiles) show, parental engagement is linked to pupil performance. To establish this home-school connection was one of the reasons why I embedded <https://www.remind.com/> on the right sidebar of our class blog at <http://shiningasoure.blogspot.pt/>; other reasons include a reinforcement so that there would be no excuses for not knowing about assignments, the forthcoming test structure, correction of exercises or school messages/notices. Besides displaying the newest info and ensuring more transparency in our teaching / learning, it was also a conscious environmental option. This is consistent with the annual educational blogging report <https://www.theedublogger.com/2017/04/11/educational-blogging-2016/>, last accessed on June 16, 2017, according to which 42,8% of class blogs are used for assignments, homework and class news.

to give visibility to what they do as well as their pupils' which may amplify their learning opportunities.

These are not, however, the only positive effects of blogging.³⁴

From the US (Hildebrand, 2014) to Canada (Noel, 2015), from Spain (Vurdien, 2013) to the UK (Curran & Marshall, 2011), Turkey (Özdemir & Aydin, 2015) and Macedonia (Kamberi, 2015), from Taiwan (M. H. Lin et al., 2013) to Korea (Kang, Bonk, & Kim, 2011), Malaysia (Ariffin & Yaacob, 2014), Thailand (Domalewska, 2014), and Japan, (Blackstone, Spiri, & Naganuma, 2007), research has been taking place all over the world to explore the potential of blogs in the development of various skills in the teaching and learning of English as a Foreign Language. In an insightful and comprehensive way, Chen (2015) groups those contributions / benefits into three categories: language, metacognitive and intercultural. Using Chen's (2015) systematization, let us now focus on each of them.

2.4.1.3. Blogging to Improve Language Skills

As a foreign language teacher, it has always been a priority of mine to provide opportunities to all pupils for the development of the traditional four skills – reading, writing, listening and speaking - in classes. With blogging, though, it is typically the writing skill that is more practised, as substantiated by research. As Pop and Martinez, (2003) acknowledge, writing is difficult to teach and needs extensive practice. Sun (2010) investigated the effects of extensive writing and the results showed that it could improve learners' writing skills as well as their motivation to write. Amir, Ismail, and Hussin (2010) and Sun and Chang (2012) went further and showed that blogs can facilitate learners' collaborative writing processes and interactions. Montero-Fleta and Pérez-Sebater (2010) could also confirm that writing for a purpose in blogs for professional development encouraged students to produce language more fluently and correctly, advantages also highlighted by Vurdien (2013), whose study concluded that students' writing performance improved their use of grammar and vocabulary in general. Consistent with previous findings is also the study by Huang (2016), who indicates the practicality and potential of using blogs to facilitate effective writing instruction. As mentioned earlier in 1.1, for Switek (2016), blogs are writing laboratories. "They are

³⁴ An extensive list of benefits including videos is shared every year under "The Current State of Educational Blogging". This year's report is available at <https://www.theedublogger.com/2017/04/11/educational-blogging-2016/>, last accessed June 16, 2017.

places to try out different styles, structures, and ideas with the added benefit of feedback from readers in the form of comments and traffic.” (p.245)

In a year-long project, Ducate and Lomicka (2008) involved students first as readers and then as writers of blogs. Their findings suggest that students became more comfortable with blogging, and ownership and creativity were encouraged due to the opportunities for interaction outside the classroom which also increased, and they became more linguistically competent and confident as they improved their reading, writing, vocabulary and cultural knowledge. For Huang (2016), by incorporating blog tasks in writing activities, pupils can choose their topics of interest and not only produce creative, reflective writing but can also comment on their peers’ blog entries which ultimately lead to a more relaxed, student-centred, and self-paced reading and writing target language environment. This two-way blogging / commenting is mutually beneficial for both participants who are committed in improving their writing skills.

In an ideal situation, learners would experience ‘flow’ (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990) when immersed, when in “the process of total involvement” during blogging, which would lead to effortless fluency in their writing³⁵.

Blogging creates more opportunities to write, which, through careful scaffolding, encourages self-reflection and critical thinking (Sawmiller, 2010). The immediacy of a blog and the promise of a worldwide audience increases student motivation for writing, better writing. This process is clarified by Richardson (2006) who explains that “...bloggers are constantly making editorial decisions, and these decisions are more complex than those made when writing for a limited audience” (p.31), adding that “...because of a potential audience that goes beyond the classroom, they pay more

³⁵ This epiphany I have never witnessed, but the truth must be told: besides the reasons already pointed out in Setting the Scene (1.1), <http://shiningasoure.blogspot.pt/> was a class blog also because I did not have the time or the conditions for a classroom blog though it does not mean this flow never happened with my pupils. I have felt so when writing blog entries and, even more, while reading. The blogging activity was intentionally left for out of the classroom so that pupils could work at their own pace; there were times I praised pupils for the improvement in their writing skills, for thriving and becoming more confident to write more often, longer and more careful texts; silent pupils in the classroom who had powerful and memorable blog participations; fewer times, though, for using writing as a self-discovery journey, for going through this total involvement that leads to an improvement in linguistic proficiency. Notwithstanding, as a teacher, I am fully aware that all my pupils are different and learn differently and, in hindsight, what really matters is that, in the last three school years, I have managed somehow to reach them all, have managed to immerse my pupils in rich environments, motivating and engaging them in activities of their own interest so that they reach this “flow”. As in every teaching / learning situation, I recall a famous scene from the “Matrix” trilogy in which Morpheus tells the other character “I’m trying to free your mind, Neo. But I can only show you the door. You’re the one who must walk through it.” Teachers cannot do more than that. Bearing this in mind, the Pakistani blogger, Malala Yousafzai, was a real inspiration to my pupils because she was only eleven when she started blogging, demanding education for girls. Her campaign led to a blog for the BBC, several documentaries, books, her winning the Nobel Peace Prize, but also an attempt on her life.

attention to the editorial correctness of the post as well.” (p.31) The same author sums up the differences between blogging and writing: “Writing stops; blogging continues. Writing is inside; blogging is outside. Writing is monologue; blogging is conversation. Writing is thesis; blogging is synthesis.” (p.31) With blogging, writing is an ongoing process, always open for feedback, to be added, further explored.

But the whole process starts with reading in a truly symbiotic process. To be able to write both quality blog entries and comments, pupils need to feel motivated to read either about what is requested for school assignments or about topics of their own interest – or simply read because they feel like it. Indeed, based on their study, Warschauer, Zheng and Park (2013) conclude that reading and writing are more connected than ever in the digital era due to the web-based reading with the advent of smartphones, tablets and e-readers.

The power of reading is well documented in the fields of the first language (L1) / second language (L2) and EFL, and with diverse age groups (Krashen, 2004), but for some authors (Atwell, 2007; Gallagher, 2003; 2009), schools are not doing enough – but killing the reading experience – for the sake of an overloaded curriculum and standardised tests, including PISA (Programme for International Student Assessment)³⁶. As school schedules and curricula are not enough to incorporate the time needed for pupils to extensively practise reading and writing, Hildebrand (2014) examined how blogs affect the reading and writing practices of pupils of all ages, from elementary to college, with the precious contributions of teacher librarians, and concluded that blogging stimulates pupils to read and write, creatively, insightfully and consistently. Further, the versatility of blogs allows readers and writers to interact regardless of who / what / where they are, and teachers and librarians to integrate them into the classroom or into the school routine. Such findings, if shared and replicated, are likely to create a more vibrant school community – especially for those schools (like my own) whose library blog is blocked for comments. These significant relationships between reading and writing habits and learning effectiveness were also revealed by Quadir and Chen (2015).

However, we cannot ignore speaking and listening in a foreign language teaching / learning context. Reading and writing go hand in hand and so do listening and speaking, but unlike the first two, these latter are often “The untaught skills” as Adler (2002) calls them. Though speaking practice is limited, the demand for improving oral proficiency is increasingly higher, especially in relation to

³⁶ Available at <http://www.oecd.org/pisa/>, last accessed June 15, 2017

English as the international language of communication. English is also required for every updated curriculum vitae model where the language descriptors are according to the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEF)³⁷.

As a foreign language teacher, I have also experienced this imbalance, that is, due to the size of our classes, limited class time (Sun, 2009), demanding curricula and to the heterogeneous groups we face every year, we are unable to give all pupils an equal opportunity to participate. As a language learner myself, I have always had the feeling that so much time is spent teaching / learning it that we hardly ever have the time to use it in a more authentic way.³⁸

However, the evolution of blogs has led to innovative and imaginative creations; for language teachers, the use of blogs has provided additional opportunities for oral practice (Sun, 2009) and in particular video blogs have rapidly evolved to a highly creative form of expression and communication (Biel & Gatica-Perez, 2010). Indeed, the production of videos, their use in / for education, and their integration in blogs have garnered much attention worldwide, triggering a new phenomenon, Video Blogging - often shortened to Vlogging. Christensson (2011) defines vlogs as:

...short for "video blog" and is pronounced "vlog" (one syllable). A vlog is a blog, or web log, that includes video clips. It may be entirely video-based or may include both video and written commentary. (...) People who create vlogs are known as "vloggers." Some vloggers post videos for fun, while others run vlogs for the purpose of generating revenue through advertisements. While it's possible to set up a vlog website, many vloggers post their vlogs on YouTube since it makes their videos easier to find. Additionally, YouTube offers free video hosting, which means vloggers can post unlimited videos...

For Curran and Marshall (2011), videoblogging is similar to blogs except for the fact that it presents the blog in a video format. Considering this, Sun (2009) developed a class vlog that was used by students to upload their oral contributions. Though mainly an out-of-class activity for additional speaking practice, according to the study results, vlogs were helpful because they promoted authentic and purposeful language use among EFL learners, improved fluency, and learners also reported they performed better than in face-to-face situations. As for listening skills, students'

³⁷ <http://europass.cedefop.europa.eu/sites/default/files/cefr-en.pdf>, last accessed June 15, 2017

³⁸ In what concerns Soure, where I currently teach, I would say that pupils are even disadvantaged once it is a rural area, far from any tourist site, meaning pupils have no opportunity to speak English as soon as they leave the classroom walls of their English class. Aware of this – I would say, generalised - handicap felt by so many EFL teachers, I sometimes asked pupils to use their smartphones to record, for example, quotes or short videos and to share them in our class blog to be listened to and commented by as many as possible.

understanding also improved owing to the requirement that they had to respond to others' blog entries.

In an exploratory study conducted to investigate school-related vlogging, Snelson (2015) concludes that vloggers recorded their videos in multiple settings, including classrooms, showed and described school experiences, shared information and connected with others in a funny way. Teachers can take advantage of the ubiquity of pupils' handheld devices and their motivation to record short videos to practise their English language skills in authentic situations regardless of the school subject or ask pupils to develop their listening skills and comment on some vlogs. As stated by Kleanthous and Cardoso (2016), vlogging improves learners' speaking skills as they can record their voices repeatedly, which, in itself, is a great presentation practice.

Being a vlogger is the dream occupation of many young people, and successful bloggers are widely encouraged by their peers (Combe & Codreanu, 2016). Some vloggers even reach celebrity status like the Green Brothers³⁹, who became prominent through the originality and nature of their videos. Other vloggers are even younger as is the case of the now 25-year old Dianna Cowern⁴⁰ who created a channel about physics, astronomy and science-related topics, or a 16-year-old discussing books⁴¹. In a quick youtube search on "vlogs language learning", hundreds of videos immediately appear on the screen. While many of these vloggers are not really teaching a foreign language, the vast majority of videos are in English. In these contexts, I believe content is far less important than the ability to communicate and the community(ies) vloggers and our pupils may build. By watching vloggers (or eventually becoming one), our pupils are learning (or practising) vocabulary and skills they will need in their working lives. Their will and determination to do something should also be valued and, as teachers, we should empower our pupils to become creators and not just consumers, or, what Toffler (1994) refers to as prosumers.

In the 21st Century, the four traditional skills (reading, writing, speaking and listening) are, therefore, no longer enough. According to the National Education Association (2014), NEA, if today's pupils and students want to succeed in the future, they must also be proficient communicators, creators, critical thinkers, and collaborators. The 4 additional Cs (Communication, Creativity, Critical Thinking and Collaboration) emphasise the complexity and globalisation of today's world and "need to be fully integrated into classrooms" (NEA, 2014, p.6). That is not new as acknowledged

³⁹ <https://www.youtube.com/user/vlogbrothers>

⁴⁰ <https://www.youtube.com/user/physicswoman>

⁴¹ <https://www.youtube.com/user/milelongbookshelf/featured>

by A.J. Juliani in a recent blogpost (Juliani, 2017) or if we have watched Sir Ken Robinson's talks on youtube, especially the one on "Changing School Paradigms" (RSA, 2010), in a visually striking animated version. It is therefore urgent, on the one hand, to captivate pupils for school and not alienate them⁴² and, on the other hand, to prepare them for a new working reality - for some jobs that do not even exist yet (World Economic Forum, 2016)⁴³. To prepare our pupils – and not deepen the already existing gap – to be able to pave their path with creativity and resilience, schools need to be reimagined: learning spaces, school subjects, pedagogies have to change to equip pupils with a new set of skills. This is so real that those applying for a job now are already facing deep changes in their applications and selection criteria. Some recruiting companies are discarding degree requirements in order to give "every applicant the opportunity to demonstrate their potential, creativity, strengths and ideas, regardless of their background" (Sherriff, 2016). This means that what really matters now is not what the candidate knows, but rather what they can do. Blogs or vlogs can provide an online space for meaningful learning, to promote communication and collaboration among peers or with an international audience, and to show how creative and critical they can be in their entries and comments; success in education is achieved when pupils are provided with a set of skills that allows them to face the challenges of a fast-changing society such as ours. As the educational researcher Sugata Mitra (Mitra, 2013) points out, "It's not about making learning happen; it's about letting it happen. The teacher sets the process in motion and then sets back in awe and watches as learning happens."

2.4.1.4. Blogs to Foster Metacognition

Though metacognition may be a natural aptitude, it can and should also be taught and nourished by teachers with new class(room) dynamics.

As an asynchronous discussion tool, blogs allow participants to voice their ideas, interests and thoughts (Gomes, 2008), the time to reflect, to learn and share at their own pace, to even look for further information if that is the case. For Kochoska and Petrovski (2017), pupils all have an equal opportunity to share and therefore have time to be reactive to one another and to be reflective.

⁴² as pointed out by Sanches, A. (2016, March 15). "A escola mudou pouco, os adolescentes mudaram muito". Retrieved June 15, 2017, from <https://www.publico.pt/2016/03/15/sociedade/noticia/a-escola-mudou-pouco-os-adolescentes-mudaram-muito-1726244> and Santos, J. P. (2016, April 7). A Escola e a Quarta Revolução Industrial. Retrieved June 15, 2017, from <https://online.sapo.pt/503581?source=social>

⁴³ Also see, by Jenny Soffel, Website Editor, World Economic Forum. (2016, March 10). What are the 21st-century skills every student needs? Retrieved June 15, 2017, from <https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2016/03/21st-century-skills-future-jobs-students>. This website entry not only presents the skills that will be needed most but also compares the top 10 skills needed in 2015 and 2020 in a summarised way.

Meinecke, Smith and Lehmann-Willenbrock (2013) also point this out by claiming that built into the blog experience is the element of reflection, which involves specific behaviours such as questioning, exploratory learning, analysis and learning at a meta-level.

Li et al. (2013) suggest that blog use encourages critical thinking when some methods and strategies are deployed, highlighting the relevance of providing detailed instructions and rubrics on writing blog posts and on commenting on others' blogs.

For Huffaker (2005), blogs provide an online venue where self-expression is encouraged; Deng and Yuen (2011) go as far as to highlight four areas that blogs can potentially support: self-expression, self-reflection, social interaction and reflective dialogue, for both individual and a group of students. Considering that in a blog the presented ideas are the starting point for dialogue, for these two authors, bloggers share their experiences, feelings and thoughts – self-expression – and thus encourage self-reflection through communication, interaction and collaboration with a real audience and even link to other websites and blogs to deepen / optimize this exchange. This conclusion resonates with Blood (2002) who, right when the first blogs emerged, argued that blogs can help bloggers to become more reflective and critical observers of the world around them. Deng and Yuen (2011), though, add a new dimension - blog reading - acknowledging that learners need to read and reflect first before engaging in meaningful interactions. This link between posting and responding is consistent with Ducate and Lomicka's (2008) research insofar as they observed students' progression from reading to writing blogs, specifically in a foreign language, and therefore became more comfortable and familiar with the culture of blogging. This echoes several other references (Huang, 2016; Vurdien, 2013; Ward, 2004) arguing that blogs facilitate both the exchange of ideas, self-reflection and enable pupils to provide feedback on their peers' work, thus creating a more relaxed, student-centered, and self-paced reading and writing target language environment (Huang, 2016). For Ward (2004), it is not a case of either/or - learners who are blog readers and writers will find these activities mutually beneficial.

2.4.1.5. Blogs for Intercultural Competences Beyond the Classroom Walls

I have mentioned collaboration before and indeed it is of paramount importance for our 21st Century learners and their future careers. But what exactly is collaboration, here collaborative learning? For Dillenbourg (1999) "The broadest (but unsatisfactory) definition of 'collaborative learning' is that it is a situation in which two or more people learn or attempt to learn something together" (p.1). In other words, this clear definition places its focus on learning together, blog users teach and learn

together, taking advantage of a unique affordance of blogging: the ability to extend learning beyond the classroom walls.

In an increasingly connected and globalised world and more than we already do today, our learners will likely experience collaborative work throughout their lives, and may involve working in an international team, hence with co-workers from different linguistic and cultural backgrounds. From an early age, our pupils should therefore be encouraged and led to communicate with people from different countries (Meinecke et al., 2013; Richardson, 2006). The school is well-placed as a plural space for democratic and inclusive teaching and learning, and blogging in English, facilitated by the teacher, may bring further benefits. Such benefits include greater awareness of the other and the differences between one's own culture and the other's⁴⁴. This can help to bring about greater understanding through intercultural competence, which language teaching is particularly well-placed to develop.

2.4.1.6. Blogs, New Literacies and Skills

The definition of what it means to be literate has changed over time, but literacy has always been one of the central goals of education. However, the ever-changing world requires new skills.

Therefore, another strong reason for teachers to consider blogs as a pedagogical tool is the fact that blogging can teach pupils the new literacies they will need to master in our continuously expanding information society (Richardson, 2006). As our pupils spend more and more time online, for Richardson (2006), it is crucial that we teach our learners the skills to analyse and manage it, the process to research trustworthy sources, how to be a critical reader and viewer and how to organise and summarise information. The same concern is encapsulated by the International Reading Association (2009) suggesting that “To become fully literate in today's world, students must become proficient in the new literacies of 21st-century technologies.” (p.2)

⁴⁴ An example of this can be read at <http://shiningasoure.blogspot.pt/2014/07/came-most-difficult-moment-of-muslims.html>. Back in July 2014, a month into pupils' summer break, one of my pupils – then a 13 year-old-boy - was fasting the whole month of Ramadan for his very first time and shared that in our class blog. I didn't expect that but it unleashed / triggered a very enriching and insightful exchange with some peers but, above all, with other Muslims from different corners of the world. This example confirms an authentic and international audience and is consistent with Duarte (2015) who argues that a group blog actively supports learning activities, in this case with the contribution of a pupil triggering comments thus assisting the learning of others. It is also my strong conviction that being reached out by people my pupils do not know and from different contexts, besides peaking motivation, interaction and bringing authenticity to learning, it also promotes positive attitudes of respect, tolerance and acceptance towards differences.

But what are these “new literacies”? The National Council of Teachers of English (2013), (NCTE), updated their position statement clarifying their stance in the following way:

Literacy has always been a collection of cultural and communicative practices shared among members of particular groups. As society and technology change, so does literacy. Because technology has increased the intensity and complexity of literate environments, the 21st century demands that a literate person possess a wide range of abilities and competencies, many literacies. These literacies are multiple, dynamic, and malleable.

The NCTE Committee adds then that:

Active, successful participants in this 21st century global society must be able to
Develop proficiency and fluency with the tools of technology;
Build intentional cross-cultural connections and relationships with others so to pose and solve problems collaboratively and strengthen independent thought;
Design and share information for global communities to meet a variety of purposes;
Manage, analyze, and synthesize multiple streams of simultaneous information;
Create, critique, analyze, and evaluate multimedia texts;
Attend to the ethical responsibilities required by these complex environments.

As teachers it is therefore our duty to effectively integrate these new literacies into our daily practices, thus closing the gap between the speed of change in our daily lives – largely brought by the Internet and the Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) - and the slow change of educational paradigms. Sawmiller (2010) and Zawilinski, (2014) also advocate that using emerging technologies and integrating them into teaching will allow pupils’ experiences in and outside of school to converge. One way of developing digitally competent citizens who, in the future, may actively and successfully participate in society, is by incorporating a blog. As Toffler (1971) put it, “The illiterate of the 21st century will not be those who cannot read and write, but those who cannot learn, unlearn, and relearn.” (p.414)

2.4.2. CONSTRAINTS OF EDUBLOGGING

Whilst teachers and pupils can reap the rewards of blogging, I am also aware, through my own experience, that blogging teachers (and those willing to become bloggers) also face many obstacles. In fact, in the literature, some of the authors who stress the benefits and potential of blogging also draw attention to its downsides, since the multiple and much-desired benefits do not always materialize.

Substantiated in research, Hungerford-Kresser et al. (2012), admit they made a wrong assumption considering that today’s generation of tech-savvy pupils – the so-called digital natives (Prensky, 2001) - would enjoy blogging. This corroborates the doubt around the validity of Prensky’s digital

native/immigrant dichotomy, which is based, essentially, on the effective use of technology (or lack thereof⁴⁵) (Helpster & Enyon, 2010).

In an experimental study conducted by Lin, Lin, and Hsu (2011), the authors compared the effects of classroom blogging on ESL undergraduate writers' performance with a traditional teaching approach, and both groups had a statistically similar performance. In this case, according to the same authors, it is legitimate to question whether it is worth teachers pursuing blogging, taking into account not only the effort but also the time spent on designing and maintaining the blog. Furthermore, the payoff is not immediate since it takes time to build readership. Huang (2016) also reports that pointing out language errors on blogs was more time-consuming than on paper and quite ineffective for peer feedback. As for pupils, another inhibitor for their successful blogging and commenting is therefore the inability to provide constructive feedback due to their own low proficiency in L2 (Huang, 2016). This is reinforced by Lin et al. (2013), who add that, in these cases, pupils' activity was limited by the fact that everything is time-consuming, by feelings of anxiety and fear of exposition and being ridiculed by more able peers.

As for Arena (2008), this experienced Brazilian teacher blogger believes it is important to guide pupils in their use of blogs for educational purposes as blogging doesn't "simply happen". Indeed, blogging is a challenge for teachers "due to schedule constraints, overflow of information, resistance from students, and constraints on educators and their institutions" (Arena, 2008, p.6); blogging happens "only if learners and educators apply themselves to developing semantic webs taking all into another level of understanding of the language being studied and of the vast, fascinating world surrounding them." (Arena, 2008, p.6)

In another study (Andergassen, Behringer, Finlay, Gorra, & Moore, 2009) on why students choose not to blog, results show that the main reasons include a preference for direct (online) communication, and concerns about the loss of privacy. Ray (2006), also an advocate of blogging, discusses two more downsides: firstly, accessibility, namely inequitable access from home; secondly, safety issues, a set of rules that should be followed as they were designed to protect children from online predators, harassment or bullying. As for Domalewska's (2014) study, this

⁴⁵ Simply using tech tools does not make us innovative or guarantee effective and efficient use. Indeed, digitising learning experiences will not, necessarily, improve pupils' learning nor, according to Freeman, Adams Becker, Cummins, Davis, & Hall Giesinger (2017) "translate into equal learner achievement. Technology is an enabler but does not alone compensate for gaps in student engagement and performance attributable to socioeconomic status, race, ethnicity, and gender."; the integration of technology throughout the curriculum should always be motivated by the need to optimise pupils' learning and our teaching, in other words, what is best for this pupil?

suggests that students created their blogs in order to pass the course and treated blogging as another teaching activity and not as a forum for exchange of opinions and information. For Soares (2008), age may also be relevant for successful blogging. In her own words, there seems to be a preference “to involve older, more mature and independent learners, both in terms of cognitive development and linguistic proficiency in the target language, in the blogging activity” (p.524). As Bernstein (2004) admits “Lots of kids don't care. That's not news, or evidence. They never did, they never will. Not everyone wants to be a writer. Especially not when they're 15.”⁴⁶

While vlogs are more visible than the original blogs and could engage our pupils differently, other concerns emerge for schools related to the privacy and safety of our youngsters, and that is a powerful reason to think twice before investing so much and then not being allowed to share and publicise our pupils' creations, no matter their potential for developing language speaking skills, a concern shared by many educators and teachers worldwide, including Portugal⁴⁷. In this case, however, a strategy to captivate learners and prevent potential problems, would be for teachers to be the ones to opt for vlogging, thus introducing another trend, the flipped classroom⁴⁸ even if only for a few classes.

As asserted before, blogging is challenging for teachers and pupils alike but for different reasons. It is evident that pedagogical benefits exist, but constraints have also been identified. Are teachers ready to make a greater investment in this area? As Duarte (2015) says “The commitment of administrators and instructors is crucial to long-term success terms” (p.114). Such investment is important to overcome the hurdles they face in schools on a daily basis and to transform blogging into a pedagogical benefit.

⁴⁶ Indeed, based also on my own experience and on an informal questionnaire answered by my pupils in the end of our 3-year-long blogging experience, all expressed positive attitudes and beliefs in what concerns BALL, but this enthusiasm did not translate (enough) into their engagement in blogging activities. Though I wish I had experienced far more commitment, I believe I cannot complain much about my own pupils' participation in our class blog – after all, between 2013 and 2016, we reached the modest numbers of 269 blog posts and 1347 comments, a feat when compared to other edublogs shared by *Portal das Escolas* – the truth is that this discrepancy between pupils' opinions, beliefs, eventually their intentions, and their real actions is consistent with prior research (Lin et al., 2011; Lin et al., 2013; Wu, 2008).

⁴⁷ See Comissão Nacional de Protecção de Dados (2016)

⁴⁸ According to <https://library.educause.edu/resources/2012/2/7-things-you-should-know-about-flipped-classrooms>, the flipped classroom is a pedagogical model in which the typical lecture and homework elements of a course are reversed” so that “. . . in the repurposing of class time into a workshop where students can inquire about lecture content, test their skills in applying knowledge, and interact with one another in hands-on activities.” Bergmann and Sams (2013) claim that teacher-created videos as an instructional tool posted on the blog to be discussed in class can also help absent pupils as well as the absent teacher: absent pupils would have access to the class content and would not feel left behind; in case the teacher needs to be absent, posted videos can be food for thought, for project work, for reflection and would redeem the absent time.

2.5. EDUBLOGGING IN PORTUGAL

Portugal has also been subject to the same trends and subsequent enthusiasm for blogging which have taken place around much of the globe.

The project Blogopedia⁴⁹ - the Portuguese Blogosphere Encyclopaedia - referred to by Gomes & Lopes (2007) is a wiki that lists blog categories to help users in their searches which reflects the growth of bloggers and blogs in Portuguese; in another search in the Internet Archive⁵⁰, however, there are blogposts dating back to 1999 (the self-titled Pioneers) and there is a claim that “Antes de haver sequer um nome para o fenómeno, antes de existir o *Blogger*, já se escreviam blogues em Portugal.”

By the beginning of the new millennium, the Portuguese blogosphere was also characterised by a growing diversity that can be explained by technological aspects (for example, vlogs) and the topics the blogs focused on, as can be exemplified by travelblogs, photoblogs (Gomes & Silva, 2006) among others. Another possible explanation for such variety could be the objectives underlying the creation, for example, of edublogs (Gomes & Lopes, 2007).

Besides the explosion of references to blogging and new bloggers sprouting constantly, SAPO⁵¹, the largest national search engine, also made a blogging service available from November 2003 onwards (Gomes & Silva, 2006; Santos, 2004).

Echoing what was happening abroad, blogging in Portugal also created interest from academics, teachers and educators alike. A growing number of teachers of all subjects and levels have discovered and experimented blogging as a facilitating tool in teaching, learning and for communication. As Gomes (2008) states:

The “blogosphere” already comprises a set of educational tools that embrace a variety of purposes: there are blogs created and moderated by individual teachers and students; blogs with a collective authorship consisting of both students and teachers; blogs concentrating on a particular theme, and those that aim for transdisciplinary reach. Some blogs are digital portfolios of work carried out, and other blogs that act as a web presence of schools, departments or student societies. The type of use and the number of teachers and students involved keeps

⁴⁹ http://blogopedia.aventar.eu/mediawiki/index.php?title=P%C3%A1gina_principal, last accessed June 15, 2017

⁵⁰ http://web.archive.org/web/20070310064502/http://grupos.com.pt/blogopedia/1%C2%BA_Post, last accessed June 15, 2017

⁵¹ <http://blogs.sapo.pt>

increasing. The educational blogosphere is increasingly expanding to the different educational stages, from pre-school to higher education. (p.219)

Gomes (2008) writes extensively about the educational uses of blogs, referring to their applications in terms of strategy and / or resource (as previously mentioned in 2.4.1.). In another article, Gomes and Lopes (2007) illustrate the educational uses of blogs in the following way:

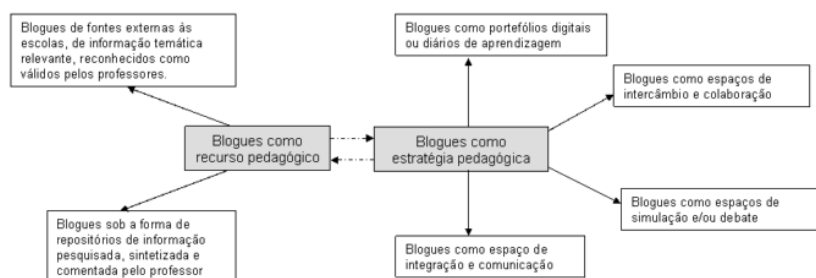


Figure 2: Mind Map with Blogging Educational Uses (Gomes & Lopes, 2007)

Aware that this is an incomplete representation of the plethora of possible uses, Gomes and Lopes (2007) reveal that more can be added, namely regarding the use of blogs as a pedagogical strategy with students being challenged to research, analyse, select, summarise and publish information about the studied topics and / or the ongoing activities online.

Carvalho (2005) also exhorts the benefits of this 2.0 web tool and encourages readers to try it out. In it, he mentions Teresa Almeida D’Eça, an APPI member and the first (and only) known Portuguese colleague to create a successful blogging experience and being internationally awarded for it (Farmer, 2006).

D’Eça (2006) herself describes the whole process of creating blogs, classroom and out of the class activities, her expectations and slow positive feedback from 7th graders, which emphasises the idea that blogs can be used differently with all age groups.

Judging by Gomes and Lopes' (2007) and Gomes and Silva's (2006) considerations, a decade ago the Portuguese school blogosphere was already getting busy and crowded, “consolidated, comprehensive and diversified” (Gomes & Lopes, 2007, p.118)⁵², especially due to the technological evolution, variety of topics approached, authorship and usage goals. In three articles, Gomes and her colleagues (Gomes, 2008; Gomes & Lopes, 2007; Gomes & Silva, 2006), attempt

⁵² Personal translation from Gomes and Lopes (2007)

to systematise the use of blogs in educational contexts and share their own contributions as can be seen in Figure 3 below.

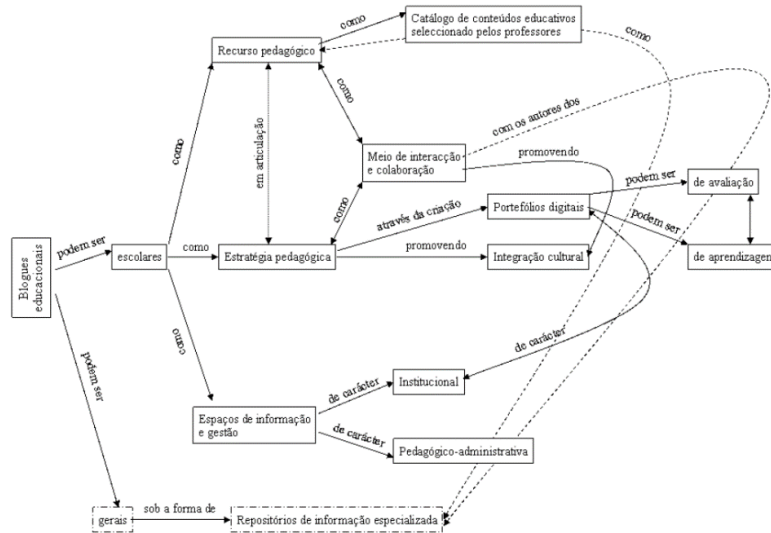


Figure 3: Mind Map of Different Educational Blog Uses (Gomes & Silva, 2006)

As the authors themselves disclose, this is an intricate, yet incomplete, web of connections, due to the increasing complexity of the educational blogosphere. Following this attempt at categorisation and sharing the same arguments as Gomes and Silva (2006), who argue that these endeavours result in better knowledge and reflection in relation to the potential of educational blogging, below (see Figure 4) is my own attempt to categorise the educational uses of blogs.

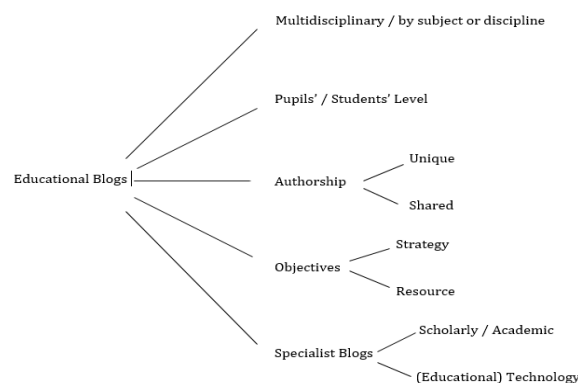


Figure 4: Outline of Educational Blog Uses

The issue of authorship should be noted here as it indicates the authors' willingness to engage in blogging either as a class activity or as a complement to the traditional face-to-face teaching. Furthermore, pupils tend to value their schoolwork when they have a clear purpose and deem it to

be relevant either for themselves, their future or for someone or something they consider important. As such, blogging can be motivational and a pedagogical strategy which facilitates the development of many 21st Century and ICT skills, as well as writing, but is a process which requires practice.

Figure 5 below is a personal detailed version of educational blog uses.

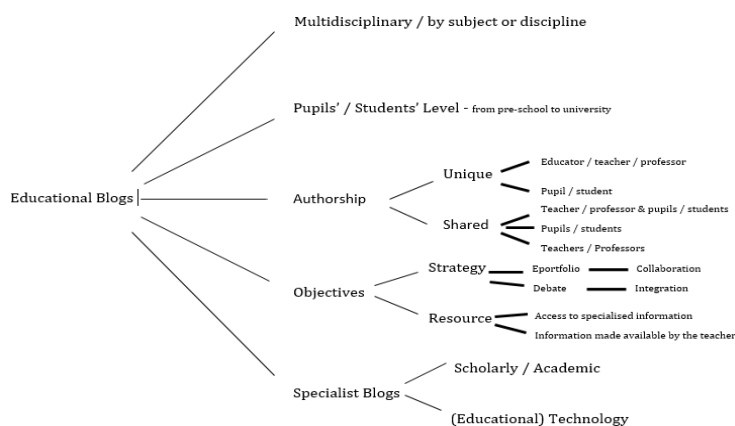


Figure 5: A Detailed Representation of Educational Blog Uses

In order to take advantage of this impressive range of pedagogical uses, the organisation of resources also needed to be in place. From the 80's onwards there has been an increasing concern and investment in both teacher development and equipping schools so that all public schools would have at least one computer with Internet access (Coutinho, 2006). However, only in the 2007/2008 school year did the Portuguese government prioritise investment in Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) with *Plano Tecnológico da Educação* (or *PTE*), with the goal of placing Portugal among the most advanced European countries in the technological modernisation of education (Sousa & Silva, 2009). Portugal also encouraged the purchase of personal computers, throughout compulsory education, the *Magalhães* being the most high-profile example due to the fact that it was aimed at primary school children (Costa, 2010). However, the existence of computers at school does not automatically imply deep changes in classroom practices – and evidence of this is the prevalence of chalk and blackboards that are still standard equipment. Nevertheless, this effort impacted schools' daily practices within the classroom and out of it, with an increasing number of teachers taking advantage of technological resources, including with blogs. This growing recognition of the relevance of blogs led to a number of publications and the initiative of giving different awards⁵³; ultimately this led to the creation of a Catalogue of

⁵³ Following the trail of Edublogs (<http://edublogawards.com/previous-winners/>, last accessed June 15, 2017), the year 2005 witnessed the launch of an Iberian community-based contest as an incentive awarding the best blogs in the different categories in the field of education. In their own words, “Os Prémios BLOPEs (um BLoPE é um BLOgue em Português

Educational Blogs – *Catálogo BloguesEDU* - for all subjects / levels, the only platform of its kind in Portugal.⁵⁴

Aware that blogs were already a resource and tool with increasing visibility within schools and that it was already possible to identify countless good practices, *ERTE* wanted to concentrate them all in a single place, with the catalogue also being a way of providing support – technical and bibliographical - to those willing to start using blogs in an educational setting. A couple years on and constantly growing, this database clearly indicates that blogs are a facilitating tool for learning and communication.

In *Portal das Escolas*, after a simple search, on April 10th 2017, only under the tag (*etiqueta*) “Inglês”, there were no results. Another attempt included the use of the term “Inglês” under the tag and curricular area and this time there were four results: of these four, only one of these blogs is still running and being updated while the other three were short-lived. The last search included the simple use of “Inglês” for the curricular area (and not under the tag) and 38 results emerged. However, a minority of these blogs are in Portuguese and are not meant for English teaching and learning. Even more striking is the fact that the vast majority are short-lived and have no comments⁵⁵. In other words, not a single blog directly involves and engages pupils since there is little evidence of pupils’ active contributions; in some cases, visitors cannot be certain whether pupils access the blogs as they are supposed to or even accomplish the suggested tasks. There is absolutely no interaction with learners much less blogposts by them – surprisingly not even in European projects. There are, therefore, different motivations for the creation of the aforementioned blogs within the *Portal das Escolas*, and not even geography is a common dominator as they are

ou Espanhol na área da Educação) pretendem divulgar e incentivar a utilização da importante ferramenta que é um blogue na área da Educação.(...) Pretendemos que estes prémios sejam uma marca de respeito, reconhecimento e homenagem ao trabalho que os educadores tiveram durante o ano, que as suas contribuições e esforços sejam mais reconhecidas pela comunidade.” Later, in 2008, and replacing the original and only edition of BLOPEs (<http://edublogawards.com/previous-winners/>, last accessed June 15, 2017), another contest was launched but just for Portugal and for two years. Faithful to the original goals, this new BLIBIE (<http://edublogawards.com/previous-winners/>, last accessed June 15, 2017) included a public polling system and many more categories, which reflect the extent of creativity and blog use in education. In the 2008/2009 edition, an APPI member won in the category of “Best Teacher Blog”. Again inconsequentially, in 2012, there was another contest “Kidsmart – Concurso de Blogues” (http://erte56.wix.com/blogues_kidmart#, last accessed June 15, 2017) promoted in partnership by International Business Machines (IBM) and Ministério da Educação e Ciência having as a goal to publicise in blogs preschools’ work with KidSmart.

⁵⁴ Launched on March 10, 2011, under the responsibility of *Equipa dos Recursos e Tecnologias Educativas (ERTE)* and the tutelage of the Ministry of Education, the *Catálogo BloguesEDU* (available at http://portaldasescolas.pt/portal/server.pt/community/04_catalogo_blogs/284) “...destina-se a todos os docentes que queiram publicar e divulgar o seu blogue revelando trabalho realizado com os alunos. No Catálogo, o docente terá acesso a um conjunto de blogues utilizados nos diferentes níveis do ensino básico e secundário, em distintas áreas disciplinares e que são divulgados como exemplo de boas práticas.” (<http://www.erte.dgicd.min-edu.pt/bloguesedu>).

⁵⁵ I made several attempts to contact the blog creators but none ever replied.

scattered around Portugal, from Barcelos to Silves, though they are visibly more concentrated along the coast and between Setúbal and Braga⁵⁶.

In a private communication with the only person in charge of this information update, the last registration was numbered 826 which means that between 2011 and at the time of writing, 22nd March 2017, this was the total number of registered educational blogs. However, among that number are now blogs that have expired and not yet been revisited; others are no longer active or have problems and are therefore not revalidated, and there are even some with double registrations (because the teacher forgot that it had already been registered). Presently, there are 211 public blogs, and a further 45 awaiting approval. Even if all the information there is not updated as confirmed by the person in charge and by the date stamped⁵⁷ on the tables (last edited on 2014 December 10), the collected data is nevertheless revealing that blogs are not being used for interaction and communication, for improving pupils' skills, but simply to disclose events and activities – as a “disclosure object” (Almeida, Castelano, Santo, Souza, & Luquetti, 2012).

As of 2017 and taking my school as a reference, even when teachers do have some knowledge of the pedagogical use of ICT, there is no technical support or monitorisation in ICT to help with the problems occurring with the few (fully) operational desktops; problems further, as budget cuts have made the renewal of equipment unfeasible, the existing laptops are obsolete (Fares, 2014).

Using blogs for educational goals has attracted a certain degree of attention in Portugal. When searching scholarly ezines, university repositories, conference proceedings, books or web pages from scholars, we find a number of articles, dissertations and theses. However, these are limited to studies of a particular school and different school subjects as, for example, reported by Sousa & Silva (2009); Ferreira (2014) focused on specific language issues, in this case on writing and how teaching and learning Portuguese is processed using blogs; Dias (2011) analysed the different types of blog posts, the underlying educational purpose and the language used; Henriques (2014) details the positive perception of the use of blogs in a Maths class using an alternative curriculum; Martins (2015) considered a blog's potential to bring family and preschool / nursery school communities

⁵⁶ Map available on <https://fusiontables.google.com/DataSource?docid=1OggY61wAVXYpHNnFiXQJ2nhOIP4TV3BxJUJz3BgK#map:d=3>

⁵⁷ <https://fusiontables.google.com/DataSource?docid=1OggY61wAVXYpHNnFiXQJ2nhOIP4TV3BxJUJz3BgK#rowsid=1>

closer by monitoring their children's learning; Varela (2015) implemented an eTwinning⁵⁸ project to determine the motivational, linguistic and sociocultural potential to learn EFL.

Unlike the above cited studies in Portugal, this research project is an attempt to capture data from across Portugal from various school settings, from the English teachers themselves, in a study hoping to make a modest contribution – in the Portuguese context – to explore the ways in which pupils and teachers may benefit from using blogs, specifically in the EFL class(room).

The relevance and topicality of blogs have been duly acknowledged by the Ministry of Education given their inclusion in the Portuguese English Curriculum objectives (Bravo, Cravo, & Duarte, 2015), more precisely for 9th graders who should be able to interact on general issues and to cite from the English Curriculum: “Escrever comentários e mensagens em blogues e redes sociais.”(p.11) In a broader perspective, the *Metas de Aprendizagem* (Costa et al., 2010) specifies the competences that pupils should have by the end of each cycle – here, 3rd CEB – in relation to ICT. There are four domains – Information, Communication, Production and Safety – all aimed at the pupil's global development in diverse school subjects, with blogs being included from primary education onwards. Just recently, the *Direção-Geral da Educação (DGE)* published a working paper *Tratar os Media por “Tu”* (Silveira, Pessoa, Pinto, Petrella, & Carvalho, 2017), which includes an activity dedicated to the blogosphere (p.28) and ends the paper by suggesting the creation of a class blog followed by several activities. Similarly, Pereira, Pinto, Madureira, Pombo and Guedes (2014) in *Referencial de Educação para os Media / Media Education Guidance* (English version available), highlight the importance of learning to “read (the media) critically,”(p.6) a skill set involving:

...being able to recognise and value the content that contributes to the broadening of horizons, to understanding what is going on in the world, to welcoming the diversity of values and worldviews and to the construction of identities. It further involves the acquisition of processes of self-defence against the risks and threats, including those arising from the new media and social networks. (p.6)

Bearing this in mind and reflecting other European documents, “This document aims to propose a frame of reference for the pedagogical work in media education issues in preschool education and primary and secondary schooling.” (p.5), and includes a sub-topic called “Participating in / through the media | Producing content / messages” in Topic 12, “We and the Media” (p.33). Its performance descriptors specifically refer to blogging from primary to secondary, which again stress the

⁵⁸ Etwinning is a free online community for schools in Europe which allows educators and teachers to find partners and collaborate on projects within a secure network and platform accessible at <https://www.etwinning.net/pt/pub/index.htm>.

application of blogging to enable our children and youngsters “to take ownership of tools that equip them to use the potential of the media responsibly and alert them to the dangers to which they may be exposed through them.” (p.5)

Likewise, the latest *Perfil dos alunos à saída da escolaridade obrigatória* (Martins, 2017) acknowledges that new principles, values and key competences (and not just knowledge acquisition) imply changes in our pedagogical practices. According to the document, this profile aims to create a framework and is definitely not a uniformising attempt. Some of the practical implications of the document are student-centredness, the promotion of activities that allow pupils to make choices, the expression of their points of view, problem-solving and decision-taking based on values, in and outside of the classroom. Unsurprisingly, these consequences are also common to blogging among pupils with the required technical and technological knowledge (Martins, 2017).

In the last four sections of this report, then, the significant potential for educational blogs to be applied to FL classes has been identified, as have the constraints that may also be present in school settings. The Portuguese education system, under the auspices of the Ministry of Education, has duly recognised, over the last 30 years, the importance of ICT in educating and providing pupils with 21st Century Skills for a global world driven by rapid change in new technologies. Blogs have been identified as an important part of this process. However, if teachers are not provided with the necessary resources and skills to implement practices to prepare pupils for this ever-changing world, then such skills are unlikely to be successfully developed in the classroom. As EFL teachers occupy a unique position to prepare pupils for global citizenship – by exploring cultures and values, and using language, technologies and communication – this project set out to better understand the perceptions of Portuguese EFL teachers regarding the use of blogs. The empirical part of this study will be related in the next sections of this report.

CHAPTER 3 – RESEARCH RATIONALE AND DESIGN

The essential point is that good research cannot be built on poorly collected data...

(Gillham, cited in Dömyei, 2003, p.1)

In the previous chapter, I focused on the rise and development of new technologies, and how blogs have been part of this rapidly changing and ongoing process. I also considered research studies – both in and outside of Portugal – focusing on the potential benefits and constraints of using blogs in education. Now I will set out the empirical study, with the goal of this chapter being to present the overall framework and underlying rationale of this research project. It addresses the study's purpose and objectives, whilst also providing information on the research methodology, that is, the diverse strategies and steps taken to collect the necessary data. As a novice researcher, but an experienced practising teacher, I also attempt to give an honest account of the challenges faced during this process.

3.1. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This project aims to make a modest but worthy contribution to research carried out in Portugal. It intends to fill a gap – that of the absence of any research in Portugal specifically investigating how EFL teachers in Portugal perceive the benefits of using blogs in the classroom, to what degree they are using blogs, and what might be some of the factors that could deter them from using blogs as a pedagogical tool.

Rather than focus on one level of teaching or one school, a key aim was to try to reach as many EFL teachers as possible, irrespective of geographical region, level of teaching or levels of experience. This would not only give the project richer data, but also allow me to see if there are any emerging patterns in EFL teaching, regarding the research objectives, across the Portuguese context.

Taking into account this goal, the questionnaire was thought to be the most appropriate data collection instrument that could achieve this aim. Further, as my supervisor and I are longstanding members of APPI, one of our key strategies was to use our contacts within this important English teaching organisation to disseminate information and ensure greater numbers of EFL teachers would complete the questionnaire.

Figure 8 below - from Ary, Jacobs, Sorenson and Razavieh (2009, p.33) - illustrates the stages in the research process followed by my project. This chapter essentially focuses on the ‘Design the study’ and the ‘Collect the data’ phases.

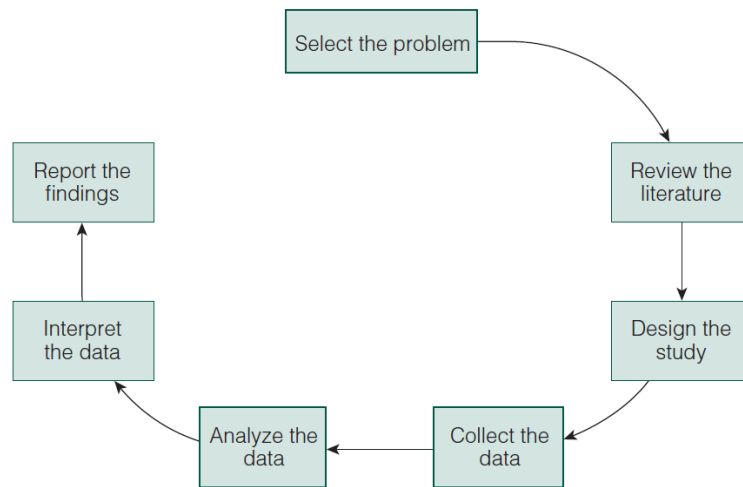


Figure 6: Stages in the Research Process

The central data collection instrument of this study is one that is largely associated with quantitative research. Quantitative and qualitative research are contrasting paradigms in many ways, as can be seen from Table 1 below, adapted from Ary, Jacobs, Sorenson, and Razavieh (2009, p.25).

Table 1: Quantitative versus Qualitative Approach

	QUANTITATIVE	QUALITATIVE
PURPOSE	To study relationships, cause & effect	To examine a phenomenon in detail
DESIGN	Developed prior to study; the researcher is independent from the object	Flexible, evolves during study; the researcher interacts with the object
APPROACH	Deductive, precise & reliable	Inductive & iterative
TOOLS	Uses preselected instruments, here questionnaires	Active, systematic & rigorous questioning
SAMPLE	Uses large samples	Uses small samples
ANALYSIS	Analysis of numerical data	Narrative description & interpretation

The two paradigms are not mutually exclusive and although my approach is essentially quantitative, at the start of the project, data collection methods associated with qualitative research approach were also part of the research design. Further, as will be explained in greater detail later in this chapter, the main questionnaire of this study also included open-ended questions, not only allowing us to explore the responses from a qualitative-interpretative perspective, but also allowing practising teachers' voices – that is responses in their own words – to be registered and to provide important contextualisation of their own teaching settings.

As distinct as quantitative and qualitative research are, they are also complementary paradigms, and Miles and Huberman go as far as to remind us that “Qualitative data can be used to supplement, validate, explain, illuminate or reinterpret quantitative data gathered from the same subjects” (as cited in Bogdan & Biklen, 2006, p.41). Bearing this in mind, for this dissertation, and in practical terms, different phases were established, each step to improve and refine the former and hence the overall research design.

In the following section, I will describe in more detail how the research was carried out.

3.2. IMPLEMENTING THE RESEARCH DESIGN

This section describes how the research methodology was implemented. As previously said, this study was largely carried out by using a quantitative approach. This was undertaken in different phases: firstly, with an exploratory questionnaire; then a pilot questionnaire; and finally with the application of the final and main questionnaire.

Brown defines questionnaires as “any written instruments that present respondents with a series of questions or statements to which they are to react either by writing out their answers or selecting from among existing answers.” (as cited in Dörnyei, 2003, p.6)

Dörnyei (2003, p.1) claims that because questionnaires are relatively easy to construct, versatile and able to gather a large amount of information, they are one of the most widespread methods of data collection in L2 research.

In 2016, I began implementing my research plan with two exploratory questionnaires. According to the Merriam Webster dictionary, the term “exploratory” means “done or created to find something or to learn more about something”⁵⁹. As part of my research plan, they were intended as a starting point, to gather general information and help me identify key issues that could be addressed in the questionnaires of the following phases. They mostly included open-ended

⁵⁹ <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/exploratory>, last accessed on June 15, 2017

questions, which allowed me to elicit concerns of EFL teachers regarding new technologies, and to probe for feedback in relation to their knowledge about blogs. Due to limitations of space, and the nature of these questionnaires as a means to refine ideas for the next two questionnaires, the presentation and analysis of these are not included in the main body of this report. However, both exploratory questionnaires are included in Appendix 1 and 2 respectively, and the analysis of the data collected can be found in Appendix 3.

Being a presenter at an APPI Seminar in Arcozelo in October 2016, I asked participants to complete a printed version of the exploratory questionnaire (Appendix 1) at the end of my presentation. A week later, at a regional APPI Seminar in Vila Nova de Santo André, my supervisor was presenting and applied the same exploratory questionnaire (Appendix 2) at the end of his presentation. 77 teachers in total responded to these, helping me to identify important issues I needed to address in the pilot questionnaire.

In the process of constructing the pilot questionnaire, - I considered several aspects: firstly, length, in this case not too long to discourage busy teachers from responding, but sufficiently long to allow me to collect relevant information; next, layout, meaning a user-friendly appearance with simple and clear instructions; also important was the assurance of confidentiality and anonymity of respondents in order to encourage honesty in their answers. I started by contextualising the project as well as thanking respondents. I also included succinct and informative instructions and introduced varied questionnaire items. As was the case at the beginning of the questionnaire, there was a final “Thank you” and a smiling face to build rapport and to express my appreciation for their time and cooperation.

For Cohen, Manion, & Morrison (2000) “...the wording of questionnaires is of paramount importance” (p.260) which leads them to claim that “pretesting is crucial to its success” (p.260). Dörnyei (2007) also insists on piloting “research instruments and procedures before launching” (p.75) the project and adds that “Just like theatre performances, a research study also needs a dress rehearsal to ensure the high quality (in terms of reliability and validity) of the outcomes in the specific context.” (p.75)

Therefore, based on the data collected from the exploratory questionnaire, notes from my research log and further reflection, last January a pilot questionnaire (Appendix 4) was applied to all EFL teachers in a 2nd and 3rd CEB school in the Leiria region. For reasons of confidentiality, this school will not be named since teachers were assured that anonymity would be preserved.

Administering this printed pilot questionnaire to a cohort of 9 respondents, similar to the target population the instrument was designed for (Dörnyei, 2003), served several purposes (Cohen et al., 2000):

- To check the clarity of the questionnaire items, instructions and layout;
- To gain feedback on the validity of the questionnaire items, the operationalization of the constructs and the purposes of the research;
- To eliminate ambiguities or difficulties in wording;
- To gain feedback on every single aspect the respondents could provide;
- And to identify any need to reformulate, replace or narrow down items, or even add new ones. (p.260)

Indeed, this proved to be a useful process because several items were changed, others refined and a new one added, this latter change following some responses to the last questions⁶⁰ (see Appendix 5 with results). The pilot questionnaire was largely designed with closed questions, Likert Scale items, opinion scales and lists of indicators, whilst the last two items were open-ended questions, which aimed to tap into teachers' own words, feelings and reflections, so rich quality information and new insights might be collated. This mixed questionnaire is justified by Dörnyei (2003) who argues that:

...by permitting greater freedom of expression, open-format items can provide far greater "richness" than fully quantitative data. The open responses can offer graphic examples, illustrative quotes, and can also lead us to identify issues not previously anticipated. (p.47)

Therefore, the main questionnaire aimed to collate relevant information in a systematic manner (Dörnyei, 2003) with a much broader sample. Therefore, in a time-, effort- and cost-effective way, it was meant to collect a significant amount of information from what was hoped would be a relatively large number of respondents and their points of view concerning their use of technology, blogs and suggestions/alternatives for classroom practice.

Following the previous phases described above, in March 2017, the main questionnaire was ready and my supervisor and I requested APPI's assistance in disseminating it to APPI members. This was done by email. Again, introductory words were used to explain the purpose and significance of the study, the acknowledgement of our appreciation and my contact was given for questions or

⁶⁰ The differences from the pilot questionnaire to the main questionnaire are the following: Questions 3.1 and 3.2 from the pilot questionnaire became just 3.1 in the main questionnaire which included the option "not applicable"; 3.4 in the pilot questionnaire was 3.5 in the main questionnaire and slightly different: no longer "If you use a blog in class..." but "When using a blog in class..." and respondents could opt for "Not applicable"; In the pilot questionnaire, question 3.7 asked for a link in case the blog was still active and in the main questionnaire it became 3.8; 3.16 was the only required question that was absolutely new in the main questionnaire – the one on social media after being referred to by respondents in all questionnaires, both in the exploratory and pilot.

comments that might arise. It was hoped that this concerted strategy would increase the quality and quantity of participant response.

The main questionnaire (Appendix 6) contained five distinct groups of items.

Group one aimed to gather respondents' biodata to help me understand who the respondents were. Group two concerned the respondents' school and group three was aimed to elicit information about blogs. In this group, there were two alternatives when respondents reached item 3.6: in case their answer to have ever creating a blog was affirmative, they would go on to item 3.7; however, in case their answer was negative, the questionnaire would automatically take them to item 3.15, to proceed as before. Group four addressed teaching English in Portugal and the last group consisted of two open-ended questions and a request.

These questions and the responses will be presented and discussed in the next chapter.

Unlike the pilot questionnaire, the main questionnaire contained a request to respondents - after the two open-ended questions - to leave their email contact if they were willing to be interviewed, using a Skype conference call. Regrettably, teachers who did initially indicate on the questionnaires that they would be willing to be interviewed about their experiences with blogs, did not reply to my emails, and due to restrictions of time and professional commitments, this phase of the research had to be abandoned.

Unlike the previous two questionnaires, the main questionnaire was administered online, in other words, APPI staff sent out our request for participation by email, which included the link to the questionnaire.⁶¹

This option for collecting data via the Internet and APPI was carefully considered. My supervisor and I are both longstanding APPI members and speakers at its seminars and conferences. As such, we trusted that being familiar with our work would encourage participants' responses; all APPI members are EFL teachers and thus the target population of my research; only APPI has the email address of its members and, consequently, its staff were the only ones who could send out my questionnaire to teachers across Portugal. As Dörnyei (2007) points out, web-based research allows access to "specialised populations which would otherwise be difficult to reach" (p.121) and ensures a high level of anonymity, thus, greater likelihood of honesty. In addition, by providing a hyperlink

⁶¹ Accessible at

https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLSdH5XnagMN742ljrxYabh_G9nHdxdbGCM0Ka7uaywYGlfskA/viewform?usp=sf_link

and a deadline, respondents would not feel pressured to fill it in, or hurriedly, which, ultimately, would contribute to the validity and reliability of the answers. By the deadline of March 29th, 93 questionnaires had been completed and registered.

Table 2 below is an overview of the three phases of this research project and its respective objectives.

Table 2: Overview of Data Collection Methods and Research Objectives

Quantitative Approach:

Data Collection Methods/ Instruments	Dates / Period Collected	Participants	Research Objectives	Comments
Exploratory Questionnaire	1 st & 7 th October 2016	Teachers of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) / participants in 2 Regional Seminars organized by APPI. Number of participants = 77 (71 female; 6 male)	-To gather general information, identify main issues and emerging patterns on the use of technology and blogging.	Printed questionnaires in English
Pilot Questionnaire	From 12 th to 20 th January 2017	2 nd & 3 rd CEB EFL teachers from a school in the Leiria region. Number of participants = 9 (6 female; 3 male)	-To check its clarity; -To gain feedback on its validity; -To eliminate ambiguities or difficulties in wording; -To gain feedback on every single item the respondents could provide; -And to identify any need to reformulate, replace or narrow down items, or even add new ones.	Printed questionnaires in English
Main Questionnaire	From 20 th to 29 th March 2017	EFL Teachers / APPI members. Number of participants = 93 (87 female; 6 male)	- To obtain data in order to answer research questions; -To collect a large amount of information on respondents' points of view concerning their use of technology, blogs and suggestions/alternatives in a time-,effort- and cost-effective way.	Online questionnaire using a Google Form

In the following chapter, I move from the study design and implementation of research methodology to the analysis of the data collected through the main questionnaire.

CHAPTER 4 - DATA ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION OF RESULTS

If you torture the data enough, nature will always confess.

(Coase, 1995, p.27)

This chapter contains the analysis of the main questionnaire sent via email to Portuguese EFL teachers. The questionnaire items were analysed quantitatively, apart from the two open-ended questions at the end of the questionnaire, which were analysed qualitatively.

Except for the inspiration taken from an eTwinning Questionnaire⁶² for Part 2, the questionnaire was created and developed for the sole purpose of this study to find out about English language teachers' experiences and perspectives concerning the use of blogs. As previously indicated, it was structured in five parts and contained a total of 26 closed questions followed by 2 open questions and took, on average, between 5-6 minutes to complete. In case the answer to question 3.6 (if respondents had ever created a blog) was negative, the questionnaire would be even shorter and faster to complete as they were automatically taken to question 3.15. The questionnaire was made available on March 20th 2017 to all Portuguese EFL teachers and was online for nine days. Besides the email sent out by APPI, the questionnaire was also posted on APPI's Facebook. At the end of the nine-day period, 93 respondents had completed the questionnaire, with this number constituting the data for the analysis that follows.

4.1. BIODATA

In order to have an idea of who the respondents were, they were asked about gender, years of experience, teaching location and levels taught.



Figure 7: Distribution by Gender

⁶² Though at a European level, it was a reference as a quantitative large-scale survey of (eTwinners') teaching practices and professional development activities and needs. It is available online at http://files.eun.org/etwinning/Monitoring_Survey_2014_english.pdf

As can be seen from Figure 7, 93.5% of all respondents were female. From my personal experience of attending APPI seminars or conferences, this gender discrepancy always stands out among presenters and participants alike, so this was unsurprising.



Figure 8: Teaching Experience

In Figure 8, almost 70% (69.9%) of all respondents have over 20 years of experience and only 1.1% of them are novice teachers.. This means that this sample represents a very experienced group of Portuguese EFL teachers, but may also highlight a particular characteristic of our schools, that of an aging teaching population, with younger teachers seemingly fewer in numbers. This could be a factor to consider when contemplating the possible reluctance of older teachers to use ICT in the classroom.

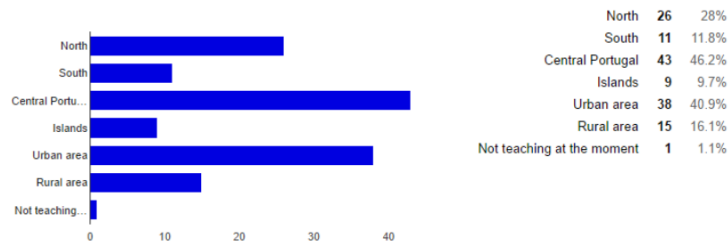


Figure 9: Teaching Location

Figure 9 indicates that almost half of the respondents are from Central Portugal (46.2%), closely followed by respondents teaching in an urban area (40.9%). If we take this factor into account in relation to blogging, there are also more blogs along the Portuguese coast and between Setúbal and Braga (see 2.5), it is worth noting that this may reflect two aspects: there are probably more schools / teachers / pupils in these areas and they are also substantially more active (see 2.5).

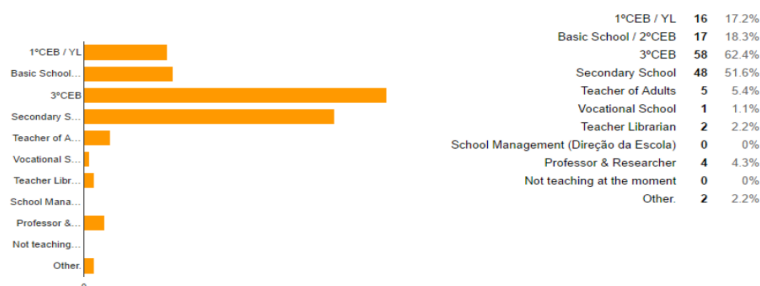


Figure 10: Teaching Areas / Levels

Taking Figure 10 into account, a large percentage of respondents teach in 3rd CEB (62.4%) followed by those teaching secondary pupils (51.6%). In both these questions (Figures 9 and 10), respondents could select more than one checkbox for some questions which is why the results for them add up to more than 100%.

Regrettably, the percentage of respondents working in school management is null and therefore there is no available data on their position.

4.2. YOU AND YOUR SCHOOL

To get a better idea of the respondents’ school context, a 5-point Likert scale ranging from “1-strongly agree” (first place, top-rated) to “5-strongly disagree” (last place, least rated) was employed. This is used for the eight statements of question 2.1.

In terms of the school profile, concerning innovative practices and teachers’ professional development, the predominance lies in the respondents’ agreement. In spite of this, there are issues that deserve a closer look.

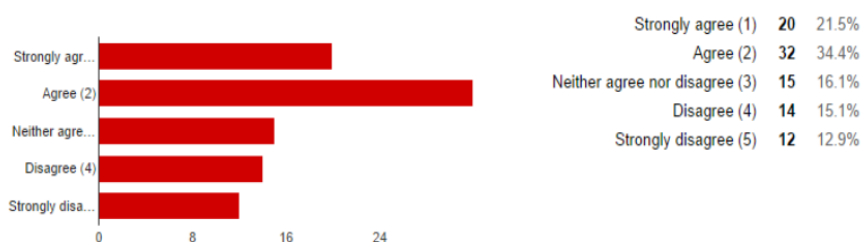


Figure 11: The Profile of Respondents’ Schools – European Projects

For the first statement regarding school participation in European projects, in Figure 11, 34.4% expressed their agreement, followed by 21.5% who answered they strongly agreed. This may indicate schools look for challenges and innovation and there are windows open for partnerships with European schools, for sharing and learning. Together (55.9%), however, they outnumber the other three items by only 5.9% which may imply that there are still a significant number of schools that do not promote European contacts among staff and pupils and therefore do not encourage collaboration and communication, two critical 21st Century Skills for the lifelong learner. This may have implications also for the use of new technologies and web tools, such as blogs.

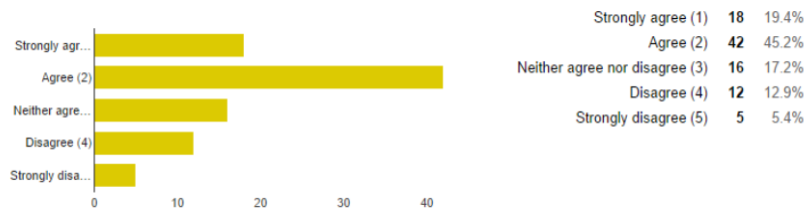


Figure 12: The Profile of Respondents' Schools – Innovative Practices

Concerning the second statement, Figure 12, whether respondents' schools are involved in initiatives aimed at cultivating innovative practices, the percentages here are higher with 45.2% agreeing with the statement plus 19.4% who strongly agree, making a total of 64.6%. This is very encouraging after the former statement, suggesting, perhaps, that more schools are dealing with innovative methodologies and practices, but perhaps not projects or blogging – it is possibly a question of time to involve the educational community in European projects.

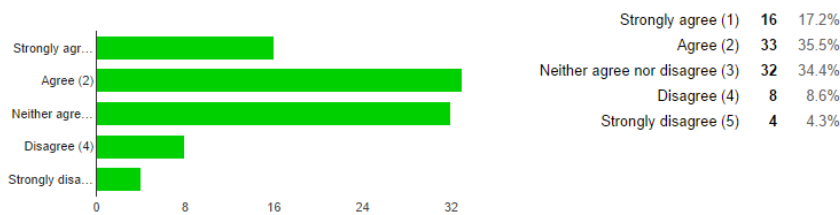


Figure 13: The Profile of Respondents' Schools – Collaboration

In Figure 13, the respondents' agreement prevails with 17.2% who strongly agree and 35.5% who agree, making a total of 52.7%; it is worrying, however, that there is roughly the same amount of neutral answers (34.4%), disagree (8.6%) and strongly disagree (5.4%), related to the school's promotion of collaborative work with teachers meeting, sharing, evaluating or developing teaching methods and materials, which is consistent with previous answers and percentages: Portuguese schools are perhaps not used to promoting collaborative work among their own staff, much less with their European counterparts. These results, then, point to a need to promote teacher collaboration within Portuguese schools and among their European colleagues, one of the key trends accelerating technology adoption according to Horizon Report k-12, 2016 Edition (Becker, Freeman, Giesinger Hall, Cummins, & Yuhnke, 2016) "...based on the perspective that learning is a social construct" and that "Educators also benefit through peer groups as they participate in professional development and interdisciplinary teaching" (Becker et al., 2016, p.12).

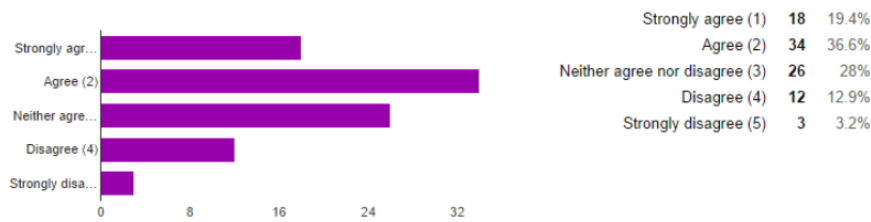


Figure 14: The Profile of Respondents' Schools – Professional Development (PD)

In statement 4, Figure 14, my school is engaged in improving teachers' professional development (PD), the agree and strongly agree make up 56% which, again, is not very convincing since it is just a little over half and the neutral answers are 28%: one possible and favourable interpretation is that teachers are well aware that their schoolboard would like to do more, but just cannot for hierarchical / bureaucratic (or other reasons); on a more pessimistic note, with staff careers on hold for so long and time restrictions for PD, in some schools the reaction may just be disillusionment and lack of involvement.

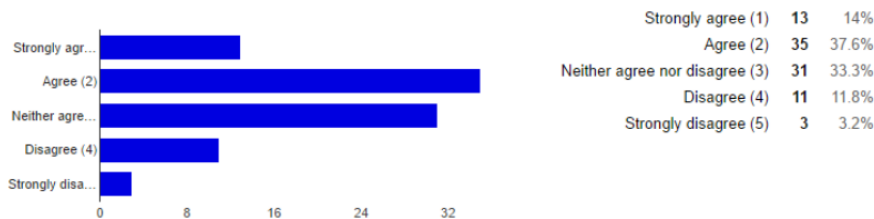


Figure 15: The Profile of Respondents' Schools – Schoolboard Role

The results for statement 5, figure 15, seem to reinforce what has just been said. Respondents agree and strongly agree they can count on the schoolboard (51.6%) but that encouragement and support of innovative practices is limited.

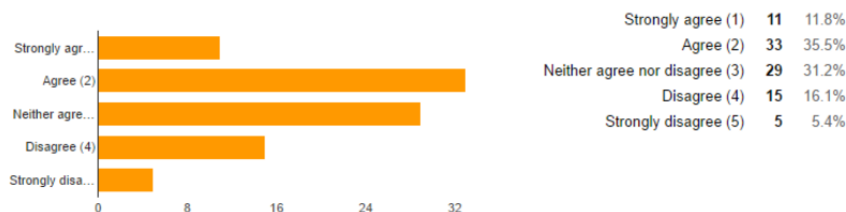


Figure 16: The Profile of Respondents' Schools – Technology and Changes

Statement 6, Figure 16, introduces the topic of technology and the effectiveness of changes introduced by, for example, *Reglamento Interno* (Internal school regulations). The results here are

strikingly similar to the previous ones: the agree and strongly agree percentage is below 50%, with 47.3%, which raises the question of whether schools cannot or simply fear changes and advances concerning not only collaboration but also the use of technology, challenging the prevailing tendency for traditional settings already referred to, thus not adjusting policies to the evidence pointing out need to change existing practices.

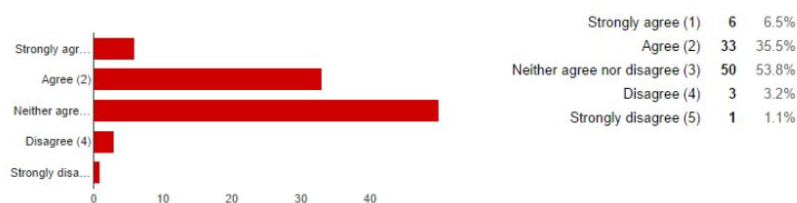


Figure 17: The Profile of Respondents' Schools – Parents and School Innovation

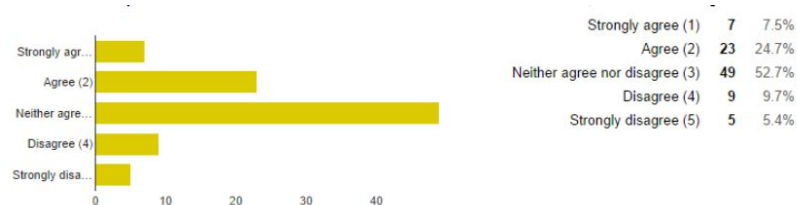


Figure 18: The Profile of Respondents' Schools – Parents and Tech Awareness

As Figures 17 and 18 demonstrate, the majority has opted for neutral responses (53.8% in Figure 17 and 52.7% in Figure 18). Perhaps parents are not consulted about innovation and technology at school and therefore have never been put in a situation in which they were supposed to give their opinion or, should it be the case the school welcomes change and innovation, it is possible that parents aware of these changes have simply not intervened in any way. For practising teachers, and especially form teachers, lack of parental involvement has always been a significant cause of concern. There are indications that some parents are detached from their children's education⁶³ which may explain these neutral majorities for the only two statements related to parents. However, from a different perspective, schools may also be seen to be failing to engage parents⁶⁴ due to a lack of communication. As previously mentioned, parents play an essential role in school success and student achievement. Acknowledging this, in 2015 a European working group developed a toolkit⁶⁵

⁶³ As experienced by so many educators, not only in Portugal but elsewhere as in this opinion article, accessed on June 15, 2017 at <https://amenteemaravilhosa.com.br/pais-hiperpassivos-criancas-hiperativas/>

⁶⁴ Gallup, I. (2016, December 08). Schools Fail at Engaging Parents. Retrieved June 15, 2017, from http://www.gallup.com/businessjournal/199193/schools-missing-big-opportunities-engage-parents.aspx?g_source=K_12&g_medium=topic&g_campaign=tiles

⁶⁵ Accessible at <https://www.schooleducationgateway.eu/en/pub/resources/toolkitsforschools.htm>

which is continually updated, enlarged and translated⁶⁶. In this toolkit, one of the areas is dedicated to parental involvement, their importance to their children’s social, emotional and cognitive development and learning, thus offering ideas to improve collaboration within, among and beyond schools. Since ICT tools can support “mutual, balanced and ongoing”⁶⁷ communication, blogs could be just one of the technological means to be used to improve the aforementioned lack of parental involvement and engagement.

To sum up this first question on respondents’ school profile and based on strongly agree and agree percentages, it seems that there is a lot to be done to improve school dynamics in accordance with 21st Century trends and needs; there is also room for improvement to build family-school partnerships and engage families as learning partners. Blogs – either in L1 or L2 – provide opportunities for innovation and collaboration as well as this two-way communication and closeness. In addition, to prepare pupils for tomorrow’s jobs (World Economic Forum, 2016) and learn all about collaborative work, teachers have to set the example: if we collaborate with other teachers and pupils and create spaces where we can all share what we know, then a different kind of learning could take place and, in the long term, this may be more valuable for everyone.

Question 2.2., Figure 19, aimed to ascertain data on available technology in classrooms around the country.

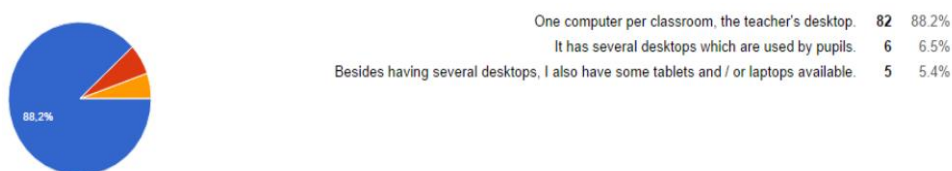


Figure 19: Classroom Equipment

An overwhelming majority of respondents (88.2%) describes having similar equipment, that is, one computer per classroom, the teacher’s desktop, while a very low percentage (12%) reports having more technology available. Unsurprisingly, these results are in line with the previous question (2.1), namely participation in European projects, innovative practices, collaboration and PD, because there appears to be limited conditions for working differently. There seems to be a gap between the reality in Portuguese schools and what is expected and required according to the latest trends in

⁶⁶ The Portuguese version of this booklet was announced by DGE last August 22nd, 2017 and can be accessed at <http://dge.mec.pt/noticias/guia-europeu-para-escolas-mantenha-se-ligado-escola>

⁶⁷ From <https://www.schooleducationgateway.eu/en/pub/resources/toolkitsforschools/subarea.cfm?sa=24>

education in Europe and in Portugal (Martins, 2017) in particular, hence making any change difficult right from the start, and classroom blogging even more difficult.

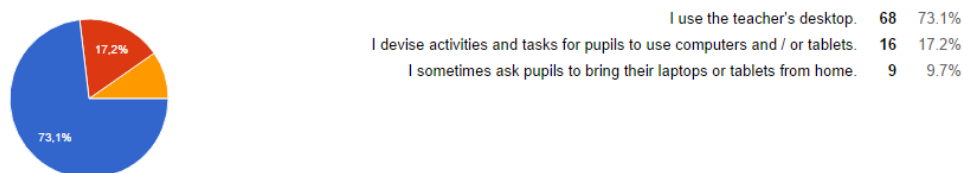


Figure 20: Technology Use

Probably as a consequence of the previous situation, as indicated by response to question 2.3., Figure 20 above, shows that 73.1% of respondents claimed to use the teacher's desktop, and 17.2% reported devising activities and tasks for pupils to use computers and / or tablets, perhaps aiming to involve the whole class or for post-class activities. 9.7% of respondents also reported sometimes asking pupils to bring their laptops and/or tablets from home which may mean that the Bring Your Own Device⁶⁸ (BYOD) trend is slowly gaining ground as predicted in the 2015 Horizon Report⁶⁹.

When asked about the number of hours of English they teach a week in question 2.4, there is a great disparity which goes from 0h/week to 30h/week. To make reading easier, time was split into 0 to 10 hours/week, 11 to 20 hours/week and 21 to 30 hours/week as presented in Figure 21 below. According to these results, half of the 93 respondents have a full, or close to a full, working timetable.

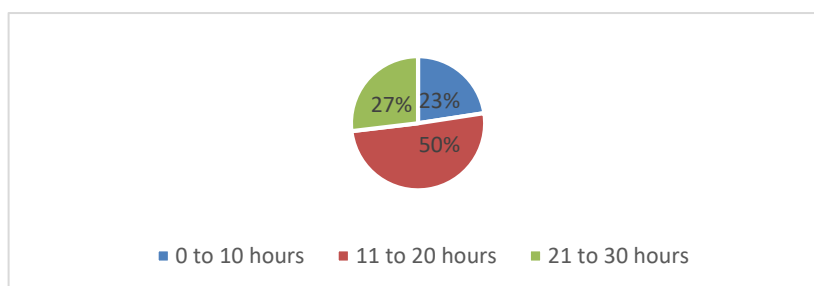


Figure 21: Hours of English Teaching per Week

With question 2.5., (see figure 22), the aim was to try to gauge, on average, the percentage of classroom time Portuguese teachers of English use for technology.

⁶⁸ <http://horizon.wiki.nmc.org/Bring+Your+Own+Device>, last accessed June 15, 2017

⁶⁹ Johnson, L., Becker, S., Estrada, V., and Freeman, A. (2015). NMC Horizon Report: 2015 K-12 Edition. Austin, Texas: The New Media Consortium. Available online at <http://cdn.nmc.org/media/2015-nmc-horizon-report-k12-EN.pdf>



Figure 22: Classroom Use of Tech

As is evident from Figure 19 (2.2) and is now from Figure 22 (2.5), should teachers have no technological means available, it is challenging to introduce innovative digital practices in their classes. Nevertheless, 67.7% of respondents use between 25% and 50% of their classroom time for technology, which may imply an effort, to slowly introduce some activities, making the most of the available technology. Despite this low use of technology, 3.2% reported no use at all. Interestingly, 6.5% say they use over 75% of their classroom time for technology. These differences are likely to point to personal initiative, available resources and school culture regarding the use of ICT.

Next (see Figure 23 below) is a cross-analysis on use of technology versus years of experience.

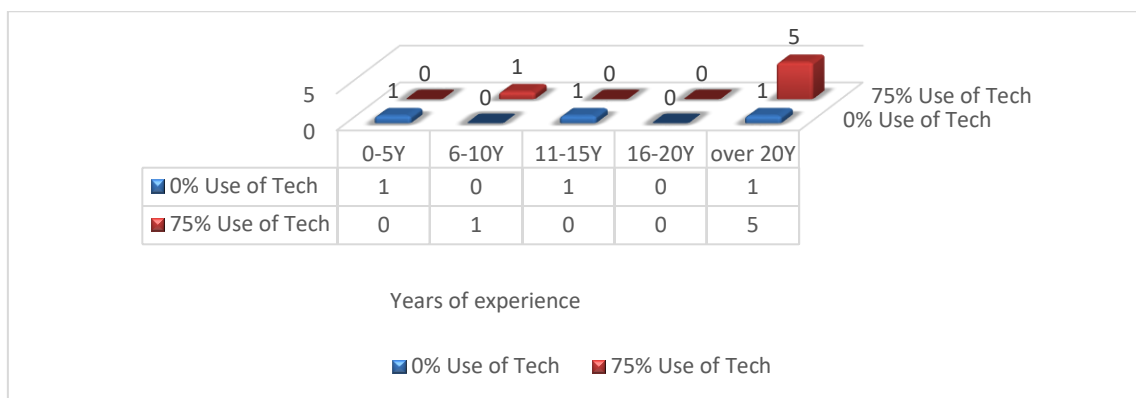


Figure 23: Use of Technology Versus Years of Experience

A cross-analysis of these two extremes (0% and over 75% use) in relation to years of experience shows that, in the case of 0% use of technology, besides being female and having only one desktop and using it, respondents have no other common denominator since they all have different years of experience; in the second situation, respondents with over 20 years of experience are the ones who use it more often (5 out of 6). This is consistent with very recent data⁷⁰ showing that, despite being more confident about their own technological abilities, novice teachers are less likely to use

⁷⁰ Project Tomorrow (2017, April). First Year in the Classroom: Speak Up 2016 Findings. Retrieved June 16, 2017, from <http://www.tomorrow.org/speakup/speak-up-2016-first-year-in-the-classroom-april-2017.html>

technology in their classes than their more experienced peers. Possible explanations may be because, on the one hand, more experienced teachers recognise the need to capitalise on our pupils' interests to engage them and, on the other hand, novice teachers lack knowledge on the pedagogical use of ICT and the confidence in how to optimise the use of tech in classes. This suggests they lack the necessary digital competences and have yet to make the leap to integrate technology into their daily practices. Also, first year teachers may avoid risks that could lead to classroom management problems. Experienced teachers, however, may feel more at ease trying different activities as they are likely to have more secure long-term positions in schools. Younger teachers, on the other hand, may feel investment in innovative practices is not worth it if they are only placed in a school for a relatively short period of time.

Other interesting findings are that these respondents are, again, all female, teaching different levels and 5 out of 6 only have one computer per classroom, the teacher's desktop, and that is what they reported using. The only teacher who reports having several desktops which are used by pupils says that she devises activities and tasks to use the available computers. This seems to reinforce the idea that teachers to manage the resources they have to motivate pupils; teacher's motivation and mindset (or lack thereof) seem to be an important factor in the use of technology.

4.3. YOU AND BLOGS

Given the objectives of this report, the next set of items –the longest of the questionnaire - addresses respondents' use of blogs in different contexts, starting with more general questions and moving on to personal / professional ones.

In question 3.1. (see Figure 24), the goal was to gather information on whether the respondents included blog readers.

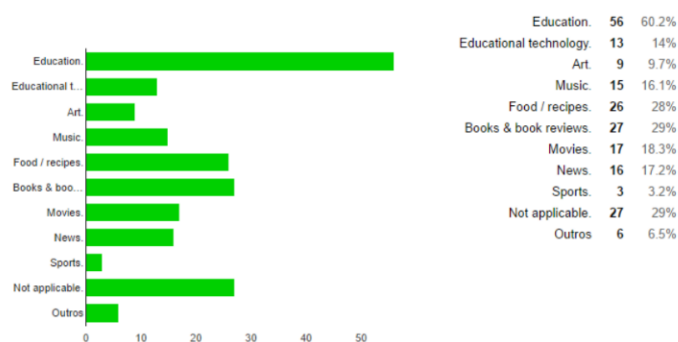


Figure 24: Blog-Related Topics of Interest

60.2% claim they read education-related blogs, which is encouraging in itself as it implies that respondents do use blogs and these are related to their own careers. Other topics of interest pursued by these respondents are also food / recipes (28%), books & book reviews (29%). Nevertheless, it is interesting to observe that “Not Applicable” has a similar percentage (29%), illustrating that about 25% of respondents may be resistant to this Web 2.0 tool or still be unfamiliar with them, and still do not use blogs at all.

Regarding respondents’ first contact with blogging in an educational context, the answers were diverse (see Figure 25).



Figure 25: Blogging in an Educational Context

Based on respondents’ options, in top position (29%) is using Google or any other search engine as the source of the very first contact with blogging specifically in an educational context; nearly as many (24.7%) cited an APPI seminar / conference or any other professional development event. Both situations support the importance of inner motivation and professional development to keep updated with current trends in education.

To know whether respondents had ever used blogs in their EFL classes (question 3.3), an either/or scale was used (see Figure 26).



Figure 26: Use of Blogs in EFL Classes

Even though in question 3.1. 60.2% of respondents said they used education-related blogs, when asked about using blogs in their own EFL classes, question 3.3., there is almost a corresponding “No” of 59,1%, indicating that respondents may well read blogs, but do not necessarily use them in class.

Unsurprisingly then, when asked (question 3.4, Figure 27 below) how often they used blogs in their classes, a majority of 60.2% stated they had never used one, with a difference of 1.1% between Figures 26 and 27.



Figure 27: Frequency of Blog Use in EFL Classes

A cross-analysis of data between the percentage of classroom time used for technology (question 2.5) and the frequency of blog use in classes (question 3.4) shown below in Figure 28, illustrates that for those who stated they used 25%, 50% and 75% of technology time, the ‘Never’ option use of blogs in EFL prevails. However, all groups - including those respondents who answered they made no use of technology (0%) - end up using blogs (printed word) at least 1-3 times per school year, mostly “blog texts for examples on grammar and / or current issues” (question 3.5).

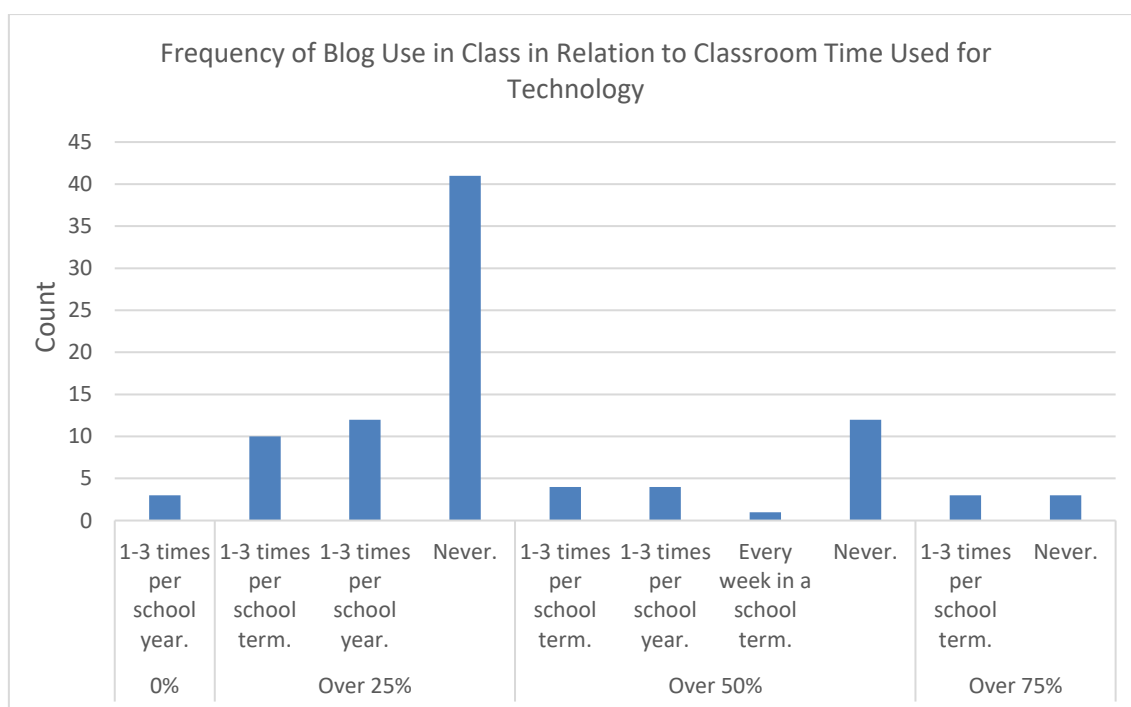


Figure 28: Blog Use and Classroom Time for Technology

Whilst I suspected the reiterated majority of negative answers (“No” in Question 3.3, “Never” in Question 3.4) would prevail in question 3.5., the how and what the minority of blog users would do with blogs still needs to be understood (see Figure 29 below).

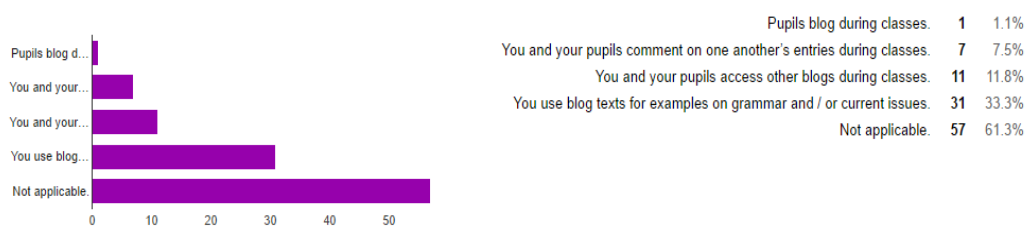


Figure 29: The Use of a Blog in Class

Consistent with previous answers, the “Not Applicable” option had 61.3%, but more importantly for this research is what respondents - who are also blog users - do with blogs in class: 33.3% stated they use blog texts for examples on grammar and / or current issues. This is clearly a very limited perception of the potential of blogs in an educational context and not a practical use of this teaching and learning tool which can be successfully used, synchronously or asynchronously, and with all age groups for a variety of purposes. Tung Yin says that “...blogs are like television: potentially a terrific education tool, but often just pedestrian entertainment” (cited in Kaur & Bala, 2016, p.161).

As the previous Figure 29 demonstrates, only a minority (in a total of 20.4%) make other, potentially more exciting and engaging uses of blogs, namely agreeing to let pupils blog during classes (1.1%), commenting on one another’s entries during classes (7.5%) and accessing other blogs during classes (11.8%). This incentive is crucial for pupils’ involvement, for pupil-centred learning and for making the whole learning experience memorable. As such, this should be seen as positive and an inspiration to spread these three hands-on personal teaching and learning experiences as examples of good practices.

Below, in yet another cross-analysis of data from questions 3.4 (frequency of blog use in classes) and 3.5 (type of use) in which the “Never” (question 3.4) and “Not applicable” (question 3.5) were removed, there is an indication that indeed the major use of blogs either per school year or school term is to provide “examples on grammar and / or current issues”, 16 and 14 respondents respectively; in all the time frames (every week; 1-3 times per school term and 1-3 times per school year), respondents claimed that together with their pupils they accessed other blogs during classes and one respondent reported blogging during classes 1-3 times per school term, an amazing feat. These data seem to confirm what had already been referred to above but in a much clearer way.

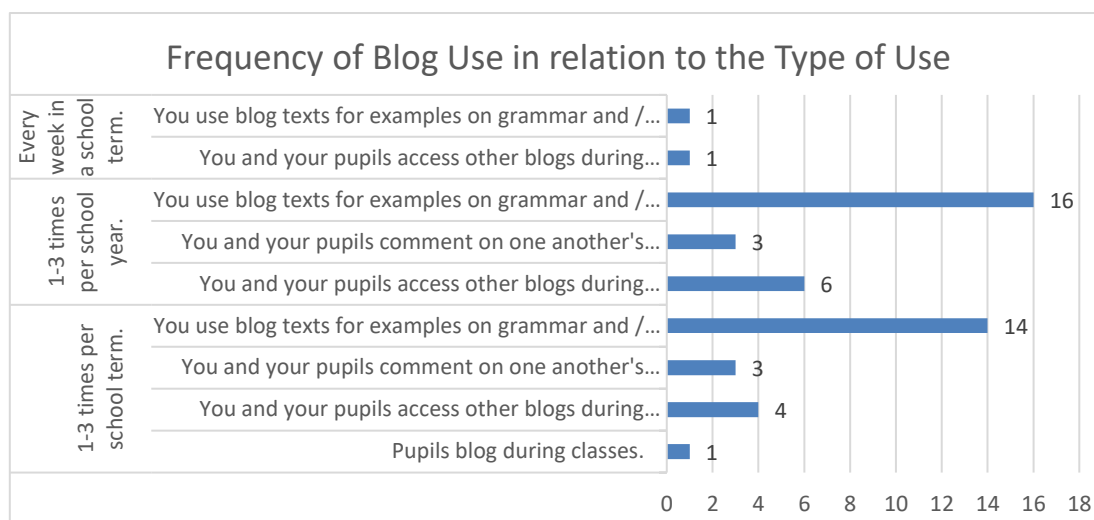


Figure 30: Blog Use Frequency and Type of Use

Ever more direct, question 3.6 (Figure 31 below) is a yes/no answer on whether these respondents had ever created their own educational blog for EFL purposes.



Figure 31: Creation of Educational Blogs for EFL Purposes

Corroborating previous answers, 76.3% answer “No” whilst 23.7% answer affirmatively, and it is the latter that will be focused on next (from questions 3.7 to 3.14).

A cross-analysis of data of school location (question 1.3) in relation to edublog creation shown below corroborates that indeed, just like in *Portal das Escolas*, there are more educational blogs – particularly now dedicated to EFL – in central Portugal, and especially in all urban areas.

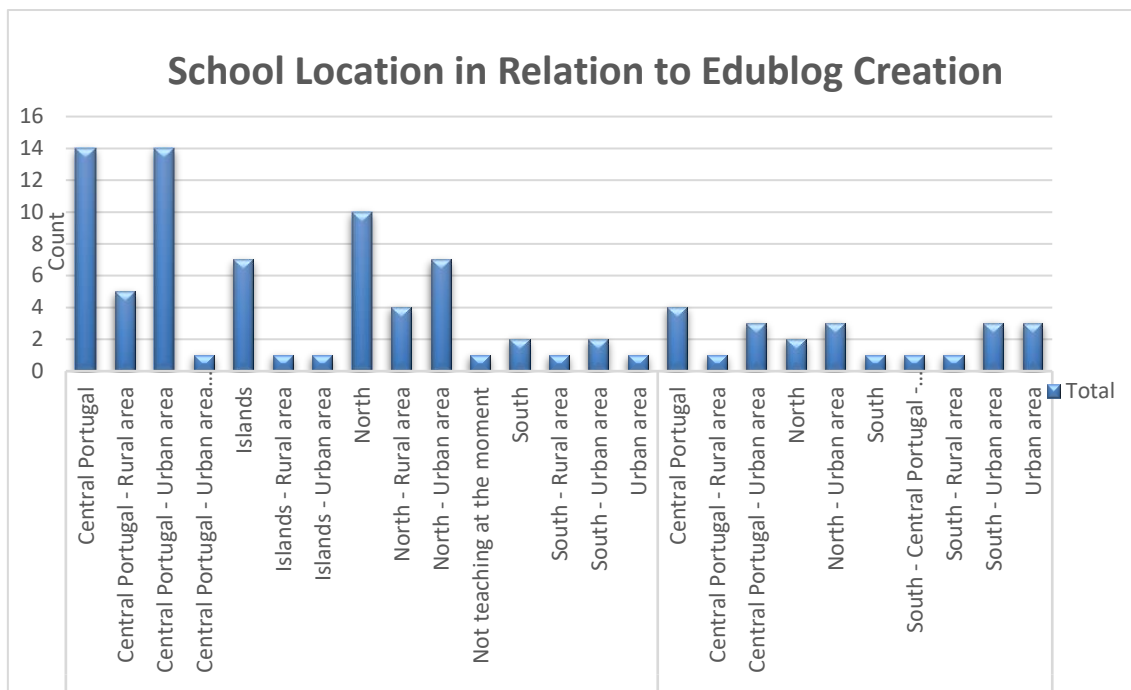


Figure 32: School Location and Edublog Creation

As mentioned before, responses from questions 3.7 to 3.14 are those of 22 respondents (23.65% of the original cohort) who answered affirmatively to question 3.6, whether they had ever created a blog for EFL purposes.

When asked about the number of blogs created (question 3.7, Figure 33 below), a majority of 63.6% respondents answered one, 22.7% created two and 13.6% stated having created more.



Figure 33: Number of Edublogs Created

However, when asked to share the links (question 3.8), the respondents reported these as inactive or provided links that did contemplate English as well as other school subjects and were entirely written in Portuguese. Out of the links shared, five were devoted to EFL teaching and learning, four of which created by the same teacher over a period of several years, but last updated in 2014 and without a single comment. Created by two teachers, there is another blog⁷¹ devoted to EFL teaching

⁷¹ <http://inglesespacomais.blogspot.pt/>, last accessed June 16, 2017

and learning, which was also last updated in January 2012. It should be noted that this is one of the blogs listed in *Portal das Escolas*, whose colleagues I tried to contact, but unsuccessfully: no email feedback was given and no contact left in the questionnaire either. This also serves to show one of the difficulties in conducting research – securing contacts with participants beyond anonymous questionnaires in order to gather further data or data of a different nature.

This lack of blog activity suggests that the blog users among these respondents find maintaining an active blog a challenge. Reasons for this might include factors such as demotivation or being placed in a different school. Whatever the reasons, this is in accordance with what has already been said about not involving pupils and being a one-way communication when blogs are conversational in nature, providing opportunities for further learning. This suggestion is again reinforced by the results in question 3.9, Figure 34:

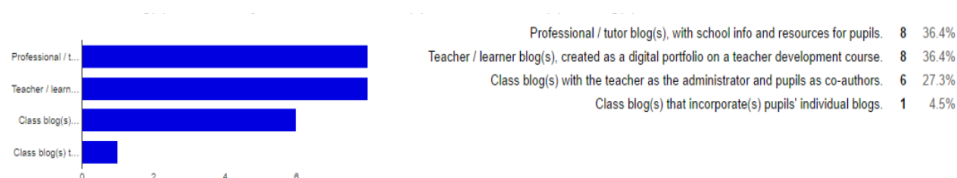


Figure 34: Kinds of Blogs Created by Respondents

In terms of authorship, neither the choice for professional / tutor blogs, with school information and resources for pupils (36.4%) nor teacher / learner blog(s), created as a digital portfolio on a teacher development course (36.4%), seem to do enough to engage other learners as they are solely created and administrated by the learner/blogger; close behind there is class blog(s) with the teacher as the administrator and pupils as co-authors (27.3%), the one option that aims at equal participation and communication, challenges creativity and instils critical thinking. This “participatory culture” is defended by Professor Henry Jenkins (DMLResearchHub, 2011), who believes in the importance of including the more creative work on new media literacies into formal education.

From these respondents, only one teacher (4.5%) states having a class blog that incorporates pupils’ individual blogs. There was no way to contact this respondent to share their experiences which would enrich this research project.

After the kind of blogs (question 3.9), respondents were asked about its content on question 3.10, Figure 35:

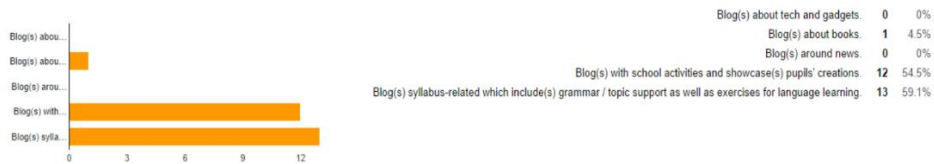


Figure 35: Blog Content

Either using other Edublogs (questions 3.3, 3.4 and 3.5) or one's own creations (questions 3.7, 3.9 and 3.10), these results highlight what has already been documented here and suggested in the review of the literature: there are mainly blogs that are syllabus-related (59.1%) and blogs with school activities and showcasing pupils' creations (54.5%). Though these are praiseworthy, in the long term, it will simply not be enough to attract and keep an audience of (young) learners as can be seen by the very low or null engagement of pupils in Edublogs, for example, the ones listed in *Portal das Escolas*.

The reasons rated by respondents to embrace blog creation vary greatly as the ranking in question 3.11, Figures 36 to 45 suggest.

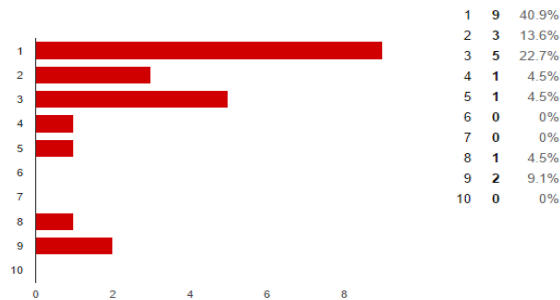


Figure 36: For Collaboration

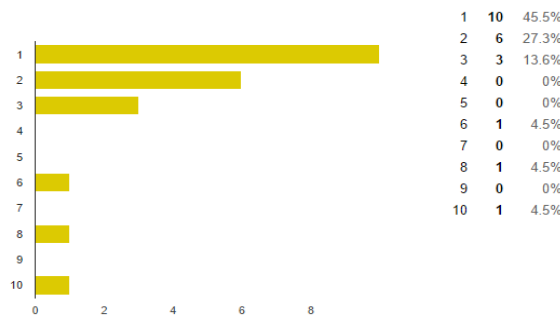


Figure 37: To Foster Pupils' Autonomy

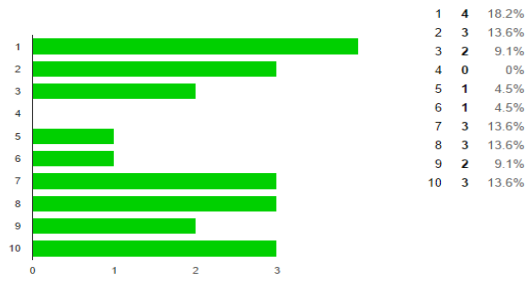


Figure 38: For Audience

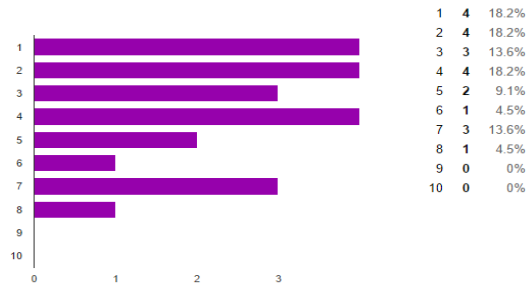


Figure 39: To encourage Speaking and Listening

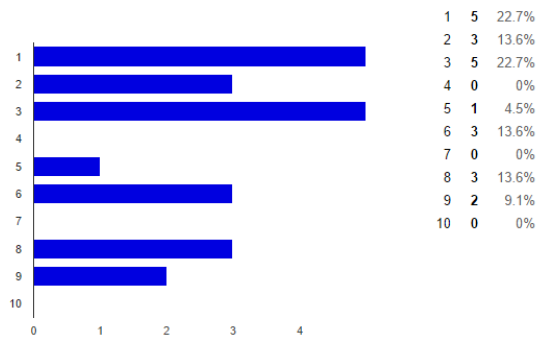


Figure 40: As a Digital Portfolio

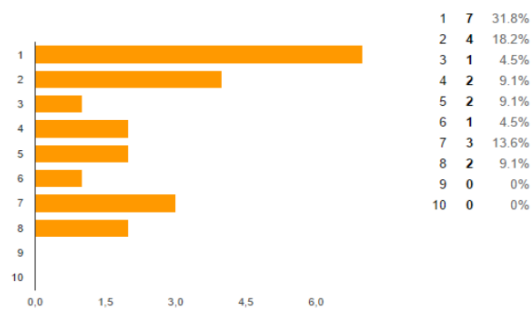


Figure 41: To Develop Digital Literacies

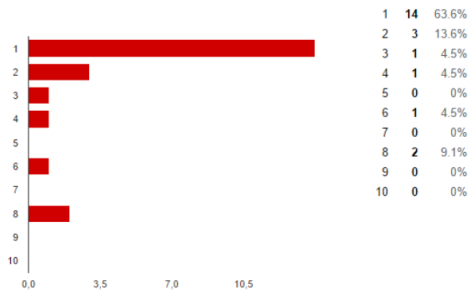


Figure 42: To Extend Teaching/Learning

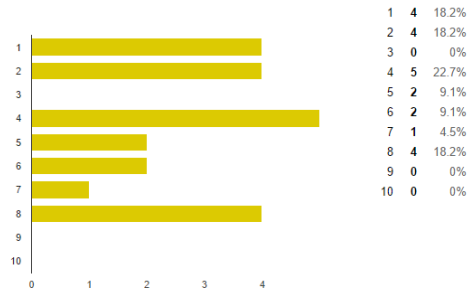


Figure 43: As an Alternative Assessment

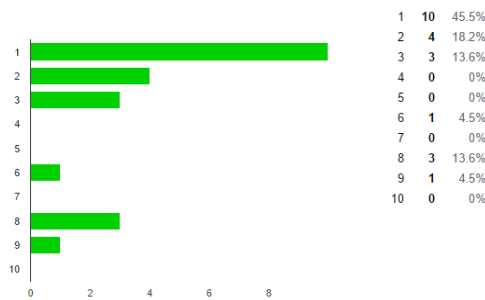


Figure 44: To Share Resources

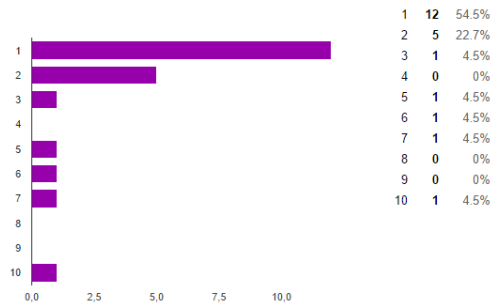


Figure 45: To Motivate Pupils

As for this question / question type in particular, there were several respondents who ranked the topics the same importance, which meant that others were left blank. Therefore, there is no possible comparison among reasons, but some consensus in those which are the most important for this sample. In order to observe how teachers feel towards these reasons, three categories were defined

for the purpose of this analysis. The first groups together the respondents who feel it plays an important role in blog creation, comprising ratings 1, 2 and 3; the second one includes ratings 4, 5, 6, and 7, representing respondents who don't feel strongly about the listed reasons; as for the third and final group, it contains the ratings 8, 9 and 10, these being considered the least important.

As illustrated by the last sequence of figures, the rating that most respondents agree on is "to foster pupils' autonomy" with 86.4% belonging to group 1. Taking into account that in the 21st Century our pupils need to learn how to think - and critically - and not what to think in order to develop questioning and solve problems, blogging to develop learners' autonomy is an encouraging perspective for blog use..

"To extend teaching / learning outside of the classroom and instill reading and writing habits" had 81.7% of ratings in group one. This evidence confirms research by Domalewska (2014) , who argues that "irrespective of their personal differences, preferences and histories, technology helps to deliver individualized content at the time and place students select (...) thus increasing their learning spaces by taking learning out of the classroom. " (p.21). This technology-rich context, extra time and opportunity for blogging at their own place and pace also lead pupils to read the blogposts and comments, then read further to be able to write a substantive post and comment.

Committed and dedicated teachers acknowledge that it is no longer enough "to have an educational model in which 21st Century pupils are "taught" by 20th Century teachers, with 19th Century practices (Oliveira, 2017) which dovetails with Sir Ken Robinson's point of view presented in the review of literature.

Accordingly, "To motivate pupils" also had 81.7% of ratings in group one, a crucial issue that is deeply affects Portuguese teens and is getting worse based on a study by the World Health Organisation⁷²: Portugal ranks 33rd place with only 11% of boys and 15% of girls expressing their fondness for school. The same study also emphasises the fact that Portuguese teens lack autonomy, which should encourage us to give blogging greater consideration. .

Just below these ratings, there are "To share resources and lesson plans / ideas" with 77.3% and "Collaboration" with 77.2%. By blogging, respondents believe that they are sharing educational materials, which may lead to collaboration and hence professional development and growth.

The other ratings are already below 60% and thus not representative of a consensus. It is noteworthy that "To have an audience", "Encourage speaking / listening on topics on the blog" and "As an

⁷² <http://www.op-edu.eu/files/2016-04/publico.png>, last accessed June 16, 2017

alternative to traditional assessment tasks” most of their ratings are very similar without having major differences among group results, which may imply that for this sample the benefits are debatable, with evidence suggesting there are other more relevant reasons than these.

Concerning question 3.12, Figure 46 below, the results are encouraging.



Figure 46: Length of Time Using Blogs at School

According to these results, respondents who start using blogs at school seem to appreciate them and acknowledge their potential as a teaching and learning tool even if they are preferably syllabus-related, with school activities and showcasing pupils’ creations (question 3.10). The unrelenting evolution in ICT has enhanced the quality of education and these respondents seem to confirm that.

Question 3.13, Figures 47 to 53, asked respondents to rank a set of statements concerning the benefits of blogging but, intentionally, from a teacher’s perspective and thus the use of the pronouns “you” and “your” were used in the items, apart from the first one.

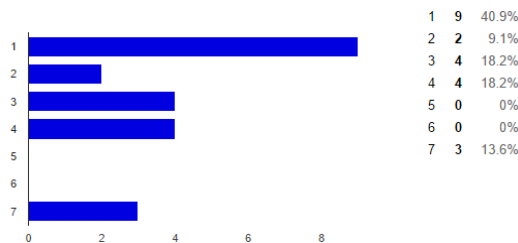


Figure 47: Introduction of Teaching Topics

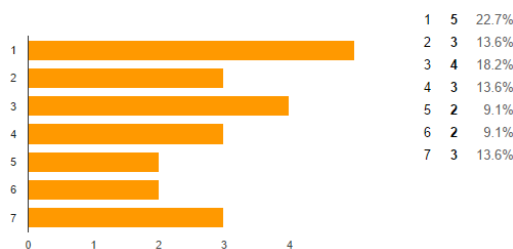


Figure 48: Improvement of Technology Skills

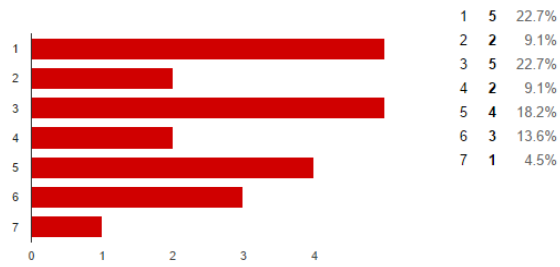


Figure 49: Reading and Writing Proficiency

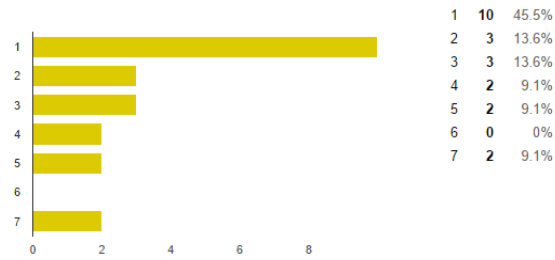


Figure 50: Cross Curricular and 21st Century Skills

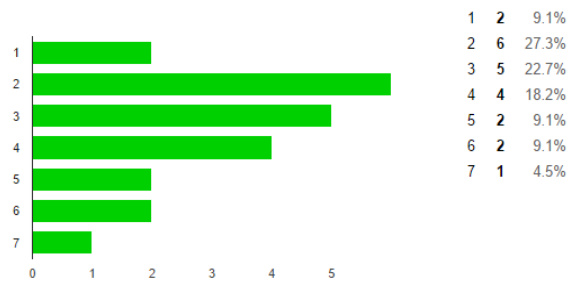


Figure 51: Variety in Assessment Practices

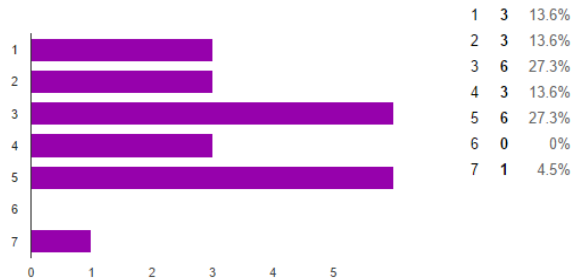


Figure 52: Knowledge about Pupils

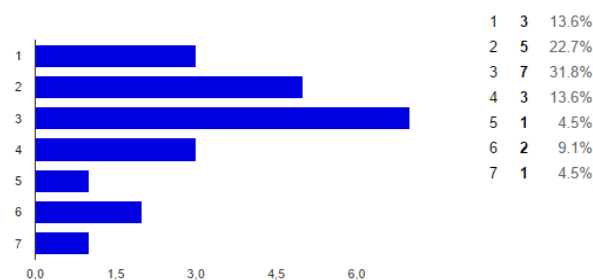


Figure 53: Closeness Teacher / Pupils

As before, respondents were allowed to repeat rankings, meaning some remained unselected. Of the seven statements, grouped into 3 categories – the most important (ranks 1 and 2), of average importance (ranks 3, 4 and 5) and the least important (ranks 6 and 7), the one with the highest

percentage was the statement that refers to the fact that blogging “deepens the knowledge about your pupils,” with 68.2% and of average importance (ranks 3, 4 and 5). In group 1 and with 59.1% is the statement “Blogging promotes your ability to teach cross-curricular and 21st Century Skills such as team work, creativity, critical thinking,” followed by three other statements, all with 50%. However, of these 3 statements only “Blogging facilitates the introduction of teaching topics such as diversity, multiculturalism, plurilinguism⁷³” belongs to the first group while the other two statements are ranked of average importance.

This apparent lack of relevance of the statements on the questionnaire and therefore an apparent lack of impact on the respondents’ skills and performance come, in my point of view, as no surprise or even reason for concern. In fact, they may be considered an opportunity to praise this (minority) sample of blogging respondents. As an aspiring blogger myself, it could be possible that rather than focusing on themselves and on the benefits to them, these respondents seem to perceive the potential blogging benefits for their pupils. For these respondents, blogging may well be a means to an end, a tool to support learning, with no specific goals or expectations for themselves, but rather on promoting their pupils’ educational success.

As crucial and on top of the agenda as teaching about diversity and tolerance may be, or any other of the statement themes , such as 21st Century Skills, teaching (in the most traditional sense of the word) may not be what drives these respondents - it may be pupils’ learning and the most successful way to ensure happens.

Question 3.14 is the last to be answered by the limited sample of blogging respondents and contains 10 statements the respondents were asked to rate according to their importance: 1 being the most important and 10 the least important. Again, three groups – similar to the ones in question 3.11 – were created in order to assist in an easier analysis of the collected data. Unlike the previous set of statements from question 3.13, items in question 3.14 (Figures 54 to 63) are more focused on the impact blogging has on pupils and learning outcomes, again from the respondents’ point of view.

⁷³ These topics are particularly relevant nowadays in a world context of refugee crisis and constant fear of terrorist attacks.

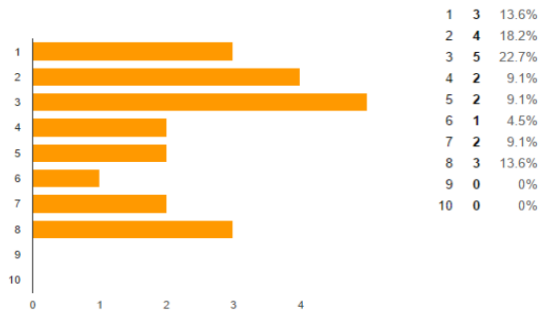


Figure 54: Reading and Writing Improvement

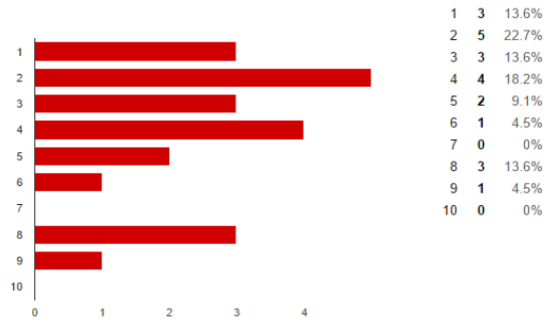


Figure 55: Pupils' Interests and at Their Own Pace

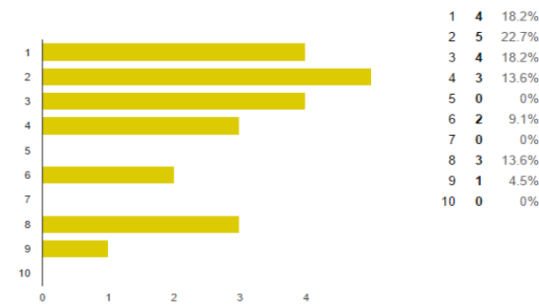


Figure 56: Autonomy and Responsibility

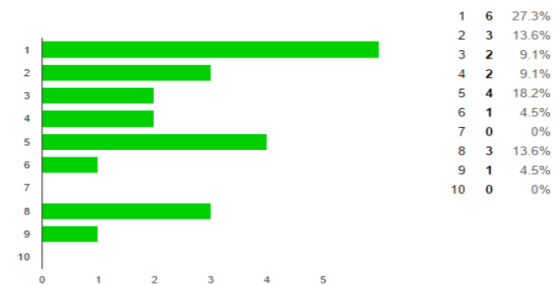


Figure 57: Improvement in Technology Skills

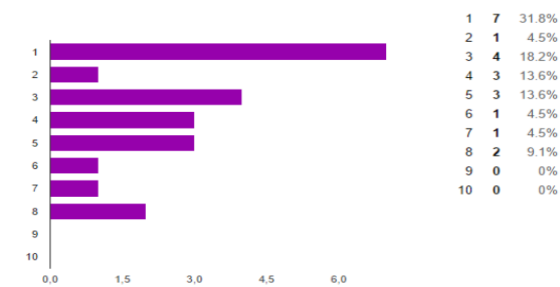


Figure 58: Improvement in 21st Century Skills

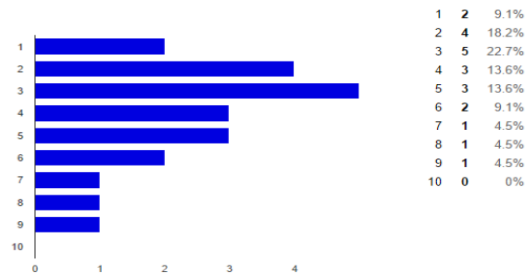


Figure 59: Mind Opener

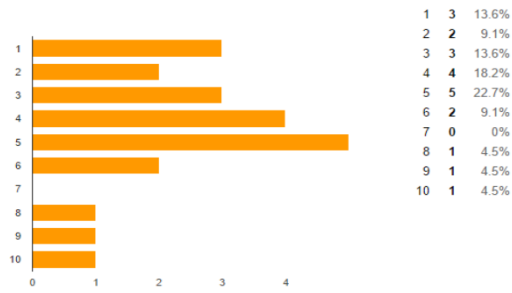


Figure 60: Preparation for the World of Work

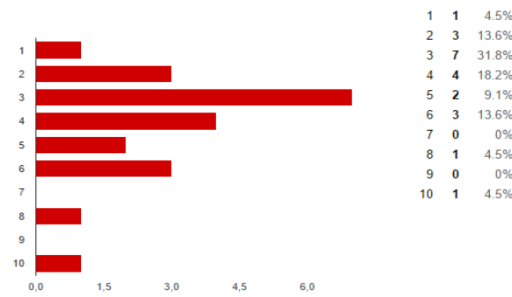


Figure 61: Academic and Personal Growth

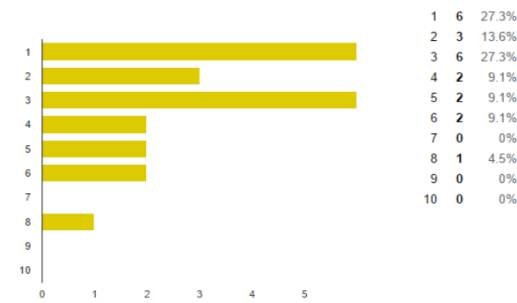


Figure 62: Motivation to Learn English



Figure 63: Team Building

Given data was not collected from pupils, assessing the impact of blogging on their learning is dependent on the respondents / teachers' point of view. As before, there are three groups: the first group integrates rankings 1, 2 and 3 and are considered to be the most important; rankings 4, 5, 6 and 7 belong to the second group and are of average importance; while the third and last group has rankings 8, 9 and 10 and are the least important.

Except for a single case, there are not common lines of thought or opinions with a clear majority, since even in the cases when there is a majority, these are slightly above 50%. In group one, to motivate pupils to learn English through blogging is the highest rated with 68.2%; blogging has helped to prepare pupils for the ever-changing world of work is the only statement in the second group reaching 50% which may suggest respondents' difficulty in perceiving that potential. Regarding the third group when responding to this set of statements, none is above 20%, which may indicate that all statements are relatively relevant but just for these respondents. For greater insights it would be convenient to have data triangulation, in this case data also collected from the pupils concerning their point of view.

Question 3.15, Figures 64 to 72 below, collated responses from all 93 respondents, who are asked to give their opinion on why there are not more class blogs. This is the last time respondents are asked to order the importance of 8 statements. Following previous procedures, group 1, the most important, has rankings 1, 2 and 3; of average importance, rankings 4 and 5 and, the least important group includes rankings 6, 7 and 8.

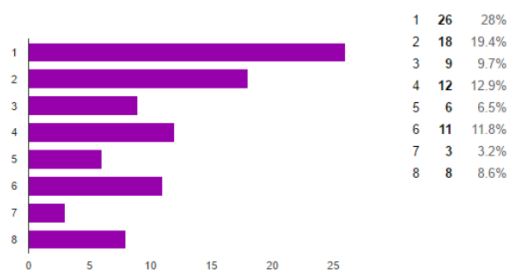


Figure 64: Too Time Consuming

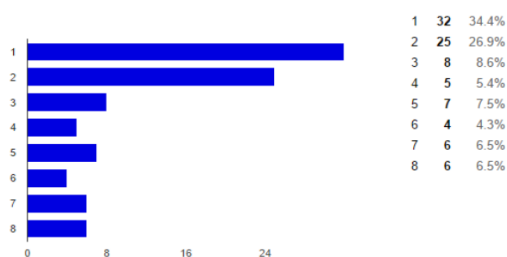


Figure 65: Too Much Schoolwork

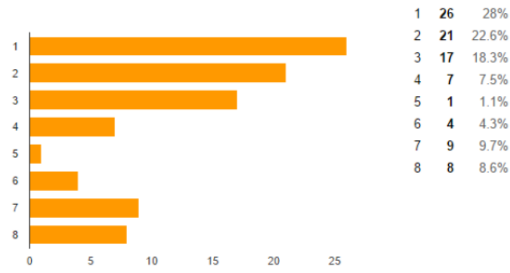


Figure 66: Lack of Confidence

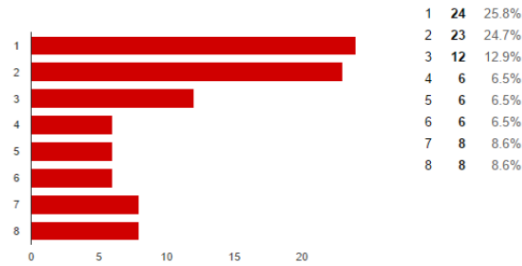


Figure 67: Lack of Tech Support

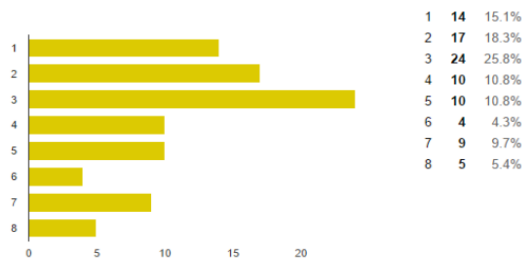


Figure 68: Lack of Training in ICT

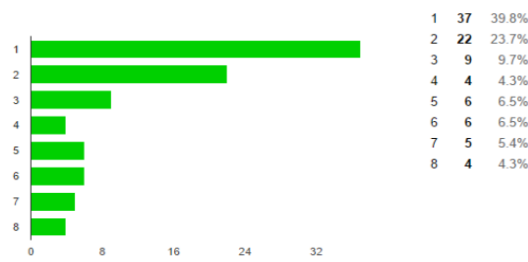


Figure 69: Large Classes

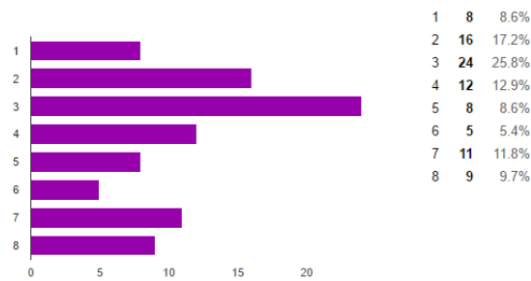


Figure 70: Teachers' Scepticism

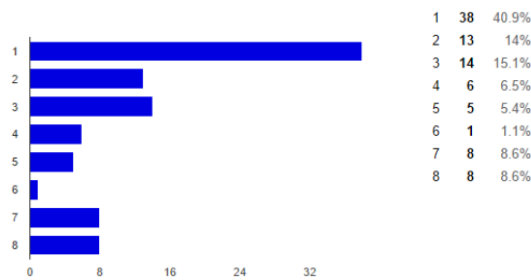


Figure 71: Lack of Good Internet Access

In this question, respondents agree that all statements are relevant reasons for the paucity of edublogs, namely class blogs. The size of classes – a long debated issue in Portugal – and the slow Internet connections in many schools, with 73.2% and 70% respectively, are the highest rated reasons pointed out for the reduced number of EFL blogs. Since the number of pupils per class is slowly being taken into account by this new government (Santos, 2017), perhaps the Ministry of Education could reconsider the bandwidth infrastructures in a technology-driven world where even very young children display an array of handheld devices that available Internet connections are unable to cope with.

Surprisingly, 56.8% of respondents dismiss the idea of blogging being time-consuming (Figure 64) as a constraint for this activity and consider excessive school administrative tasks (with 69.9%, Figure 65), including paperwork, as a more significant reason for not getting involved in blogging; 59.2% respondents admit they lack training in ICT (Figure 68), but a significantly higher percentage (68.9%) confess their lack of confidence (Figure 66) in creating and managing blogs in particular, which may mean that professional development is necessary in this area.

63.4% (see Figure 67) signal the lack of technical support and means to support teachers' endeavours as another reason hampering the creation and use of class blogs. This is corroborated by what has already been described in chapter 2 of this report.

Question 3.16, Figure 72 below, was introduced in the main questionnaire, especially after so many teachers had suggested Facebook / social networks as an alternative to blogs, both in the exploratory and pilot questionnaires.



Figure 72: Social Media and Networks

Therefore, unsurprisingly, when asked about being on social media and networks, 86% said they are on Facebook, 29% Instagram and 17.2% Twitter. Of the 22 respondents who reported having created blogs, only 3 are not on social media and networks which would point to a majority of connected EFL teachers in this sample; many more are on social media and networks than connected through blogging.

4.4. TEACHING ENGLISH IN PORTUGAL

Question 4.1. asked respondents to express their agreement and disagreement on a set of sentences whose aim was to ascertain their opinion about the education system in Portugal and schools (see Figure 73).

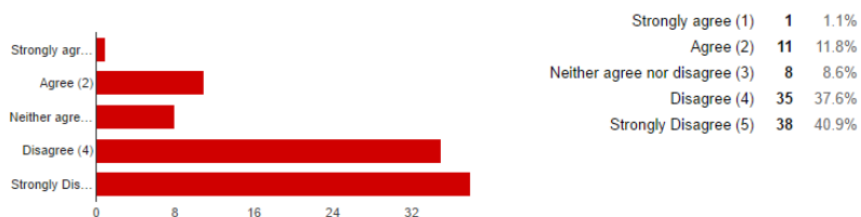


Figure 73: Available Time to Implement Innovative Practices

More than time for blogging in particular (Figure 64), time constraints to implement innovative practices unify many of these respondents with 78.5% disagreeing and strongly disagreeing with the statement. Indeed, besides being busy with paper work (Figure 65), too large (and many) classes, pupils and different levels (Figure 69), teachers continue to feel the constraints of having to implement the programmes and *metas curriculares*. Pressure is constant - increasingly in the end of each cycle when there are exams – which does not leave much time and freedom for teachers to introduce changes.

Nevertheless, ours is a technology-based society and pupils are often caught between old methods and paradigms and, for example, blogs and other media, that encourage participation and creativity.

It is unsurprising, then, that respondents acknowledge the relevance of the use of technology to best develop competences included in the curriculum.

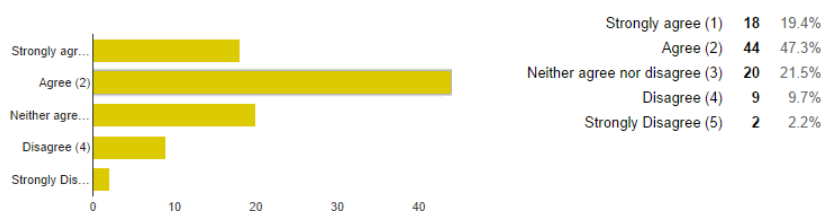


Figure 74: Competences Best Developed Through the Use of Technology

Taking into account the prior time constraints acknowledged by so many respondents, this result is encouraging with 66.7% agreeing and strongly agreeing with the statement. Notwithstanding these percentages, when looking at the other end of the spectrum, there is 11.9%, probably of more traditional-minded respondents, who either do not see the use, application and benefits of technology and / or do not follow educational trends in Europe and worldwide⁷⁴ and hence their disagreement and strong disagreement. Worth noting is also the 21.5% of neutral answers by respondents who are perhaps still unsure about the real benefits of the use of technology for the development of competences and may need updated PD.

As the next statement and results suggest (Figure 75), it is not that easy to change common and long-established school assessment regulations so as to assess other competences, such as critical thinking.

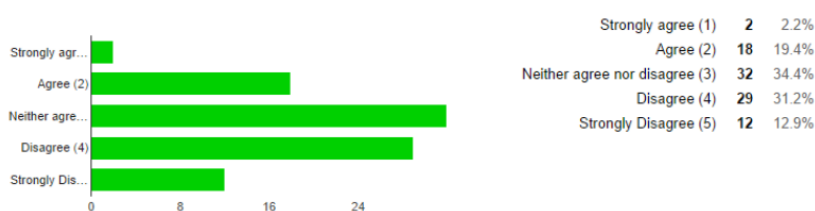


Figure 75: Assessment Regulations and Competences

Even if innovative teachers / respondents wish to assess 21st Century Competences and skills such as critical thinking, there appears to be low expectations for doing any different from colleagues or what one has done before, as the percentage of respondents (44.1%) seem to suggest. Additionally, a possible explanation as to the 34.4% of neutral answers could be that these are professionals who do not challenge the assessment regulations defined by the department of languages. Another

⁷⁴ As reported in Becker, Freeman, Giesinger Hall, Cummins, & Yuhnke (2016); Freeman, Becker, Cummins, Davis, & Hall Giesinger (2017)

interpretation may be that changing teachers' methodologies and assessment regulations requires a change of mindset and that can take some time. As much as reflection, critical viewing and positioning should be common place among pupils, perhaps these skills are not as widespread in a school system where pupils may often be expected to take a passive attitude in direct instruction. These results highlight the need to change school practices as well as the need for flexibility regarding assessment regulations.

In relation to class size (see Figure 76), practising teachers know how large classes may be and how size can hamper teaching and learning, even more when there are pupils with special needs. Furthermore, as discussed in the review of the literature, there has been little investment in school equipment, namely ICT, which further hinders any changes and innovation.

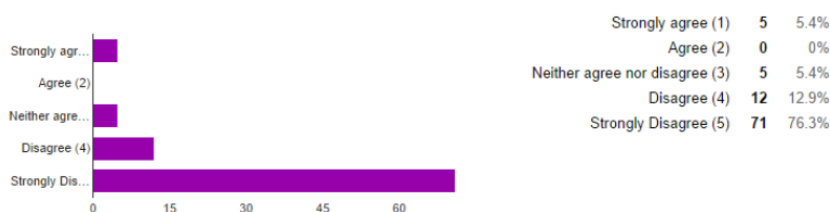


Figure 76: Class Size and Classroom Equipment

Unsurprisingly, 76.3% alone from those who strongly disagree plus 12.9% by those who disagree make up a clear majority (89.2%) and suggest that class size does matter (as already intimated in question 3.15, Figure 69). This has become such a critical issue for the promotion of educational success that after several years and several debates, a reduction in the number of pupils per class has just been approved for the next school year (Santos, 2017). Though not significant as it will only reduce each class by two pupils and will only cover around 200,000 pupils in the so-called priority intervention areas, it is a welcome initiative that might move beyond the priority intervention areas.

As Figure 77 below demonstrates, there is not enough training in the area of the pedagogical use of ICT:

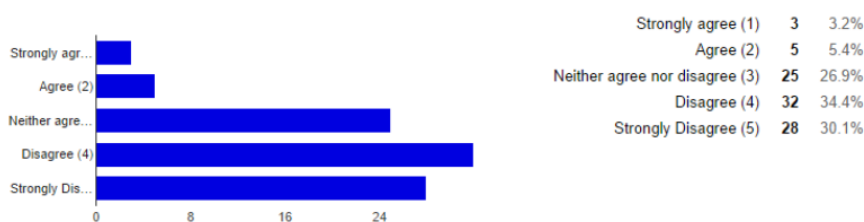


Figure 77: Training on the Pedagogical Use of ICT

As acknowledged by respondents, despite the lack of technological resources in schools in general, a total of 64.5% expressed their disagreement and strong disagreement with the statement that “there is enough training on the pedagogical use of ICT”. There seems to be a recognition and desire for teacher development in this area, including masters’ degrees as this one.

For those who reported using no technology in their own classes, there is probably sufficient training for what they need whilst teachers who wish to make the best use possible of ICT, training to use this pedagogically is clearly insufficient.

When asked to state their degree of agreement with the statement that they could change their classroom practices anytime (see Figure 78), opinions tend to avoid extremes and concentrate in a balanced agree, neither agree nor disagree and disagree.

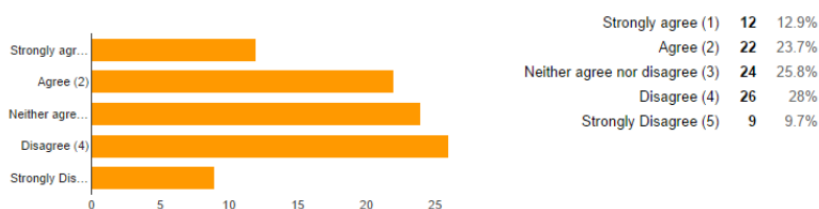


Figure 78: Classroom Practices

There appears to be differing perspectives as whether to change classroom practices or not. This disparity may imply that some schools, schoolboards and teachers themselves tackle change differently, some being more supportive, open and prone to innovation than others. As for teachers, I believe this may also suggest a certain level of insecurity or resistance towards changes and subsequent reactions from the schoolboard, colleagues, pupils and parents.

4.5. RESPONDENTS’ INPUT

In the fifth and last part of the questionnaire there were two open-ended questions giving participants voice with the opportunity and freedom to provide feedback as they pleased, thus allowing me to gain further insights on blogging I may have not previously considered. These last questions gave me the possibility of corroborating findings from the closed questions and acquire a clearer understanding of EFL teachers’ perceptions on blogging in Portugal. Further, it allowed the teachers’ voices to be expressed in their own words, a contribution that is in line with providing participants in research with a platform for their voices, as opposed to being silent partners in projects.

Question 5.1 invited respondents to suggest ways that teachers can boost pupils' interest and participation in blogs, since one of the common problems affecting blogging is the paucity of pupils' contributions.

What was notable was the willingness to make such suggestions and the rich variety of responses. Many teachers stressed the need to meet pupils' interests and to assure them that their contributions to blogs, either as entries or comments, will be assessed items and blogging tasks included in their final grade. From this perspective, some respondents added that specific, scheduled assignments, "...comment on posts or post a written work once a month, for example...", "...blogs for homework..." should be launched. One participant also suggests that "There could be more projects such as eTwinning or collaborative projects to motivate students to share and practise their skills" while another recommends "school contests regarding literature (writing short stories / tales); research assignments on any topic related to English language, culture and literature". Yet others advocate blogs "As a ludic and recreational class activity; As an alternative to class speaking assessment to encourage shy students", and the use of "interactive activities through technological gadgets" as well as "videoclips, artwork or photos to get them thinking".

Involving pupils in blog creation, receiving more "time and support from school," acknowledging the need to "change internal regulations (namely RI)" as well as schools being prepared for these changes are other ideas shared by respondents. Whilst some admitted lacking ideas and experience on blogging, one respondent confessed that "One of the things I would like to do is to use the blog as a learning journal where the students would post about their daily learning experiences."

As for question 5.2, it challenged respondents to suggest alternatives to blogs that teachers would be able to use in the classroom.

It is very enlightening to read the diversity of tools shared by respondents. Again, there are references to European platforms as "Working on eTwinning projects gives students and teachers the opportunity to use a wide variety of IT tools including blogs, forums, chatrooms...-it is also a safe environment." Other ideas included "Google Docs and Google Drive" "that may be useful", for example, as "a way to perform polls with students".

Edmodo⁷⁵, Storify⁷⁶, Glogster⁷⁷, Quizlet⁷⁸, wikis, are other options as is Padlet⁷⁹ to “share ideas or different views on a certain topic” or “digital portfolios”. Another possibility is Kahoot⁸⁰ to “practice the syllabus in an innovative and playful way through gaming”. A respondent points out “I would suggest gamified activities, such as Kahoot or Plickers⁸¹ that are not only closer to the pupils’ technological world outside school, but also because they imply the use of emotions which are crucial to a more meaningful learning experience.” This same participant ends up quoting Benjamin Franklin as it resonates with their ideas “Tell me and I forget, teach me and I may remember, involve and I learn.” Following this line, another participant advocates that “Quizzes are often more appealing and less time-consuming even though they can still be used in an interactive way and by using technology in the classroom.”

Alongside more traditional approaches such as “They can showcase their work by putting them on the classroom walls,” there are also the latest “Vlogs. They love showing up”, Socrative⁸² because “gaming engages learners”, “Visual logs (like pinterest⁸³)” and “Webtools to develop specific skills, for example, Edpuzzle⁸⁴ for listening, Toondoo⁸⁵ for writing or Voki⁸⁶ for speaking.” Unsurprisingly, some respondents state that “Social networks are also a great tool to communicate, share, comment. Kids love and spend lots of time on Instagram, WhatsApp and Facebook so it’s an easy way of getting them to write and read.”

In a completely different tone, a respondent confessed “There’s no time for that” and another added “I can’t find any alternative” stressing the uniqueness of blogs; another respondent puts it this way, though: “The problem is not the use of blogs. From the moment we had access to technology guaranteed, blogs would be a marvellous tool, but what’s the point of working hard on the building of a blog if we do not have enough computers to work with. Most of the time there is only one computer in each classroom!” This opinion is in line with what another respondent says “I can’t because that’s difficult enough, nowadays, to open any site because the Internet supplied by the

⁷⁵ <https://www.edmodo.com/>

⁷⁶ <https://storify.com/>

⁷⁷ <http://edu.glogster.com/>

⁷⁸ <https://quizlet.com/>

⁷⁹ <https://padlet.com/>

⁸⁰ <https://kahoot.it/#/>

⁸¹ <https://plickers.com/>

⁸² <https://www.socrative.com/>

⁸³ www.pinterest.com

⁸⁴ <https://edpuzzle.com/>

⁸⁵ <http://www.toondoo.com/>

⁸⁶ <http://www.voki.com/>

Ministry doesn't work at all, all computers are out of date and full of bugs. It's almost impossible to work using any kind of technology.”

In this discussion, an attempt was made to identify how teachers who answered the questionnaire perceived using blogs in the classroom. The questionnaire itself aimed to elicit data from five key areas: firstly, teachers' biodata; secondly, their teaching context, that is, the school setting in which they worked; thirdly, to explore their knowledge and perceptions of using blogs, with a focus on their pedagogical use in EFL classes; fourth, to ascertain their opinion on macro aspects of the Portuguese education system; lastly, to elicit teachers' opinions and ideas on blogs and new technologies through their own words.

Targeting the first four areas was a way of trying to explore the personal, professional, social and economic factors that impact on a school and its staff in complex but interconnected ways. In studying how teachers view blogs, it is necessary to take such interconnections into account. The fifth area was a way of using teachers' own words to complement the quantitative analysis that preceded these.

In the next chapter, I will set out the final considerations of this research project, taking into account the network of factors mentioned above.

CHAPTER 5 – FINAL THOUGHTS

Many educators think that lowering their standards will give students success experiences, boost their self-esteem, and raise their achievement. It comes from the same philosophy as the overpraising of students' intelligence. Well, it doesn't work. Lowering standards just leads to poorly educated students who feel entitled to easy work and lavish praise. (...)

On the other hand, simply raising standards in our schools, without giving students the means of reaching them, is a recipe for disaster.

(Dweck, 2008, pp.193-194)

In this chapter, I will look back and forward: firstly, I will look back to reflect on what has been carried out for this research project, I will consider its implications and also refer to its limitations; secondly, I will also use this moment to look ahead and suggest future research projects that might be undertaken taking into account the present study.

As described in Setting the Scene in Chapter 1, this report is the result of my personal and professional motivations. Daubney (2017) makes a point about the motivation of practising teachers who are also researchers, sometimes known as practitioner-researchers:

It is essential for researchers to focus on their areas of interest and, within the constraints that shape their working contexts, do what they are passionate about. This is not always possible, of course, but this issue again highlights the importance of agency, and managing and exercising our choices. (p.81)

This is a relevant issue for me both as a researcher and a teacher because I have tried to carry out my first research project in an area that I also have a deep passion for in my own teaching – new technologies in general and blogging in particular. The idea of constraints influencing our working contexts, on what we can and cannot do, has also played an important role in helping me answer the research questions I set out in Chapter 1.

In many respects, teachers recognize that they have opportunities to help and inspire learners to use new technologies and to prepare them for an ever-changing world. However, there are pressures that exist which mean that, in reality, what teachers can actually implement in the classroom may not correspond with their intentions and what their practices would look like in an ideal world.

Therefore, I created different categories – based on the review of literature and themes and patterns that emerged from the data collected from the questionnaire – in order to better answer the research questions.

That is why the four interconnected areas – as explained in the previous chapter – were underlying the different sections of the questionnaire.

With the questionnaire, I tried to tap into EFL teachers' perceptions of technology and blogging, but also attempted to ascertain their perceptions and attitudes towards aspects of the academic community and professional culture in which they worked (equipment, technical support and a supportive school management, opportunities for professional development etc.) as well as factors from outside the school they felt impacted on their profession and classroom practices (the need to implement the English curriculum, curricula objectives (*metas curriculares*), government policies, legal frameworks, etc.). The former factors I refer to as “micro” factors, that is, factors evident in the local context, the immediate school community. The latter factors I refer to as “macro”, that is, top-down factors over which the school community itself has little or no control.

To help me answer the research questions, I organised the different factors in a cycle diagram (see figure 79 below) where we can identify the constraints at both a macro and micro level which impact teachers' perceptions on blogs and blogging in EFL classes in Portugal. While these macro and micro factors dynamically interact with each other, for the purposes of clarity and categorising teacher perceptions, they are maintained in separate categories, but the figure below clearly points towards these factors mutually shaping each other.

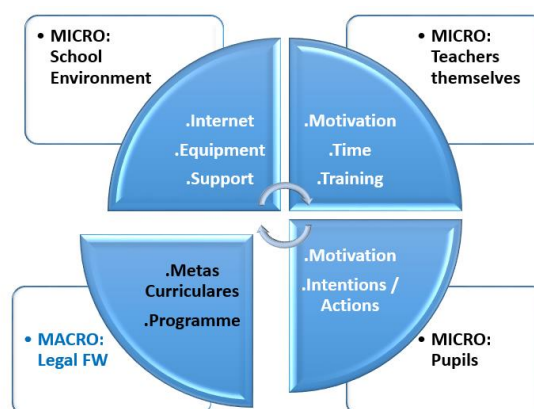


Figure 79: Macro and Micro Factors Identified in Teachers' Perceptions

At this point, and before attempting to answer each question, I would like to recall the four research questions of this project:

1. What are the perceptions of Portuguese EFL teachers of the benefits and potential benefits – for teachers and pupils – of using blogs?
2. To what extent are blogs being used by Portuguese EFL teachers in their English classes?
3. What are some of the constraints on EFL teachers using blogs for learning?

4. How can teachers and pupils be encouraged to use blogs more as part of their EFL teaching and learning respectively?

In relation to the first question, it is clear teachers do show their awareness of the benefits and potential benefits of using blogs, especially for pupils, who are their main concern. Based on their answers, teachers point to the relevance of blogs in boosting autonomy, with pupils being able to work on their own, at their own pace and whenever they choose. Related to this, another benefit referred to by the respondents is that they are best used as an extension of the classroom, as a complement to class work to support and amplify learning.

As for reading and writing, the respondents believe the communication arising from blogs leads to more reading, interpretation of texts, web searches, close-reading of content and subsequent writing tasks. This way, by sharing, pupils learn together in a community due to this network of contributing factors. Therefore, the interactive nature of blogs dovetails with collaborative and social constructivist learning approaches.

Teachers also report that blogs enhance pupil motivation, not only to learn but to also produce better quality material as they are not just sharing with the teacher and classmates, but also with the outside world. This becomes even more pertinent after receiving comments from readers they do not know. In terms of language teaching, this is an important point because publishing a variety of texts in a public space – whether these are short comments or longer pieces – means greater attention is paid to accuracy, and is likely to encourage enhanced language awareness.

All attempts at answering these research questions are also influenced by consideration of the constraints both in and outside of the classroom. A number of constraints will be considered further on, but it is worth noting here the macro factors likely constraining the classroom practice of many teachers across Portugal. These are the requirements of the Portuguese education system, the legal framework requiring the implementation of the curricula programmes and curriculum objectives. The pressure is likely to be constant, and beneficial innovative practices, such as the use of blogs, may become less of a priority for many teachers, especially in the final part of the academic year of each cycle when teachers are focusing on preparing pupils for exams, as well as administering and correcting them.

As for question two, although teachers are aware of blogs and blogging and view blogs as online tools/platforms that can be used both as a resource and as a strategy, in our study, the number of edublogs created or which are active is low. Of the few teachers who reported having created blogs,

these platforms are currently either inactive or are not specifically used for EFL purposes. It would be unwise to suggest this is the case across the Portuguese context, but our study implies an awareness of the benefits of blogs on the part of teachers, but little systematic use of these in the classroom. As noted previously, out of 93 respondents, only 22 had created a blog, and I was unable to arrange an interview with any of those who had. Although difficult to generalise from this study, blogging does not appear to be an activity that is widespread among EFL teachers.

In relation to the third question, the findings point to a number of significant constraints that are likely to influence teacher practice. Indeed, as mentioned above, the macro factors identified in teacher perceptions and indicated in Figure 79, appear to be constraints that teachers are consistently having to consider. In terms of micro factors, three main areas can be classified as constraints: the school environment, the teachers themselves and the pupils.

Firstly, the teachers in our study view the school environment as having a significant impact which may determine whether or not good practices are even started when some Portuguese schools lack updated, functioning technological equipment, digital infrastructures and support. For example, these teachers state that they are often limited to one computer per class and that the Internet connection is not fast enough for certain activities.

Secondly, and in relation to the teachers themselves, they seem to lack the professional motivation, time and adequate training for blogs and blogging. Though many teachers report reading blogs, many of which are education-related, fewer use blogs in EFL classes and even fewer have created a blog. Such a lack of motivation appears to result from a complex web of factors, including dissatisfaction with professional status and career progress, the lack of technical support in their schools to undertake these projects, being over-burdened with administrative tasks, the time-consuming nature of implementing tasks using new technologies, and large classes. However, it should be noted that respondents to questionnaires may want to provide the 'right' answers in order not to harm their self-image, so the possibility of teachers shifting responsibility from themselves to outside factors cannot be discounted. Conversely, the fact that teachers may not be using blogs on a regular basis does not mean that they are not 'tech savvy' or not trying to be innovative. Indeed, the fact that teachers suggested a range of alternative technologies to blogs – as evidenced in their responses to question 5.2 – might indicate they are willing to integrate these alternatives to blogs into their classes, especially if they require less technical knowledge and are less time-consuming.

Finally, and as can be seen in Figure 79, levels of pupil motivation may negatively impact on their intentions to act. In other words, pupils – according to the data provided by the teachers – often express their enjoyment and acknowledge the learning potential of blogging, but then do not subsequently engage more systematically in blogging, either with entries or comments⁸⁷. Even though the goal of this research was not to directly explore pupils’ perceptions, teachers who create Edublogs acknowledge the challenges and constraints of maintaining levels of interest and engagement in a blog, but without having the necessary resources in the classroom, both pupils and teachers may end up losing interest and abandon their endeavours.

In an attempt to answer the fourth and final research question, it is clear that a significant number of teachers are willing to put forward suggestions as a way to encourage both teachers and pupils to use blogs more. The following ideas were put forward, which I have organized under four broad categories.

1. Methodological considerations: in this category, respondents referred to linking pupil participation with pupil assessment to increase motivation and engagement, and interactive classes that also included teacher-pupil collaboration on creating blogs.
2. Resources: respondents again referred to the need for better resources to carry out these innovative tasks related to blogging, such as better Internet connectivity and more efficient and more recent models of computers.
3. Materials: within this category, the teachers mentioned the importance of using appealing materials and tools that captured pupils’ interests, such as video, photos and the topics to be studied in class.
4. Projects: here, ideas such as creating interactive blogs, setting up competitions and getting involved in European projects were suggested.

Having considered the research questions and to what extent this study has been able to answer these, I will now turn to the implications that have been identified.

5.1. PEDAGOGICAL IMPLICATIONS

⁸⁷ This has been referred to in the review of the literature. It has also been my own experience and what I could observe from accessing and analysing so many edublogs - some mentioned here, others from *Portal das Escolas*. Collating information on difficulties faced by blogging teachers as well as their perceptions on why pupils do not often engage in blogging activities was thought of but for interviews at a later phase.

At various moments in this report, I have referred to the 21st Century Skills our pupils are expected to develop and which will help them to cope and thrive in our fast-moving technological age. A step forward, therefore, has been the decision to reformulate the ICT curriculum in Portugal with its gradual extension to all levels, from 5th to 9th grade⁸⁸.

Yet a key theme that is referred to by the respondents in this study is the lack of up-to-date resources and connectivity necessary to encourage and aid teachers to implement innovative practices using ICT to ensure such 21st Century Skills are developed. Indeed, this has been identified as a constraint at the micro level in Figure 79. However, along with the aforementioned changes to be implemented in the ICT curriculum, this is a change that can only realistically be brought about by government intervention. Nevertheless, it remains an implication that has arisen from this project, and it can directly impact on teachers' lessons, for example, slow connectivity can impede motivating activities that pupils can use their mobile phones to participate in.

The implications of this study, however, that point to changes that might feasibly be achieved, are firmly rooted in the constraints at a micro level, that is to say, what the school community can attempt to change for the better, more specifically, what changes the teachers can help to bring about in the classroom.

As a first step towards helping to bring about change, school management might consider reorganizing administrative tasks and teaching timetables so as to allow teachers interested in further developing their ICT skills on PD courses more time to do this. Furthermore, teachers could be given fewer teaching hours in order to participate in innovative projects that are likely to bring benefits to both teachers and the school community.

Another initiative on the part of the school management could be to engage parents by involving them in school activities⁸⁹. Both parents and teachers may be resistant to change, meaning the continuation of established practices that are no longer engaging pupils, who may experience high levels of boredom. By promoting the involvement of all interested parties and giving them a voice, the school can bring all actors of change together.

As for the teachers and classroom practice, data from our study indicates that while teachers feel they do not have the resources, they also point up that they lack confidence and the technical know-

⁸⁸ <http://leitor.exameinformatica.pt/#library/exameinformatica/10-06-2017/educacao-23/noticias/disciplina-de-tic-e-programacao-obrigatoria-do-5-ao-9-ano-em-2018-2019>, accessed June 24, 2017

⁸⁹ <http://www.gallup.com/opinion/gallup/170525/school-cliff-student-engagement-drops-school-year.aspx>, accessed June 24, 2017

how and knowledge to effectively implement these activities. Therefore, PD would appear to be crucial. In the short-term, teachers can attend fresher ICT courses or PD courses of a relatively short duration. This would help to give them confidence in not only learning how to use ICT/Web 2.0 tools themselves, but how to integrate these into their lessons. As indicated by many of the respondents' answers to the second open-ended question at the end of the questionnaire, many teachers do use or are at least aware of tools that can be used pedagogically, referring to a range of interesting options to use in the classroom. Indeed, a significant number have positive perceptions of blogging and acknowledge their potential benefits, so it is legitimate to consider why there are so few or active edublogs in Portugal. It is my conviction that this is due to a misconception of what blogs actually are, how they can be implemented and how to take full advantage of them. It seems likely that what is lacking is the knowledge and skills to develop 21st Century Skills in more sustained projects as opposed to brief uses of ICT tools and social media to complement their lessons.

Possible activities aimed at integrating blogs more systematically could include the following:

- during school terms, blogging tasks could be assigned and scheduled to ensure continuous participation, also subject to assessment, and pupils should be accountable for their publications (though always under the supervision of the instructor, including *esafety* issues).
- just like teachers are free to post blog entries, pupils should also be allowed to do so, thus empowering learners, developing their autonomy and creating a sense of attainment and ownership. The free blog hosting service based on the WordPress blogging software, offers tips, prompts and challenges for both teachers⁹⁰ and pupils⁹¹.
- for different reasons, many pupils feel too insecure about their language proficiency to even consider a written assignment for their teacher and even less writing a few sentences online. In these cases, teachers may suggest the use of free online tools that enable users to proofread and edit documents for grammar or spelling typos. One such example is *Grammarly*⁹², which finds most mistakes and may boost self-confidence;

However, perhaps a long(er)-term issue is that of initial teacher training. This is a theme addressed by Costa, the coordinator of *Repensar as TIC na Educação: O professor como agente*

⁹⁰ <https://teacherchallenge.edublogs.org/>

⁹¹ <https://studentchallenge.edublogs.org/>

⁹² <https://app.grammarly.com/>

transformador (Costa, 2012). To nurture 21st Century pupils, 21st Century teachers are needed, as are 21st Century courses. In other words, even though teachers are expected to master new skills, existing PD courses do not contemplate what teachers really need nor do higher education institutions prepare future teachers for the challenges they are going to face. Costa (2010, 2012) has often claimed that, firstly, there is a poor use of ICT, meaning users are unable to take full advantage of the potential provided by technologies, and second, there is inadequate teacher development - not only continuing PD but also pre-service education. As Costa (2012) writes, there is a technological and methodological deficit and the latest edition of the Horizon Report (Freeman, Becker, Cummins, Davis, & Hall Giesinger, 2017) reinforces the need for the teaching profession to adapt:

The emphasis on more hands-on, technology-enhanced learning has impacted every facet of school life, with teaching as a central force. With students inventing, iterating, and collaborating regularly, teachers have been transplanted from their position as “sage on the stage” to “guide on the side.” There is a need for mentoring and coaching as students work through complex problems to explore new frontiers and gain concrete skills. As student-led class discussions delve deeper into the material, teachers must balance the student-centered approach with subtle but effective facilitation. Schools that recognize and scale positive teaching practices are a necessity. Further, just as there is a need to advance digital literacy among students, teachers must also engage in ongoing professional development, with support from schools. (p.9)

Such concerns have led to calls for a framework to further this professional development, more specifically, “A digital competence framework for educators at European level could reinforce national and/or regional initiatives by providing a common understanding of the digital competence needs for educators.”⁹³

Blogging, as well as other Web 2.0 activities, can, therefore, be very challenging, but also highly rewarding for teachers and pupils when combined with effective pedagogy. As already pointed out, there are many reasons for integrating a blogging project into a classroom. As a creative outlet – whether in writing, using photography, video and / or multimedia tools – blogging may open doors for pupils to connect with their true talents and passions, and can help our pupils to discover what inspires them and is worthy of their commitment and effort. It is the task of teachers to inspire them to these efforts.

5.2. LIMITATIONS AND FURTHER RESEARCH STUDIES

⁹³ <https://ec.europa.eu/jrc/en/digcompedu>, accessed June 24, 2017

The starting point to look ahead implies looking back to address the limitations of the current study. Firstly, since responding to the questionnaire(s) was voluntary, it is hard to draw clear conclusions because the representativeness of the sample is limited. In the case of the main questionnaire, if we take into account that APPI has over 4000 registered members, 93 respondents is, proportionally, a restricted sample, particularly by quantitative research standards. Nonetheless, in today's world where those working in education are often requested to fill in online questionnaires, the figure of 93 English teachers represents a worthwhile return for a project of this scale. It should be noted that collating data through the exploratory and pilot questionnaires means another 86 respondents were involved in preparing the ground for the main data collection instrument of this study.

Secondly, this study is based on the self-reports of the respondents and at no time did it include observation or interviews, which would have allowed for greater exploration of teachers' experiences and perspectives of blogs, and richer data to work with. However, as referred to in Chapter 3, semi-structured interviews were initially part of the planned data collection. As a consequence, this study should only serve as an initial mapping of teachers' perceptions on using blogs in Portugal.

This could, nonetheless, be the exact starting point for future research: an interview study of teachers who have had experience with blogging to identify their motivations and to gather information on the difficulties, and problems faced by blogging EFL teachers in the field. Successful moments and positive experiences would also provide invaluable input.

Rather than large-scale questionnaire studies, small-scale research projects, involving classroom observation, might prove more fruitful to explore blogging as a pedagogical tool. The implementation of a blog in a school or in two different schools in EFL classes over a semester or two semesters could help teachers and researchers – and teacher-researchers – to better understand their potential as well as the constraints that teachers would face – the sort that have been identified by respondents in this study. Such a project could focus on EFL classes or an interesting option would be to compare another subject with English. Would English blogging and its potential for contact with other cultures prove more motivating for students? A further possibility would be to have a particular focus on language skills, for example, would publishing regularly on a blog lead to greater pupil concern for the quality of writing and hence their accuracy?

This also brings us to another possibility – the importance for further studies to collate data from the pupils themselves, the need to include pupils' voices and therefore their own perceptions towards blogs and blogging. As the 2017/2018 school year will see the implementation of the *Projeto de*

Autonomia e Flexibilização Curricular (Despacho nº 5908/2017 de 5 de julho de 2017) in some schools, it would be interesting to document not just the pedagogical experience but also to create class blogs, and study how they may contribute to learning in an effective way, develop competences that take longer to develop (for example, research, analysis, debate and reflection), or prepare pupils better for the job market of the future; in other words, how (and if) the so-called “Aprendizagens Essenciais (AE)” (curricular orientation document based on planning, fulfilment and evaluation of teaching and learning) lead to the development of the competences set out in *Perfil dos alunos a saída da escolaridade obrigatória* (Martins, 2017).

As Zig Zaglar⁹⁴ wrote “*You don't have to be great at something to start, but you have to start to be great at something*”.

⁹⁴ https://www.goodreads.com/author/quotes/50316.Zig_Ziglar

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX 1 – EXPLORATORY QUESTIONNAIRE (ARCOZELO)



BACK TO SCHOOL: Ideas, Activities & Tech Tools

Alexandra Duarte

Exploratory Questionnaire on New Technologies

All Information will remain anonymous

Section 1 – Biodata

Your answers to the questions below will give me a broad picture of who you are.

1. Gender <input type="radio"/> Female <input type="radio"/> Male	3. Years of experience <input type="radio"/> 0 - 5 <input type="radio"/> 6 - 10 <input type="radio"/> 11 - 15 <input type="radio"/> 16 - 20 <input type="radio"/> over 20	4. Cycles of teaching (please tick all that apply) <input type="radio"/> Primary English <input type="radio"/> 2 nd Cycle <input type="radio"/> 3 rd Cycle <input type="radio"/> Secondary
2. Teaching area <input type="radio"/> Urban <input type="radio"/> Rural		

Section 2 – New Technologies

Your answers to the questions that follow will help me have a general idea about your knowledge and use of new technologies.

1. Have you been on any training courses for ICT or have any qualifications in the area?

2. Do you use New Technologies in your classes? And outside of the classes?

Yes. No. Yes. No.

2.1. If yes, can you please give one or two examples?

2.2. If no, can you please say why?

3. Do you think blogs are a useful learning tool for students?

Yes.

No.

3.1. If yes, how can they be useful?

3.2. If no, could you please say why?

4. Would you like to incorporate blogs in your EFL lessons?

Yes.

No.

5. Have you ever used blogs in your lessons?

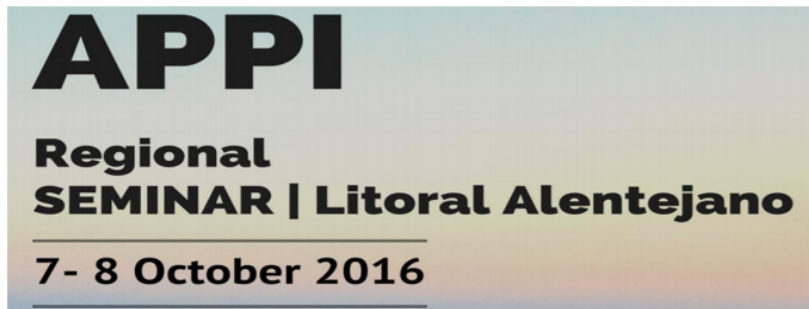
Yes.

No.

5.1. If yes, can you please leave the link and describe the experience?

6. What are some of the reasons you might not use blogs in your teaching?

Thank you very much for your cooperation!
Please leave your email address if you **don't mind being contacted in the future and would like to be sent the presentation:**



Alexandra Duarte

Exploratory Questionnaire on New Technologies

All Information will remain anonymous

Section 1 – Biodata

Your answers to the questions below will give me a broad picture of who you are.

1. Gender <input type="radio"/> Female <input type="radio"/> Male	3. Years of experience <input type="radio"/> 0 - 5 <input type="radio"/> 6 - 10 <input type="radio"/> 11 - 15 <input type="radio"/> 16 - 20 <input type="radio"/> over 20	4. Cycles of teaching (please tick all that apply) <input type="radio"/> Primary English <input type="radio"/> 2 nd Cycle <input type="radio"/> 3 rd Cycle <input type="radio"/> Secondary
2. Teaching area <input type="radio"/> Urban <input type="radio"/> Rural		

Section 2 – New Technologies

Your answers to the questions that follow will help me have a general idea about your knowledge and use of new technologies.

- 1. Have you been on any training courses for ICT or have any qualifications in the area?**
If yes, please specify.

- 2. Do you use New Technologies in your classes? And outside of the classes?**

Yes. No. Yes. No.

- 2.1. If yes, can you please give one or two examples?**

- 2.2. If no, can you please say why?**

3. Do you think blogs are a useful learning tool for students?

Yes.

No.

3.1. If yes, how can they be useful?

3.2. If no, could you please say why?

4. Would you like to incorporate blogs in your EFL lessons?

Yes.

No.

5. Have you ever used blogs in your lessons?

Yes.

No.

5.1. If yes, can you please leave the link and describe the experience?

6. What are some of the reasons you might not use blogs in your teaching?

Thank you very much for your cooperation!

Please leave your email address if you don't mind being contacted in the future:

APPENDIX 3 – RESULTS OF THE TWO EXPLORATORY QUESTIONNAIRES

I collected 46 questionnaires from Arcozelo (North Portugal) and my supervisor a further 31 from Santo André (South Portugal) in a total of 77. This significant number of questionnaires showed that there is a large majority of females (Figure 1) in this group of respondents and that there 78% of the teachers with over 20 years’ experience (Figure 2), teaching a diversity of cycles (Figure 3) with 65% of educators teaching in urban areas (Figure 4).

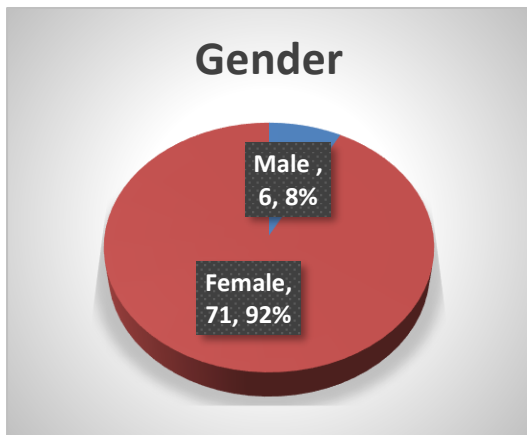


Figure 1 - Gender

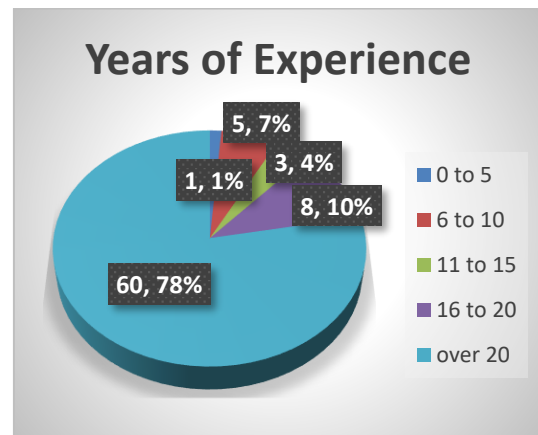


Figure 2 – Years of Experience

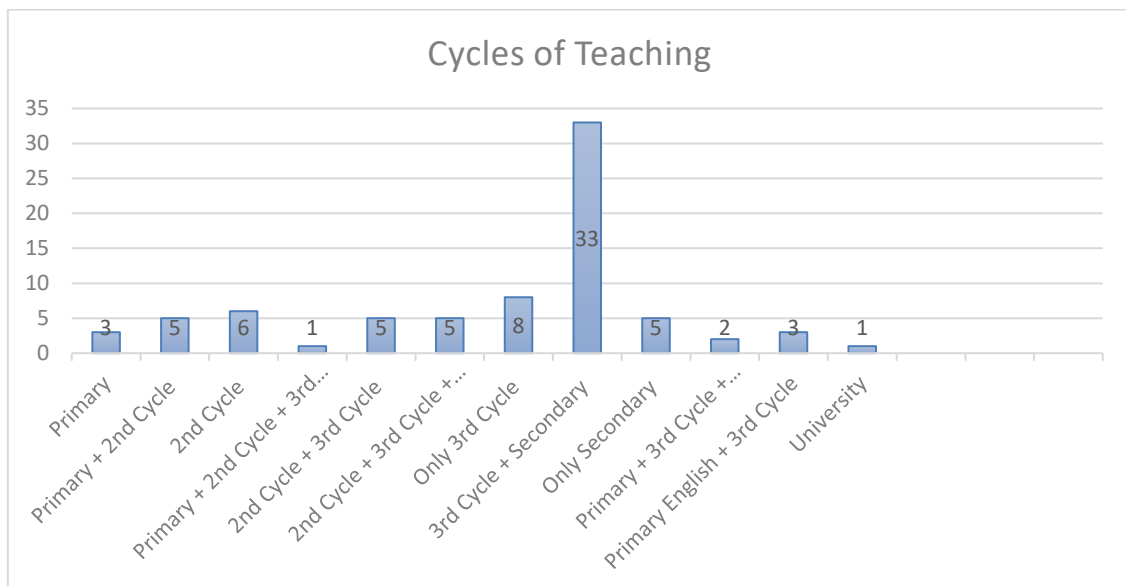


Figure 3 – Cycles of Teaching

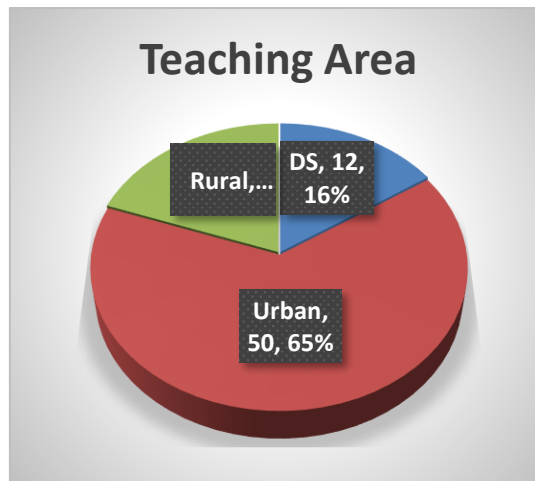


Figure 4 – Teaching Area



Figure 5 – ICT Training / Qualifications

Irrespective of their teaching area, many teachers reported having some training courses and qualifications in ICT (Figure 5), namely by enrolling in Teacher Development Courses on Moodle (3 participants), Interactive Whiteboards (6), Movie Maker (2) and others still (4) on using Web 2.0 tools from online courses / MOOCs.

The responses also indicated that those teachers who use new technologies in their classes also use them in their daily lives (the only discrepancy being for those who did not answer), with the exception of only two teachers who reported that they could not use new technologies in lessons because that was the school's policy, while the other did not make any kind of use because they were not keen on using technologies (Figures 6 & 7). The majority of the teachers said that they use the new technologies for Powerpoint presentations, to access the Internet for videos, online educational games, free web 2.0 tools and for European projects.

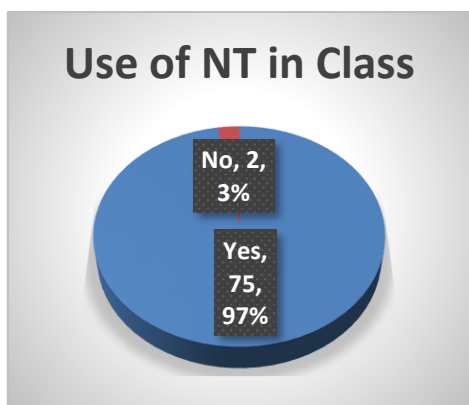


Figure 6 – Use of New Technologies in Class

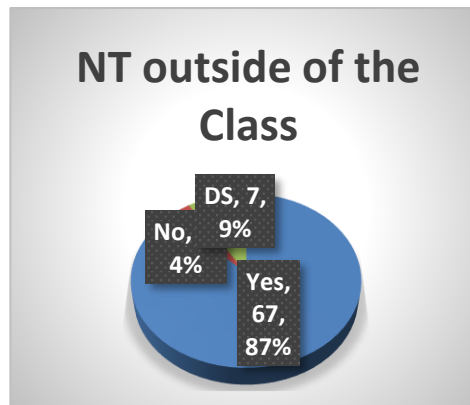


Figure 7 – NT outside of the Class

In relation to blogs as a useful learning tool for pupils (Figure 8), of the 77 respondents, 62 answered positively adding a plethora of different possible uses which can be grouped into the following categories (Chen, 2015):

- To provide language skill practice, especially in writing (to improve their language proficiency, to develop their writing skills, to teach vocabulary, to motivate pupils with video clips, messages, opinions; to practise every day English, strengthening reading /writing abilities)
- To sharpen L2 learners’ metacognitive skills (for collaborative work, to promote the learner’s autonomy, to develop critical thinking, to share ideas and work)
- To assist L2 learners in developing intercultural competence (for multicultural knowledge, to get involved in other experiences and realities)

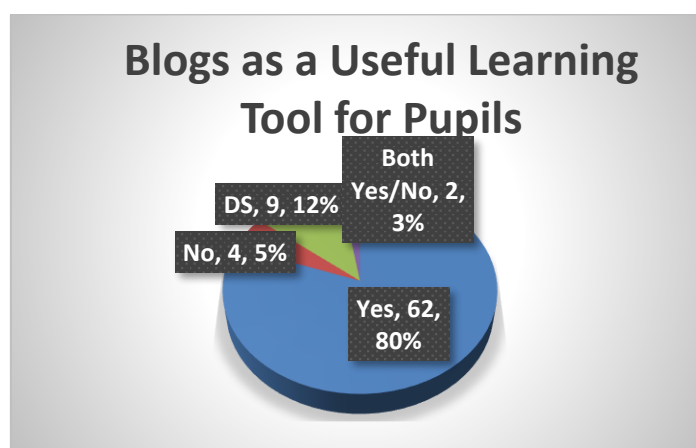


Figure 8 – Blogs as a Useful Learning Tool for Pupils

Of the 4 respondents who replied negatively, the reasons pointed out being: “I actually never read blogs and never have.”, “I don’t know how to do a blog.”, “Most of my students do not have

computers or internet at home.” and “I’ve never thought of it.” 2 of the respondents chose both ‘yes’ and ‘no’ and added they could not know once they had never tried; 12% did not answer this question but their questionnaires suggest that, again, it could be due to lack of knowledge.

Likewise, 59 participants expressed their wish to incorporate blogs in their EFL lessons (Figure 9), even though 58 have never used them in classes (Figure 10) and the reasons for that varied from having no reason at all, no opportunity, lack of the necessary technical skills, lack of time due to the excessive number of classes/levels/ pupils, and included lack of school resources, regardless of the school area.

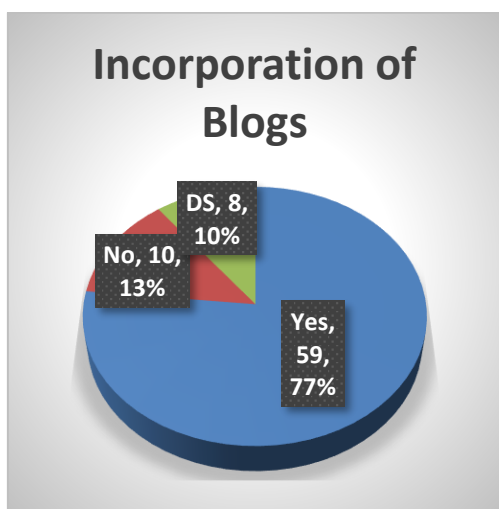


Figure 9 – Incorporation of Blogs in Lessons

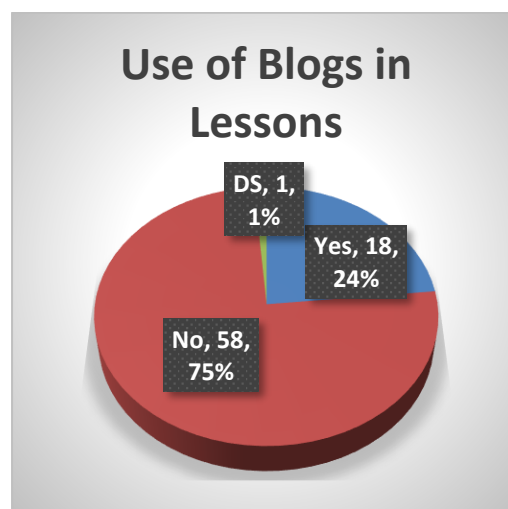


Figure 10 – Use of Blogs in Lessons

Among the respondents there was only one who answered “If only a few people in a class contribute it isn’t very rewarding.” and that caught my attention as it came from one of the few participants (24%) who had answered they had already used blogs in EFL lessons but would not like to incorporate them.

Only 3 participants shared links for their blogs and many added reasons they might not use blogs in teaching such as lack of time and training, lack of technical support and equipment at school, pupils with limited computer and internet access - to name the most frequently cited reasons.

APPENDIX 4 – PILOT QUESTIONNAIRE

Teachers' perspectives of using blogs in EFL classes in Portugal

In this study, one of our key aims is to find out about English language teachers' experiences and perspectives concerning the use of blogs and new technology in their personal teaching contexts. This means that there are no right or wrong answers but rather it is your personal perspective and experience that are important to us. The questionnaire will take approximately 5/6 minutes to complete and all responses are anonymous.

We would like to thank you in advance for completing this questionnaire. Your cooperation is greatly appreciated and will not only contribute to a better understanding of how English teachers in Portugal view the role of blogs in the EFL classroom, but also provide ideas about how to increase teacher willingness to use blogs and to implement practical teaching activities in classrooms. If you have any questions, or would like to make any comments, we would be very happy to hear from you. We can be reached at: teacheralex.duarte@gmail.com

A Happy New Year to you all and we wish you a successful, happy and healthy 2017 ☺

Alexandra Duarte and Mark Daubney

Edublogging in Portugal

What is a blog? The expression was first used in 1997 by Jorn Barger and is the short form of the term "weblog", a webpage where the writer presents a record of activities, thoughts, or beliefs called posts, with the newest entry at the top of the page. Proclaimed the "Word of the Year" in 2004 by the Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary, hyperlinks, pictures, audio and video can also be added to blogs to enrich them.

Below you have two examples of edublogs, blogs used for education (pictures 1 & 2), and a more recent phenomenon, a vlog, in other words, a blog that contains video material (picture 3, below, vlogbrothers).



1. Biodata

1.1 Gender?

- Female Male

1.2 How long have you been a teacher of English?

- 0-5 years 6-10 years 11-15 years
 16-20 years over 20 years

1.3 Where are you teaching? Select all that may apply.

- North South Central Portugal Islands
 Urban area Rural area Not teaching at the moment

1.4 Please select the situation(s) that best describe(s) your current position. I am an English teacher working in the following area(s) / level(s) ...

- 1ºCEB / YL Basic School / 2ºCEB 3ºCEB Secondary School
 Teacher of Adults Vocational School Teacher Librarian School Management (Direção da Escola)
 Professor & Researcher Not teaching at the moment Other

2.You & Your School

2.1 What's your school profile? How strongly do you agree or disagree with the statements that follow?

	Strongly agree 1	Agree 2	Neither agree nor disagree 3	Disagree 4	Strongly disagree 5
-My school actively participates in European projects.					
-My school is involved in initiatives aimed at cultivating innovative practices in school.					
-My school promotes collaboration and teachers meet, share, evaluate or develop teaching methods and materials.					

-My school is engaged in improving teachers' professional development.					
-My schoolboard encourages innovative practices and supports them.					
-Changes introduced by the school management (such as in "Reglamento Interno") are effective in relation to the use of new technologies.					
-Parents welcome innovation and change at school.					
- Parents are helpful when it comes to tech awareness and its use at school, for education.					

2.2 How is your (usual) classroom equipped? Please select the option that best describes your situation.

- One computer per classroom, the teacher's desktop.
- It has several desktops which are used by pupils.
- Besides having several desktops, I also have some tablets and / or laptops available.

2.3 What use do you make of the available technology? Please select the option that best describes your use.

- I use the teacher's desktop.
- I devise activities and tasks for pupils to use computers and/or tablets.
- I sometimes ask pupils to bring their laptops or tablets from home.

2.4 How many hours of English do you teach? Please tick the one(s) that apply:

- 90mins (8th grade)
- 120mins (YL in First cycle)
- 135mins (7th+9th grades)
- 180mins (Secondary)

2.5 What percentage of this time do you use for technology?

- over 75%
- over 50%
- over 25%
- 0%

3.You & Blogs

3.1 Are you a blog reader? Tick the one that best describes you.

- Yes.
- No.
- Sometimes.

3.2 Which of the items below best describe the blogs you use in your day-to-day life? Please select all that apply.

- education.
- educational technology.
- art.
- music.
- food / recipes.
- books & book reviews.
- movies.
- news.
- sports.
- other topics.

3.3. How did you first hear about blogging in an educational context?

- At an APPI seminar / conference or any other professional development event.
- At school collaborating with a colleague.
- Using Google or any other search engine.
- In a webinar.
- Using Social Networks such as Facebook or Twitter.
- In a MOOC (Massive Open Online Course).
- In academic readings.
- Another context. Please specify. _____

3.4. Have you ever used blogs in your EFL classes?

- Yes. No.

3.5 How often do you use blogs in your classes?

- Every week in a school term. 1-3 times per school term. 1-3 times per school year. Never.

3.6 If you use a blog in class, please indicate all that apply to you.

- Pupils blog during classes.
- You and your pupils comment on one another's entries during classes.
- You and your pupils access other blogs during classes.
- You use blog texts for examples on grammar and/or current issues.
- None of the above.

3.7 Have you ever created a blog?

- Yes.

If the blog is still active, could you please leave the link?

- No.

----- If your answer is NO, please move on to question 3.15 -----

3.8 How many blogs have you created?

- One. Two. More.

3.9 What kind of blogs are they? Select the one(s) that best describe(s) the blog(s)

- personal.
- professional / tutor blog(s), with school info and resources for pupils.
- teacher / learner blog(s), created as a digital portfolio on a teacher development course.
- class blogs with the teacher as the administrator and pupils as co-authors.
- class blogs that incorporate your pupils' individual blogs.

3.10 What best describes that / those blog(s)? Please choose the option(s) that apply.

- blog(s) about tech and gadgets.
- blog(s) about books.

- blog(s) around news.
- blog(s) with school activities and showcasing pupils' creations.
- blog(s) syllabus-related which include(s) grammar / topic support as well as exercises for language learning.

3.11 From 1 to 10 order the importance of the reasons for creating blogs (1 being the most important / 10 the least important):

- For collaboration.
- To foster pupils' autonomy.
- To have an audience.
- To encourage speaking / listening on topics on the blog.
- As a digital portfolio.
- To develop digital literacies.
- To extend teaching / learning outside of the classroom and instil reading and writing habits.
- As an alternative to traditional assessment tasks.
- To share resources and lesson plans / ideas.
- To motivate pupils.

3.12 How long have you been using blogs at school? Please tick one.

- 0-3 years.
- 4-6 years.
- Over 6 years.

3.13 From 1 to 7, please rank the following statements in order of importance, with 1 being the most important and 7 the least important. Blogging ...

- Facilitates the introduction of teaching topics such as diversity, multiculturalism, plurilinguism.
- Improves your technology skills for teaching.
- Enhances your own reading and writing proficiency.
- Promotes your ability to teach cross-curricular and 21st Century Skills such as team work, creativity, critical thinking.
- Helps to vary the way you evaluate your pupils and your assessment practices.

Deepens the knowledge about your pupils.

Brings you and your pupils closer.

3.14 How do you think blogging has impacted on your pupils? Please rate its importance, from 1 to 10, being 1 the most important and 10 the least important.

By reading and writing more, pupils' writing has improved (longer sentences and texts, fewer misspelt words).

It has offered other opportunities for pupils to express themselves at their own pace and about topics of their own interest.

They have become more autonomous and responsible.

Blogging has improved their technology skills (such as in research, safety, copyright).

It has improved their 21st Century Skills – Collaboration, Communication, Creativity and Critical Thinking.

Blogging has opened their minds to other cultural and linguistic realities.

It has helped to prepare them for the ever changing world of work.

It has contributed to their academic and personal growth.

Pupils are more motivated to learn English.

They have benefited from team building through class blogging.

----- **Now again to be answered by all respondents** -----

3.15 From 1 to 8 order the importance of the reasons why, in your opinion, there aren't more class blogs (1 being the most important / 8 the least important):

Too time consuming.

Teachers have too much to do at school, including paperwork.

Many teachers lack the confidence to create and manage blogs.

There is no tech support at school nor the tech means to support teachers' efforts.

Teachers lack the training in ICT.

Classes are large and teachers may have classroom management difficulties if they allow pupils to blog.

Pupils' reading and writing habits are changing; teachers are sceptical about investing time and effort in blogs.

Many schools don't have good internet connections to allow teachers to use tech tools / platforms for teaching / learning, much less for blogging.

4. Teaching English in Portugal.

4.1 How strongly do you agree or disagree with each of the following statements about the education system in Portugal and schools?

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
	1	2	3	4	5
-Teachers have (enough) time to implement innovative practices in their classes.					
-The curriculum includes competences which are best developed through the use of technology.					
-School assessment regulations make it easy to assess other competences, such as critical thinking.					
-Classes haven't got more than 18-20 pupils and classrooms are well equipped allowing a variety of approaches using ICT.					
-There is enough training on the pedagogical use of ICTs.					
-If you so wished, you could change your classroom practices anytime.					

5. Your Input

5.1 Please recommend alternatives to blogs that teachers can use in the classroom. Please explain your choice(s).

5.2 Please suggest ways that teachers can boost pupils' interest and participation in blogs.

Thank you for participating ☺

APPENDIX 5 – RESULTS OF THE PILOT QUESTIONNAIRE

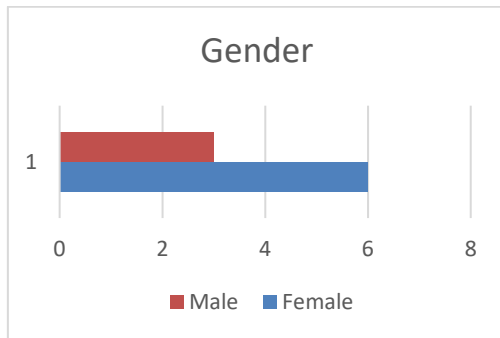


Figure 1 – Gender

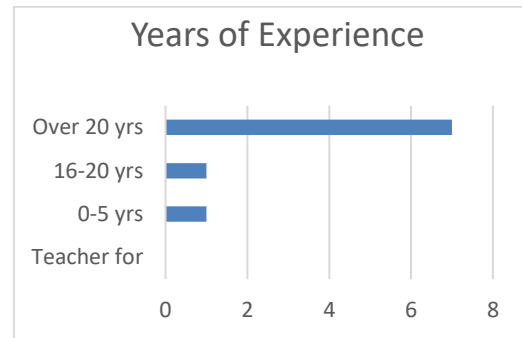


Figure 2 – Years of Experience

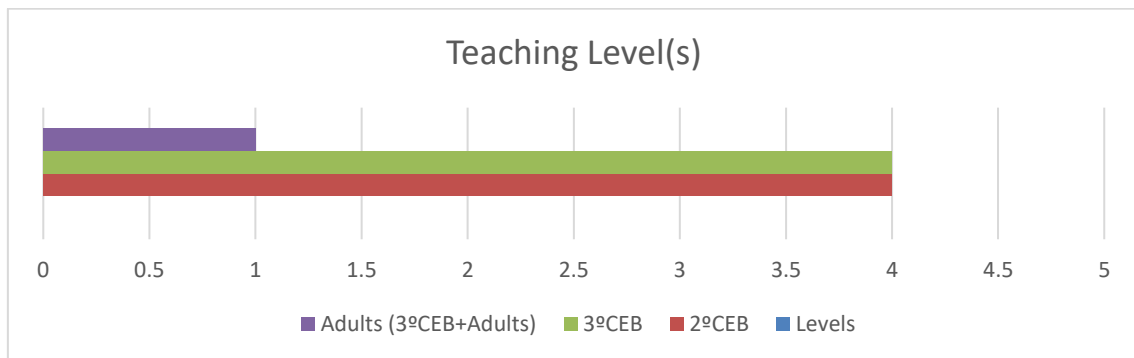


Figure 3 – Teaching Level(s)

With a predominantly female group of experienced teachers (Questions 1.1 & 1.2, Figures 1 & 2), teaching mainly 2°CEB and 3°CEB (Question 1.4, Figure 3), especially 3°CEB (Question 2.4), this school from central Portugal (Question 1.3, 9 respondents – 100%) provides only one computer per classroom for the teacher’s use (Question 2.2, 9 respondents – 100%) which may explain why all use the teacher’s desktop (Question 2.3, 9 respondents – 100%), one out of nine teachers reports never using technology in the classroom, 4 report using 25% of their time, 3 over 50%; yet one reports using it over 75% (Question 2.5, Figure 4).

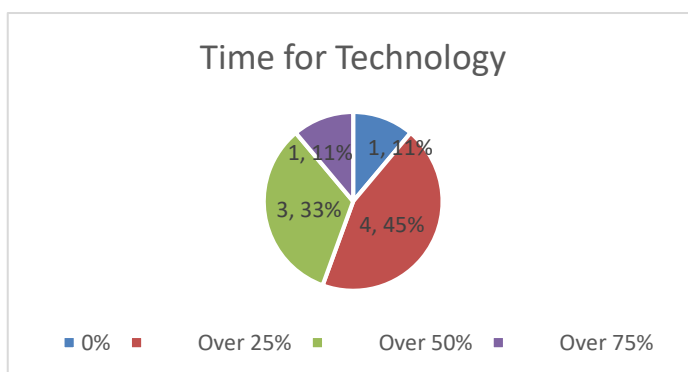


Figure 4 – Time for Technology

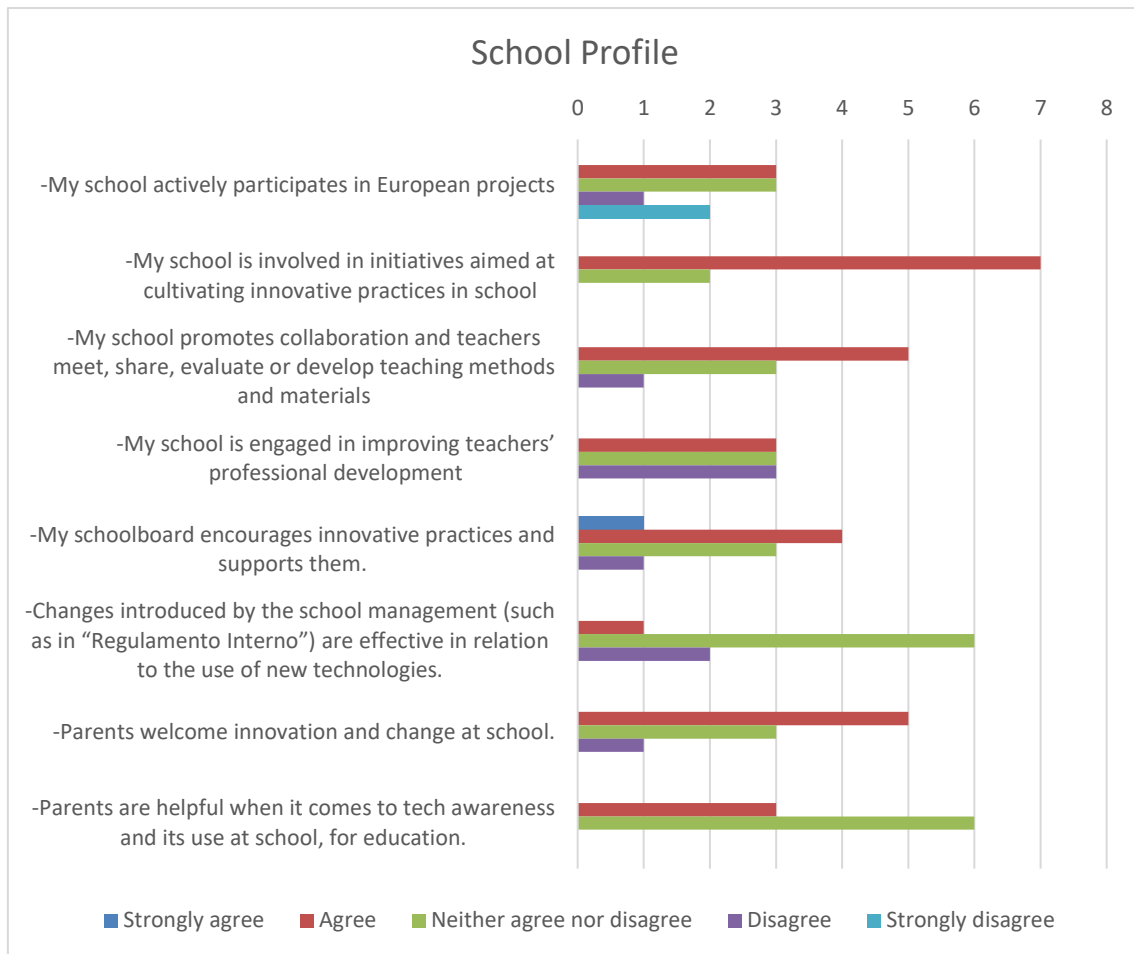


Figure 5 – School Profile

When asked to express their agreement and disagreement with a set of statements under You & Your School (Question 2.1, Figure 5) the respondents avoided the extremes, such as “Strongly disagree” or “Strongly agree” and mainly chose “Agree” and “Neither agree nor disagree” on virtually all eight statements. Whilst 77.7% of the respondents answered they agreed on the idea that the school is involved in initiatives aimed at cultivating innovative practices, opinions split and the percentage decreases (55.5%) regarding the school promoting collaboration and teachers meeting, sharing, evaluating or developing teaching methods and materials which may be a sign of some resistance among professionals to change the *status quo* in their daily practices. The disagreement widens when it comes to the school being engaged in improving teachers’ professional development with 33.3% equally expressing their agreement, neither agreement nor disagreement and disagreement. All that concerns school policies seems to cause some tension as there is no consensual opinions as to the schoolboard or parents. As for the former and the eventual encouragement of innovative practices and supporting them, responses vary between “strongly agree” (the only one) and “disagree”, with four respondents expressing their agreement. Even

concerning changes introduced by *Reglamento Interno* as being effective in relation to the use of new technologies, 6 respondents out of 9 (66.6%) respondents answered they neither agree nor disagree which may mean there is a long way to go until schools are ready to implement any technological changes starting by replacing obsolete desktops and laptops and increasing the number available in our classrooms; as for the latter, 5 respondents stated they agreed that parents welcome innovation and change at school, 3 neither agree nor disagree and one expresses their disagreement on the issue. As for the statement if parents are helpful when it comes to tech awareness and its use at school, for education, 3 respondents stated they agree, but the remaining 6 revealed they neither agree nor disagree, - perhaps because there is no need to approach parents on this topic as the school has no way of implementing tech activities.

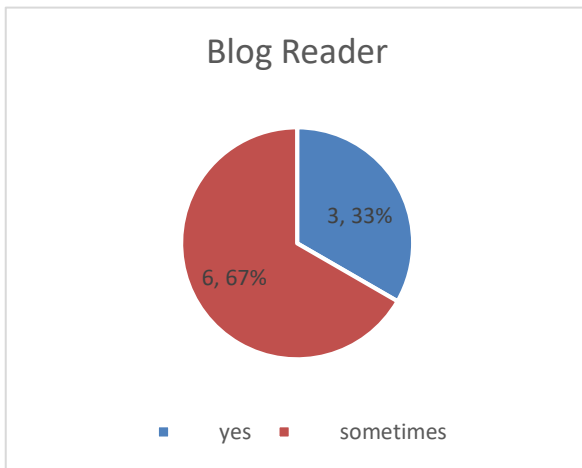


Figure 6 – Blog Reader

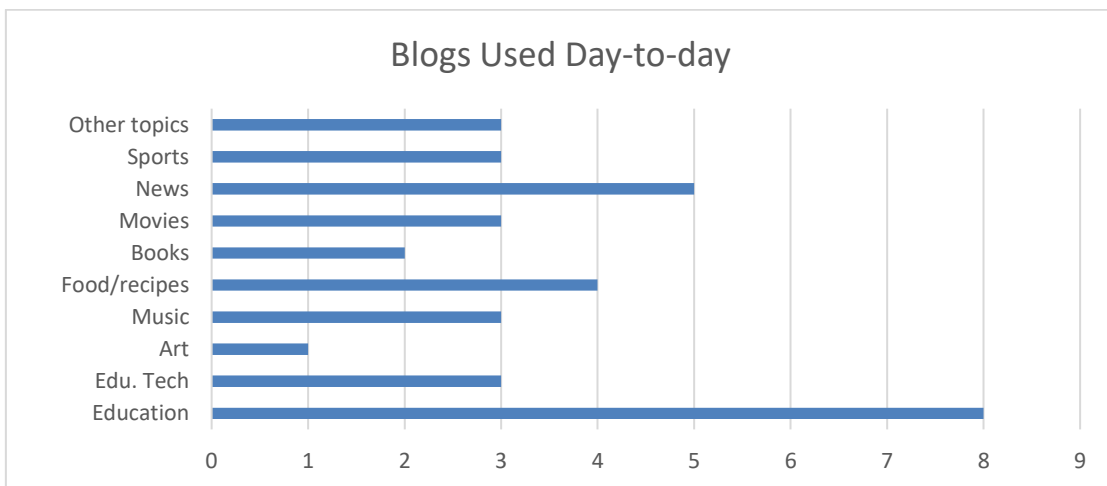


Figure 7 – Blogs Used Day-to-Day

33 % of respondents answered affirmatively to blog reading and 67% of the respondents admitted they sometimes read a variety of blogs (Question 3.1, Figure 6), perhaps unsurprisingly about education (Question 3.2, Figure 7).

Concerning blogging in an educational context (Question 3.3, Figure 8), while four respondents answered they first heard about educational blogging at school collaborating with a colleague and the other four using google or any other search engine, a remaining respondent stated they became aware of it at a professional development event which may mean that there has not been enough PD focused on blogging.

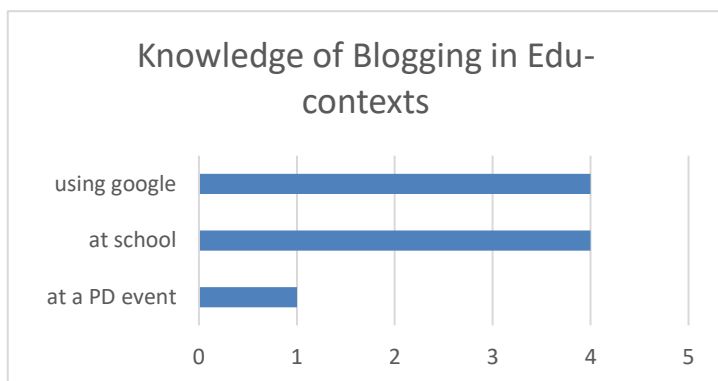


Figure 8 – First Contact with Edublogs

5 out of 9 respondents described using blogs in their EFL classes (Question 3.4, Figure 9), 4 of them 1 to 3 times per school year, and one respondent stated using it every week (Question 3.5, Figure 10).

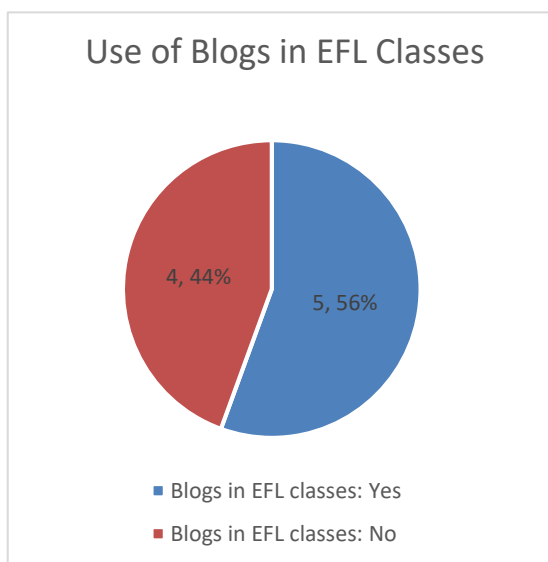


Figure 9 – Use of Blogs in EFL Classes

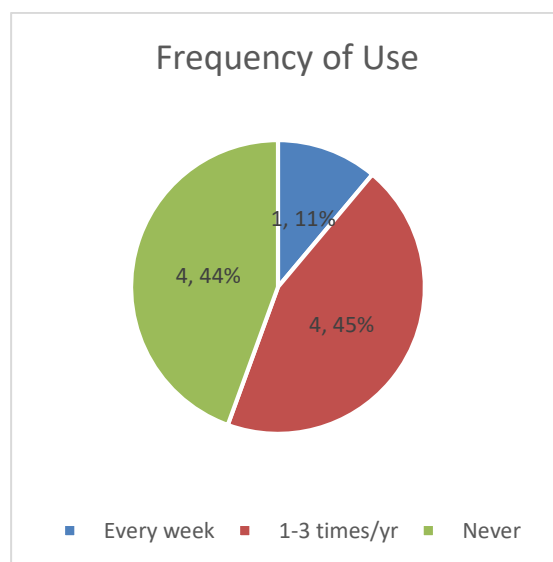


Figure 10 – Frequency of Blog Use in Classes

Within the classroom, only 4 participants in this pilot questionnaire reported using blog texts for examples of grammar and / or current issues, which may suggest that blogging is seen as up to date and provides authentic teaching and learning material (Question 3.6, Figure 11).

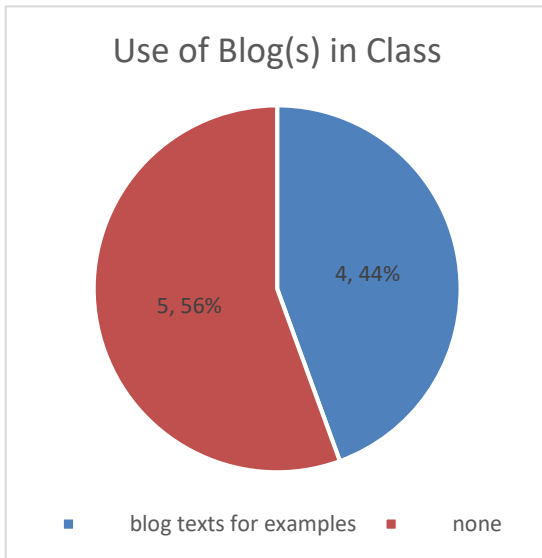


Figure 11 – Use of Blog(s) in Class

Of the four respondents who claimed having created blogs, 3 created one blog and one participant reported having created more than 3 (Question 3.7, Figure 12); none provided a link.

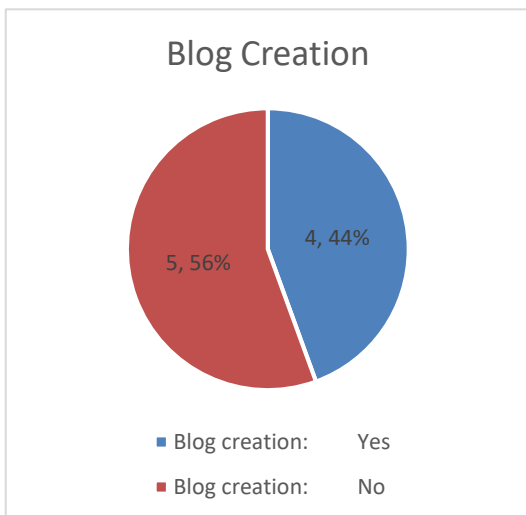


Figure 12 – Blog Creation

From Questions 3.8 to 3.14 there were only four respondents, less than half of the sample population, which shows that the advantages of blogs are not always evident to those working in educational settings.

Of these 4 respondents, 3 stated they had created one blog and one had created more (Question 3.8). When asked about the kind(s) of blogs, mostly answered personal and another a class blog (Question 3.9).

In a cross analysis, it is possible to see that the female teacher (numbered Pilot Questionnaire 3, PQ3) who is less experienced – much younger, perhaps – was the one who reported using over 75% of time for technology use, having created 1 blog recently (for 0-3 years, Question 3.12), namely

the class blog mentioned before, with the teacher as the administrator and pupils as co-authors in which they disclosed school activities and showcased pupils' creations (1 respondent, Question 3.10). However, when asked about using blogs in her classes, the answer was 1-3 times per school year which, as indicated by Question 3.11, the teacher's goals mainly included fostering pupils' autonomy and motivation, therefore to use outside of the classroom.

Another female teacher (PQ1) with over 20 years of teaching experience also stated that with only one computer (the teacher's desktop) she used tech over 50% of class time; when asked if she had ever used blogs in her EFL classes, her answer was affirmative and added that she used them every week in a school term for examples on grammar and /or current issues, but has never created her own blog (Question 3.7).

Either due to the constraints of limited respondents or to the variety of answers and priorities allowed by an ordering question – or both – the truth is that it is difficult to find patterns and draw conclusions. Nevertheless, the following can be noted:

- In Question 3.11., to order importance of the reasons for creating blogs, all 4 respondents placed the goal of having an audience as number 10, and neither were they created as digital portfolios as a priority as this was placed 7th, 8th and 9th by two participants;
- When asked to rank 7 sentences concerning blogging in Question 3.13, 3 out of 4 respondents reported that it facilitates the introduction of teaching topics such as diversity, multiculturalism, plurilinguism in fourth place and for the last, for number 7, that it helps to vary the way you evaluate your pupils and your assessment practices. Again, not the top of priorities;
- Only 3 respondents (of 4) answered Question 3.14., which further complicates the task of establishing patterns. However, unlike in the previous two sets of questions, there is some degree of agreement for the first and second priorities. In other words, 2 out of 3, agree that blogging has, in the first place, impacted on pupils because it has offered other opportunities for pupils to express themselves at their own pace and about topics of their own interest; in the second place and again two out of three agree that blogging has improved their technology skills (such as in research, safety, copyright). Both substantiate the claim that blogging allows the teaching / learning of other literacies and competences.

Question 3.15 was again aimed at all participants in this questionnaire and the goal was to evaluate the reasons why there are not more class blogs. Quite clearly, work overload was considered the top reason by 66.6% of the respondents and, at the opposite end, pupils' reading and writing habits are changing; teachers are sceptical about investing time and effort in blogs, comes seventh with 44.4%, and many schools do not have good internet connections to allow teachers to use tech tools /

platforms for teaching / learning, much less for blogging, comes last again with 44.4%. These options may show that where there is a will, there is a way, but with so much to do all the time as pointed out first, there is no way around other obstacles.

In relation to Teaching English in Portugal (Question 4.1. Figure 13), almost 50% of the participants (44.4% to be exact) strongly disagree with the statement that teachers have time to implement innovative practices in their classrooms which may imply that even though they do want to change their practices, namely with the use of technology, they feel they cannot. This is consistent with their strong agreement (88.8%) that the curriculum includes competences which are best developed through the use of technology. Moreover, it is also relevant to point out that these participants have different opinions on assessment, always a complex issue, namely on the ease to assess competences such as critical thinking.

All participants disagree and strongly disagree that classes are small and classrooms are well equipped which, again, limit the use of ICT. As for training or the ease and speed to change classroom practices, opinions vary more, between agreement and strong disagreement which may lead to other discussions on teacher personal development choices and opportunities.

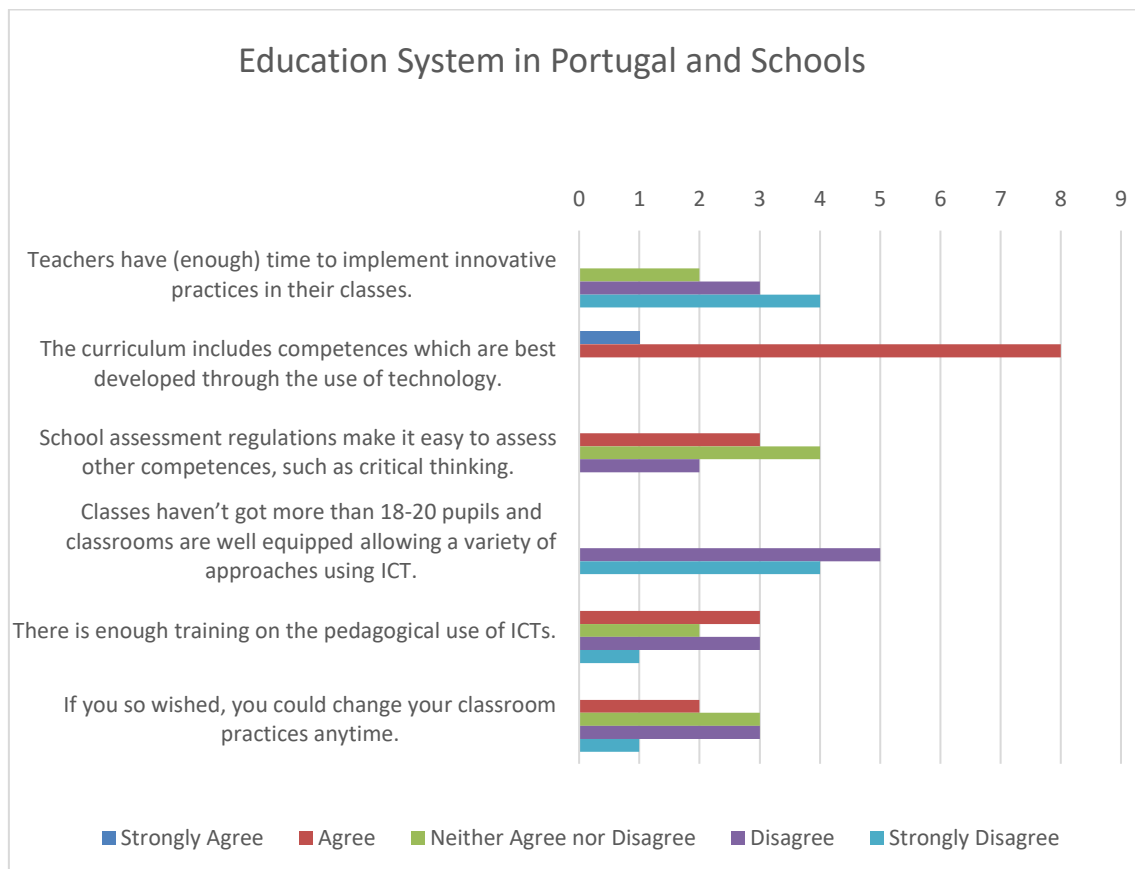


Figure 13 – Education System in Portugal and Schools

When asked for their own input in Questions 5.1 and 5.2., respondents seem to be somewhat lacking clear perceptions about the potential of blogs in an educational context. According to these findings, all respondents read different kinds of blogs, but seem to lack adequate knowledge about blogging and its pedagogical benefits for our EFL classrooms. It is, perhaps, time for teachers not only to reconsider their attitudes of scepticism but also to embrace modern technologies within their classrooms, namely with the integration of computer-assisted tools such as blogging. Some suggest chat rooms, other forums, even Facebook, but blogs share some similarities with all these means of computer-mediated communication means.

APPENDIX 6 – MAIN QUESTIONNAIRE / ONLINE QUESTIONNAIRE⁹⁵

Teachers' perspectives of using blogs in EFL classes in Portugal

In this study, one of our key aims is to find out about English language teachers' experiences and perspectives concerning the use of blogs and new technology in their personal teaching contexts. This means that there are no right or wrong answers but rather it is your personal perspective and experience that are important to us. The questionnaire will take approximately 5/6 minutes to complete and all responses are anonymous.

We would like to thank you in advance for completing this questionnaire. Your cooperation is greatly appreciated and will not only contribute to a better understanding of how English teachers in Portugal view the role of blogs in the EFL classroom, but also provide ideas about how to increase teacher willingness to use blogs and to implement practical teaching activities in classrooms. If you have any questions, or would like to make any comments, we would be very happy to hear from you. We can be reached at: teacheralex.duarte@gmail.com

Alexandra Duarte and Mark Daubney

What is a blog?

The expression was first used in 1997 by Jorn Barger and is the short form of the term "weblog", a webpage where the writer presents a record of activities, thoughts, or beliefs called posts, with the newest entry at the top of the page. Proclaimed the "Word of the Year" in 2004 by the Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary, hyperlinks, pictures, audio and video can also be added to blogs to enrich them.

Below you have two examples of edublogs, blogs used for education (pictures 1 & 2), and a more recent phenomenon, a vlog, in other words, a blog that contains video material (picture 3, below, vlogbrothers).



⁹⁵ Accessible at

https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLSdH5XnagMN742ljrrxYabh_G9nHdxdbGCM0Ka7uaywYGIfs_kA/viewform?usp=sf_link

1. Biodata

1.5 Gender

Female

Male

1.6 How long have you been a teacher of English?

0-5 years

6-10 years

11-15 years

16-20 years

over 20 years

1.7 Where are you teaching? Select all that may apply.

North

South

Central Portugal

Islands

Urban area

Rural area

Not teaching at the moment

1.8 Please select the situation(s) that best describe(s) your current position. I am an English teacher working in the following area(s) / level(s) ...

1ºCEB / YL

Basic School / 2ºCEB

3ºCEB

Secondary School

Teacher of Adults

Vocational School

Teacher Librarian

School Management (Direção da Escola)

Professor & Researcher

Not teaching at the moment

Other

2. You & Your School

2.1 What's your school profile? How strongly do you agree or disagree with the statements that follow?

	Strongly agree 1	Agree 2	Neither agree nor disagree 3	Disagree 4	Strongly disagree 5
-My school actively participates in European projects.					
-My school is involved in initiatives aimed at cultivating innovative practices.					
-My school promotes collaboration and teachers meet, share, evaluate or develop teaching methods and materials.					

-My school is engaged in improving teachers' professional development.					
-My schoolboard encourages innovative practices and supports them.					
-Changes introduced by the school management (such as in "Reglamento Interno") are effective in relation to the use of new technologies.					
-Parents welcome innovation and change at school.					
- Parents are helpful when it comes to tech awareness and its use at school, for education.					

2.2 How is your (usual) classroom equipped? Please select the option that best describes your situation.

- One computer per classroom, the teacher's desktop.
- It has several desktops which are used by pupils.
- Besides having several desktops, I also have some tablets and / or laptops available.

2.3 What use do you make of the available technology? Please select the option that best describes your use.

- I use the teacher's desktop.
- I devise activities and tasks for pupils to use computers and/or tablets.
- I sometimes ask pupils to bring their laptops or tablets from home.

2.4 Please indicate the number of hours of English you teach a week: _____

2.5 What percentage of this time do you use for technology?

- over 75%
- over 50%
- over 25%
- 0%

3.You & Blogs

3.1 If you are a blog user, please select from the topics below those which best describe your use of blogs:

- education.

- educational technology.
- art.
- music.
- food / recipes.
- books & book reviews.
- movies.
- news.
- sports.
- not applicable.
- other topics.

3.2. How did you first hear about blogging in an educational context?

- At an APPI seminar / conference or any other professional development event.
- At school collaborating with a colleague.
- Using Google or any other search engine.
- In a webinar.
- Using Social Networks such as Facebook or Twitter.
- In a MOOC (Massive Open Online Course).
- In academic readings.
- Another context. Please specify. _____

3.3. Have you ever used blogs in your EFL classes?

- Yes. No.

3.4 How often do you use blogs in your classes?

- Every week in a school term. 1-3 times per school term. 1-3 times per school year. Never.

3.5 When using a blog in a class, please indicate all that apply to you.

- Pupils blog during classes.
- You and your pupils comment on one another's entries during classes.
- You and your pupils access other blogs during classes.
- You use blog texts for examples on grammar and/or current issues.
- Not applicable.

3.6 Have you ever created an educational blog / blog for EFL purposes?

- Yes.
- No.

----- If your answer is NO, please move on to question 3.15

3.7 How many educational / EFL blogs have you created?

- One.
- Two.
- More.

3.8 If the blog(s) is / are still active, could you please leave the link(s)? _____

3.9 What kind of blogs are they? Select the one(s) that best describe(s) the blog(s)

- professional / tutor blog(s), with school info and resources for pupils.
- teacher / learner blog(s), created as a digital portfolio on a teacher development course.
- class blogs with the teacher as the administrator and pupils as co-authors.
- class blogs that incorporate your pupils' individual blogs.

3.10 What best describes that / those blog(s)? Please choose the option(s) that apply.

- blog(s) about tech and gadgets.
- blog(s) about books.
- blog(s) around news.
- blog(s) with school activities and showcasing pupils' creations.
- blog(s) syllabus-related which include(s) grammar / topic support as well as exercises for language learning.

3.11 From 1 to 10 order the importance of the reasons for creating blogs (1 being the most important / 10 the least important):

- For collaboration.
- To foster pupils' autonomy.
- To have an audience.
- To encourage speaking / listening on topics on the blog.
- As a digital portfolio.
- To develop digital literacies.
- To extend teaching / learning outside of the classroom and instil reading and writing habits.
- As an alternative to traditional assessment tasks.
- To share resources and lesson plans / ideas.
- To motivate pupils.

3.12 How long have you been using blogs at school? Please tick one.

- 0-3 years. 4-6 years. Over 6 years.

3.13 From 1 to 7, please rank the following statements in order of importance, with 1 being the most important and 7 the least important. Blogging ...

- Facilitates the introduction of teaching topics such as diversity, multiculturalism, plurilingualism.
- Improves your technology skills for teaching.
- Enhances your own reading and writing proficiency.
- Promotes your ability to teach cross-curricular and 21st Century Skills such as team work, creativity, critical thinking.
- Helps to vary the way you evaluate your pupils and your assessment practices.
- Deepens the knowledge about your pupils.
- Brings you and your pupils closer.

3.14 How do you think blogging has impacted on your pupils? Please rate its importance, from 1 to 10, being 1 the most important and 10 the least important.

- By reading and writing more, pupils' writing has improved (longer sentences and texts, fewer misspelt words).
- It has offered other opportunities for pupils to express themselves at their own pace and about topics of their own interest.
- They have become more autonomous and responsible.
- Blogging has improved their technology skills (such as in research, safety, copyright).
- It has improved their 21st Century Skills – Collaboration, Communication, Creativity and Critical Thinking.
- Blogging has opened their minds to other cultural and linguistic realities.
- It has helped to prepare them for the ever-changing world of work.
- It has contributed to their academic and personal growth.
- Pupils are more motivated to learn English.
- They have benefited from team building through class blogging.

----- Now again to be answered by all respondents

3.15 From 1 to 8 order the importance of the reasons why, in your opinion, there aren't more class blogs (1 being the most important / 8 the least important):

- Too time consuming.
- Teachers have too much to do at school, including paperwork.
- Many teachers lack the confidence to create and manage blogs.
- There is no tech support at school nor the tech means to support teachers' efforts.
- Teachers lack the training in ICT.
- Classes are large and teachers may have classroom management difficulties if they allow pupils to blog.

Pupils' reading and writing habits are changing; teachers are sceptical about investing time and effort in blogs.

Many schools don't have good internet connections to allow teachers to use tech tools / platforms for teaching / learning, much less for blogging.

3.16 Are you a user of social media and networks? Please tick all that apply. Are you on...

Facebook?

Twitter?

Instagram?

I am not on social media or networks.

Other.

4. Teaching English in Portugal.

4.1 How strongly do you agree or disagree with each of the following statements about the education system in Portugal and schools?

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
	1	2	3	4	5
-Teachers have (enough) time to implement innovative practices in their classes.					
-The curriculum includes competences which are best developed through the use of technology.					
-School assessment regulations make it easy to assess other competences, such as critical thinking.					
-Classes haven't got more than 18-20 pupils and classrooms are well equipped allowing a variety of approaches using ICT.					
-There is enough training on the pedagogical use of ICTs.					
-If you so wished, you could change your classroom practices anytime.					

5. Your Input

5.1 Please suggest ways that teachers can boost pupils' interest and participation in blogs.

**5.2 Could you please suggest alternatives to blogs that teachers would be able to use in the classroom?
Please explain your choice(s).**

In order to raise awareness of the use of blogs in the ELT community in Portugal, one of our goals is to speak to English language teachers working in Portugal. We aim to carry out interviews with a small number of teachers who could help us make a positive contribution to this area of ICT. If you are willing to participate in a short Skype interview, please leave your email address. Thank you very much!

Thank you for participating.