

EFL Students' Experiences with Blog-Integrated Writing Instruction

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Abstract

With the advent of the Internet, various tools (e.g. wikis, discussion forums, blogs) have been redefining the way we teach writing. Among internet based applications, blogging especially attracts attention with its user-friendly and open-to-anyone nature, hyperlinked post structure and options for comment and reply that foster interaction. As it is directly related to writing, blogging has currently been regarded as a natural tool for writing instruction. [1].

Describing a blog-integrated writing course, this paper presents the results of a study on students' perceptions towards blog use as a means of writing. 27 intermediate level university students were instructed according to the principles of process approach and they were required to carry on stages of writing process (drafting, revising etc ...) through blog software. The study lasted for 16 weeks and at the end of the course, the students were given a Post Instruction Perception Questionnaire divided into four categories: student perceptions towards effect of a) blog use on overall writing performance; b) blog use on the components of writing; c) blog use on the feedback and revision; d) effect of blogging on interest, motivation and technology use.

The results showed that the students had a positive perception of blog use in their writing course and they believed that carrying on the writing activities through blog software especially contributed to the improvement of the content and organization of their writings.

1. Introduction

Technology integration into the field of language teaching is a common practice which has taken a new trend with the advent of internet and concomitant development of various tools. Advances especially in Web 2.0 tools which facilitate knowledge sharing and active participation of each user [2, 3, 4] have brought about many advantages such as motivating students intrinsically, providing them with authentic materials and allowing them to communicate with real audiences [5, 6].

One Web 2.0 tool that has captured language teachers' attention in recent years is blog pages. In its general sense, a blog is an easily created and updated webpage for personal publishing without any knowledge of HTML. Though the definitions vary, the highlighted features of blogging are reverse chronological order of posts, easy-to-use hyperlinked post structure [7], open-to-anyone nature and comment option that fosters feedback and interaction [8]. From an educational perspective, blogging with these features have the potential to support student interactivity, enhance learner engagement and provide an environment for collaboration and knowledge creation [9].

Potentials of blogging in language education have been tested in a great number of studies, focuses of which range from blogging in independent learning [10], blogs for reading comprehension [11] to blogging as a source of cultural input [12]. However, the most noteworthy language skill to which blogging is prevalently introduced is writing. Even, blogging is regarded as a natural tool for writing instruction [1] and as research has shown; it fits very well to the principles of process approach to teaching writing [13].

However, relevant literature implies the need for additional research on the use of blogs as a pedagogically sound practice [14]. Focusing on students' perceptions about blog integrated instruction could provide valuable information on further points to be considered while making use of blogs in writing instruction [9]. To this end, this paper describes a study on the integration of blogs into the writing instruction in an EFL context with a focus on students' perceptions towards the effect of blog use as a means of writing.

2. The Study

This study was implemented at a Turkish university in a writing course which followed the principles of the process approach. Drawn according to the convenient sampling procedures, participants (n=27) were undergraduate EFL students, whose age range is between 18-21.

Blog use improved writing performance	-	-	2	7.4	4	14.8	15	55.6	6	22.2	.83	3.93
Blog use negatively affected writing performance	15	55.6	7	25.9	4	14.8	1	3.3	-	-	.88	1.67
Blog use caused writing carefully	-	-	2	7.4	4	14.8	12	44.4	9	33.3	.90	4.04

As obvious from the table, the students had a favourable perception towards the effect of blogging on their writing performances. 78 % of the participants agreed that their writing skills improved because of blog use ($x= 3.93$). The fact that a great majority of students (above 80 %) stated a strong disagreement ($x=1.67$) with regard to negative effects of blogging verified their positive attitudes towards blog use for their writing skills. The analysis also demonstrated an important finding with regard to blogging; that is, students anticipated the online audience as claimed in the literature [18]. Since they felt the possibility of being read by anyone, 78 % of the students paid much more attention to their writing ($x= 4.04$). This means that through blogging, an awareness of audience could be developed in the students, which seems to be difficult to realize in a school setting. This awareness of audience seems to have influenced the content of the students' writing as their responses to the statements with regard to the writing components were mostly positive. The highest mean for this category was observed under the title of vocabulary. The students also expressed that organization ($x= 4.22$) and language use ($x= 4.04$) in their writing improved through blogging as shown in Table 2.

Table 2. Effect of blog use on writing components

	StronglyDisagree		Disagree		No idea		Agree		Strongly agree		SD	X
	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%		
Effect of Blogging on the Components of Writing												
Effect on content	-	-	4	14.8	4	14.8	13	48.1	6	22.2	97	3.78
Effect on vocabulary	-	-	-	-	3	11.1	14	51.9	10	37.0	66	4.26
Effect on language use	-	-	-	-	5	18.5	16	53.3	6	22.2	65	4.04
Effect on organization	-	-	-	-	2	7.4	17	63.0	8	29.6	58	4.22

Since the blogging activities were blended with process oriented writing instruction during the treatment, the students were asked to give their opinions about blogs in connection with feedback and revision as the indispensable parts of process approach. Table 3 shows the results.

Table 3. Effect of blog use on feedback and revision

	StronglyDisagree		Disagree		No idea		Agree		Stronglyagree		X
	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%	
Blogging in Process Oriented Writing Instruction											
Weblog use facilitates reviewing peers' writings	-	-	-	-	3	11.1	11	40.7	13	48.1	4.37
Weblog use facilitates revision and editing	-	-	2	7.4	3	11.1	9	33.3	13	48.1	4.22
Giving feedback to peers through weblog is advantageous	-	-	2	7.4	8	29.6	15	55.6	2	7.4	3.63
Seeing the feedback to peers through weblog is advantageous	1	3.7	2	7.4	9	33.3	11	40.7	4	14.8	3.56
Getting feedback from peers is advantageous	2	7.4	2	7.4	7	25.9	11	40.7	5	18.5	3.56

As Table 3 indicates, the same favourable perception was observed for the role of blogging in the writing process. The highest mean was observed in the statement related to the place of blogs in reviewing the peers' writing ($x=4.37$). In addition, most of the students expressed that reviewing their peers' writing through blog pages contributed to their writing performance ($x= 3.63$). Providing students with the chance of seeing the feedback is another advantage that is realized by means of

blog pages, and the students stated that they benefited from this feature of blog ($x=3.56$). With regard to revising and editing their own writing, 81 % of the students stated a strong agreement that blogging was useful ($x=4.22$). Additionally, they reported blogs to be beneficial in getting feedback from their peers ($x=3.56$).

Finally, the students expressed their opinion on motivation and technology related statements in the questionnaire to inquire further about students' blog experiences. Table 4 displays the results.

Table 4. Students' overall experiences of blog use

	Stronglydisagree		Disagree		No idea		Agree		Strongly agree		X
	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%	
Maintaining a blog motivated me towards writing course	1	3.7	4	14.8	4	14.8	6	22.2	12	44.4	3.89
I enjoyed blogging on the net.	2	7.4	4	14.8	3	11.1	10	37.0	8	29.6	3.67
I prefer only in-class writing instruction to the blog supported writing instruction	9	33.3	11	40.7	3	11.1	1	3.7	3	11.1	2.19
Publishing on the net through my blog was not motivating	11	40.7	8	29.6	3	11.1	5	18.5	-	-	2.07
I would like to use weblogs in my future learning.	1	3.7	3	11.1	10	37.0	5	18.5	8	29.6	3.59
I frequently experienced technical problems while using weblog.	5	18.5	5	18.5	4	14.8	10	37.0	3	11.1	3.04
I felt nervous maintaining my blog on the net.	4	14.8	11	40.7	8	29.6	-	-	4	14.8	2.59
I disliked sharing my writing with someone other than the teacher	16	59.3	6	22.2	3	11.1	2	7.4	-	-	1,67

A significant percentage of students (67 %) responded that they found blogging motivating and they enjoyed blogging on the net ($x= 3.67$). While 46 % of the participants expressed their willingness towards using weblogs in future, almost half of them (37%) were unsure about it. With regard to their preference between blogging and in class writing instruction, they reported in favour of blogging ($x= 2.19$). Lastly, for statements concerning technical aspect of weblogs, students expressed uncertainty ($x=3.4$) and only a small portion of the students (15 %) reported feeling nervous while approximately 56 % of them did not report such a feeling.

4. Conclusion

The popularity of blog use as a pedagogical tool for language learning has grown increasingly since it promises positive outcomes as implied in this study. Students' favourable perceptions towards blog integration into the writing course suggest that blog pages could prove to be effective means for the delivery of writing instruction. They could be especially beneficial for the settings where course time is limited and where the teacher is the only audience for the students' writings as in the research setting. As reported by the participants of this study, the possibility of reaching wider audience realized through the blog pages could lead to carefully planned content and organization, which precipitates betterment in students' writing.

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