

## ROLE OF BLOGS IN ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHING AND LEARNING: AN INCLUSIVE TOOL FOR ESL LEARNERS

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### **ABSTRACT**

*A blog is a place for promoting open dialogue and encourage community building, where the bloggers and commenter's exchange opinions, ideas, and attitudes. It is basically a publication mechanism, like a journal where any instructional materials can be published so that the students and also teachers can make comments. Through blogs, teachers can publish articles and instruct students to complete the assignments and the teachers could identify the learning needs of students. Blogs are interactive homepages to engage students in online exchanges, thus expanding their language study and learning community beyond the physical classroom. Regular blogging also encourages more autonomous learning. When a student's audience includes his or her classmates, the teacher and potentially anyone with an internet connection, motivation to engage in meaningful written communication appears to increase. It can be an effective medium in terms of facilitating greater learner interaction and reflection on skills development.*

**KEYWORDS:** *Commenter's Exchange Opinions, Idea and Attitudes*

### **INTRODUCTION**

While the students develop their own blogs, teachers can observe and monitor the students' progress (e.g., students may directly or indirectly express their doubts in topics on blogs) Before exploring specific technologies that can support a teacher's evaluation process, it is imperative to consider how to effectively integrate technology into instruction. The first and most important principle of technology integration is that the focus should be on the outcome of the instruction, and not on the technology itself. The more teachers and learners get familiar with technologies, the more they can use and incorporate them with their teaching styles.

Blogs encourage active and reflective participation in learners' generation and knowledge sharing and that they provide a space for purposeful writing. Studies on the effects of blogging mainly focus on reading and writing skills and show that blogging enhances these skills. However, a fairly limited number of studies on the effects of blogging on speaking skills show that blogs are effective tools for developing conceptualization, brainstorming, articulation, and monitoring, evaluating, self-presentation and information exchange skills. Sun (2009), in a study that presents findings on using blogs as a platform for language learners' speaking skills, noted that blogging develops skills conceptualization, brainstorming, articulation, monitoring, evaluating, self-presentation and information exchange skills. Hsu et al. (2008) researched the use of audio blogs in English as a second language instruction and found that audio blogging improves learners' oral performances and allows individualized oral feedback.

While the extant research indicates that the use of blogs enhances reading processes, causes positive perceptions of reading, encourages classroom discussions, and develops literacy and critical thinking skills, there is little evidence to support that blogs positively affect learners' reading skills. In an empirical study on online writing in K–12 classrooms designed to explore the nature of literary responses as communicated via weblogs, it was found that students learn more about the thinking and reading processes and, consequently, increase their level of engagement (West, 2008). Blogs are effective for leading classroom discussions. As an example, Kahn (2007) noted that discussion-based instruction enhances learners' achievements in reading skills and that using blogs is an effective technique for leading classroom discussions as students increase their achievement level.

Reading opens up new vistas to become an influential writer, thinker, and problem solver. Of all the reading processes evolved so far, reading aloud with expression, is a fundamental reading skill, that the students' should be developing in lower grades. It can be easier to recognize when someone skillfully reads aloud in an expressive manner. However, to effectively teach or assess this skill, a closer examination of its features, development, and relationship to other reading skills is needed. Researchers have found strong links between oral reading prosody and general reading achievement. For example, after comparing students' reading prosody in first and second grades with their reading comprehension it was found to be high at the end of third grade. In this context, Tse et al. (2010) investigated the types of blogs used by students in a primary school in Hong Kong to assess the influence of blogging on standard tests of Chinese and English reading comprehension. They found little evidence to support that using the internet is related with high grades in either English or Chinese or with high scores on reading tests. The reading ability might be an important element to consider that lists the stages of the reading process. It's helpful for parents and teachers, to discuss the various steps that can be used during the reading process. Through blogs educators can positively influence reading and learning skills.

Research indicates that using blogs to enhance writing skills has considerable effects on EFL learners with respect to their writing performance, their ability to monitor writing, their perceptions towards writing, and participation in writing projects. It has been found out that blog-integrated writing instruction improved learners' writing performances. In addition to the aforementioned contributions of blogs to EFL learners' overall writing, the findings of the further research reports demonstrated that using blogs to promote writing skills has significant effects on developing rhetorical strategies, improving grammar, designing paragraphs and essays, revising written works, giving and receiving feedback and participating in peer reviews. Lee (2010) required students to blog as an assignment to develop language competence and concludes that blog entries positively affect writing fluency and accuracy, motivation and peer feedback while also increasing the use of the target language. Similarly, Boas (2011) found that blogging activities provide opportunities for learners to engage in the writing process, including pre-writing, drafting, and peer reviewing and revising.

A blog can be used as an important tool for networking and sharing tips or news with other teachers, dispersing information. Blogging became an effective way of teaching writing in English. A blog might be a more reliable tool as compared to the conventional way of teaching writing. Teaching writing using blog provides a form of interaction between the teacher and the students for both formal and informal learning setting. Blogging is a great way for aspiring authors and freelance writers to build up an online portfolio. By showcasing their writing skills on large platforms with expansive reach, freelancers can grow their exposure and sign new clients. The use of blogs has been found to facilitate academic writing. Experience of writing on blogs may improve knowledge of effective writing.

The cycle of blogging activities such as making blog posts, viewing other bloggers' posts, commenting and reflecting on them are beneficial in polishing the writing skills. In situations where they cannot relate to certain words, they have the choice to refer to online dictionaries and using the internet, they are able to keep the grammar in their writing intact. Blogging can offer opportunities for students to develop their communications skills through meaningful writing experiences. Such projects not only motivate students to write, but motivate them to write well. Furthermore, student-blogging projects can be designed to address the basic problems of writing skills.

The more one writes, the better one becomes at it. Most professional bloggers write on a regular basis and therefore analyse and proofread their writing constantly. Feedback from readers helps to become a better writer. However, being a good writer is not a prerequisite for a successful blog. Many very high profile bloggers are self-proclaimed terrible writers, and part of their success could be attributed to their message of "If I can do it, so can you". Results from the analysis done by various researchers positively suggested that the participants were quite familiar with blogging activities and have been doing so ever actively with varying length of words for each post. The participants were also found to be driven and motivated to write in order to meet the expectations of their target readers. This would greatly influence the rhetorical organization, content, and style of writing in their blogs. However, in terms of the time spent on reading others' blogs, it was clear that participants spent little amount of time to read online presumably due to the fact that they had been busy writing their own posts.

On the whole, blogging has been perceived to polish writing skills and develops skills to improve writing skills. Most of the users agreed to varying degrees that writing on blog had made them use academic writing style and register correctly, apart from training them to choose the correct sentence and paragraph structure, decide on their word choice and spelling cautiously, check on their grammar and revise their style of presenting their arguments in writing. Obviously, blogging was perceived as an effective tool in teaching writing in English which helped to improve and their writing and keep them motivated.

Blogging will help students to express themselves and to practice valuable computer, keyboarding, writing, spelling, and grammatical skills. Blogging is a community-based endeavour, and networking is one reason people engage in it. A blog can be utilized as a platform to showcase knowledge and expertise. Several studies concur that the use of a blog can positively enhance learning in the second language classrooms. Research has confirmed positive uses of the blog which include writing for an audience and peer review, the development of analytical skills of learners. Publishing blog posts that are accurate, timely, relevant, and informative will eventually get the attention of industry insiders and earns recognition as an authoritative source and thought-leader.

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