



Blogging: A Tool in Foreign Language Learning and Its Impact on Students' Learning Behavior

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Abstract- The traditional techniques of teaching and learning within the confined class room area has been utilized for centuries and made a powerful impact in the pedagogics but now the pursuit of learning has become innovative as Technology assisted learning (TAL) has altered the whole scenario of learning in the past few years. This new model of education will bring a revolution coupled with transformation of both the learning efficacy and behavior of the pupils. It will propagate active learning with more emphasis of students on knowledge synthesis, reflection, analysis and its applications rather than memorizing the knowledge. This philosophy of education and learning will aim on introducing multiple new computer or web based techniques to enhance the students' personal as well as professional skills.

Keywords: Language Learning, teaching, Technology assisted learning (TAL)

I. INTRODUCTION:

Among a number of user-friendly TAL techniques, Blogging is the most sophisticated one. Blog (web log) is a website that most closely resembles to a journal and is frequently being updated. It is quite easy to write a blog because it only requires a basic technical knowledge. As stated by Stanley (2005), Blogging is much similar to sending an email. The publications on a blog provide information about multiple subjects, posted in a chronological order, with comments and updates on a particular subject. Blogs have now become an interactive source of learning and it facilitates individuals to publish their writings on World Wide Web (www). It has entirely changed the face of interaction among people on internet and allowed people of every niche to display their learnings, creativity and opinions on a particular subject and they benefit the readers with broader context of content and timely updates.

Blogging is widely accepted by the pedagogical practices as it bestows language teaching as well as learning to both teachers and students. It has the ability to equip the reader with autonomous learning and reflection with the facility of worldwide interaction among blog audience outside the premises of a classroom. According to Bloch (2004), blogs provide both the reader and writer with an exceptional freedom in terms of expressing their ideas and arguments as compared to the participation in vicinity of classrooms. This technical form of foreign language learning will help the students worldwide to enhance and polish their skills in terms of reading and writing. It will promote the autonomous learning of students and provide them a platform with a global aspect of creative learning and skills.

In classrooms, students have an interface to write, mutually share their ideas and a coherence is developed among them to enhance the learning (Huffaker, 2005:94). Being a foreign language pedagogue at College of applied sciences, I prefer and enjoy penning down my thoughts in a summarized way in the form of an informative and structured blogs and I personally believe that students must have the reflective abilities as well as writing skills that will furnish them with exceptional acceptance and praise all over the world. Working with young students I perceive that the students of this age group experience a series of changes in their thoughts and life processes so they have a lot of content to be shared (preferably in the form of blogs) worldwide and I being the teacher highly appreciate this way of learning and communication among students. Like many professionals I also conceive that blogging can better improve the students' fluency in writing and grammatical aspects of language than conventional language teaching practices in the classroom.

Blogs can be a source to enhance the understanding, writing skills and motivation of students in language learning process but the head to head interplay should not be replaced. It will aid both instructor and student to grow personally and professionally and will act as a milestone in the process of transforming into a pro language learner. So, in this study I will focus on the use of blogs as an aid to the pupils in foreign language learning and increase their participation in the classroom activities. It will be discussed that how blogs help them achieve the qualities of analysis, brainstorming and vision about different perspectives of the language learning and also it will benefit the tutors to explore new ways of interaction with the pupils and inculcating the true skills and learning abilities in the students. This study will aim to find out how blogs can assist the teachers in finding innovative technical or computer assisted ideas for teaching purposes and to boost the motivation levels of them and their students.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW:

Blogs are associated with the second generation of Computer mediated communication tools and are perceived as online journal publication that is continuously being updated (Godwin-Jones, 2003). They are now considered as a distinct tool used to any form of writing, using inbuilt tools, with basic formatting that is easily understood by the unprofessional tech users. They have been present on web since decades however they have been recognized worldwide due to the diversity of their content and multipurpose functionality in different fields and professions. While addressing the characteristics of blog's content, it is stated that blogs usually confer information about diverse subjects in the form of a monologue (the author's post) or a dialogue (the comments on the original post of the author), also the author's discourse in the blog is a personal experience that reveals some aspects of author's identity (Wrede, 2003).

Many authors stress over the concerted aspects of the blogs because their content is being reflected and commented by the audience globally (Pointek, 2004), aid in the knowledge and learning construction as stated by the theory of constructivism (Vygotsky, 1978). The diverse features of blogs such as content synchronization and worldwide interlinked discussion tools make them perfect for both presenting and discussing knowledge to create a better learning space in the classroom (Lohnes, 2003). It is a potentially continuous and oriented activity, professionally handled by a tutor, to produce content on foreign language learning (Wrede, 2003). However, most important point is to note the classification of the blogs according to their technical utilities. Educational blogs are best tools to be consumed for the purpose of foreign language learning by the instructors and can play an essential role in boosting the learner's autonomy.

In the past few years, the focus on learner's autonomy and motivation in the foreign language learning has increased substantially (Benson, 2003). Learner's autonomy can be described in multiple diverse ways but originally it arises from the concept that learner (can be both student and instructor) consciously brings efforts to control his/her learning and most of the times it is coupled with the habits of initiation of learning, advancing towards learning goals and then reflecting the outcomes of learning (Benson, 2001; Holec, 1981). However, autonomy never means the isolation of learner rather the knowledge is socially constructed globally by absorbing the learning process. Social interactions promote the learner to develop reflecting abilities, analysis and generation of new information in diverse perspectives. This perspective is stated by authors as the ability of learner's critical reflection is a measure of "the capacity of internalization to participate fully and critically in social interactions" (Little, 1996). This internalization process adapts the learner to a habit of self-learning and actively contributing in the learning process (Dörnyei, 2005). Critical reflection of learner on blogs' content is essential in promoting learner autonomy and it should be viewed explicitly by the learner (Lamy and Hassan, 2003). Besides perceptual aspects of foreign language learning process, attitude of learner towards the blog learning and task completion is also an important feature. The significance of the blogs serving the purpose of foreign language learning depends upon its establishment, structure (content and subjectivity) and its maintenance by the responsible student or teacher who have the ability to think out of the box (Godwin-Jones, 2003). Therefore, the use of blogs in foreign language learning should take into account the factors like students' participation, their interest, mutual sharing of new perspectives and their analysis in order to stimulate the learner's autonomy and incite the social interaction skills (Dang, 2006; Lee, 2002; Levy & Stockwell, 2006).

Raised Awareness and Repositioning:

Typically a blog consists of features like content, media, images and links of other blogs and webpages related to its particular topic. They provide a collaborative platform where people of same interests can interact worldwide and exchange their perspectives about a particular subject. It is being valued now a days that teachers must support the learner's autonomy and enhance his/her motivation to participate in the learning process. As stated in the above section, using conventional teaching techniques exclusively in the classrooms are no more a better option to strengthen the student's skills and abilities because technology has undertaken the whole world in almost every field of life. There are several educational purposes of the blogs including the general ones and those which are particularly serving the purpose of foreign language learning. Administering blogs for the purpose of foreign language learning develops the students' proficiency in writing due to peer-reviewed tasks.

The blogs of some foreign language teachers are quite popular globally among students when it comes to the foreign language learning because it requires no particular technical skills to create, edit and update the blog content. The conducive nature of blogs let the students indulge in the activity of language learning and interaction. Not only teachers' blogs but also the tutors can instruct the students to create a blog which is equipped with teachers' tasks to them in a well-structured way in contemplation of their improved writing skills with the passage of time. Language instructors should make the students obvious that their blogs and content is not only serving the purpose of learning but also a platform of communication with others searching the same idea on internet.

Being a foreign language instructor I totally agree with the classification of blogs for educational purpose; three types of blogs can be utilized to make the foreign language learning an innovative and skillful task i.e. the tutor blog, the learner blog and the class blog (Campbell, 2003). This research and the review of the related literature has enhanced my knowledge and broadened my vision regarding the purpose of technology in language learning process particularly in terms of blogging. Being a reflective language instructor, I learned to share the content about a particular topic by blogging on it and by comments and feedback on one's blogs aid in expanding one's perception about a particular subject. In the light of the reviewed literature, I understand that the well-structured and maintained blogs with creative and thoughtful content can help the instructors to instil the true meaning of learning in the students and can assist in creating a healthy learning environment in class that can enhance the competences of both learner and the instructor.

The "Engagement theory" (Astin, 1993), implicates the student involvement in the academics. It states that the more successful students are highly engaged in the learning process and the participation level of a learner can be measured. I agree with Astin's views because now a days, students are more inclined towards the technological means of education. However, some of the literature context is still incomprehensible in terms of learning aspects of the blogging. It is obvious that blogging can be a source of learning but the management of blog and its content quality should not be ignored or compromised. Therefore, I must say that whoever is willing to use blogs as a source to enhance language skills must understand the organizing factors in order to make this source quite informative. So, it can be claimed that the process of learning can be made more engaging by designing the language courses using web based content as the students use both their mental and physical energies deeply while exploring the online content (in this case blogs are being discussed primarily).

Pedagogical Interventions:

As discoursed in the above sections of this article, blogging is said to be an emerging as well as effective source of teaching and learning in pedagogical practices. But there must be some tenets regarding the use of blogging in foreign language learning that should be strictly observed and followed by both the instructors and learners. The blogs used for this particular purpose must be adeptly intertwined with course contents to depict what is being taught to the students in the class as well as provides with the students' feedback and research. It is a bilateral relationship and can be build following these percepts (Kennedy, 2003; Ward, 2004):

- **Practical Demonstration:** Tutors should instruct the students on how to create and use a blog in foreign language learning. Students must be provided with a computer based practice by reflecting and commenting on a teacher's blog. It will give them confidence and a concept of global learning and analysis of the content along with development of writing and learning competences.
- **Creating Personal Blogs:** Most of the students now a days are much familiar with blogs but in case some students are not good at this, then teachers should help them in setting up their blogs and provide guidelines about creating and editing the content.
- **Tasks Management:** Teachers can assign the tasks that should demand the students to pen down their views and a critical analysis of the data available about that task. Students can also be asked to write down their opinion about a self-chosen subject.
- **Cooperation:** manage the assignments in a way that engage students and encourage them to read and respond to each other's topics.

Blogging can be a tool to better understand a foreign language but being a professional pedagogue dealing with young students, I reflect that it is not that much easy to take up a technology assisted technique in a conventional classroom setup. I perceive that there must be innovations in the field of education and learning. These innovations, in my perspective, demand an extra effort to make the pupils skillful and professionally competent but it is the responsibility of a brilliant and effective tutor to boost the motivation level of students, their creativity and empower them with the skills of critical analysis by making use of engaging techniques and activities. I personally suggest that all the theories and visions about learning and skills enhancement regarding a foreign language should consider the side factors like student's capabilities, their preference and compatibility with the proposed method of teaching i.e. either blogging or any other TAL method. I am a believer of the fact that there are no bad students, so the learning of students must be boosted by keeping their thought process in mind.

III. CONCLUSION:

Blogs serve multiple purposes in the foreign language learning by enhancing the reading, writing and reflective competencies in the students as well as teachers. There is no time and space limitation in this method of learning, rather learners tend to develop exceptional language awareness, autonomy and responsibility of planning and maintaining the content. This research has embarked me as a foreign language teacher with new ideas of personal and professional development by deploying the theories and literary research of others in the relevant field. No doubt that blogging can be utilized in foreign language learning process but there must be some principles to keep the things innovative regarding the use of blogs in learning, skills enhancement and competences. As it is impossible for us being humans to explore all the hidden facts about a particular subject in a given frame of time so in the same context there are some or may be many aspects about the use and limitations of educational blogs (for example, the difficulties in following the student's progress using technological means of teaching, establishing a systemized way to deal with all aspects of foreign language learning and learner's needs and interests) in a diversified way that have to be traversed in future researches. In short, teaching methods must be adjusted according to the learner's interest and some other factors like his/her age group and aims about learning.

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