

THE USE OF CLASSROOM BLOG IN LANGUAGE TEACHING TO SECONDARY SCHOOL STUDENTS



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ABSTRACT

The article investigates student interaction over a classroom blog between secondary school students who are learning English as a foreign language.

Keywords: *classroom blog, mobile group blog, second language learning, Web 2.0 technologies, interaction of teacher-to-learner, interaction of learner-to-learner*

INTRODUCTION

Although today the technology has become embedded in our everyday life, researchers and practitioners constantly strive to find ways of incorporating technology in education, with language learning being one of those fields [Garrett, 2009: 158]. Mobile technology offers learners free access to acquire linguistic phenomena not only in the present context but across contexts, retrieving and delivering information in everyday life. As Kukulska-Hulme noted: “Mobile learning promises to deliver closer integration of language learning with everyday communication needs and cultural experiences. Mobile devices may be used for learning at home, in a classroom, in a social space, on field trips, in museums and art galleries, in work contexts or as part of everyday learning [Kukulska-Hulme, 2006: 122].

DISCUSSION AND RESULTS)

From social-constructivist perspectives, language learning is regarded as the result of interactions between learners, teachers, and other sources of the target language in socio-educational contexts [Williams & Burden, 1997: 56]. Several studies found that mobile technology could improve the interaction of teacher-to-learner and learner-to-learner. However there is a significant gap between the way in which students engage with new media and ICTs in their daily lives and the way in which school practices rely mainly on print media.

Web 2.0 technologies (e.g., blogs, wikis, and social bookmarking) allow users to do more than just retrieve information with high levels of interactivity among people,

allowing them to contribute, create and modify content collaboratively, share results and discover new and related content through informal relationships with others [Low, 2006; Solomon & Schrum, 2007: 12]. Among those web 2.0 services, blogs are commonly used by individuals for social purposes, the media, and organisations [Thorne & Payne, 2005: 41].

Blogs are increasingly being used for educational purposes [Murray & Hourigan, 2008: 24]. Blogging within an educational setting implies targeting certain assignments or specific interactive exchange aspects [Lee, 2010: 49]. Although these emerging web based tools generally require low level technical skills, they call for elaborated writing skills. The blog as a writing environment requires a certain style of posting. Accordingly, the discursive quality of posts in blogs can be both of a private nature, where the person writes for personal reasons, as well as of a more social nature where there is an expectation of an audience being out there [Lantolf & Thorne, 2006:120].

Using social software such as a blog in a targeted way in language education allows for student engagement in a joint project. There are certain expectations from the students of what they are supposed to communicate in the blog. There is a clear connection between assignment descriptions and how the web based interaction is initiated by students in a blog. Therefore, it is possible to see that the students are concerned about following the instructions posted on the blog start page in their interaction, taking elements from the guidelines into account. Another aspect is the set form that blogging within an educational environment invites its users into. In the student postings, there are few deviations from the instructions given.

In educational purposes school teachers can design and develop a mobile group blog, by customising Wordpress 2.2 features, especially adding one plug-in for mobile devices. This web-based mobile application can be accessed from Internet-enabled mobile devices or PCs.

First, the teacher gives the students a writing task to be done after she explained the nature of web blog and let the students get familiar with the media. They are also asked to read through other people’s blog entries and to give their comments. It leads into self-directed learning, as they individually and socially constructed meanings to develop their intercultural knowledge and skills. Language learning is emphasised in these activities. The teacher observes their activities online and gives some advice, acting as a member of the group particularly at the beginning, by giving a few examples of blog entries as semi-scaffoldings to the bloggers. Sticking to the set blog

structure is something that the students generally do when contributing with content in their postings.

Moreover, the teacher can employ various kinds of ways in teaching writing using classroom blog. The activities are presented in the following table:

Types of activities	
.	Allowing students to post
.	Allowing students to reflect on the blog entries sent by their peers
.	Reflecting on the comments received
.	Assigning prompts
.	Remind students to preview their text before posting their entries

After the blogging finishes, learners can be asked to fulfill a questionnaire about their experiences of blogging and their comments and suggestions for improving this mobile group blog system.

	Questions	Answers		
		es	o	Comments
.	Is classroom blog fun?			
.	Is classroom blog simple and easy to use?			
.	I can get feedback from teacher and peers.			
.	Classroom blog makes me easier to discuss with friends and teacher outside the classroom.			
.	Classroom blog facilitate me to get more reference for my writing.			
.	Classroom blog gives me more motivation to write.			
.	Classroom blog feels like more real than the paper-based writing.			

The activities show indirectly the process of writing is created through the process of planning, drafting, revising, and editing. The teacher can allow the students to post their writing on the blog. It means that the students would go through the process of planning and drafting before they post their entries. The process of drafting based on prompts that the teacher gives is similar with the fourth activity which can be done by the teacher. Revising and editing process can be seen in the fifth strategy which is done by the teacher who reminds the students to preview their text before posting their entries.

The use of classroom blog in teaching writing enables the students to have their personal space to read and write in a community, they also find a room to share their ideas so that they could activate interaction with readers and create audiences and feedback for their writing.

It is also discovered that when the students do blogging, they indirectly create a sense of ownership in the blogging process which fosters the students to write more freely and interactively.

The classroom blog used in the writing session can be said a good source to increase the students' confidence in writing more than just paper based writing as they usually did. The confidence comes from the students' awareness of the existence of the real audience to read their posting.

Moreover, classroom blog is a motivating tool of learning where it could enhance the students' analytical and critical thinking skills. Their analytical and critical thinking skills are built from the teacher's instructions where they are assigned to give comment to each other, to at least five writings after they finished with their writing.

Thus, based on the data gained from the observations, interview, and document analysis, there are some difficulties found by the teachers who applied classroom blogs to their teaching process. Since laptop and modem or mobile phones are important tools to support the activity, the students who cannot bring the tools do not have an opportunity to participate in the activity. Also, when the students share their laptops or mobile phones to do the writing task, it ruins their time management to finish the task given by the teacher.

CONCLUSION

Also, Shao, Y. [2011: 144] argues that it would be more effective that learners in the home country can get immediate feedback and interactions with people in the

second-language cultural context, to answer questions and remove doubts in good time.

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