BLOGGING IN FOREIGN LANGUAGE EDUCATION

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Modern information and communication technology influences education fundamentally. Not only the environment in which learning takes place, but also learning theories and teaching methods have been revolutionized. Nowaday learning strategies involve global sourcing models across the fields of learning content, technology and support services. Thus, e-Learning 2.0 refers to teaching strategies inspired by Web 2.0 technologies. e-Learning 2.0 emphasizes social learning and the use of social software such as blogs, wikis, podcasts and virtual worlds. It focuses on collaboration and assumes that knowledge is socially constructed. Participants learn through conversations, interaction about problems, actions and teaching others.

The benefits of these technologies have been studied by different scholars (e.g., Downes, Dunlap, Richardson, Warlick, Baxter, Connolly, Stansfield etc.). Kieslinger,

Ebner, Wiesenhofer observed microblogs of scientists in e-learning. Banday, Wang and Vasquez presented various Web 2.0 tools for e-learning. Agerdal-Hjermin researched the use of a blog in corporate communication. Lee paid attention to reflective writing and interactive exchange through blogging in an advanced language course. The challenges facing the integration of ICT in teaching and learning activities have been explored by Mathevula and Uwizeyimana.

Special attention in researches is devoted to blogging that is increasingly popular in education (both in school and university) due to its ability to promote literacy, collaboration, and participation, remove barriers to writing and publishing online, facilitate critical feedback, by letting readers add comments, which could be from teachers, peers or a wider audience.

It differs substantially from traditionally assigned learning content, as it is much less formal. It is written from a personal point of view. Students' blog posts are often about something from their own range of interests, rather than on a course topic or assigned project. What is more important, that a network of interactions forms something similar to a social network.

There are a number of definitions of the term 'blog' that have been used in dictionaries and in various researches.

According to Webster's Dictionary a blog is 'a journal that is available on the web. The activity of updating a blog is "blogging" and someone who keeps a blog is a "blogger." Blogs are typically updated daily using software that allows people with little or no technical background to update and maintain the blog. Postings on a blog are almost always arranged in chronological order with the most recent additions featured most prominently' [6].

Blood defined a blog as 'a site or online journal published on the World Wide Web (WWW) for discussion or informational purposes in a reverse chronological order' [1].

Campbell suggested that a weblog (or 'blog') 'can be thought of as an online journal that an individual can continuously update with his or her own words, ideas, and thoughts through software that enables one to easily do so. Unlike a standard website, weblog entries are made by typing directly into the browser and with the click of a button are instantly published on the internet. All basic document formatting, like spacing, bold, italics, underline, and creating links, requires no knowledge of HTML or FTP (File Transfer Protocol), so that anyone who can type, copy, and paste can create and maintain a weblog" [3].

Moon and Lim defined weblogs 'as free, user-friendly websites that are easily created, maintained, and updated without any knowledge of HTML, offer

huge possibilities for innovative learning in classrooms, across disciplines and in various levels' [7].

Audin in 2014 introduced a new term to denote blogs used for educational purposes – 'edublogs' [2].

The pioneer of edu-blogging Will Richardson (author of the book *Blogs, Wikis, Podcasts and Other Powerful Web Tools for Classrooms*) used the blog software Manila to enable his English literature students to publish a readers guide to the book *The Secret Life of Bees*. Richardson asked the book's author, Sue Monk Kidd, if she would participate by answering questions and commenting on what the students had written – to which she agreed. As a result a special learning space was created.

Recent researches show that weblogs have become one of the best-received Web 2.0 technologies in foreign language education [7]. They possess some features that make them different from other information and communication technologies. Izquierdo and Reyes distinguished the following:

1) Relevance which is provided with the opportunity of blogs to allow teachers and learners to upload content relevant to their courses and promote student-teacher, student-student, and student-others interactions about the postings.

2) Accessibility. Weblogs are accessible to anyone who is interested in communicating with each other without attending face-to-face classes, for those who are short of time and have no opportunities to attend all the classes.

3) Interactivity. Webloggers can select other blogs through a list of given links, or users can subscribe to other blogs and look through their tasks and activities.

4) Interest. Weblogs give students equal opportunities to take part in all activities, which have the potential to enhance students' interest and motivation in learning foreign languages [5].

The positive attention from educators to blogging can be explained by its potentials to implement feedback principle; raise students' motivation of cognitive activity; create a favorable environment for individual training; promote students' autonomy; develop reading, listening, writing and speaking skills; form creative thinking.

A useful resource for teaching and learning possibilities of blogs is Edublogs (http://edublogs.org). It provides different uses for the teacher and the tools to create their own blogs for teaching: 1) post materials and resources by uploading, or copying and pasting the materials and allowing students to have instant access to them from home or school. What's more, the teacher can easily manage who gets to access them through password or plug in safety measures; 2) host online discussions as it provides simple forum functionality, i.e. students can respond to blog posts and

discuss different topics with the teacher managing and editing all responses through the blog's administrative panel; 3) have students as contributors, authors and even editors so as to produce class publications; 4) replace the usual newsletter by posting information, news, events, etc.; 5) ask students to blog and do it oneself but using one's own Edublog in order to glue student's blogs together; 6) share lesson plans as well as ideas, reflections and fears with colleagues in one's own country or a foreign country in order to make it a collaborative and genuinely productive experience; 7) improve one's teaching by including a wide range of multimedia tools such as video, slideshows, multimedia presentations.

A collection of the best ESL teacher blogs on the Internet is http://esl.about.com/od/esleflblogs. These sites provide insightful information, lesson plans, local cultural information on the countries they teach in, as well as reflections on teaching English as a second or foreign language.

The Readable Blog (http://www.readableblog.com) exists to help adult English language learners improve their English skills. All kinds of things: news articles, downloadable MP3s of English stories, tips for good writing, websites with grammar quizzes, and lots more can be posted there.

Marmara ELT Resources (http://www.marmaraelt.com) is the site that mainly deals with second language learning. It has many categories such as ELT resources, ELT tips, ELT classroom management, grammar and vocabulary teaching and so on.

ESL Library (http://blog.esllibrary.com) is a site full of lesson plans, flashcards, and discussions of ESL classrooms.

Fun to Teach ESL (http://esleld.blogspot.com) is the blog for ESL and ELD teachers, with lots of resources and a well curated Pinterest page.

Nowadays to create new blogs and blog posts by means of simple online forms most bloggers use either Google's popular Blogger service or WordPress. The writer does not need to know any programming or formatting.

Blogs are connected to each other to form what is commonly known as the 'blogosphere'. Blog authors may also post a list of blogs they frequently read; this list is known as a 'blogroll'. Blogs may also be read through special readers, known as 'RSS readers', which aggregate blog summaries produced by blog software. Readers use RSS readers to 'subscribe' to a blog. Popular web-based RSS readers include Google Reader and Bloglines.

In foreign language education using blogs students can present their work (e.g., presentations, instructional materials, podcasts, videos, design documents, and research reports); write opinion pieces and summaries of readings; build repositories of ideas and resources. Dunlap considered that public sharing and professional

contribution that occurs with blogging involves students in reflective activities such as goal setting, identifying valuable learning resources, self-evaluation, and collaboration that support the development of their self-directed learning skills and metacognitive awareness for lifelong learning [4].

Thus, due to interactivity, efficiency, multimedia implementation, availability and keeping large amounts of information blogging is a useful educational tool that can be used productively in foreign language education.

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