

The Use of Blogs in Learning English as a Foreign Language

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Within the context of English as a foreign language (EFL), using blogs has emerged as a language learning tool. However, how teachers effectively incorporate blogs within the confines of an instructional framework and what the current research shows about using blogs as a learning tool remain unsolved issues. Thus, the current paper presents a review of the research on the use of blogs in EFL learning contexts. The study first introduces blogs and a theoretical framework for the use of blogs within the borders of the constructivist approach. Then, in accordance with the studies reviewed, the research is divided into the following five sections: effects on (1) the awareness of the target culture, (2) interaction and communication, (3) basic language skills, (4) learners' motivation, perceptions and attitudes, and (5) autonomous learning. In conclusion, while the current literature reflects that using blogs is a valuable and effective technique that can be readily used in the context of EFL, more research is necessary. Finally, the paper ends with practical recommendations for EFL teachers and researchers.

Introduction

During recent years, using blogs has emerged as a language learning tool, and accordingly, this technique has come to constitute an important place within the context of EFL. On the other hand, there still remain unsolved issues as to how EFL teachers can effectively incorporate blogs into their teaching activities within their existing curricula and what the research shows about using blogs as an instructional strategy. Thus, the present paper reviews the current research on the use of blogs in EFL learning and presents practical recommendations for EFL teachers and researchers. However, before presenting a review of the studies on the effects of blogging on EFL learning, the term *blog* and some related concepts as well as the theoretical framework of blogging in accordance with the constructivist approach must be described and clarified.

A blog is a site or online journal published on the World Wide Web (WWW) for discussion or informational purposes in a reverse chronological order (Blood, 2000; Dyrud et al., 2005; Kajder & Bull, 2004). Blogs that interactively allow their visitors to leave comments and messages (Mutum & Wang, 2010) consist of web-based journals that are easily linked and cross-linked in online communities (Goodwin-Jones, 2003) or discrete entries or posts that are created by single individuals, small groups or multiple authors. Blogs are themed around

certain topics (Kajder & Bull, 2004), and they allow bloggers to create social relations with their readers (Gaudeul & Peroni, 2010), to use unrestricted time and place (Dyrud et al., 2005), and to give personal responses to articles (Jacobs, 2003). While most blogs are textual, a blog typically combines texts, images, videos and links to other blogs and focuses on specific areas such as art (artblogs), photographs (photoblogs), videos (videoblog or vblog), music (MP3blogs), audio (podcasts) or microblogs that feature very short posts. Blogs that are used as instructional resources or for educational purposes are referred to as edublogs. Though blogs are not directly intended for educational purposes and uses, they have drawn attention from EFL educators as they constitute a tool for creating journals without requiring any experience or knowledge about computer programming (Wu, 2006), and they serve as a learning tool with the context of learning a language learning (de Almeida Soares, 2008). As a final note, as of 17 November 2012, there are nearly 81 million Tumblr and 58 million WordPress blogs in existence worldwide.

The use of blogs in EFL learning is mainly supported by the constructivist approach, as their use underscores learner interactions (Kern, 2006), learner-centered and constructivist environments, social interactions, and active and social learning (Ferdig, 2007). Accordingly, the constructivist approach emphasizes the cognitive development of the learner to the extent that it is influenced by society and culture (Driscoll, 2005; Vygotsky, 1978). As blogging helps learners to construct knowledge, which refers to the process of constructing meaning from past experiences, it serves as a valuable tool for developing ideas collaboratively with peers and teachers (Jones & Brader-Araje, 2002). More specifically, with respect to EFL learning, learners can use their language knowledge in various situations, discuss their opinions with their peers, transfer their knowledge from one basic skill to another, and create a social learning environment that facilitates collaborative learning.

Research on the use of blogs in EFL learning

This section presents a review of the research, divided into five subsections, on the effects of the use of blogs in EFL learning. The first subsection reviews the studies on the effects of blogs on the awareness of the target culture, while the second one focuses on blog effects on interactions and communications in the target language. The third subsection presents the contributions of blogs to enhancing basic language skills, namely, listening, speaking, reading, and writing skills, and the fourth subsection presents the research results on the effects of the use of blogs on EFL learner motivation and the learners' perceptions of and attitudes towards the use of blogs. The last subsection focuses on the effects of blogging on autonomous learning, knowledge sharing knowledge, information exchange as well as on blogs as a learning space.

Awareness of the target culture

The use of blogs in language learning contributes to gaining cultural knowledge, provides opportunities to explore the target culture, and increases cultural awareness. Research shows that learners gain cultural knowledge via blogs (Hauck, 2007) and have opportunities to explore the target language and culture. For example, in a qualitative study, Lee (2009) reported the results of a telecollaborative project through which American and Spanish students created blogs for intercultural exchanges and, hence, suggested that the effective use of task-based instruction for interactive collaboration provides opportunities for exploring the target language and culture. In another example, Chapman (2008), who focused on tools such as message boards, comments, discussion lists, and blogs in BBC Learning

English, suggested that student-teacher centered blogging facilitates the exploration of language. With respect to enhancing the learner's awareness of the target culture, Lara and Lomicka (2008), based on their project in which learners participated as blog readers and writers as they examined learners' progress, reactions and self expressions, reported that the project enhanced creativity, allowed experimenting with language, facilitated expression, and increased awareness of the target culture. Similarly, Jauregi and Bañados (2008) conducted a study using interactive tools to internationalize academic literacy regarding the Spanish culture and language. They concluded that the project positively affected motivation and learning outcomes regarding language context and cultural issues. Blogs also provide access to popular culture. In this context, Pasfield-Neofitou (2011) examined the use of computer-mediated communication by Australian university students who learned Japanese as a second language. The results of the study indicated that the use of blogs presented opportunities for language acquisition, communication with native speakers and access to popular culture and authentic materials.

Accordingly, the current research demonstrates that the use of blogs enhances cultural interaction, competence, communication and exchanges. Lee's study (2012), which involved undergraduates who used blogs to develop their intercultural competence, found that blog tasks afford opportunities to reflect on cross-cultural issues and cultural exchanges with native informants. Similar findings were also reached by Hauck and Youngs (2008) as they reported on task design and learner interactions among native francophone students who participated in a masters' program in distance education at a university in synchronous and asynchronous online environments. They concluded that blogs are efficient in engaging learners in intercultural interactions. Regarding intercultural competence, Elola and Oskoz (2008) examined how intercultural competence is enhanced among Spanish and American students who used blogs as a mediating tool during a semester and found that blog interaction enhances both groups' intercultural competencies. Finally, Lee (2011) examined asynchronous computer-mediated communication among American undergraduate students via the use of blogs and face-to-face interactions with native speakers in terms of autonomous learning and found that blogs afford learners the opportunity for independent learning and are beneficial for reflecting upon cross-cultural issues.

Interaction and communication

Research shows that the use of blogs plays an important role in developing interactions among students and between teachers and students in the target language. As Thorne and Payne (2005) noted, writing environments such as blogs and wikis enhance interactions and communicative practices among learners. Furthermore, as Hsu' (2009) study confirmed, the use of blogs by pre-service EFL teachers not only increases their motivation, but it also enriches the discussions and interactions. Similarly, Miceli et al. (2010) shared the experience of integrating a class blog into an advanced Italian as a foreign language course and claimed that blogs played an important role in promoting interactions and developing class community. In addition, de Andrés Martínez (2012) discussed the design and management of an online learning space for a face-to-face undergraduate Spanish course using proprietary technology and suggests that blogs as learning spaces provide opportunities to complement traditional face-to-face courses; to enhance learner confidence, maximize progress, creativity and participation; to create a platform to discuss learner strategies; and to facilitate collaborative and social interactions. Finally, Trajtemberg and Yiakoumetti (2011) identified the interaction strategies among undergraduate EFL students regarding teacher- and

student-initiated interactions and find that the use of blogs promotes self-expression, interaction, self-evaluation, and language progress.

According to some research reports, blogging provides opportunities for communication in the target language. In a study that examined the use of a blog in an intermediate level Spanish as a foreign language class and its influences on learning (Armstrong & Retterer, 2008), it was found that blogging is a way to communicate in a foreign language. From a wider perspective, Hung (2010) examined the implementation of a video blog project in an ESP course and concludes that video blogs help learners to organize and reflect on their learning products; they provide opportunities for professional development, peer learning, visual representation, self-evaluation, technical enhancement, and relief from time constraints; and finally, they facilitate real-time communication. Moreover, based on a case study (Stickler & Hampel, 2010) that focused on two learners who participated in an intensive online intermediate level German course that involved blogs for reflective learning, an online language course was determined to combine different approaches to learning and teaching such as using language communicatively and focusing on form and language practice. In the last reviewed study, Warschauer and Liaw (2011) stated that emerging technologies, such as wikis and blogs, provide flexible means for developing language and literacy skills through collaboration and communication.

Basic language skills

Studies on the effects of blogging mainly focus on reading and writing skills and show that blogging enhances these skills. However, very few studies have been conducted with respect to the effects of blogging on speaking skills. In a general sense, Rasmussen (2011) described an undergraduate German-language course that aimed to improve students' language and critical thinking skills and concluded that blogging as a web-based e-learning tool enhances learners' language skills. However, learning German in this study was notably in the context of learning a native language. In addition, after providing brief information about blogs and their current uses, Ducate and Lomicka (2005) suggested some ideas such as writing weekly summaries, recording vocabulary, exploring hyperlinks, reading journals, describing pictures, exchanging blog addresses and posting on cultural topics as ways to improve reading and writing skills. Ducate and Lomicka (2008) subsequently reported on a year-long project in which students participated as blog readers and writers and found that blogging fosters ownership and creativity, allows learners to experiment with language, facilitates expression in a relaxed environment, and creates awareness of the target culture. Below, studies that focus on the effects of blogging on speaking, reading and writing skills are reviewed.

Speaking skills

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, monitoring, evaluating, self-presentation and information exchange skills; however, these studies show that blogging has no effects on improving learners' fluency, accuracy, pronunciation, or language complexity. First, 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. Next, Sun (2012) examined the effectiveness of an extensive speaking activity on speaking performance and how learners perceived gains in the activity

via voice blogs. The author, on the one hand, suggested that learners perceive gains in their speaking proficiency. On the other hand, the author emphasizes that no significant improvement was found regarding learners' pronunciation, language complexity, fluency or accuracy. Moreover, Sindoni (2009) analyzed the rationale for the creation of multimedia texts in the EFL context and suggests that podcasts promote a learning experience and encourage peer learning. Last, Hsu et al. (2008) researched the use of audioblogs in English as a second language instruction and found that audioblogging improves learners' oral performances and allows individualized oral feedback.

Reading skills

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. To begin with, 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). In terms of perceptions, de Izquierdo and Reyes (2009) explored the effectiveness of blogs with respect to reading activity in a freshman EFL reading program at a university and find that blogs are very well perceived by most of the participants and that they are used effectively when compared to other new ways of learning in the traditional classroom. 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.

The current research indicates that blogging enhances literacy and critical thinking skills. Witte (2007), for instance, in a project entitled the Talkback Project, used blogs as an online discussion environment to involve eighth-grade students, parents and pre-service teachers and claimed that classroom blogging creates opportunities for learners to strengthen their digital fluency and their traditional literacy skills. Moreover, Gebhard et al. (2011) analyzed how a teacher uses systemic functional linguistics to design a blog-mediated writing curriculum to enhance second-grade EFL learners' literacy development and conclude that writing practices afford the learners an expanded audience and increased literacy activities. Furthermore, Johnson (2010), who explored the motivation for and content of young adult learners' use of blogs for learning English language arts and literacy skills, find that blogging is beneficial way for students to use the course content information to enhance critical thinking and reading skills. In addition, it was determined that when learners collaborate, it deepens the learning experience and allows them to create and design their own online contributions. In terms of literature, Melin and Laun (2007) suggested that literary skills can be enhanced through the systematic integration of recent literature, blogs and multi-media materials. Similarly, Colwell et al. (2012) reported on a project focusing on pre-service teachers' perceptions and reactions when responding to children's and young adult literature using a Ning blog. They stated that the project facilitated literature responses in a teacher education course, while Webb (2007) claimed that using blogs for the teaching of poetry and commentary enhances learners' critical thinking skills.

There exists little evidence regarding the effects of blogs on reading tests. 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, too, find 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. In a qualitative study, Yang (2011) explored university students' interpretations of shared space contributions to their multilateral exchange experience in a blogging context and report that the effectiveness and success of the multilateral English blogging project is relative to the course content being studied.

Writing skills

Studies that focus on using blogs to improve writing skills show that blogs can be easily integrated into a virtual EFL writing environment (Murray & Hourigan, 2008). For instance, Palombo's (2011), exploratory and design-based descriptive study revealed that sixth grade students' blog experiences facilitated their writing process and improved their written products. Research also demonstrates that integrating blogs into portfolios or e-portfolios contributes to more effective writing, as noted by Klages and Clark (2009) in their study that integrates e-portfolios and blogs, whereas Godwin-Jones (2008) stated that using portfolios as a tool for practicing language skills has the ability to link to blogs.

The 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 attitudes towards and perceptions of writing, and their interactions and participation in writing projects. For example, Arslan and Şahin-Kızıl (2010) conducted a quasi-experimental study to examine the effects of blog-centered writing on intermediate learners' performance and found that blog-integrated writing instruction improved learners' writing performances. Similarly, Sun (2010a) compared learners' writing performance to determine the effects of extensive writing on writing abilities and conclude that blogs enhance overall writing performance, promote autonomous writing, and result in positive attitudes towards EFL writing.

Regarding motivation and attitudes, Lou, Wu, Shih, and Tseng (2010), in a study conducted in a vocational high school in Taiwan, investigated the effects of integrating blogging into their curriculum on students' compositions that were written in Chinese. The results of the study suggest that the use of blogs enhances motivation, improves compositional writing skills, results in positive attitudes towards blogging in Chinese language composition, and facilitates interactions between teachers and students. Rivens Mompean (2010) measured the pedagogical value added of such a blog for the development of written expression for the potential to transform blogging potential into a real activity for younger EFL learners. The results of their study demonstrated that the project was successful in improving motivation, participation and interaction in the writing process. Finally, Miyazoe and Anderson (2010) examined the effectiveness of forums, blogs, and wikis and conclude that students have positive perceptions of online writing.

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. With respect to grammar, Castañeda (2011) examined the differences in levels of achievement regarding the preterite and imperfect aspects in the Spanish language between students who enrolled in video and photo blogs. The results of the study indicate that the students perform better when blogs are used as a learning strategy compared to the use of traditional technologies. In addition, Bloch (2007) examined the use of blogs in a second language writing course that focused on the controversies surrounding

plagiarism and found that blogging improves the development of rhetorical strategies. In the same study, however, it is noted that there is less evidence of students demonstrating grammatical control.

Research shows that blogging enhances expository, narrative, persuasive and argumentative writing. For instance, Thorne and Reinhardt (2008) examined student-selected or -created digital vernacular texts originating in blogs and noted that blogs enable traditional forms of expository and narrative prose. In addition, as Godwin-Jones (2006) claimed, blogs encourage feedback and the articulation of ideas and opinions, offer opportunities for collaborative projects and debates, and lead learners to engage in developing skills of persuasion and argumentation. Furthermore, the use of blogs to enhance writing skills facilitates the revision of written materials, the giving and receiving of feedback, and the participation in peer-review activities. In a case study regarding the training effects of peer review on peer comments, on revision quality, and on learners' perceptions of composing in weblogs as part of an EFL writing class, Liou and Peng (2009) found that freshmen make more revision-oriented peer comments and are more successful in revising their own compositions. Liou and Peng (2009) also stated that blogs constitute a suitable platform for providing opportunities for learners to interact in an EFL writing course. In another study, 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, peer reviewing and revising. Moreover, in an experimental study, Ciftci and Kocoglu (2012) examined the effects of online peer feedback via blogs on Turkish EFL students' writing performance and perceptions. They suggest that students who used blogs for peer feedback demonstrate increased performance in their revised drafts. Similarly, Dippold (2009) examined the extent to which blogs can facilitate peer feedback in an advanced level German class and finds that blogs can be used effectively for peer feedback.

Finally, the use of blogs has been found to facilitate academic writing. Gallagher (2010), for example, noted that the use of blogs in composition classes increases learners' motivation to engage in academic writing. Shin (2009) explored the academic and social purposes of second-grade English language learners in an urban school with respect to their blog-oriented academic writing practices and the interrelations with their goals. The results indicate that learners incorporate blogging with their academic and social goals by drawing on linguistic features. Moreover, Duff, Spangenberg, Carter and Miller (2010) reported on the results of a project called Grammar Gang Blog. This project shared knowledge about the function of grammar in academic writing at the university level and finds that the project contributed to global interactive community building among students, staff and their institution. Last, Sun and Chang (2012) examined the effects of interactive and collaborative features of blogs on EFL learners' academic writing knowledge and writer identity. They claim that blogs encourage active and reflective participation in learners' generation and knowledge sharing and that they provide a space for purposeful writing.

Motivation, perceptions, and attitudes

From a broader perspective, research shows that the blogging context is a factor that affects bloggers' affective states. For example, Subrahmanyam et al. (2009) examined the connection between adolescents' communications within blogs and their developmental processes, finding that adolescents who use blogs reflect off-line themes in their blogs.

Accordingly, they suggest that the learners' online and off-line contents are interrelated in a psychological context.

The research indicates that the use of blogs has considerable effects on learners' levels of motivation. For instance, Shih (2010) explored the effects of blended teaching, that is, online and face-to-face instruction, and used blogging as an instructional strategy in English for specific purpose (ESP) course. They found that the model enhances learners' satisfaction and motivation. Similarly, Istifci (2011), in a study that examined elementary school EFL learners' opinions regarding weblogs as a distance education tool finds that weblogs enhance motivation. Finally, Stevens et al. (2008) reported the findings of an online project that involved key elements that are essential to collaboration in Web 2.0. They note that participating teachers from several different countries believed blogging enhances motivation.

Blogging also positively affects the perceptions of and attitudes towards EFL learning. In terms of perceptions of language learning, Wu and Wu (2011) noted that university students' perceptions regarding the use of blogs in EFL learning were positive. Similarly, Peters et al. (2009) examined five French language learners' attitudes towards and perceptions of technological activities in the language classroom and note that traditional types of computer-assisted activities, such as listening, grammar, and vocabulary exercises, are more appreciated when compared to newer types of activities, such as blogs and WebQuests. However, in a study that provided data about pre-service EFL teachers' experiences using a blog as a platform to comment on peer's performance in the classroom, Ozkan (2011) stated that learners offered both positive and negative views with respect to blogging. Regarding attitudes towards language learning, Sun (2010b) examined the possibilities and challenges of integrating blogs into teacher training programs. After administering a blogging project to twelve students seeking a Master's degree, the author found that blogging encourages active engagement in knowledge sharing. The results of the study emphasized that blogging causes positive attitudes about student-teachers professional development. Additionally, Al-Fadda and Al-Yahya (2010) reported on graduate students' experiments with blogs and demonstrate positive attitudes towards the use of blogs during pre-class preparation and post-class reflections.

Autonomous learning and learning space

This study has also focused on the use of blogs as an environment for autonomous learning and knowledge and information sharing as well as a learning space. Petersen et al. (2008) reported on their experience regarding a course in which learners were encouraged to travel to the target country. For this purpose, they introduced a mobile community blog to share knowledge, and they suggest that while a blog is not functional for connectedness, it is an ideal tool for knowledge sharing. In a paper that discussed the validity of the incorporation of online communication in an advanced-level Japanese as a foreign language classroom, Doerr and Sato (2011) concluded that there are different kinds of spaces created in blogs such as a language education environment where native speakers dominate non-native speakers and a place for the exchange of information. Regarding learning space, Absalom and De Saint Léger (2011) compared an online blog and a traditional pen-and-paper learning journal with respect to reflective tasks for enhancing learning and find that reflective tasks within blogs facilitate working habits and offer a space for the use of language. Moreover, Comas-Quinn et al. (2009) discussed the pedagogical challenges related to mobile blogs as language learning tools and claim that blogging provides a supportive environment for learners to engage creatively and to concentrate on their interests. Within the context of reflection, Yang (2009)

explored blogs as a reflective platform in EFL teacher training processes and found that the use of blogs creates a medium to provide critical reflection for teachers. In addition, Hajizadeh (2011) researched the potential for a blog to be a medium for reflecting on language learning among university students and suggests that blogs can be an effective tool for encouraging students to reflect on their learning. Last, Chen (2011) examined the reflective practices of integrating informational technology into the English curriculum of an EFL teacher and found that the college blog promotes autonomous learning, while Sykes et al. (2008) explored Web 2.0 technologies and social bookmarking in relation to collaborative content building and dissemination of information and stated that blogs are a medium that provides individualized self-expression.

Conclusions and recommendations

From this review of studies on the use of blogs in EFL learning, several conclusions can be drawn. First, blogging as a language learning strategy makes significant contributions to enhancing learners' cultural knowledge and cultural awareness about the target society. In addition, the use of blogs enhances learners' cultural interactions, competencies and exchanges. Second, blogging plays an important role in developing learners' interactions and communications in the target language. Third, blogs are effective tools for developing speaking, reading and writing skills. However, with respect to speaking skills, while blogs are effective for developing skills related to conceptualization, brainstorming, articulation, monitoring, evaluating, self-presentation and information exchange, they have no effect on fluency, accuracy, language complexity, or pronunciation. Furthermore, the research indicates that the use of blogs enhances reading processes, results in positive perceptions of reading, encourages classroom discussions, and develops literacy and critical thinking skills. However, the use of blogs has little effect on learners' reading test results. Blogging positively affects learners' writing performance, their ability to monitor writing, their attitudes towards and perceptions of writing, and their interactions and participation in writing. More specifically, blogs are effective for developing rhetorical strategies, improving grammar skills, designing paragraphs and essays, revising written works, giving and receiving feedback and participating in peer review activities. The use of blogs also facilitates academic writing and enhances the sharing and exchanging of knowledge, provides a learning space for learners' to interact, allows for reflection on learning, develops autonomous learning, and improves self-expression. The use of blogs has also been found to considerably enhance learners' motivation, to affect positively students' perceptions of learning, and to result in positive attitudes towards learning. However, one study found that students have both negative and positive views regarding blogging. Finally, blogs have been found to enhance autonomous learning and knowledge and information sharing while also serving as a learning space for ELF learners.

This paper offers several recommendations regarding the use blogs for language learning. First, teachers can initiate using blogs to increase cultural awareness, interactions, competencies and knowledge of their students. In this sense, as Lee (2011) claims, effective metacognitive and cognitive skills, well-designed tasks, and accessibility to the Internet are the main elements necessary to maximize the use of blogs for autonomous learning and intercultural communications. Second, foreign language teachers should also be aware of the role of blogging in interactions and communications in the target language, as Kim (2011) suggests that blogs can enhance students' communication contexts. For this reason, as Larson et al. (2009) claim, learners spend much of their educational journeys using pen and paper in the classroom while also being exposed to information and communication technologies such

as blogs and wikis. However, it is also obvious that pre- and in-service teacher training programs should include certain elements regarding how to use blogs as a tool to promote interactions and communications among students and between students and teachers, as suggested by Dippold (2009) who asserts that it is necessary to train teachers and students in the use of interactive online tools. In a narrower scope, as Miceli et al. (2010) suggest, teachers must be trained regarding the need to integrate blogs into their course content and structure and regarding their role in moderating blog interaction. Third, teachers should organize activities to develop EFL learners' speaking, reading and writing skills. Accordingly, teachers should use blogs to develop learners' speaking skills with respect to conceptualizing, brainstorming, articulating, monitoring, evaluating, self-presenting as well as in their ability to effectively exchange information. However, as the research results show that blogs have no effects on improving learners' pronunciation, language complexity, fluency or accuracy, teachers should concentrate more on listening skills by using video, music and audioblogs to provide comprehensible input. Moreover, as Hourigan and Murray (2010) state, the use of blogs in the context of second and foreign language learning addresses some of the factors that should be considered by teachers such as skills related to integration, reflection and interpretation. In addition, they should introduce reading activities to develop learners' literacy and critical thinking skills. However, it is recommended that teachers avoid blogs to test EFL learners' reading skills because there is little evidence to support the effect of blogs on reading tests. Next, teachers should require that learners use blogs as a writing tool to develop their rhetorical strategies and grammar. They should use blogging to enhance paragraphing and essay design and to improve learners' skills in revising their writing, in giving and receiving feedback, in participating in peer review activities and in improving their academic writing skills. In this sense, blog-based portfolios and online writing projects are ideal tools that to use for writing instruction, as Schaffhauser (2009) states that online collaborative tools can help teachers and students to collaborate on projects. In other words, teachers can create groups and guide their students as they prepare their projects and portfolios. Fourth, language teachers should use blogs to increase their students' motivation level and enhance their perceptions of and attitudes toward foreign language learning as blogging provides students the opportunity to solve problems related to their affective states. Fifth, teachers should organize activities to enhance their students' sharing and exchanging of knowledge, their autonomous learning and self-expression, and their use of blogs as a learning space. In conclusion, as Levy and Kennedy (2010) emphasize, foreign language teachers should revise and extend materials related to blogging while considering the current and recent technological developments. As a final point, as the utilization of blogs in the language classroom depends on the teacher's efforts (Arena, 2008), teachers should be trained on how to channel and integrate blogging into their instructional practices.

Although Wang and Vazquez (2012) state that blogs have been one of the most studied Web 2.0 tools, Warschauer and Liaw (2010) emphasize that research on various emerging technologies is insufficient. As Teclehaimanot and Hickman (2011) state, a comprehensive understanding of how these technologies can best be utilized in education is still lacking. In other words, given that blogging has significant effects on and makes important contributions to language learning, much more research regarding the use of blogs is warranted considering the tremendous growth and wide use of emerging technologies around the world (Aydin, 2012). Moreover, research should specifically focus on the various uses of blogs in the context of EFL learning as Hourigan and Murray (2010) suggest that applications of expression tools in language learning contexts require further investigation. To conclude, it is evident that research will make it possible to test the current hypotheses, to develop approaches and strategies to help EFL learners (Eberhardt, 2007), and to train teachers in

using blogs when teaching EFL.

Apart from these practical recommendations for teachers and researchers, the use of blogs in EFL learning can be evaluated from a constructivist perspective. It is evident that the results of the studies reviewed in this paper support the sociocultural theory, which emphasizes the importance of learner interaction (Kern, 2006). In other words, the use of blogs in EFL learning promotes not only social interaction and active and social learning but also knowledge construction within a learner-centered, constructivist environment, as posited by Ferdig (2007). In a socio-cultural framework, it is obvious that blogging constitutes a virtual environment for the cognitive development, which is influenced by society and culture, of EFL learners (Driscoll, 2005; Vygotsky, 1978). Most importantly, given that blogging contributes significantly to peer interaction in EFL learning, the research supports social construction as it allows for learning in both independent work scenarios and in peer and group work scenarios.

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