

## The role of Edublogs in next generation classes



**Masoud Hashemi , Islamic Azad University  
Toyserkan Branch  
Masoudhashemi38@yahoo.com  
167-2212  
Masoud Hashemi**

### Abstract

The advent of the Internet and the wide spread of technology in our life create new opportunities for language learning and teaching. The teachers of English gain access to the and enjoy enormous variety of authentic materials relating to all spheres of life at almost no cost. In non-English speaking countries, such as Iran, where it is not always easy to obtain realia, the Web is the invaluable source of information, both for teachers to create motivating classroom materials and for their classes to explore the whole world just by clicking the mouse. Research in the area of computer-mediated communication (CMC) has shown that using technology can provide students with a sense of empowerment and development of communicative abilities..During the last few years ,the number of teachers using Computer-assisted Language Learning (CALL) has increased markedly and numerous articles have been written about the role of technology in education in the 21st century. Modern teachers can use blogs(weblogs) as an educational tool to archive class handouts, posting assignments, facilitating discussions, and organizing their course content. This is due to the nature and importance of blogs as an effective tool for conversation amongst students and teachers. Blogs are tools that allow conversations, course delivery and student assessment. The use of tools such as blogs for the delivery of the course materials and the course information by the teacher as a supplementary material along with active student participation for communication and the online assessments helps the educators in achieving the desired learning goals. So , blogs are considered very effective and attractive tools in the process of teaching and learning. This article tries to highlight the capabilities of edublogs, types of blogs, features of blog and benefits of edit blogs.

**Key words:** blogs, edublogs , modern educational systems

### 1. Introduction

The appearance of the Internet and the wide spread of technology in our life create new opportunities for language learning and teaching. The teachers of English gain access to the and enjoy enormous variety of authentic materials relating to all spheres of life at almost no cost. In non-English speaking countries, such as Iran, where it is not always easy to obtain realia, the Web is the invaluable source of information, both for teachers to create motivating classroom materials and for their classes to explore the whole world just by clicking the mouse. Research in the area of computer-mediated communication (CMC) has shown that using technology can provide

students with a sense of empowerment and development of communicative abilities. When discussing the current state of the art with regard to the use of new technologies in the foreign language teaching and learning one issue tends to come up, CALL (Computer-Assisted-Language-Learning). During the last few years, the number of teachers using Computer-assisted Language Learning (CALL) has increased markedly and numerous articles have been written about the role of technology in education in the 21st century. Although the potential of the Internet for educational use has not been fully explored yet and colleges and schools still make limited use of computers, it is obvious that we have entered a new information age in which the links between technology and TEFL have already been established. In the early 90's education started being affected by the introduction of word processors in schools, colleges and universities. This mainly had to do with written assignments. The development of the Internet brought about a revolution in the teachers' perspective, as the teaching tools offered through the Internet were gradually becoming more reliable. Nowadays, the Internet is gaining immense popularity in foreign language teaching and more and more educators and learners are embracing it.

### **1.1 The History of CALL ( Computer-Assisted Language Learning)**

Computers and Internet have been used as an innovative tool in the hands of EFL teachers ever since the 1960's and have shown tremendous potential for foreign language learners as well. According to Warschauer & Healey (1998), this period can be divided into three main stages: behaviorist CALL, communicative CALL, and integrative CALL. Each stage corresponds to a certain level of technology and certain pedagogical theories.

#### **Behaviorist CALL**

In the 1960's and 1970's the first form of computer-assisted Language Learning featured repetitive language drills, the so-called drill-and-practice method. It was based on the behaviorist learning model and as such the computer was viewed as little more than a mechanical tutor that never grew tired. Behaviorist CALL was first designed and implemented in the era of the mainframe and the best-known tutorial system, PLATO, ran on its own special hardware. It was mainly used for extensive drills, explicit grammar instruction, and translation tests (Ahmad, et al., 1985).

#### **Communicative CALL**

Communicative CALL emerged in the 1970's and 1980's as a reaction to the behaviorist approach to language learning. Proponents of communicative CALL rejected behaviorist approaches at both the theoretical and pedagogical level. They stressed that CALL should focus more on using forms rather than on the forms themselves. Grammar should be taught implicitly and students should be encouraged to generate original utterances instead of manipulating prefabricated forms (Jones & Fortescue, 1987; Philips, 1987). This form of computer-based instruction corresponded to cognitive theories which recognized that learning was a creative process of discovery, expression, and development. The mainframe was replaced by personal computers that allowed greater possibilities for individual work. Popular CALL software in this era included text reconstruction programmers and simulations.

## **Integrative CALL**

The last stage of computer-assisted Language Learning is integrative CALL. Communicative CALL was criticized for using the computer in an ad hoc and disconnected fashion and using the computer made 'a greater contribution to marginal rather than central elements' of language learning (Kenning & Kenning, 1990: 90). Teachers have moved away from a cognitive view of communicative language teaching to a socio-cognitive view that emphasizes real language use in a meaningful, authentic context. Integrative CALL seeks both to integrate the various skills of language learning (listening, speaking, writing, and reading) and to integrate technology more fully into language teaching (Warschauer & Healey, 1998). To this end the multimedia-networked computer provides a range of informational, communicative, and publishing tools that are potentially available to every student.

### **1.2 Why Use CALL?**

Research and practice suggest that, appropriately implemented, network-based technology can contribute significantly to:

#### **Experiential Learning**

The World Wide Web makes it possible for students to tackle a huge amount of human experience. In such a way, they can learn by doing things themselves. They become the creators not just the receivers of knowledge. As the way information is presented is not linear, users develop thinking skills and choose what to explore.

#### **Motivation**

Computers are most popular among students either because they are associated with fun and games or because they are considered to be fashionable. Student motivation is therefore increased, especially whenever a variety of activities are offered, which make them feel more independent.

#### **Enhanced Student Achievement**

Network-based instruction can help pupils strengthen their linguistic skills by positively affecting their learning attitude and by helping them build self-instruction strategies and promote their self-confidence.

#### **Authentic Materials for Study**

All students can use various resources of authentic reading materials either at school or from their home. Those materials can be accessed 24 hours a day at a relatively low cost.

#### **Greater Interaction**

Random access to Web pages breaks the linear flow of instruction. By sending E-mail and joining newsgroups, EFL students can communicate with people they have never met. They can also interact with their own classmates. Furthermore, some Internet activities give students positive and negative feedback by automatically correcting their on-line exercises.

#### **Individualization**

Shy or inhibited students can be greatly benefited by individualized, student-centered collaborative learning. High fliers can also realize their full potential without preventing their peers from working at their own pace.

### **Independence from a Single Source of Information**

Although students can still use their books, they are given the chance to escape from canned knowledge and discover thousands of information sources. As a result, their education fulfils the need for interdisciplinary learning in a multicultural world.

### **Global Understanding**

A foreign language is studied in a cultural context. In a world where the use of the Internet becomes more and more widespread, an English Language teacher's duty is to facilitate students' access to the web and make them feel citizens of a global classroom, practicing communication on a global level.

## **1.3 The capabilities of CALL**

CALL ( Computer-Assisted-Language-Learning ) brings a lot of wide range on-line applications for use in the foreign language class. These include dictionaries and encyclopedias, links for teachers as well as students , chat-rooms, pronunciation tutors, grammar and vocabulary quizzes, games and puzzles, literary extracts. The World Wide Web (WWW) is a virtual library of information that can be accessed by any user around the clock. If someone wants to read or listen to the news, for example, there are a number of sources offering the latest news either printed or recorded. The most important newspapers and magazines in the world are available on-line and the same is the case with radio and TV channels.

Another example is communicating with electronic pen friends( pen-pals ), something that most students would enjoy. Teachers should explain how it all works and help students find their key-pals. Two EFL classes from different countries can arrange to send E-mail regularly to one another. This can be done quite easily thanks to the web sites providing lists of students looking for communication. It is also possible for two or more students to join a chat-room and talk on-line through E-mail. .

Another network-based EFL activity could be project writing. By working for a project a pupil can construct knowledge rather than only receive it. Students can work on their own, in groups of two or in larger teams, in order to write an assignment, the size of which may vary according to the objectives set by the instructor. A variety of sources can be used besides the Internet such as school libraries, encyclopedias, reference books etc. The Internet itself can provide a lot of food for thought. The final outcome of their research can be typed using a word processor. A word processor can be used in writing compositions, in preparing a class newsletter or in producing a school home page. In such a Web page students can publish their project work so that it can reach a wider audience. That makes them feel more responsible for the final product and consequently makes them work more laboriously.

The Internet and the rise of computer-mediated communication in particular have reshaped the uses of computers for language learning. The recent shift to global information-based economies means that students will need to learn how to deal with large amounts of information and have to be able to communicate across languages and cultures. At the same time, the role of the teacher has changed as well. Teachers are not the only source of information any more, but act as facilitators so that students can actively interpret and organize the information they are given, fitting it into prior knowledge (Dole, et al., 1991). Students have become active participants in learning

and are encouraged to be explorers and creators of language rather than passive recipients of it (Brown, 1991). Integrative CALL stresses these issues and additionally lets learners of a language communicate inexpensively with other learners or native speakers. As such, it combines information processing, communication, use of authentic language, and learner autonomy, all of which are of major importance in current language learning theories.

## **1.4 What are blogs ?**

Blogs are personal journals or diary written as a reversed chronological chain of text, images or multimedia, which can be viewed in a web page and are made publicly-accessible on the web. Blogs typically contain text in the form of a "blog post", offer the ability for readers to comment or provide feedback, contain archives to past blog posts, and link to other blogs and bloggers. Blogs are inherently different from personal home web pages. First, bloggers post entries through manual software, such as a web browser, or automatic software, which is downloaded off the Internet and used to instantly publish content to web. Therefore, bloggers do not need to understand HTML or other web programming languages to maintain their blogs. Second, the resulting blog page resembles a personal diary, with entries sorted by time and date, a much stricter format than personal web pages of the past.

### **1.4.1 What are Edublogs ?(Blogs + Education = Edublogs)**

Edublogs are . written by anyone with a vested interest in education and its outcomes. Edublogs can be written by teachers for the improving classroom instruction, by students to post their assessment tasks, and by policy makers who need to comment on education.

Educational blogs allow all students to partake in discussion on any topic. In accounting education, blogs facilitate ongoing discussion that may take place between an accountant and their client or vice versa. In accounting, a problem may be presented, analyzed, discussed and then a viable solution developed. Thus blogs become the facilitator of this discourse. An educational blog will help in developing knowledge, skills, and attitudes that will be used by the student throughout their professional and personal lives. In the past students have been required to write journals or diaries mat allowed them to reflect on their learning but online edublogs have extended this experience to allow for interactivity with their peers and external commentators too.

### **1.4.2 Functions Of Edublog**

#### **a) Edublog as a communication tool**

Educational blogs are used as a communication tool by educators, students, and education administrators to interact more effectively .These blogs offer an environment that extends learning outside the classroom domain and help the students to share their opinions, experiences and everything they want to share with other group members and their instructor. Besides, students and instructors can add their comments to contents of a blog which could be followed in a chronological order.

#### **b) Edublog as an Assessment Protocols**

As with education in any setting and delivered in any manner, assessment must follow appropriate protocols.

Before assessment processes and procedures are identified, the learning objectives and outcomes must be determined. There must be a sound relationship between objectives and assessment. Instructional objectives are statements of expected learning outcomes; they describe knowledge, skills, behaviors, and/or attitudes that learners should be able to demonstrate after engaging in the process of instruction. Assessment is the process by which it is determined whether students have acquired the knowledge/skills/behaviors/attitudes reflected in the objectives. Thus, the development of objectives should precede the decisions about what and how to assess. Assessment can be described as the systematic, on-going, iterative process of monitoring learning in order to determine what students are doing well and in what ways they need to improve. Assessment includes observing, describing, collecting, recording, scoring, and interpreting data.

### **c) Edublogs as Learner Self-Assessment**

To really succeed students must learn to self-assess so that they can understand the main purposes of their learning and thereby grasp what they need to do to achieve. Blogs enable learning from self reflection, from others, and provokes complex thinking skills and strategies. Students have the opportunity to put into writing their own thoughts and beliefs, review other postings and responses to a subject matter, and are then able to compare their level or knowledge or approach to their peers. The blog can be a student's platform for testing their understanding or mastery of a skill or subject matter.

Assessments can come in the form of peer-to-peer or instructor-to- student, by offering each other alternate views, assistance, or confirmation. Instructors are able to assess the group collectively to measure the group's understanding of the material. Feedback can then be given collectively or to individual student's blog.

### **d) Edublogs as Teacher Assessment Tools - Formative and Summative**

Edublogs have potential in both formative and summative assessment procedures. Assessment, based on the current wave of "accountability," is a major educational issue.

Most of the attention to assessment has been focused on summative assessment. Summative assessment is the attempt to summarize student learning at some point in time, say the end of a course. By contrast, formative assessment occurs when teachers feed information back to students in ways that enable the student to learn better, or when students can engage in a similar, self- reflective process. If the primary purpose of assessment is to support high-quality learning, then formative assessment ought to be understood as the most important assessment practice.

Assessment through blogging can also give insight to the instructor if instruction methods or material need to be tailored. Blogs open the assessment process to an infinite number of people who may express interest in the subject thus expanding the learning process. Blogs also allow for assessment and correspondence on a continual real-time basis, which is not often a feature of traditional instruction methods. Blogs are not bound to time, class structures, or the physical limits of a classroom.

## **1.4 .3 The main advantages of Edublogs**

**a) Encourage collaboration:** Blogs have great potential as a collaborative environment.

**b) Create interactions between students and the**

**outside world:** Edublogs help to create a interaction between students and community/teachers/friends. One way to make students feel their work is valuable is to demonstrate how their words are being read outside the classroom.

**c)Link with other educational blogs:** Blogs provide an easy way to do this with built-in options for linking to other blog communities.

**d) Links between schools, classrooms, teachers, students and parents:** blogs can provide links between schools, classrooms, teachers, students and parents.

**e) Gateway to information:** Teachers can use blogs as a gateway to information by archiving class handouts, posting assignments, facilitating discussions, and organizing their course content, due to the nature and importance of blogs as a reflective tool that allows for conversation amongst students and instructors.

**f)Flexibility in its usage :** As blogging has grown, so has the flexibility in its usage and its benefits. Being extremely accessible, this web-based communication tool has the capacity to aide students and educators to collaborate, share knowledge, debate and monitor progress twenty-hours a day, seven days a week.

**g) Effective assessment tool:**With the proper supervision of blogs, the ability for students to receive feedback and critiques to guide and monitor their academic achievement can surely be an effective assessment tool.

**2 . Conclusion**

The use of technology has become increasingly important in language teaching and learning. The successful use of technology, however, requires that language teachers have the necessary technical competence and pedagogical knowledge. The capacities of blogging for self presentation and social interactivity would assist students to forge a stronger sense of personal empowerment and expressive entitlement, on the one hand, and increased connection to a shared learning community on the other. They are an important communication tool for promoting active student engagement and deep learning teaching methodologies that can also be used in informal class discussions and activities, providing for a more relaxed, participative and democratic environment that encourages students to think critically and to express themselves. To sum up, blogs have the potential to transform teaching and learning in accounting education.

Using blogs as an educational tool in classes is not only refreshing , highly motivating , and exciting for the language students but it also creates innovative ways of teaching. Indeed, blogs are authentic, interesting, and communicative resources that can serve a variety of purposes in various classroom settings. A medium to reflect on material,

inquire into issues, and interact with others, blogs provide a rich and easy-to-use environment for both learners and instructors. The recent popularity of blogs, as well as their user-friendly nature, makes them an obvious choice for instructors wanting to introduce out-of class resources to their learners. This paper supports the hypothesis that blogs can also be popular in the modern classroom. However, to determine whether or not blogs do indeed encourage greater learner independence and interest in learning beyond the classroom, more research needs to be done. Nonetheless, it is hoped that this paper will provide instructors with insight into the advantages, and some of the disadvantages, connected to using blogs in the classroom. Furthermore, this paper hopes to inspire instructors to incorporate blogs into their own pedagogy for the purpose of inspiring learner independence or for other objectives. More research needs to be done to determine how to most effectively manipulate blogs in, and out, of the classroom in order to make better use of this interesting and authentic computer-based resource.

In conclusion, it could be said that modern classes should be enriched with the Internet capabilities, in order to provide students with choice, variety, authenticity, and decency and to give them a real purpose for writing, to allow them to experience the authentic written interaction with other people, to motivate them additionally through using computers and the Web, and to give them the feeling of self-confidence when seeing their works published on the class website. When students graduate from university and begin their careers, the bulk of their writing will not be done with pencil and paper, but rather on a word processor. Therefore, writing classes ought to be set in realistic environment utilizing the writing aids of a computer. Since most universities have computer labs with Internet access, writing teachers can easily create classes utilizing blogs that allow students the chance to write and submit assignments in class. Combined with essential discussion and lecture from the teacher, the utilization of both class and student blogs can effectively maximize student access to class materials and exposure to teacher feedback. .

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