Chapter 12
Using Blogs to Motivate English as a Foreign Language Writers

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ABSTRACT

Not many studies have been present on the effects of blogging, particularly with respect to English as a Foreign Language (EFL) writing motivation. Those studies did not focus on the effect of the use of blogs on Turkish EFL learners' writing motivation. Thus, this chapter examines how the use of blogs affects EFL writing motivation among EFL learners in a Turkish EFL learning context. A questionnaire interrogating demographic information, a pre-test and a post-test measuring writing achievement were administered to a group of participants including 48 language learners. According to results, blogging on its own does not increase motivation; however, the process-based writing instruction mainly has positive influences on EFL learners' motivation in both traditional pen-paper and blog environments. Thus, EFL teachers need to know that the use of blogs does not increase motivation among Turkish EFL learners. To increase their motivation level, it is also recommended that teachers should use a writing environment where their students are encouraged to write in the target language.

INTRODUCTION

Writing as a productive skill in the foreign language learning process is a process and a product in which tangible and intellectual factors have an important role (Sokolik, 2003). Since the 1950s, writing instructions including process and project-based activities have become more common due to the change in paradigm from teacher-oriented instructions to learner-oriented instructions (Brown, 1987). Thus, in EFL classes, writing is used for controlling the learning process, minimizing errors, teaching punctuation, determining the English level of students, consolidating vocabulary, boosting memory and developing creative thinking skills (Nightingale, 1988). However, as Boscolo and Hidi (2007) under-

line, the lack of motivation in writing instruction is as one of the considerable problems to overcome. In addition, the environment in which the learner is expected to write is also one of the key factors for cultivating motivation.

The lack of motivation among learners causes certain problems regarding writing. First, learners consider writing difficult and have a common belief that they do not possess the intellectual capacity required to express themselves in written English (Erkan & Saban, 2011). Students have trouble with writing not just linguistically, but in a communicative manner as well (Ismail, 2011). Second, learners have negative attitudes towards writing; thus, they tend to see writing and its processes as time-consuming and tedious (Owston & Wideman, 1997). Third, because of the testing system, which does not include adequate writing sections, learners are likely to regard writing as unnecessary. In other words, learners focus more on reading comprehension and grammatical correctness owing to the demand of exams and curriculum (Huang, 2005). Last, while research shows the superiority of computer integrated writing instruction over traditional pen-paper writing in terms of motivation and achievement (Chuo, 2007; Owston & Wideman, 1997; Sullivan, & Pratt, 1996; Zhu et al., 2015), computer-based writing instruction has been neglected in EFL classes. In conclusion, by considering the studies that are in favor of positive settings for writing motivation, more attention is necessary for the environment in which learners are expected to write.

With the rapid technological developments in the field of ICT, the course of English learning and teaching has drastically changed. Educators and scholars have been seeking alternative ways to integrate ICTs into language learning classrooms as an alternative and a complementary to traditional learning environments. In addition, the generation after 90s has grown up in a technology-oriented world where they were exposed to computers. Thus, the term digital natives is used for individuals who have been familiar with the technology since birth (Kirschner & Karpinski, 2010; Prensky, 2001; Sánchez, Cortijo, & Javed, 2014; Tapscott & Williams, 2010). Due to the technological developments and increasing familiarity of the students with the ICT, educators and researchers have been urged to explore alternative ways to incorporate the recent technologies into language learning environments and create new instructional settings utilizing recent technological developments.

The latest technological developments have paved the way for the integration of writing and computers. This approach is reinforced by technology by providing both collaborative writing opportunities and skill development using computer-based programs. Teachers and students may benefit from all these innovations. As one of these tools, Weblog or its short form blog is an asynchronous means of communication and usually ascribed to John Barger who was one of the foremost bloggers in 1997 (Ducate & Lomicka, 2005). Considering the growing trend, blogs have become a very important tool and environment for communication among web users, which help the development of creative thinking, reading, writing, autonomy and collaboration. According to Ducate and Lomicka (2008), blogs contribute literacy in a number of ways, especially reading and writing skills, as they create a learning environment in which language learners can share and discuss their ideas. In addition to creating an interactive environment, blogs are helpful in terms of announcing assignments, keeping records, giving feedback and taking part in discussions, which enables teachers and students to access the information through virtual world whenever or wherever it is needed.

In terms of EFL learning, using blogs is useful due to several reasons. First, blogs are practical tools for learning, as they are easily accessible and most of them are free of charge (Murray & Hourigan, 2008). Learners can start to utilize them as soon as they find a computer with an internet connection. Second, blogs contribute to collaboration among learners. The students' feelings about group identity increase by

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