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Teaching Reading and Writing Skills to Young Learners in English as a Foreign Language Using Blogs: A Case Study

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Abstract

This study focused on the development of reading and writing skills to a group of B1 level learners of English in a private language institute in Athens, Greece with the aid of blogs (a web tool), since Computer Assisted Language Learning (CALL) enhances foreign language learning. To this end, two groups of young learners were formed; the control group which was taught through the traditional coursebook and the experimental group which was taught through a differentiated approach to language teaching. The differentiated approach which was applied involved eight teaching sessions in a private language institute. Pre-tests and post-tests were administered to both groups in order to evaluate the use of CALL in the improvement of literacy skills. Pre- and post- semi-structured interviews were also conducted with the students of the experimental group to evaluate their attitudes and feelings before and after the instruction. The aim of using blogs, as a web tool, was to enhance collaborative learning and social interaction. This research attempted to prove that blogs create a social interaction between students, and between the students and the teacher. For the purposes of this research, students were involved in process writing by making drafts and writing their posts and in active reading when they read other posts and texts from other web sites.

Key words: computer assisted language learning, blogs, literacy skills, differentiated instruction, foreign language teaching

Introduction

In the heyday of technology, Second Language Teaching and Learning uses technological advances to help students expose themselves to a real and purposeful context. Computer-mediated collaborative learning is a way to promote interaction both between students and their teachers but also amongst students themselves using authentic input in real tasks (Warschauer, 2000).

Computer Assisted Language Learning (CALL) requires new approaches which do not ignore the demands of the new technological era (Vlachos, 2014).

Blogs are online journals which motivate students to read texts as well as other students' posts. In addition, they can skim many texts and posts and find different or similar opinions with those of other authors before expressing their own views with a post. In other words, blogs are incentives for personal writing (Yang, 2009). Not only do they develop their literacy skills but also their e-literacies. Students learn to use the computer; they use search engines to browse the net and they use the word-processor to write a post (Paroussi, 2014).

The purpose of this research was to examine whether students of a B1 level are able to handle blogs easily and appropriately and whether, through the use of blogs, they could improve their reading and writing skills. Specific research questions were formulated to conduct this research.

1. Does the CEFR encourage the use of online communication with the use of blogs?
2. How can blogs enhance young learners' writing skills?
3. How can blogs enhance young learners' reading skills?
4. Does the teaching context in foreign language institutes encourage the use of CMC in English language teaching?
5. Can blogs develop a positive attitude towards reading and writing?

The teachers, who were also the researches, modified the curriculum and the teaching process, by integrating technology in the lessons, thus adapting and applying a differentiated form of instruction in the classroom. Two groups of students participated in this research. A control group which used a coursebook and an experimental group which was taught through differentiated instruction. The researchers applied the same tests, focusing on reading and writing skills to both groups. Pre- and post- semi-structured interviews were also conducted with the experimental group to find out about students' attitudes and feelings both before and after the differentiated instruction.

1 Theoretical background of the CEFR applied in a foreign language institute

It is common practice for schoolchildren in Greece to learn English as a foreign language in the private sector, also known as foreign language institutes. These institutes abide to the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR) and use the textbooks which are designed according to its specifications. Not only does the CEFR provide a framework for designing curricula and teaching material, but it also gives guidelines as concerning the assessment of each level in language learning.

1.1 The Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR)

The CEFR was developed during the 1960's when the Council of Europe aimed at facilitating communication amongst its member states. Their purpose was to establish that all citizens learn both their native language as well as other languages of the member states. During the 1970's, the focus was on developing a positive stance towards language learning. Thus, learning objectives were developed in the form of 'can-do' statements in order to reinforce learners' autonomy, independence and motivation. It was imperative that objectives dictate what learners could do, even in the lowest levels (Council of Europe). By the 1990's, a full framework had been developed for language learning, teaching and assessment aiming at plurilingualism, positive enforcement in learning, design of textbooks and transparency in testing criteria. It divided language proficiency into six levels; two Basic A levels (A1, A2), two Independent B levels (B1, B2) and two Proficient C levels (C1, C2) (Council of Europe).

1.2 The CEFR and young learners

The CEFR was initially designed to cater for the communicative needs of adult speakers. However, there is a tendency to introduce English, as a foreign language, in different curricula both in primary schools and in foreign language institutes, under the influence of globalization, parental expectations and the support of policy makers (Benigno and Long, 2016). The notion underlying designing language descriptors for young learners was that language learning is a priority and there is a need to improve mastery of skills from an early age (Benigno and Long, 2016). Hence, language descriptors should be created for young learners between 6 to 15 years of age (A1 to B1 levels, according to the CEFR).

1.3 The CEFR and writing skills

As far as writing skills are concerned, the CEFR uses global scale criteria and defines an independent user (B1 level) using 'can-do' statements, as someone who "can produce a simple connected text on topics which are familiar or of personal interest and can describe experiences, events, hopes, dreams, ambitions and briefly give reasons and explanations for opinions and plans" (Council of Europe, 2001, p. 5).

Writing is a production activity. Taking into consideration the overall written production, the CEFR defines a B1 level user as someone who "can write straightforward connected texts on a range of familiar subjects within his field of interest" (Council of Europe, 2001, p. 8). That is to say, B1 level users should be able to write about topics that are within their interests, express their experiences or describe an event (Council of Europe, 2018). Grammatical correctness and the correct use of vocabulary are also of great importance. The linguistic aspect of

writing is taken into consideration when students produce written texts and when these texts are corrected, (Fasoglio, Beeker, & Keuning, 2014).

Both the linguistic aspect of writing and its contextual aspect are important. It is vital to understand the context of communication, the social status of writers-readers, the socio-cultural conventions, the purpose and the different genres of writing (Fasoglio et al, 2014). Considering the overall written interaction, learners of a B1 level must be able to write personal letters or notes, convey important information and attempt to get the message they want across to their readers. To be more specific, they must describe personal experiences/feelings, write e-mails of factual information (correspondence) and also write simple and relevant pieces of information to friends (notes, messages and forms).

1.4 The CEFR and reading skills

Reading can be viewed as a receptive skill. According to the CEFR's criterion of overall reading comprehension, a B1 level user can read factual information on texts concerning his/her interests with a satisfactory amount of comprehension. For example, he or she should be able to understand events and feelings when corresponding with a pen-pal (reading correspondence). He or she should also understand information on everyday topics (such as in advertisements or brochures) and understand if the information which they read is topic-relevant (reading for orientation). In addition, if a B1 user has enough time to re-read, he/she can recognize the most significant and the main points of a text on a familiar topic (reading for information). He or she can also read for leisure purposes, understanding the description of places, events and feelings. Thus, learners develop critical reading skills (Newby, 2012). Reading as a leisure activity is a recent change in the CEFR descriptors, concerning reading as a receptive skill (Council of Europe, 2018) and it lowers learners' affective filter (Arikan, 2015).

1.5 The CEFR and Computer Mediated Communication (CMC)

Nowadays, with the advent of technology and the internet, young learners can interact online, by using their computer and an online application (e.g. blogs, emails, instant messages). Learners can communicate simultaneously with one or more interlocutors online, contribute to others' posts and use other media (audio-video-hyperlinks). The CEFR has taken this trend into consideration and has formed online interaction criteria for B1 level users, (Council of Europe, 2018). That is to say:

- B1 users can post their contribution online on a familiar topic if they have prepared the text beforehand and they can use online tools (such as online dictionaries/grammars) to check their language accuracy.
- They can post information about personal experiences and feelings and respond to others' comments. However, some lexical errors can occur.

- They can collaborate online by explaining or clarifying details and by asking questions. Online collaboration may increase their motivation and their engagement in the learning process (Hathorn & Ingram, 2002).
- Online collaboration can be made easier if there are visuals, such as images. Using animation and videos can support and encourage online learning and more specifically, online group collaboration (Hathorn & Ingram, 2002).

2 Literacy skills

2.1 Writing skills

Writing can be defined as the learners' output when they have received sufficient input. It is considered perhaps the most difficult skill since it involves handwriting, spelling, grammar, syntax and the organization of paragraphs and ideas (Ioannou & Pavlou, 2003). There are three approaches to writing; text-oriented, writer-oriented and reader-oriented. To begin with, the text-oriented approach considers texts as autonomous objects in which writers express their intended meaning by following grammatical rules, focusing on form, product and accuracy (Jones, 2006).

Next, the writer-oriented approach focuses on the writer; his/her creativity, cognitive processes and context (Flower and Hayes, 1981). Thinking before writing, the free expression of ideas and the writer's imagination are some of its features (Hyland, 2002). Finally, the reader-oriented approach views writing as a social interaction and a social construction. It became popular around the '80s and considers writing as a social process to construct knowledge and negotiate meaning.

2.2 Reading skills

Reading is the reader's struggle to understand what the text is about. In other words, it is a dialogue between the text and the reader (Hedge, 2000). Reading serves specific purposes (Grabe and Stoller, 2002, p.6). For example:

- Reading to find specific information. This is called scanning. Readers try to find out about a specific word or piece of information.
- Reading to skim the text. This is done to get a general understanding of the text.
- Reading to learn from texts. It occurs in an academic context where the reader has to memorize information and details.
- Reading to integrate information. The reader decides on which information to use in order to write and critically analyze the contents.

2.3 Pre-reading stage

In the pre-reading phase, teachers should help learners activate their background knowledge and their cognitive schemata in order to become fully equipped when facing the new text. In a similar research carried out by Mahmood

and Nikoo (2013), Iranian EFL students' reading comprehension was improved by the activation of their background knowledge and the use of graphic organizers. As far as pre-reading activities are concerned, brainstorming, pre-teaching vocabulary, pre-reading questions, making predictions and the use of visual materials are some of the means which increase students' motivation (Vindy and Carla, 2015). Nowadays, due to the development of technology and the Internet, students can have access to visual aids when they brainstorm ideas and make predictions about a text by finding pictures and relevant information concerning a text (Mihara, 2011).

2.4 While-reading stage

At this stage, readers know that they have a reason to read, they recognize the structure of the text, identify the main ideas and relate their background knowledge to the text. They scan the text to find a piece of information or a word and they skim it to acquire a general understanding of it (Vrublevskis, 2015).

2.5 Post-reading stage

In this stage, learners can make use of the language they have learnt in the previous stages and produce it into another skill, such as writing or speaking (Karavas, 2015). Moreover, they must understand the author's intended meaning and develop critical thinking (Wallace, 2003). Post-reading activities include: retelling the meaning of the text, performing a role-play based on the text's story and characters, summarizing the text, filling in charts and tables with data from the text, writing a paragraph and being involved in a class discussion (Ibrakhimova, 2016).

3 Differentiated instruction

3.1 Definition of differentiated instruction

Differentiated Instruction is a teacher's proactive response to learners' needs (Tomlinson, 1999). The teacher prepares his/her teaching in a variety of ways to address to students' different needs and make adjustments-there is no single approach. It is also a student-centered approach, bearing in mind that not all students have the same needs, sociocultural and linguistic background, interests and abilities.

3.2 Differentiating through content

By the term 'content' we refer to what is to be taught, in which order and what level of knowledge our learners should achieve (Thousand & Tomlinson, 2018). There are several materials to support access to learning for students (Hall, 2002). Audiovisual materials appeal to many learning styles; aural (listening to audio files), visual (watching pictures/videos) and kinaesthetic (bodily sensations).

3.3 Differentiating through process

When talking about process, we mean the ways in which students understand the input (Blaz, 2016). Students can work individually, in pairs or as a small group. Flexible grouping is a way of grouping students according to their similarities or even differences (Willis and Mann, 2000). Teachers can also involve students working in a variety of groupings, changing both the social environment (co-teaching may occur) and the physical environment (e.g. providing a place in the classroom for students who become easily distracted) (Thousand & Villa, 2018).

3.4 Differentiating through product

Product has to do with how students show that they have learnt something and what they can do. Teachers need to scaffold students so that they are helped to participate more in tasks. Not only can the product be a written one (such as a report or an assignment) but it can also be an oral one (e.g. acting out) or something that entails action and movement (e.g. dancing).

In this way, students create a product based on their preferred learning style (Heacox, 2012).

3.5 Differentiating through the environment

The environment is the teaching and learning setting. It should be a place where everyone feels welcomed and it can be achieved by simple, everyday things, for example, by re-arranging seats or changing classrooms (Tomlinson, 2001). To illustrate this, students should be able to abandon their desks and sit on the floor or move around the classroom. In addition, teachers know that students need safety, shelter and a nourishing environment (Tomlinson, 1999).

4 The use of blogs

4.1 Blogs as a Computer Mediated Communication (CMC) tool

A blog can be defined as an online journal that users can continuously update by writing posts. It is the first widely adopted tool of the Read/Write Web (Richardson, 2010). Its interface is simple, requiring no special skills to understand Hypertext Markup Language (HTML) scripting. In addition, there is a basic word doc., to use, to write your post with and to respond. Users can also add pictures, hyperlinks, audio files or videos (Yang, 2009). The language used is typed and written but it looks like informal and spoken language (hybrid language—talking in writing).

The usefulness of a blog is that it provides a common ground to share ideas and establish discussion between users, thus there is negotiation and communication. Therefore, it creates a sense of community; users of a specific blog usually share the same interests and the same objectives.

4.2 The use of blogs in ELT

Computer Assisted Language Learning has helped both teachers and learners by providing an alternative means of sharing their personal knowledge, communicating and negotiating with each other. A blog is a web-based technology which supports collaboration and increases students' performance (Yang, 2009).

Blogs can be used for a variety of pedagogical reasons in ELT. To start with, they create a sense of community; students can share their opinions, ask questions and collaborate with peers. Next, students can control their own learning by working at their own pace, surfing on the internet in order to collect information, taking initiative with no teacher intervention and using pictures, audio/video files and hyperlinks (Vlachos, 2009). In addition, self-publishing online encourages ownership and increases learner independence (Kennedy, 2003).

As far as communicative competence is concerned, blogs enhance language competence since learners try to write accurately in order to become comprehensible and to acquire pragmatic competence. Not to mention that their sociolinguistic competence is reinforced when learners communicate effectively by taking into account factors such as social class, age, context and educational level. Last but not least, intercultural competence is of great importance, too; students need to understand others' needs, ethnic origins and cultures (Vlachos, 2009).

Another important pedagogical influence is the development of e-literacies. Students become aware of using search engines to browse through information and select the appropriate one according to their interests and needs, interpreting multimodal texts, using the word-processor to write well-formed texts and to learn how to use the e-mail or post messages in blogs. Moreover, they learn how to participate in online discussions, assess other sources of information, such as online dictionaries, and evaluate the information they gather (Warschauer, 2000). When students use their computer and the internet, they can become high-achievers by using a range of tools and resources, such as selecting pictures and art work, creating graphics, downloading and posting photos, copying and pasting hyperlinks and finally, posting audio files or videos (Bell, 2010).

5 The research methodology

5.1 Aim of the research

The aim of this research is to examine if blogs can improve reading and writing skills by involving students in an online community and promoting collaborative learning. To be more specific, students will read other's posts, write their own by making comments, make suggestions and give feedback on mistakes, search the internet to find information and read various texts, thus developing critical thinking (Ward, 2004). By using technology in the classroom, the teacher will

modify the curriculum to adapt learners' different needs and interests and develop language skills (Tomlinson, 2014).

A similar research was conducted by Witte (2007) in Fort Riley Middle school in the USA. The teacher collaborated with a university professor and both created the Talkback Project in which the teacher's middle school students chatted with university students using a blog and discussed literary books. The results showed increased motivation and collaboration with peers as well as an enhancement of their writing skills.

5.2 Qualitative research

For this research, two groups of students were involved; the control group and the experimental group. Pre- and post- reading and writing tests which were of the same content were taken by both groups (Sagor, 2000). In addition, a pre- semi-structured interview was also conducted with the experimental group to identify their attitudes and feelings. There were also recordings of the lessons (Ferrance, 2000). The analysis of the data which was collected was the step which followed the post-test results between the control group and the experimental group to examine whether the applied teaching methods, techniques and tools brought about the desirable results. The final step was taking informed action; the researchers needed to take specific steps to avoid students' past mistakes, such as altering the teaching methods and techniques.

The analysis could also be communicated, in the sense that students took part in pre- semi-structured interviews which were all tape-recorded. In addition, the lessons which took place were also tape-recorded. Thus, the object of the content analysis was recorded communication (Mayring, 2000). Another important feature was the natural setting; students had lessons in a real context (a classroom) and they were the real participants working in small groups; the experimental group (four students) and the control group (six students).

Interviewing students before and after the instruction is a key point in qualitative analysis. In the case of this research, the interview was applied so as to elicit information on students' attitudes, beliefs and feelings on learning English as a foreign language in a language institute and the use of technology (in the case of this research the use of blogs). It should be noted that interviewing is basic to qualitative analysis. Ethical issues may nevertheless arise in this case. For example, both parental and student consent was asked for and the administration was also informed and asked to consent.

Observation is another focal point of qualitative analysis since in this case researchers also become observants. However, in the case of this research, if the students knew that they were observed, they might not have acted as they normally did during the lesson. Therefore, it was up to the researchers to observe and take notes in their journals discretely (Richards, 2003).

6 Blog-based lessons and differentiated instruction

The lessons which were conducted abided to the principles of differentiated instruction. Students did not use their textbook at all. The material they used was audiovisual, not pencil-and-paper (Tomlinson, 2000). For example, they browsed through different websites attached to the researcher's initial post in the form of hyperlinks and watched pictures and videos posted in initial posts by the researchers. Students had access to learning (Hall, 2002) and explored various topics using their senses (Willis & Mann, 2000).

As far as the process is concerned, grouping was organized in a flexible manner, either individually or in pairs. Next, students developed e-literacy skills a bit more advanced to their cognitive level (Blaz, 2016). To illustrate this, they had to be members of a blog community something which they had not done before. Using the keyboard to write in English was something different, as well, since they were used to reading on the web, both in English as a foreign language and in Greek which is their mother tongue. The use of stations is also an example of differentiated instruction. The researchers (who were also the teachers) wanted to enable students to write autonomously by setting up different spots where students had to write at the same time on a different task (Tomlinson, 1999).

The product was differentiated, too. Students were supposed to write a post, by answering questions after having watched a video or a posted picture and after having read a short text. Posting in a blog created the sense of community (blogosphere). Students liked sharing ideas with others and were motivated since their product would not be corrected and graded, as in the case of conventional lessons. Last but not least, rearranging seats was motivating, too (Tomlinson, 1999). Unfortunately, it was not feasible to use the computer lab because of administrative reasons. Therefore, the same classroom was used. However, students sat where they wanted to sit and formed pairs at their own initiative. They preferred using their computers and the whiteboard instead of their textbooks.

6.1 The design of blogs in the specific teaching situation

The blogs which were used in this research were designed by the researchers. Their topics were based on the syllabus of the students' coursebook taught in the private language institute, for example, environment, health, teen stress and sports, to name just a few. Each blog had a main title. Titles were also given to each task, since clear instructions were needed (Daskalogiannaki, 2012). The arrangement of the tasks was in reverse chronological order, starting from the bottom and moving upwards with a date showing the archived information. The 'add comment' button enabled students to contribute their post by making a comment, thus giving feedback both to the teachers (who were also the researchers) and to other students (Blackstone & Wilkinson, 2010).

Blogs also used different plug-ins, such as visuals, hyperlinks, videos and texts (Fessakis, Tatsis, & Dimitracopoulou, 2008). Students could use the hyperlinks to browse other websites and find information resulting in self-directed exploration (Yang, 2009). The teachers used such media to warm-up students. Next, they had to respond to a blog-entry posted by the teachers by leaving a comment. After that, they could use ideas from the previous task and implement them in the second task, producing another post, helping and correcting each other.

7 Research results

Specific research questions were formulated in order to carry out this research. More specifically:

1. Does the CEFR encourage the use of online communication with the use of blogs?
2. How can blogs enhance young learners' writing skills?
3. How can blogs enhance young learners' reading skills?
4. Does the teaching context in foreign language institutes encourage the use of CMC in English language teaching?
5. Can blogs develop a positive attitude towards reading and writing?

7.1 Results of the Pre- Semi-structured Interviews with the Experimental Group

The experimental group was given a pre- semi-structured interview. First, it examined students' involvement with the English language; 50% of the students had a certificate in English and 3 out of 4 students believed that they were good at reading whereas only 2 out of 4 believed that they were good at writing (Figure 1)

Figure 1: Students' own assessment on reading and writing

Next, it involved questions which concerned students' attitudes towards the lessons in the foreign language institute. All the students liked the lessons, but they would like to add technology to these lessons (Figure 2).

Figure 2: What students want to include in their lessons

To round off, questions concerning students and their relation to technology were also included. All of them used the internet for schoolwork, for watching videos and for playing games but none of them knew what a blog was or had ever written an email (Figure 3).

Figure 3: Students and the use of computer/internet

7.2 The Results of the Post- Semi-structured Interview with the Experimental Group

To start with, there were questions which concerned students' attitudes towards the use of blogs. All students liked using blogs because it was something new and different than the traditional use of a coursebook (Figure 4).

Figure 4: Reasons for students' positive stance towards the use of computers

Next, considering the improvement of literacy skills, all students stated that writing in a blog was easier than traditional writing tasks because they preferred writing on a computer so as to express their opinions and because they received no grade (Figure 5).

Finally, students answered questions which concerned the improvement of their e-literacies. Students stated that the use of computers facilitated the use of word-processing, browsing the internet and using the correct spelling with the use of the keyboard.

7.3 The Results of the Pre-Test in both groups

The same pre- test was administered to both groups before the differentiated instruction to examine students existing knowledge. The pre-test also performed a diagnostic role. It consisted of 10 tasks; a pre-reading task and a reading task, vocabulary exercises, a post reading task and finally a writing task. In the experimental group, the three female students scored 97%, 89% and 88% respectively whereas the male student scored 77% (Figure 6). In the writing part,

the female students scored 3/5, 4/5 and 1/5 whereas the boy did not score at all (the male student presented many grammatical, syntactical and lexical errors in the pre-test) (see Figure 7).

Figure 5: Literacy skills improvement

Figure 6: The pre-test total score of the experimental group

Figure 7: The writing scores in the experimental group

In the control group, students performed well in the test. They scored 96%, 92% and 76% and in the writing part 3/5, 2/5 and only one student scored 1/4. The student who scored $\frac{1}{4}$ has a cochlear implant and is hard of hearing. According to Dostal and Wolbers (2014), hard of hearing students experience difficulties in literacy skills because they do not have enough access to comprehensible input (Figures 8 and 9).

Figure 8: The writing scores in the control group

Figure 9: The pre-test scores of the control group

7.4 Results of the post-test in both groups

Students of the experimental group showed a slight improvement. However, 2 out of 4 students had a lower mark in the post-test. This can be attributed to fatigue. As concerning the writing part, they all scored a bit better than in the pre-test writing. As far as the control group was concerned, students performed the same as in the pre-test.

Overall, the findings indicate that all the students of the experimental group improved their writing skills after having been involved in differentiated instruction through the use of blogs. They all scored higher marks in the writing part of the post-test (Table 1). This finding answers the first research question which asked whether blogs improve students writing skills as they (blogs in other words) offer students an incentive to write (Jones, 2006).

Table 1: Pre-test and post-test performance of experimental group

STUDENT	GENDER	PRE-TEST SCORE	PRE-TEST WRITING	POST-TEST SCORE	POST-TEST WRITING
S1	female	97%	3/5	98%	4/5
S2	female	89%	3/5	90%	3/5
S3	female	88%	2/5	85%	3/5
S4	male	77%	1/5	76%	2/5

However, the post-test was administered some days before the final exams in the language institute, therefore two of the students admitted being anxious and

tired, thus discouraged. According to Ackerman and Kanfer (2009), cognitive fatigue and personal issues such as lack of motivation and anxiety may result in poor test results.

To conclude, the findings were like those of the literature review. Blogs motivate students to write in an online community, collaborate with peers and develop both a linguistic and a sociocultural competence (Vlachos, 2009). Students learn to write having a real audience in mind (Daskalogiannaki, 2012). In addition, they read topics which motivate them (Yang, 2009). A similar study carried out by Vurdien (2012) in an EFL language school in Spain, showed that the use of blogs as a computer-mediated tool improved the writing skills of the students who participated. These findings answer positively to the research question which asked whether blogs motivate students to read and write in English.

8 Limitations of this research

Some difficulties occurred before and during the differentiated instruction stage which was conducted in the foreign language institute. To start with, differentiated instruction with the experimental group was initially four hours per week but due to administrative reasons, it ended up being conducted for two hours per week. Another constraint was the inability to use the computer lab because other students used it to practice tests. Therefore, the students of the experimental group had to remain in the classroom using two computers only. This resulted in pair work most of the time. More time on blog lessons was necessary but parental pressure to cover most parts of the syllabus prevented more time being devoted to blogs. This is something which students had also wished for (in other words to practice on blogs) in their post- semi-structured interviews. Finally, it was a semi-scale research, reflecting only a specific group of students. It is advisable that more students be included, students from other classes in the same foreign language institute or even from other institutes and public schools, as well.

9 Conclusion

Young learners of English, as a foreign language, are exposed from their early years of learning to reading and writing in English through the textbooks they use. Concerning the students' reading skills, the texts in the coursebook are not authentic. As far as writing skills are concerned, students usually must read a model text and produce a similar piece of written language without having a real audience and purpose in mind.

This is where technology comes in, and to be more specific, Computer Assisted Language Learning. Nowadays, young learners are familiar with using the computer and the internet for various reasons, such as to play computer games and to find information on the internet for school projects.

In this research, students were familiar with technology and the internet. But the same does not occur with the use of blogs. None of the students knew what a blog was. After they had been involved in blog lessons, they were eager to express their own point of view by writing in English, by collaborating with their classmates and by helping each other. Finally, the affective factor is of equal importance. At the beginning the students who participated in this research were a bit anxious about using a blog. As time went by, they started becoming used to it and felt relaxed and creative while using it.

In conclusion, the use of blogs proved to be helpful in enhancing students' literacy skills. There were some obstacles in the process, yet blogs proved to encourage the learning of English, as a foreign language, in the specific language center in which they were applied.

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