

LEARNERS' PERCEPTION OF BLENDED WRITING CLASS: Blog and Face-to-face

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this research was to investigate student perception of blended writing classes. It was conducted with intermediate level EFL learners in the preparatory school at Anadolu University. Data consisted of student reflections. The first reflection aimed at finding out learners' perception of fall term writing lessons, and, the instant and final reflections aimed at finding out learner perception of blended writing lessons. Although learners' perception of writing lessons was negative in the first reflections, they changed into positive in the latter ones. The findings indicated that blended writing class had changed students' perception of writing lessons positively. Therefore, this kind of classes may help students develop a positive attitude towards writing by providing meaningful writing opportunities.

Keywords: Blended writing class, meaningful writing, blog, blogging, authentic writing

INTRODUCTION

Writing is perceived and taught by the language teachers as a means of communication. However, the language classrooms in general fail to provide opportunities for using writing to communicate meaning to genuine audience for a specific purpose mainly because students know that their texts will be read either by their teachers or peers even if the instruction includes a specific audience and purpose. Therefore, writing activities which may have a context and seem to be engaging may be perceived as demotivating by the students. This opinion was confirmed by the learners' responses to the open-ended question given to them prior to this study. In their responses students evaluated the writing course negatively and described writing lessons as "meaningless", "routine", "classroom-bounded", "teacher-oriented", "mechanic", "isolated" and "neither functional nor useful".

These negative views about the writing course posed a problem to the class teacher. Students are generally unmotivated, fail to see the relevance of the course and hate writing. Review of the related literature indicated that designing tasks in which students would be interacting with their genuine audience for a real purpose on the Internet would be a solution by making English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classrooms more authentic, interactive, meaningful, real, and functional. This possibility suggests blending classroom with technology.

The computer technology and the Internet can easily be integrated into language classroom if activities are designed carefully, and carried out systematically.

There have been early examples of integrating computer, computer technology, and the Internet to the classroom (Salaberry, 2001; Zhao, 2003). These attempts brought about a new understanding to teaching and learning: blended learning (BL). In its most plain term, blended teaching is a systematic shuffle of elements and teaching approaches to be followed in one class. In other words, students are exposed to different learning environments (Scagnoli, 2005). In BL and teaching, the principles of classroom teaching are followed, and the general classroom practices are kept as they are; however, new elements are integrated into the course. These elements function differently depending on the goals and objectives of the program. Blending new elements into the existing course can operate at different dimensions; however, one important consideration to make is to what extent the new elements are perceived useful by its primary users, students.

This study aims to find out students' perception of blended writing classes and in this paper firstly the related literature will be presented and then research design is introduced. In the analysis section, the findings and the discussion of the findings are presented. The paper concludes by elaborating some implications for the further planning of blended EFL writing classroom.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Use of technology in the language classroom is at the same age with technology itself as each new technology is perceived to be revolutionary not only from technological point of view, but also "from a pedagogical standpoint as well" (Salaberry, 2001, p. 39). As a result of this, technology in the language classroom has been focus of various research studies and two comprehensive reviews of these studies were done by Salaberry (2001) and Zhao (2003).

In his article, Salaberry (2001) paints a comprehensive historical picture of research on technology in language teaching, and as a result of his review, he poses important questions to assess the pedagogical effectiveness of different technologies and argues that "the most important challenge posed by technology assisted language learning will be the identification of the pedagogical objective that technology based teaching is intended to fulfill...the concept of the pedagogical objective of technology-based instruction must be identified as a separate theoretical construct from the features that define technological resources" (p. 50). In his review, Zhao (2003) tries to answer "to what degree technology is effective in improving language learning" (p.), and claims that it is not an easy question to answer as:

- technology is a broad term and used to refer to many different tools ranging from tape-recorder to online chatrooms,
- the effect of technology is directly related with the implementation of technology in the language classroom,
- there are other variables such as student, teacher, and evaluation procedure that affects the effectiveness of technology, and concludes that "technology, when used properly, can have a positive effect on language learning" (p. 22). He states that technology should be incorporated into the curriculum and should provide solutions to pedagogical problems. Depending on the needs of the students and pedagogical problems, appropriate technology should be implemented, and to make this informed decision extensive research is needed.

Advances in technology have changed the way technology is used in the classroom. For example, "the distributed learning environments are increasingly encroaching on instructional territory that was once possible only in face-to-face environments" (Bonk and Graham, 2006:6).

Although traditionally f2f instruction and distributed learning environments were largely separate as "they have used different media and method combinations and have addressed the needs of different audiences", this has been changing with the progressive convergence of traditional face-to-face and distributed learning environments allowing development of blended learning systems (ibid.). "Blended learning...offers the possibility of recapturing the traditional values of higher education while meeting the demands and needs of the twenty-first century" (Garrison and Vaughan, 2008:5). Scagnoli (2005) states the profits of blended Classroom + Online learning as,

- **helping students learn how to build up new knowledge, combining the use of new and traditional tools to explore, select, and evaluate sources;**
- **learning to present, share and collaborate with others in real and virtual spaces**

Besides, purpose of education might be another reason for BL. According to Garrison and Vaughan, (2008) "higher education must start delivering on its promise of providing learning experiences that engage and address the needs of society in the twenty-first century" (p. 7). Considering the role of ICT in today's world, blending f2f instruction with the Internet would be one way to prepare students to the real world in which all types of web technologies have been used intensively for different purposes (Scagnoli, 2005). Change in the learner profile is another reason for BL. Most of the students coming to our classes are digital native as technology comes to their life at early ages and they are content with their computer literacy skills (Dudeney and Hockley, 2007).

There are different views on the reasons of increased interest in BL. For example, according to Stracke (2007) the need for BL was aroused by unsuccessful implementations of e-learning. According to her, it is almost impossible to exclude human from any teaching-learning process. Another reason is "the increasing awareness that blended learning approaches and designs significantly enhances the learning experience" (Garrison and Vaughan, 2008:3). Referring to the hot discussion on what BL is and availability of resources on BL, Stracke (2007) claims that "BL has taken root and is practically applied as well as theoretically conceptualized" (p. 59); however, there is need for research on BLL in the area of language learning.

One of the tools provided by the Internet is blogs, which is the short form of web log. It is an example of social software as it "allows people to connect, to communicate and to collaborate online" (Dudeney and Hockly, 2007,p.86). Although blogs are mostly used by individuals to post messages to a web page, they are also used in the language classroom. It is claimed that "the use of ICT tools such as blogs,... can be very motivating for the learners" (ibid). In this application students publish their own writing and receive comments from outsiders, potentially leading to discussion and further use of the target language.

Students' approach to their written products also changes because "these tools engender a sense of social responsibility, with learners working collaboratively on content. Also, the public nature of content created using these Internet tools ensures that accuracy and appropriacy become more important to learners" (ibid).

THE AIM OF THE STUDY

Based on the review of literature, Blog was found to be the best solution to the pedagogical problem the teacher had in the EFL writing class as Blog would provide a real audience to the learners and encourage taking their task more seriously. Upon implementation of this, the question is to what extent students perceive this effective. Hence, the aim of this study was to find out intermediate level EFL students' perception of blended writing classes that connect outside world to the language classroom through the Internet. For this purpose the following research question was posed:

How is the blended writing course perceived by intermediate EFL learners?

SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

Tasks used on the Internet would function as a bridge between EFL classroom and an authentic virtual ESL environment needed for reader-writer interaction. Students who have a chance to exhibit their work in this virtual ESL context will probably be more engaged in writing tasks and have a positive attitude towards writing since it is from the life itself. The students as writers will hopefully begin to understand the real role of writing and their responsibilities as writers through the tasks used. Besides, using alternative task design to support the tasks reported as the source of students' unwillingness to involve in the lesson, may turn students' negative perceptions towards writing and the writing course into positive ones. In turn, the teacher's role in writing classroom will change from authority and evaluator to a moderator and editor of the web-based tasks as long as the teacher feels the need for establishing a real life connection with the students' writing.

METHODOLOGY

Data Collection

This research was conducted with 55 intermediate level students at Prep School, Anadolu University in the 2007-2008 Academic Year spring term and lasted 13 weeks. These students followed a skills based program and one of the courses was "Writing" with 6 contact hours per week. Nine computer lab sessions, including a training session, were integrated in the syllabus.

First of all, the teacher registered for the blogging system and developed the web platform (see Description of the Blog below) to be used as a part of the writing lesson. Then, in the computer lab a two-hour training session was held. Here students were introduced to the Blog and taught how to access, read and post required comments to the blog outside the classroom. After that, they registered to the page. After familiarizing students with the new practice, the first tasks were posted. For each genre covered in the lesson similar procedure was followed. First the salient features of the target genre were discovered by the students through analysis of model texts and then they practiced producing the target genre with controlled f2f activities.

This was followed with a computer lab session. Each session began with a warm-up in which either the students were allowed to work on the computer alone or the teacher introduced what they can do using search engines. This was an opportunity to help them develop their computer literacy. Then, students started doing the tasks on the blog in the computer lab and upon completion of the tasks, they reflected on them. At the end of each session, if time permitted, some problems such as recovery of students' forgotten passwords were solved. In these sessions the teacher was a guide on the side and provided assistance. In total, eight sessions, except for the training session, were conducted, and in total 19 tasks were done. The number of tasks for each genre changed according to the requirements of the unit. Students were instructed to do the tasks in their own time.

Throughout the practice students wrote 9 instant reflections, that is to say, upon completion of each unit students were asked to explain their perception of the unit in general and each task specifically. The purpose of collecting instant reflections was to incorporate student feedback where appropriate and meet the students' needs and preferences more. By providing feedback, the students were involved in the construction of the Blog and this was expected to increase their motivation. At the end of the term they wrote a final reflection in the cover letter to evaluate the blended writing lesson. They were allowed to write in Turkish because the primary purpose was to elicit their opinion.

Description of the Blog

Considering learner feedback on the writing course of the fall term, blending the f2f writing instruction with blog seemed to be a possible solution. Therefore, a tutor blog was set up and maintained by the teacher. As a type of edublog, a tutor blog may be used "to provide ... learners with news and comments on issues, extra reading practice or homework, online links, a summary of a class for learners who were unable to attend, study tips and so on" (Dudeny and Hockly, 2007,p. 87). Thus, the blog was never considered as a replacement for the course book and it was not like a course book and was planned to function as a medium on which students were able to interact with the real world, other classes, their peers, and their teacher. This was also reflected in the title and the subtitle of the blog:

The Blog contributed to the f2f instruction in several ways. First of all, the activities used in the Blog were more like real world tasks which "require learners to approximate, in class, the sorts of behavior required of them in the world beyond the classroom" (Nunan (1979) cited in Mishan 2004, p. 70-71)). Besides this, students could reflect on the process continuously. These reflections informed the teacher about the students' experience and perception of the online materials, and revise the course to meet the changing needs of the students. Through these reflections, teacher could find new elements of student interest to reframe the course and sustain learner motivation which is one of the important issues in language classes. Also students could access their work to see the progress they had made as all student generated texts were published on the website. Furthermore, it could increase the motivation of the learners by reducing the paper work. Due to the nature of the online component—digitally stored, and more accessible and lively to recall in times of need—the students could look back on their productions not only within the semester, but also after that. It also affects the e actual writing process itself is also different. Researching is a vital element for writing in which students need to analyze and synthesize the information.

The online component motivates students to interact with the cyber data, which they can access by clicking around the net. Since students are online, the Internet becomes less and less scary for them, and become a source of enriched content. The content is not only limited to the vast amount of information online, but also bears the peer component, allowing students to benefit from sharing ideas with peers. This strengthens the collaboration between the students and understanding that writing is an interactive language skill. The regular classes, of course, do not neglect the importance of research; however, since the students are not linked to the online world, classroom boundaries restrict the research opportunities for a certain extent. Finally, it contributed to students' perception of writing by showing the students that writing is a part of life, not a set of skills aiming at producing isolated texts. This helps students grasp the role of writing in real life, and bridge the form with the use. This provides students with opportunities to develop a critical eye both as readers and writers.

Keeping these in mind, six different tasks supported with visual materials were developed. Each of them is explained and exemplified below. A complete overview of the blog can be accessed at the following URL:

<http://nazmihoca.blogspot.com/2006/03/reflection.html>

Homework

This part included regular contextualized homework; however, in Blog the context became real as the audience was not limited to the teacher and the classmates. Students were aware of the "public nature of content" (Dudeney and Hockly, 2007, p. 86) as they knew that what they produced was accessible to readers outside the class including people from other countries and even native speakers of English. The following is an example instruction:

Surfing on the net, I have witnessed that the world wide wedding customs page has very limited details about Turkish Traditional Weddings, whereas most of other weddings are presented in details. Let's write how our traditional weddings are, and send them an e-mail to tell them that our page can be a useful source for them.

Journal

This was an icebreaker activity used at the beginning of each session and used primarily to give students hands on practice. Also this was used as an opportunity to transfer the journal writing component of the regular classroom into this new platform. This particular task aiming at interacting with a web page and exchanging information, served more than a warm up activity because the topics of these journal entries were different from the paper-pencil journals (How?).

The following is an example instruction:

While surfing on the net, I have found a very interesting website that I want to share with you. On the website you are asked to draw a pig and based on your drawing, there are interesting clues about your personality. For example, I am a positive and optimistic person. Your task is, of course if you accept, not only to visit that page and learn about yourself, but also to write a journal entry reporting your results and comparing them with your personality.

If the webpage gives some clues about you, give me some examples. If not, tell us how different you are. Remember, I also did the test and found a bit about myself. Have fun! Click on the link below:

<http://drawapig.desktopcreatures.com>

Reflection

This part was designed to elicit students' opinion on the innovative process as they were practicing. They wrote their opinions about their experiences upon completion of each session. This instant information helped restructuring and refining the goals of the new platform and the writing course in terms of students' changing need in the learning environment. The following is an example instruction:

How useful/useless was this computer based classroom? Tell me about the strong and the weak points of the lesson. What suggestions do you have for the lesson?

Useful Links

The main goal of this part was to have students share interesting links they had found and considered useful for everyday life or education.

Another objective of this activity was to have students think about the possibility of using these links in the way the teacher used the links for web-based writing purposes. The following is an example instruction:

You can add links that we can use for classroom practices like the PIG PAGE. Please remember to add a description of the page and how we can use it.

Your Questions

In this section students could ask for clarification when they had questions in their minds. These questions were primarily addressed to the teacher and also to their peers since the platform were designed to encourage students to study in their own time. This would facilitate working on their own.

This section also provided feedback to the teacher for the revision of tasks and prompts and informed him about the type of assistance the students' needed. The following is an example instruction:

You can ask questions about the writing class here.

Writing Hits

This part functioned as the notice board in regular classes. Upon the completion of the assigned tasks, students' best works were chosen by the teacher and posted. This would provide two major benefits to the learners.

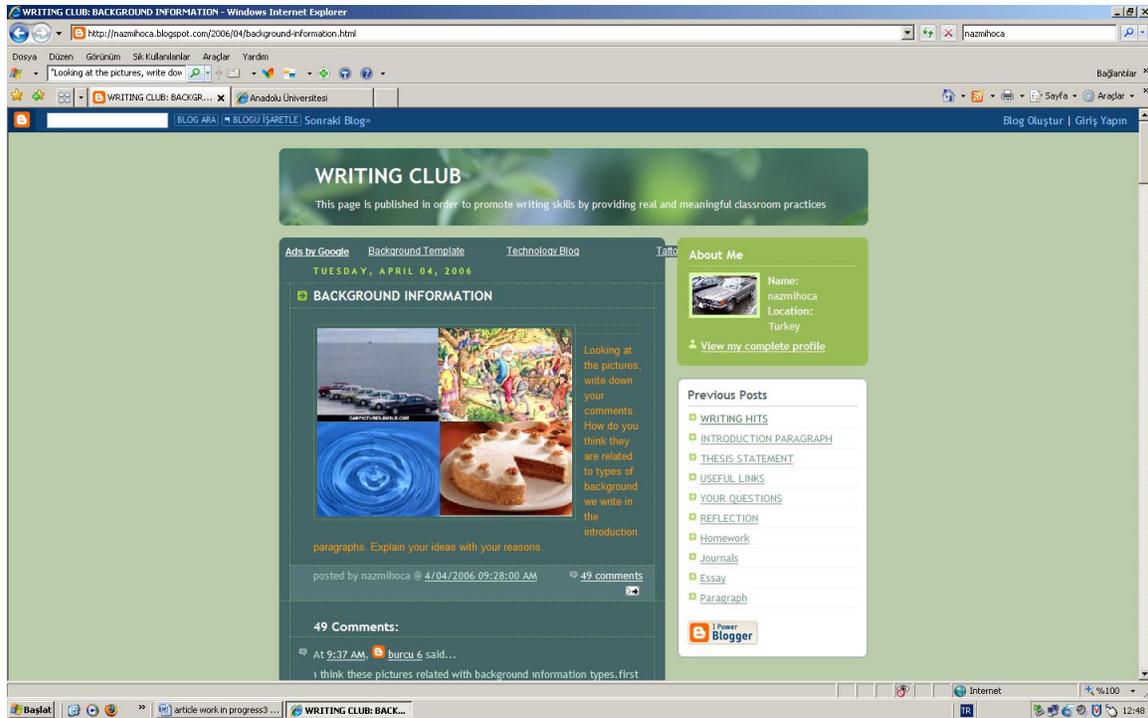
Firstly, they have the satisfaction of producing the best work and sharing it with their peers and the real world. Moreover, these samples would stay on the web forever. The following is an example instruction:

Here you can post your writing suggested by your teacher so that visitors can read The Best of Writing from various students.

Reinforcement Activities

The aim of activities in this part was to help learners understand the basic concepts of the course like essay, thesis statement, and introduction paragraph and to help the teacher to see learners' understanding of them. By the help of visuals and questions students were encouraged to think about the concepts covered in the course and reflect on their interpretation of it. The following is an example:

Background Information: Looking at the pictures, write down your comments: How do you think they are related to types of background we write in the introduction paragraphs? Explain your ideas with your reasons.



Data Analysis

For the analysis of the data, first of all, learner reflections were divided into communication units. A communication unit is defined as "a unit being a separate expression about a thought or behavior" (Mangelsdorf, 1992, p. 276). Then, Constant Comparison Method (Glasser & Strauss, 1967, cited in Lockhart & Ng, 1995) was used. In this data driven method, categories emerge from the data. By comparing and contrasting the incidents occurring in the data, the categories are driven. Because the analysis is based on interpretation, two raters independently coded the incidents in the data and inter-rater reliability was calculated using Tawny and Gast's (1984) formula:

$$\frac{\text{the n of agreements}}{\text{the n of agreements X the n of disagreements}} \times 100$$

The inter-rater reliability was found to be 94%.

PRESENTATION OF THE RESULTS

As a result of analysis of students' reflections seven themes emerged. In this section firstly these categories are defined and exemplified by using excerpts—verbatim translations of students' responses—from students' reflections. Then, the frequencies of these categories are presented.

Reframed Attitudes: This category refers to the ideas which indicate that some major changes took place in students' perception of the writing class in general.

"I like the writing lessons more. The only reason of this is this program."

Personal Enjoyment: This category refers to the ideas which indicate that writing class was a source of fun for students.

"Your lessons were very enjoyable. If the lesson gives fun, learning becomes permanent."

Academic Skills Development (Computer Skills, Research opportunities): This category refers to the ideas which indicate that the blended writing innovation has contributed to Academic Skills.

"I love the course because I'm progressing my keyboard."

"We need information while we are writing something. We cannot find out everything. The Internet is useful for us. When we search something, we just find."

"I like touching keyboard of a computer. I like speed..."

"Particularly, using computer lab is a magnificent idea. I liked it very much because it gives us opportunities, for example we could research what we need for our homework."

Up-to-datedness (Technology Era, Real Life Value): This category refers to the ideas which indicate that the innovation introduced in the writing classes has some operational value in the real life and compatible with rapid technological changes in today's world.

"This is the future of the world. This is the technology age."

"Trying to show writing not as a part of English, but as part of real life and doing it with the most useful device of our age, computer and the Internet, is the smartest thing I have seen in Turkish education system."

"I think books are boring and have only classical opinions or information. We learnt about real life. We wrote to all around the world because we had an internet page"

Reflective Thinking (Appreciation of Teacher, Future Suggestion, and Confessions/Self R evaluation): This category refers to the ideas which indicate that students have a critical eye on the Blended Writing Course they have experienced and the performance they have shown.

*"I congratulate you for starting this kind of a practice."
"This practice will be more useful if we can go to the computer lab more often."
"Thanks a lot. I hope you continue using this program in the following years."
"I think I did not do the activities as I should have done. I am sorry for this."
"Everybody should use computer lab like us. This method is valuable for our
country's future."
"We could go to lab and write our journals."
"Keeping this in mind, half of the lessons can be carried out in the computer lab.
English is a global language."
"Reflection is nice. This means that our ideas are important."*

Writing Course (Lesson, Method, Activities): This category refers to the ideas which indicate students' personal judgments of the components of the writing course such as, method, web activities, and pictures. Students expressed both positive (productive, creative, deductive, innovative, interesting) and negative (teacher-oriented meaningless, boring, useless) views about writing course.

*"I definitely need what I am learning in the writing course in the future."
"Writing different text types, makes this lesson fun, otherwise it is unbearable."*

Interactional Opportunities (Personal Voice, Goodbye Utterances): This category refers to the utterances that indicate students' natural interaction with friends, the teacher or the *outside world*.

*"We shared our paragraphs and essays with other classes on the net."
"I agree with my friend in Group 6 :)"
"I think this is the last time we came here. Bye! :)"*

After categorizing the communication units in the reflections, the frequency of each issue was calculated. The findings are presented in Table: 1 below:

Although learners' reflections on the fall term writing course focused only on "Writing Course", in the instant reflections, they focused on their reframed attitudes, personal enjoyment, academic development, reflective thinking, and up-to-datedness of the materials and interactional opportunities presented by the blog.

In total there were 625 communication units in the instant reflections. Ninety-four percent of them expressed positive views about the blended writing course and only 6% of them included negative views all of which were related with "writing course". The distribution of positive views from the highest to the lowest was: writing course (38%), reflective thinking (28%), personal enjoyment (15%), interactional opportunities (5%), academic skills (4%), up-to-datedness (3%) and reframed attitudes (3%). (See Table. 1 below)

The analysis of the cover letters indicated that, in total there were 226 communication units and only 1% of them expressed negative attitude towards writing course and 99% of them expressed positive attitudes.

Table 1 Distribution of the Communication Units in the 1st Reflections, Instant Reflections and the Cover Letter

Category	1 st Reflections				Instant Reflections				Cover letters			
	Positive Comments		Negative Comments		Positive Comments		Negative Comments		Positive Comments		Negative Comments	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
Writing Course	59	21.5	216	78.5	238	38	35	6	121	54	3	1
Reflective Thinking	-	-	-	-	174	28	-	-	25	11	-	-
Personal Enjoyment	-	-	-	-	92	15	-	-	32	14	-	-
Interactional Opportunities	-	-	-	-	31	5	-	-	7	3	-	-
Academic Skills	-	-	-	-	24	4	-	-	6	3	-	-
Up-to-datedness	-	-	-	-	19	3	-	-	27	12	-	-
Reframed attitudes	-	-	-	-	12	2	-	-	5	2	-	-

Slightly more than half (54%) of the positive comments was related with writing course. The percentage of communication units focusing on reflective thinking, personal enjoyment and up-to-datedness were 11, 14, and 12 respectively.

The percentage of communication units focusing on interactional opportunities and academic skill were equal (3%), and only 2% of the communication units focused on reframed attitudes. (See Table 1)

Although the percentage of communication units expressing change in students' attitude towards writing is low (3% for instant reflections and 2% for the cover letters), both the diversity and the nature of the issues addressed in the instant reflections suggest a positive effect of blended writing course on learners' attitudes towards writing.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Based on the findings of this study it can be concluded that the changing needs of life bring up new issues. Although the paper and pen are the vital instruments for writing, in the digital era medium of communication is also transformed into digits and bytes. In order to catch up with these rapid changes and to prepare our students to real life, some variations like blog can be inserted into course syllabi or school curricula.

BL environment practiced in this study has either directly or indirectly contributed positively in the following categories.

- **Reflective thinking skills**
- **Personal enjoyment**
- **Academic development**
- **Writing Course**
- **Reframed attitudes**
- **Interactional opportunities**
- **Up-to-datedness**

The Blended writing classroom was implemented as a solution to a pedagogical problem the teacher had to cope with. As Zhao (2003) stated technology should be implemented to solve pedagogical issues. The issue the teacher had was lack of real audience for student writing. However, with the implementation of Blog this problem was solved as the online tasks addressed a need in the virtual world and this need was met by student generated texts. Therefore, the task had a real life goal and authentic audience.

Students who participated in this action research described the blog application as involving, interactional, from real life, reflective, technologic, useful, productive, creative, and innovative. These findings are similar with the findings of Leone's study (2008) as the innovation had a great impact on "the learners' language skills, especially in listening and speaking, management of ICT tools, satisfaction levels with the contents proposed, as well as on cross-curriculum objectives such as developing autonomy, building learner confidence, creating networks, promoting collaboration...." (p. 127).

Also learners' description of Blog matches with Jonassen's (1995) description of an effective learning environment as according to him an effective learning environment should reflect these features. This suggests that innovation was successful in creating an effective learning environment.

Moreover, Jonassen (ibid.) adds that such environments lead to meaningful learning and broader world of experience. This also matches with the findings of the present study.

After the intervention, even though students did not explicitly state that the writing class was more meaningful, they also did not view it meaningless as they did before the blended writing course. They also continuously stated that the activities were different and innovative which may lead to a broader world of experience. Furthermore, the web platform provided an interaction opportunity with no place and time boundaries (Ahonon et. al., 2003, p. 9) and learners appreciated this as participants pointed out interaction opportunities provided by the blog in the instant reflections.

Besides these opportunities, students were able to address world wide audience and research for the information they may need (Brooks, 2001: 20) as they indicated in their reflections. This type of realistic environment may also nurture the motivation and the findings of this study suggests that students negative views turned into positive ones after the blended writing course was carried out.

Student participation in this practice was voluntary and student drop out was not observed although the frequency of logging in changed from student to student. In her study, Stracke (2007) identified three reasons for student drop out. To begin with, "lack of support and connection/complementary between f2f and computer assisted components of the 'blend'" (p. 57) was the first reason. When the BL implemented in this study is analyzed, it can be easily seen that there was continuous support as the students studied in the computer lab for two-hours every week. Also, the f2f and Blog was integrated and there was reference to class work in the Blog tasks. The second reason she identified was not using hardcopy materials and pen and paper; however, in the practice presented in this study, these continued to be an essential component of student work. Another reason for drop out was learners' rejection of the computer as a way for language learning. However, in the current practice, the Blog was used as a platform for exchanging ideas and information, not for language learning.

IMPLICATIONS

Although this is a small scaled study, students' reflection on the blended writing course has certain implications for teachers and course developers.

First of all, teachers must be aware of the fact that when there is an issue in the class, the solution may not be within the class.

This can be provided by developing alternative ways of bringing something from real life to the class and taking something from the class to the real world. Especially in the productive skills, the output may need to be addressed to a real audience, which probably leads students to have a real purpose and more interest in doing the task.

The other issue that may be of concern is that keeping the class up-to-date highly depends on the teacher. With the changes in the technology, needs in the real life might change, so are the tools.

In order to keep up with these changes, the teachers need to revisit their roles in the class and improve their skills in technology to make use of platforms which has no place and time boundaries for further classroom activities.

The third implication of this study is related with research and computer skills which are generally neglected in writing classes. Before writing, students might be required to do certain amount of research in advance. Moreover, for computer skills, they may also be required to write their written work on the computer rather than with pen and paper. Another issue is students' interest in reflecting on what they do.

Therefore, the classroom environment should promote constant reflection opportunities to sort out the problems occurring in the classes or to let some issues which the teacher might have never thought about earlier emerge. The final point is that such web platforms must be encouraged in the other courses in order to form a blog portal of the school.

As a conclusion, to let students benefit from the writing practice, both teachers and course book designers need to link the classroom and the real life by designing real life bounded activities, tasks or course books.

SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

Results of this study indicate a number of areas that need further investigation. First of all, as this study was conducted on Intermediate level students, other studies need to be made on other levels as well. Furthermore, as this study covered only the writing course, a similar study can be carried out for speaking classes with a purpose of "speaking for real life" or "listening for real life". Finally, some other studies may be conducted in longer periods like two or more years, and the results may be compared and contrasted.

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