

## Procedure of an ELT Course Enhanced by Blogging

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### Abstract

The use of technology in education is an undisputable phenomenon. Day by day, we encounter a new aspect of the field where it begins to take effect. This observation has led the researchers to benefit from technology in the implementation of an English language teaching course where participants elaborated on peer presentations on a blogging platform. Thus, this study aims to delve into the process of this elaboration taking into account participants' views of the blogging experience in terms of raising consciousness about certain aspects of the topics presented by course members who were students at the English Language Teaching (ELT) Department, University of Çukurova, all trained to be English teachers following their four-year education. This platform was established as a major part of an outside-class, task-fulfillment setting during the spring term of 2010-2011 academic year in order to elicit comments about the course, *Teaching English to Young Learners*. The process of commentary on topics in 341 posts on blogs, as was perceived and expressed by 36 participants, was depicted in this study.

**Key words:** Foreign language teacher education, technology use, blog-based ELT course

## İngiliz Dili Eğitimi'nde Blog Tabanlı Yürütülen Yöntem Dersi

### Özet

Eğitimde teknolojinin kullanımı, tartışılmaz bir olgudur ve bu alanda günden güne teknolojinin artan etkisi görülmektedir. Bu çalışma, böyle bir etkinin İngiliz Dili Eğitimi ve öğretmen yetiştirme alanında ne düzeyde olduğu ve öğrenciler tarafından nasıl karşılandığını temel almaktadır. Bu çalışmayı yürüten araştırmacılar ve katılımcılar blog platformunu temel alarak *Çocuklara Yabancı Dil Öğretimi* dersini işlemişlerdir. Bu çalışma, İngiliz Dili Eğitimi Bölümü öğrencileri tarafından kullanılan blogların, öğrencilerin akademik ve sosyal hayatlarına ne gibi etkileri olduğunu ve bu konudaki deneyim ve görüşlerini dikkate almaktadır. Betimsel bir desen çerçevesinde oluşturulmuş bu çalışma, 2010-2011 eğitim-öğretim yılında, blog temelli *Çocuklara Yabancı Dil Öğretimi* dersini alan 36 katılımcının desteğiyle gerçekleştirilmiş olup, 341 blog girdisini içerik analizi çerçevesinde sunmaktadır.

**Anahtar Sözcükler:** Yabancı dil öğretmeni yetiştirme, teknoloji kullanımı, blog temelli İngilizce öğretimi dersi

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## Introduction

Most people complain about inefficiency in foreign language learning and teaching for learners are not much involved in the learning process. We see many educators and practitioners promoting cooperation in learning, and yet find it rather difficult to provide for such an atmosphere to occur (Wrigley & Guth, 1992). We can cite some major reasons for the absence of such cooperation, in that learners learn differently at different paces (Reiff, 1992), and they possess different learning and communication strategies as well as styles and preferences (Bada & Okan, 2000; Dörnyei & Scott, 1997; Dörnyei & Scott, 1995; Kroonenberg, 1995; Oxford & Ehrman, 1993; Kellerman, 1991; Oxford, 1990; Færch & Kasper, 1983; Tarone, 1983). Cooperative learning does not only maximize students' own success but also others' who commit themselves to a common purpose (Johnson & Johnson 1989). Thus, how can learners' involvement be maximized so that they can benefit from this process to an optimum level? This question requires in-depth analysis. As language practitioners, who have observed this situation, we came up with the idea of increasing students' involvement that is enabling students to take on outside-class tasks, enjoyable enough to accomplish assigned tasks properly. For this, we aimed to make use of technology, more specifically, blogging, a Web 2.0 tool. Blogs are web sites on which individuals may utilize word processing software and create texts, images, graphics, video and other multimedia elements to express self (Boling, et all, 2008). Through blog use, all individuals in a class would be interacting with each other and the lecturer, making the best of this facility by responding to tasks posted in an outside classroom environment (Farmer, Yue & Brooks, 2008; Ding, 2008; Akyol, 2009; Cuhadar & Kuzu, 2010; Özkan, 2011). Task performance goes beyond individual commitment to the task itself; the individual is also in a position to feel responsible to other members since all assigned tasks require collaborative contribution. Language learners' writing skill could also be enhanced by blogging according to the Marsden and Piggot-Irvine (2012).

Thus, a comment posted by an individual regarding a task invites another member to display a similar behavior in a rather domino fashion. Regarding the process of such a facility, as was utilized for a particular course in ELT, *Teaching English to Young Learners*, below we will deal with the steps of course delivery as well as the contribution coming from such a blogging experience.

The course delivery actualized in three stages, each to be dealt with in detail:

- syllabus design, groups arrangement and topics assignment.
- topic presentations by groups.
- the blogging experience.

### Stage 1: Syllabus design, groups arrangements and topics assignment

A syllabus was designed as a result of consultation with the students regarding topics to be covered. Most topics that were voiced by students happened to be those suggested in the textbooks previously and selected for this course (See Appendix). The topics negotiated and decided on were *how to teach English to children, teaching listening, teaching speaking, teaching pronunciation, teaching vocabulary, teaching reading, teaching writing to children, cross-curricular work in young learners' classes, and culture in children's context* based on class course book by Brumfit (1991). The groups were formed by the members themselves. No external interference occurred. Topics were chosen in line with members' preferences and interests. Dates of presentations were set according to the placement of topics in the syllabus. Instructions regarding presentations were given: *should presenters make use of materials other than textbooks, should they make use of technology, timing, and duration*. Each group was supposed to present in a meeting session to be held once a week. Members were free to delegate duties concerning presentations, which were supposed to include theoretical background of skills concerned and the targeted language groups: *beginner, intermediate, and advanced*. Group members were free to decide among themselves who was to deal with what tasks.

Activities conducted during presentations were designed by members of the groups with the help from textbooks and related internet web pages.

A brief introductory content of the topic to be presented was given to other groups by a member of the presenting group. Before presentations, instructors had allocated the first session (3 hours) to an overall summary of theoretical background of all skills to be covered throughout the term.

### **Stage 2: Topic presentations by groups**

In this 3-class hour course, the instructor lectured in the first hour of the week and the remaining two hours were allocated to student presentation on the targeted topic determined at the very beginning of the course. Members, having delegated the presentation topics among themselves, started with theoretical background of the skill they are to deal with. This process took 15-20 minutes. On concluding their introductory comments, the presenters invited other members to deal with other levels on targeted skills. All students in class acted in accordance with the targeted level. Presenters at the specified level initially made a very brief introduction to their activities and invited students in the class to participate in the activities they were to conduct. All class members participated in such activities. The instructor was a participant and an observer in the class. Following each presentation by groups, the instructor thanked group members, and invited all members to post comments on the blog created for this purpose.

### **Stage 3: The blogging experience**

This process was rather interesting in that it entailed outside class activity and use of technology, i.e. blogging. A blog was created and permission of access to the blog was granted to groups. Since all students in the groups had basic knowledge of computing skills, it was not difficult to introduce this facility to students. During the first week of the course, all students had been given information about the blogging process regarding presentations. They had been invited to a computer lab where they were assigned

e-mail accounts, one for each group; and were given instructions regarding blogging, how to follow blogs and how to paste comments on blogs about presentations of their peers as well as theirs. They were informed that contribution to blogging (including times of comment entry and adherence to deadline) would be a considerable part of their overall course evaluation; another significant part was content of the posted comments, that is comparison of content of presentation with the theoretical issues stated in the assigned course books. And, the remaining major part was assessment of presentations by the lecturers themselves, who would spend most of their time observing presenters as well as participating in presentation activities at different instructional levels.

Course lecturers made sure that comments were posted regarding each presentation, and that every member complied with the set deadline. The following instructions were given during this get-together session:

-A good part of each individual's overall evaluation in this course will be based on the comments they make on other groups' presentations as well as themselves. Therefore, they are supposed to write their own comments about the presentations they and their friends make.

-Everybody is supposed to read the sections related to presentations, so that they can compare content of sections with presentations, and thus make their comments.

-Their comments are extremely important since they encourage cooperative learning and peer support. Therefore, they should try to be as objective as possible.

-Comments are supposed to be made a day or so - the latest - before the next meeting - the sooner comments are published the better since next presenters could make use of them in their own presentations, and

-Under their comments they are supposed to write their names, groups and numbers in order to keep details for course evaluation.

All students read chapters related to theirs as well as their peers' presentations, and posted

their comments on the blog. Comments were posted within a couple of days following each presentation. Next, presenters, relying on and benefiting from such comments, formed the content of their own presentations. Members included their names, groups and numbers following their comments.

## Methodology

### Participants

The participants of this study included 36 (21 female, 15 male) pre-service teachers majoring at the ELT Department of Çukurova University. They were all 3rd-year Turkish students (aged between 21-23), and were all exposed to English as a foreign language since secondary school. All the participants attended the course, *Teaching English to Young Learners* since it is one of the required courses taught at the department.

### Data Collection Tools

Adopting an exploratory qualitative approach, this present study used interviews and blogs as main sources for the data elicited from all 36 participants. The interview items consisted of a set of general questions (what is the use of blog in this course?, do you have any problems in using blogs?) and tailor-made questions based on participants' presentations in class. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with each participant to ascertain their thoughts and perceptions about blog use in the methodology course. The researcher explained the purpose and the content to each participant and recorded each interview. The time allocated each student was approximately seven to eight minutes. The participants were encouraged to express their opinions freely throughout the interview. The interviews were recorded, transcribed and analyzed based on open coding approach that allowed categories to emerge from the data. The recordings were transcribed by the help of another researcher in the same department to check the occurring themes. These categories were then refined and restructured based on the existing literature. The contents of blog entries became another valuable source of data that could serve a purpose of verifying the data findings from interviews. The content

of each blog entry was extracted and recorded in a database. The coding procedure was handled by a combination of predetermined categories. Each blog entry was thoroughly examined; emerging themes on the blogs and the interview were categorized forming convergence topics. As a first step, for each re-emerging theme (time-of-mention=ToM), a frequency test was run utilizing the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) computer program. At a second stage, a chi-square test was run in order to identify any observable significant difference in the dispersion of overall themes for each item. Out of these interviews and 341 blog entries five categories emerged: a) *manner of the presenter*, b) *content of presentation*, c) *language used in presentations*, d) *visuals and technology regarding presentations*, and e) *classroom setting*. Below, we will deal with these main categories and pertaining themes.

## Data Analysis and Findings

Table 1 illustrates six positive themes under *manner of presenter*: *interesting*, *keeps eye contact*, *entertaining*, *enthusiastic*, *motivating*, and *active*. The participants here believe that being *interesting* (30.1%) and *keeping eye contact* (29.8%) as a presenter are very important. Being *entertaining* did also emerge with a significant percentage: 14.6%. And, 11.8 % of the participants expressed that they would like to see an *enthusiastic* presenter in class, and *motivating* (7.9%) for the audience. In addition, being *active* as a presenter is valued by 5.8% of the pre-service teachers.

**Table 1. Manner of presenter: Positive**

items	f	%
interesting	278	30.1
keeps eye contact	276	29.8
entertaining	135	14.6
enthusiastic	109	11.8
motivating	73	7.9
active	54	5.8
p=	.000	

As for the negative themes in this category, four points (*too fast*, *boring*, *inadequate use of nonverbal language*, and *unclear*), as illustrated

in Table 2, were perceived as negative aspects. The most negative factors are presenters' *being too fast* (32.9%) and boring (31.5%). *Inadequate use of nonverbal language*, with 26.5%, is another negative element regarding presenters' manner. *Being unclear* (9.1%) is also regarded as negative during class presentations.

**Table 2. Manner of presenter: Negative**

items	f	%
too fast	98	32.9
boring	94	31.5
inadequate use of nonverbal language	79	26.5
unclear	27	9.1
<b>p=</b>	.000	

The verbatim statements below exemplify the participants' comments about the manner of presenters.

*Student 4 was too fast during her presentation and I could hardly catch her so I couldn't hear very well (S13).*

*Her keeping eye contact made me engaged into the topic she is presenting (S10).*

*I found the song very interesting and enjoyable (S3).*

*The slides were long and I was bored towards the end of the presentation and lost my attention (S2).*

Considering the category, *content of presentation*, the teacher trainees came up with nine items, six of which being positive (Table 3) and three negative (Table 4).

Having a look at Table 3, we see that being *informative* (26.4%), having *comprehensible input* (26.1%), *authenticity* (22.7) and *suitability of content* (17.4%) emerge as most prominent themes. *Challenging tasks* (4.0%) and *triggering questions* (3.3%) were also cited by participants with small percentages. Marsden and Piggot-Irvine (2012) also claim that students can utilize blogs to obtain information from their teacher, their classmates, and even from themselves.

**Table 3. Content of the presentation: Positive**

items	f	%
informative	308	26.4
comprehensible input	304	26.1
authenticity	265	22.7
suitable content	203	17.4
challenging tasks	47	4.0
triggers questions	38	3.3
<b>p=</b>	.000	

Regarding negative themes in this category, from Table 4, we can observe that *inappropriate tasks* (50.5%) and *lack of content* (32.0%) were the themes to emerge with most significant frequencies. Participants, by 17.5%, perceived a *too detailed* content (17.5%) as negative.

**Table 4. Content of the presentation: Negative**

items	f	%
inappropriate tasks	188	50.5
lack of content	119	32.0
Too detailed	65	17.5
<b>p=</b>	.000	

Below, we cite verbatim statements of the participants regarding this category:

*She gave comprehensible input so there was a smooth flow during her presentation (S7).*

*She gave us very useful information about how a young learner teacher can control a classroom by referring the formulaic language (S8).*

*Using games in teaching vocabulary to young learners was challenging because you have to adapt the game to the level of young learners (S21).*

In the blog entries, the participants also wrote about *language* in presentations. From the content analysis carried out on pre-service teachers' blogs, four themes emerged in the *language* category: two positive and two negative.

In Table 5, we see that being *fluent* (77.1%) and employing *appropriate intonation* (22.9%) were the two themes participants found to be very significant.



**Table 5. Language used in presentations: Positive**

items	f	%
fluent	334	54.3
use of intonation	99	45.7
<b>p=</b>	.000	

As for the other two negative themes, *lack of fluency* (54.3%) and *idiosyncratic use of language* (45.7%), illustrated in Table 6, were regarded extremely significant.

**Table 6. Language used in presentations: Negative**

items	f	%
lack of fluency	289	54.3
idiosyncratic	243	45.7
<b>p=</b>	.000	

Below are presented verbatim statements of participants regarding the *language* category:

*He had some pronunciation errors he must have studied before coming to class and check the dictionary beforehand (S30).*

*His tone of voice and intonations were so effective that I kept my attention throughout the whole presentation (S32).*

The participants, in this study, expected presentations to include *visuals and technology* as well. In this category, five themes appeared, all of which being regarded positive characteristics (*technology use, appropriate, use of illustrations, efficient use of blogs, and interesting*). Table 7 illustrates the descriptive analysis regarding this theme. Most of the participants (31.9 %) believed that an effective presentation should include *technological elements*. Using *appropriate* visuals can also be regarded as important in class presentations (28.6 %). *Using illustrations* (26.7) also appeared as a theme with significant preference to contribute to an effective presentation. The remaining other two themes: *efficient use of blogs* (10.1%) and *interesting* (2.7%), though with small percentages, are also worth considering here.

**Table 7. Visuals and technology in presentations: Positive**

items	f	%
technology use	332	31.9
appropriate	298	28.6
use of illustrations	278	26.7
efficient use of blogs	105	10.1
interesting	28	2.7
<b>p=</b>	.000	

Verbatim statements regarding this category are cited below:

*The presentation was illustrative and this made it very clear to understand (S15).*

*The video he used underlined the important parts of the presentation and we had the chance to review the topic (S33).*

*She had a good power point presentation and we never got bored during the presentation (S36).*

Table 8 presents the last category of theme analysis of students' blogs. All of the participants here expected the presenter to form group or pair work activities in which members would actively be involved at any appropriate phase of the presentation. Also in Cuhadar & Kuzu's (2010) study blog enhances communication with classmates and teacher regardless of time and place barriers. In addition, the students using blogs share information and evaluate themselves and their peers by means of blogs.

**Table 8. Classroom setting**

items	f	%
pair/group work	82	100

Some verbatim statements of participants are cited below:

*We worked well in groups in the activity he chose we shared information with ourselves (S9).*

*I joined a creative group work enlarged our schemata in targeted subjects. Also, group work made us feel belonged to a specific group. We*

*all felt responsible for our group and ourselves (S10).*

At the end of the course, teacher trainees were invited to comment on their blogging experience in terms of personal, professional and academic development. Relying on the feedback received from students, we can suggest that students' experience has helped them both at personal and professional levels. The verbatim statements below best illustrate this benefit obtained from such an experience:

*-We learned how to criticize in a fair way with writing comments. Also we see our mistakes that we made by reading the comments*

*-This blog was beneficial for all of us. The most important thing, we learned to criticize each other objectively.*

*-These courses provide many things to our professional development. We reviewed and analyzed all steps of language. We see the new methods and approaches of teaching these skills. We prepared our future teaching life. I think there is nothing we don't know about these methods.*

*-I improved my metacognitive skills, especially reflection on my own studies. I evaluated myself and put it on the web page. In addition, I studied myself, which improved my academic and professional skills (S31).*

*-It gave us the responsibility of going to courses regularly and observing our friends more carefully. In this way, we learned how to think and comment critically. I tried to be objective on my comments (S29).*

*-We exchanged our views during this experience helping to each other's improvement (S23).*

*-The presentations were given us valuable information about teaching English in selected levels (S19).*

*-This course is student centered and it is very good point because we are university students and one year later we will be teacher and we should manage the class any more (S33).*

## Conclusion

The results of the study revealed that pre-service teachers' blogs consisted of a wide variety of content knowledge and expectations in the field of English Language Teaching. When given the opportunity, students can provide invaluable feedback for each other, particularly, regarding presentations performed in classes. This study underlined the value of peer support and evaluation deriving from pre-service teachers about each other's presentations where a third eye could supply objective comments and recommendation for further work of any teacher trainee. The study, further, provides some methodological implications by underlining content analyses in revealing underlying purposes of academic blogs in an ELT setting. The findings and observations here do also suggest that blog use be extended to social life where individuals could improve their language use and peer support. Assigning roles to pre-service teachers' and letting them take vital role in assessment throughout blogs could be an alternative way to provide long-lasting interest and motivation towards ELT courses.

Based on this experience, we can observe that students developed critical and analytical skills; fed their background knowledge by being exposed to printed as well as presented material at different language learning levels; developed metacognitive as well as reflection skills; fostered cooperative learning; bolstered autonomous learning and finally built intrinsic motivation regarding attendance.

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**Appendix**

WEEK 1: What is good primary practice?

WEEK 2: Activity-based teaching: approaches to topic-centered work

WEEK 3: The role of fun and games activities in teaching young learners

WEEK 4: "Ali, are you a boy or a monster?", Drama teaching

WEEK 5: Using literature on language teaching

WEEK 6: Midterm

WEEK 7: Two lessons: five -year-olds and seven-year-olds

WEEK 8: An integrative approach with young learners; the role of informal interaction in teaching English to young learners



WEEK 9: Listening and the young learner

WEEK 10: A framework for teaching English to young learners; the development of children's thinking and understanding

WEEK 11: Syllabusing at primary level: The Italian perspective

WEEK 12: The learning strategy of the Total Physical Response: Some age differences; Eric Lenneberg, The biological foundations of language

WEEK 13: Age differences in the pronunciation of foreign sound; the critical period for language acquisition: Evidence from second language learning

WEEK 14: Course Review