

BLOG ASSISTED LANGUAGE LEARNING (BALL): BENEFITS OF AN AMAZING WEB TOOL

Dr. Gurpreet Kaur

Asst. Prof. English

Shri Guru Teg Bahadur Khalsa College,
Anandpur Sahib, Punjab, India

Abstract

The advent of technology has pierced through our veins so deeply that at the level of learning anything, it is inevitable to become its part. There are no limits of learning motivation and opportunities for both authorship as well as readership. Be it the use of audio recordings, television, films, videos, computers, and internet, all play effective role in bringing the target language and culture to the students. With the passage of time, there is a shift of language teaching methods in the 1980s to communicative language teaching of the current era. And one of the recent and interesting tools for strengthening communication skills especially writing skills is web blog writing or Blog Assisted Language Learning (BALL). This means is being extensively used for giving an upper hand to writing skills as compared to the speaking skills. The purpose of this paper is to study and reveal the extent to which youngsters and academicians are responding to the use of blog writing and being benefitted through it. The aim is also to explore other useful benefits and find differences it holds from a website.

Key words: Technology, writing skills, internet, website, communication skills

Blogging was never bound to a single purpose or reason. There have had been numerous causes, requirements and certain issues that put one into a scene that he/she eventually starts blogging. There has been a massive increase in this usage of blogs with time. There was a time when people preferred to have had their own websites for their piece of work, but overtime, this culture of websites was overtaken by blogs.

A blog is a combination of the terms web and log. It is a type of website or part of a website supposed to be updated with new content from time to time. While we indulge into a better understanding of blog writing, it is indispensable to find similarities as well as differentiate it from the website. There are some similarities in blogs and sites. Mainly, they are both found on the Internet using a URL or a web address. Both also must have some sort of host to keep the information online. Another similarity of the two is that they both can be maintained by virtually

anyone from individuals to companies. Both Weblog and websites can also contain information, pictures, link and keywords, as well.

Like similarities these have differences too. For instance, with a blog, information that is entered on the site is generally updated very frequently depending on the writer. Sometimes blog writers even update several times a day. Usually with a website, information is not updated regularly. Websites generally contain information about something that does not change often. When a website is updated, usually the entire page is altered. With a blog, just one entry at a time is updated. After a website has been changed, that information is gone and cannot be seen again by the reader. On a blog, new entries are added, but the old ones are not deleted from the site. Instead, they are stamped with the date and time that they were created, given a title and indexed on that blog page. It makes it easy for a blog reader to go to a certain blog page and read past entries without having to search.

One more essential difference between a blog and a website is that a website is generally a little harder to maintain and oftentimes requires a solid understanding of the way the Internet works. With a blog, almost anyone can easily and quickly update a blog. It does not require any special working knowledge of the Internet. In addition, there are many sites that offer blog features and most of the time these can be used for free. The major difference between the two types, blog and a static website is about the content refreshment. The major content of website remains the same. Though the webmaster could add additional pages to the website to increase the content, but the order by which the information is presented could not be later changed.

Blogs have completely replaced the website generation. For sure and must, they have much more beneficially advantageous things, attached right next to them. They cover lot many aspects, from values to morals, from knowledge to exposure, from skills to skillsets, from an area bound unknown to a global icon, etc.

Further, with English being used as a global language for communication in education, business and technology, it is essential that students need to be able to communicate in English. The process of reading and commenting on other's blogs helps the participants to improve their speaking and writing skills. It also gives them new ideas for what to write on their blogs, and helps in communicating with each other freely outside the classroom. To begin with, some of the various key benefits of blog writing are as followed:

1) Writing skills: According to Kroll (1990) writing is a task that is difficult for any person and ESL students, even in native English speaking countries, find academic writing challenging. For sure, blog has a vital part of a written content in addition to any multimedia materials linked with it. So, the foremost gift you receive is that of an opportunity to enhance your skill in writing good or at least better than you ever did.

It is not a guarantee, unless you put in effort and enjoy doing your work. Appraisal is possible for something done by oneself than by mere copying someone else's work. So, a steady effort with time, will help you write quality. In today's world of short and quick path being chosen over lengthy and time consuming monsters, what people prefer to choose in, is the most efficient ones.

If you gain in such skill that you can explain your set of words in the least yet efficient way, you are already a winner. With this, you open a gate for yourself to the art of writing. In fact there is no bounded world of writing alone, you'll find the need of writing all over the place, everywhere, every corner. If lucky, you may end up writing a best seller.

2) Knowledge base: To write in, you need to have something in your mind. A blank mind can only stare at a blank page, while an open and ready to gain mind, always tries to improve the already present set of knowledge with the latest available and among those the best available. Hence, when you choose to write, as a beginner, you may reach a point where you may feel to stop writing. This is perhaps because your tank of knowledge about anything you know may fall short and force you to quit all of it. At such point, you need an inspiration or to inspire yourself to know more of things, at least enough that you can make things an independent way.

Never confuse the improvement with copying. Never ever copy one's thing all in a go. It would be disrespect to one's sheer time and effort to write the same. Take as much needed, with permission that you may need to bring in something crisp, clear and new.

3) Efficient Research: Researching is not in fact just reading other's work, and rejoicing over the same. For sure, not all work may be good, not all of them are to be neglected either. Researching is a means by which you categorize under one name, all the relevant details, such that a global contribution is a part of it. When, you receive applauds for your suchwork, that has researching various and providing a better quality, you'll soon make this a habit to provide a class quality of posts.

4) Connections: With time and regular blogging, you make good presence of yourself. People begin to recognize you, and ultimately to rejoice being a part of it. As such people get to know you better than ever and with time the number of followers swell up and high. People begin to subscribe to your updates and posts. This eventually gains you name and fame, or adds to your already existing fame. This will also, let you connect with others of same interest as yours. For instance, you may love writing poems and maybe photography as well, then you may end up so many of them, that you may want to share among yourselves the interest and works. There by you can applaud and criticize each other's work to help each other dwell better sharing thoughts, ideas and viewpoints.

5) Motivation: As discussed before, there may come a time when you may reach a time that you fall short of contents. But, just then you're already published work motivates you, that you have presented to your valuable readers. This in turn inspires you even more, and you end up writing quality and quantity, both.

6) Revenue: One of those personal benefits of blogging is, revenue generation. Overtime, when you feel to monetize your writing venture, you can do the same. For this you may need to have a blog of your own. Else, you can work for some firms and write for their blog and earn income that way too. But, for all this, one has to be patient and should not leave to put effort in all of it. There are many industries that requires an ample of good writers and for the same, they hire such good bloggers for them, and pay in return to the work they extract. So, there you have a wide range of monetization plan.

7) Real-time working: The blog works in real time, and over masses. It means, that whenever you blog, something is read all over the world. However, this needs time as well. It is good medium to share in the current topics, like woman abuse, the country's economic growth and things alike. For such, you may get the responses in real time and people, may present their

views the same. Thereby you are able to have a very good discussion with them and hence earn you even more readers in return.

8) Exposure: Regular blogging, helps your post top the list of searches. And, no one would to love to be a part of the blog that has no regular updates, or say rotten ones. This regular update helps many business firms to get a vast exposure for their work. As a result, the search for your blog may bring you many visitors. For this, there are many other technology related tricks. Every blog has keywords and labels associated with it, that helps categorize the blog and its contents, on a personal level as well as global level. What exactly keywords do is, help people search for the topics of that particular interest. For instance, a person may search for a keyword say, “POEM”, which will return all the posts linked with poems. This search can be modified even more, by adding more keywords to it, like “Happy”, “Romantic” etc.

9) Efficiency: Blogging is best and cheapest available internet tool. With minimum of investment or no investment at all, you still stand a chance to make most of it. What matters is a quality content and some patience. This can work better than media or advertisements over television, in a way that it works in real time. You reach masses in a very quick time. This will boost traffic, which in internet world is a term for visitors.

10) Easy to publish: Blogs can be then seen as a tool to foster learner autonomy as students take charge of publishing their work and also make decisions about what to write and how much to write (Lee, 2011). This blogging requires no extra knowledge of web designing or sort. The only thing one requires is a minimal knowledge of using a computer; rest is just a matter of clicks. When you write a post, it's more like an online notepad, through which you set the formatting of your post, if needed, to make it visually more appealing and catchy. And once you end up writing it, you can post it and make it available to the entire world to read it. It has not much of chaos. You may also, want to re-look your already posted content. This is also made available by most of the blogging systems. This means, a blog posted is not permanent; you can change it just like any other file on a computer system. It's as easy as, working on any file on a personal computer.

So it can be concluded that Blog Assisted Language Learning (BALL) being the latest means of communication is most useful in developing writing skills. Moreover, other benefits of using it are specified like real-time working, developing connections, generating revenue, getting exposure, and improving efficiency. Apart from this, some important ways to gain even more benefits from BALL have been discussed in this paper. It can be expected that in the times to come, it will, indispensably, be the most used method of communication globally and keep the world in touch.

Works Cited:

- Geisler, Diana. *Foundations of Oracy: a professional development model*. 2008.
<http://downtoearthmedia.org/literacy.html>
- Kroll, B. *Second Language Writing: Research Insights for the Classroom*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. 1990.
- Lee, L. *Blogging: promoting learner autonomy and cultural competence through study abroad*. *Language Learning & Technology*, 15(3), 87-109. 2011.
- Lindsey, Delores. *Culturally Proficient Coaching*. Corwin Press. 2007.

"Weblogs: what's the use?" Fall 2002.

Assignment. <http://www.ndsu.nodak.edu/ndsu/kbrooks/110/assignment1.html>