Using Blogs in Writing Instruction: Attitudes of the Teachers of the Teacher Training School of Constantine (ENSC)

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ABSTRACT:

This study seeks to unveil the attitudes of teachers at the Teacher Training School of Constantine (ENSC) towards the use of blogs in the teaching of written expression. It uses a questionnaire to elicit data and answer the following questions: Are teachers aware of the recent technological advancements used in the field of education? Do they use any in their teaching of the writing skill? Do they hold positive attitudes towards blog integration in writing instruction? Results reveal that most teachers are not so familiar with the recent technological advancements (such as the web 2.0) nor are they keen on weblog use in teaching. They are, however, relatively aware of some of the benefits of this technology and are willing to incorporate modern tools in their teaching.

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Introduction

The fast technological advances, reshaping all aspects of human life, compel teachers to be more innovative than ever by integrating digital tools in their instructional practices not only to facilitate the teaching of the four skills especially writing, regarded as the most challenging one to master (Richard& Renundya, 2002), but also to capture the interest of the "digital natives". "Digital Natives" is a term first coined by Prensky (2001) to refer to nowadays children who are grown up using modern technologies such as computers and internet. They are speaking a different language, the language of computers and internet, and teachers are expected to learn this language to better communicate with them. Teachers need new strategies and new tools for teaching and learning to adapt with the new millennium's challenges. Such challenges "require that students be adaptable and analytical, and that they have the skills to identify and use the best tools in a rapidly changing environment." (Solomon & Shrum, 2007, p.1)

Weblogs or blogs, as they are commonly known, are one of the technological tools that have been incorporated successfully in the educational field worldwide. In Algeria, the educational institutions at its different levels, primary, middle, secondary and higher education, and with its diverse constituents, namely teachers and learners, seem to struggle with the use of technology despite the higher authorities' encouragement for e-learning and for more digitalisation of the educational setting particularly during and after the Covid-19 pandemic.   The current research paper aims at investigating ENSC written expression teachers' technological awareness, but primarily their attitudes towards the use of weblogs in the teaching of the writing skill.

The data are gathered via a questionnaire, and the teachers' responses help us answer the following questions:

- To what extent are teachers familiar with the current technological advancements?

- Which digital tools do they use often?
- What are the obstacles that face teachers when incorporating technology in their teaching?
- Do teachers hold positive attitudes towards blog integration in the teaching of writing?

1. Literature review

Before exploring teachers' attitudes, it is essential to first understand the concept of web 2.0, blogs and its different types and their advantages in educational practices.

1.1. Definition of web 2.0

Blogging is one of the eminent tools of the second phase of the web or Web 2.0, a more dynamic and collaborative version of the web. By the early 2000, the notion of interactivity went from linking and clicking to creating and sharing where individuals not only find and read information but also create and share their own in real time. The term web 2.0 was a result a of a brainstorming session between O'Reilly and Media Live International, and the meaning of web 2.0 was clarified through examples by spotting the difference between the two versions (O'Reilly 2005, see table 01).

Table 01: Some differences between web1.0 and web 2.0

Web 1.0	Web 2.0
Britannica Online	**Wikipedia**
Ppersonal Websites	**Blogging**
Publishing	**Participation**
Content Management Systems	**Wikis**

Source: O'Reilly (2005,p.2)

Web 2.0 allows users much control over the created content and has also eased the extension of social media as a significant means of online communication. With web 2.0. the web "has morphed from static HTML (Hypertext Mark-up Language) pages where readers could find and copy information to interactive services, where visitors can create and post information" (Solomon& Shrum 2007, p.8). The shift from desktop-based applications to new online tools rendered the web an interactive participatory place where the information is created and shared collaboratively. "The web is no longer a one-way street where someone controls the content. Anyone can control content in a web 2.0 world" (Ibid).

Table 02: Comparison of web 1.0 and web 2.0 features

Web 1.0	Web 2.0
Application Based	Web based
Offline	Online
Isolated	Collaborative
Licensed or Purchased	Free
Single Creator	Multiple collaborators
Proprietary Code	Open source
Copyrighted Content	Shared content

Source: **Solomon&Shrum (2007,p.23)**

2.1. Definition of blogs

The Oxford English Dictionary (n.d.) defines a blog as "A frequently updated website, typically run by a single person and consisting of personal observations arranged in chronological order, excerpts from other sources, hyperlinks to other sites, etc.; an online journal or diary". Pinkman's definition emphasizes the practicality and advantages of blogs; a blog is an easy to manage online journal where foreign language learners "… can reflect, comment, question, review, and communicate—outside the classroom in an authentic environment" (Pinkman, 2005, p. 13).

3.2. Types of blogs

Back to 1999 there were two main types of blogs the personal journals and blogs linked to other stories (arts, politics, sports, etc.); however, the millions of blogs that exist nowadays render blogs similar to books in that they can be defined by genre, style, format and author. (Farkas, 2007)

In education, blogs are classified into three main types (Campbell, 2003)

➢ **The tutor blog:** which is a blog that is created and controlled by the tutor (for his learners) to achieve certain objectives such as fostering verbal exchange via comments, providing more reading "daily" practice, and serving as a source for useful links for self-study.
➢ **The learner blogs:** this type is either controlled by individual learners or by small groups of learners and are very suitable for reading and writing classes; they can be used as journals or free spaces for self-expression (a good means of writing practice).

➢ **The class blog:** it is the outcome of a whole class collaboration; they can be used as a means for facilitating project-based learning or as a space for international language exchange.

4.1. Advantages of blogs

Blogs are not very common, yet they are significant opportunities for online collaboration for both learners and language professionals. Despite their journalistic or personal nature, there has been growing interest in the use of blogs in education, mainly for their different uses (Godwin-Jones, 2003).

- Blogs can function as an electronic portfolio when linked to a course to show the learner's progress over time.
- Self-publishing via blogging allows the students to be more responsible and gives them a sense of ownership as it leads them to be more thoughtful about what to publish in term of form and content, as they know they are writing for a real audience (Ibid).
- Blogs are easy to design and do not require much web knowledge, all what a person needs is to register on one of the blog creating sites which are free and easily accessed (Ibid).
- Blogs motivate learners to write and even improves their writing skills once they know they are writing for a real audience, an audience apart from the teacher, an audience that is going sometimes to disagree or discuss which makes them care more about what they write in terms of form and content. (Solomon & Shrum, 2010, Aljumah, 2012)
- Blogs are different from social networks such as Facebook; "they focus more on presenting oneself in writing" and recently they have been utilized in foreign language teaching, for they provide learners with an authentic language environment that allows them to get to larger audiences, and permit the teacher and student peers to exchange feedback and to foster negotiation of meaning. (Hung & Huang, 2016)
- Students can practice writing and reading as well when interacting on blogs as they comment and respond to their peer's comments. (Ibid).
- Blogging offers teachers of writing an opportunity for involving students in writing activities and promoting students' motivation and writing skills (Baggetun & Wassun, 2006 as cited in Dippold, 2009); hence, they are a good educational tool for shy and less confident students (Hanson-Smith, 2001).

- Blogs are a very useful opportunity to discuss issues "that may not be the focus of the traditional classroom" (Aljumah,2012)
- Blogs offer students an opportunity to read about the topics that interest them and even write about what interests them as well**. (Ibid)**

2. Methodology

In order to elicit data regarding the teachers' attitudes towards using blogs in writing instruction a questionnaire was used. The sample, procedure of data collection and data analysis are to be detailed below.

1.2. Participants

The participants in this study are 20 teachers (out of 45) who were randomly selected, and who had been teaching writing or had taught it at least once at the department of English at the ENSC.

2.2. Tools of research

This study used a quantitative approach using a questionnaire designed via google forms and sent in the academic year 2023/2024. One major reason for choosing an online questionnaire is the fast and easy access online questionnaires offer to larger populations in different locations (Dorney & Taguchi, 2010). "Web-based research helps us to save time because it does not require the administration of the instrument in person—once the recruitment posting has been made, administration is self-running" (Dorney &Taguchi, 2010, p.70).

5.3. Description of the questionnaire

The questionnaire used in this piece of research is made of 31 questions, all of which are closed ended questions except the last question (further suggestions), and 2 follow up questions, (Q12 and Q19), in the form of 'please specify' and 'please justify'.

With regard to its structures, the questionnaire is divided into five sections. The first section (from Q1 to Q 4) explores the demographic information of the respondents (gender, age, degree and teaching experience). The second section (from Q5 to Q10) highlights the teachers' digital literacy by questioning their computing literacy, familiarity and use of the recent digital tools, and the challenges they encounter when using technology. The third section (from Q11 to Q13) aims at investigating the use of technology in the teaching of writing while

the fourth section (from Q 14 to Q19) enquires about teachers' familiarity with the web 2.0 and blogs.

The fifth section, deemed the most significant for this study, investigates the teachers' attitudes towards blog use in writing instruction. This section used a three-point Likert scale where respondents would either agree, partly agree or disagree with a given statement. The statements investigated the teachers' views about the utility of blogs in ELT, their effectiveness in developing learners' writing proficiency, in enhancing their vocabulary, fostering their grammatical accuracy, and in increasing their interest and motivation.

5.4. Data Analysis

The response rate in this study is 100%. All the participants are female permanent teachers; the majority of whom (75%) are between 35 and 45 years old while 20% of them are more than 45 years old. Concerning their academic degree, 55% of the respondents hold a PHD degree whereas 45% hold a master/magister degree. This indicates the advanced academic level of the participants together with a substantial professional experience. 55% of the informants have between 11 and 15 years of experience in teaching English at the university, 25 % have between 16 and 20 years of experience while the minority 10% have between 6 and 10 years of experience.

As far as the digital literacy of the informants is concerned, 65% report having an average digital proficiency while 35% believe they have a good proficiency which implies certain confidence in the use of modern tools but not a total mastery. This confidence might stem from the fact that 55% have already participated in a computer-based course though 45% have never received such a course which is a relatively high rate for university teachers in the 21 century.

In order to gain a deeper understanding of the teachers' technological background and awareness (the first research question), the informants were asked about the digital tools they use often, the contexts of using these tools, and the difficulties they face when using technology. The results show that 95% use Moodle while 80% use search engines (Google) and social networking sites, 75% use mobile applications. Nevertheless, only 15% use blogs and 20% use wikis. These responses imply the teachers' non-familiarity with recent tools, continuous reliance, and preference for the widely used tools (such as Google and Moodle)

and lack of innovation. In the same way, the responses show a very limited and monotonous use of technology; most teachers (95%) use technology either for preparing lessons or for posting them (60%). Unexpectedly, only 5% of the population use technology for integrating videos and audios though technology is a very good means for alleviating the learning process and a rich source of authentic materials.

Concerning the challenges that teachers might encounter when using technology, poor internet connection and learners' poor digital proficiency were reported (by 65% each) as the major challenges teachers face. The second challenge is teachers' lack of digital proficiency (45%). Thus, teachers' willingness to integrate technology is not sufficient when confronted with inappropriate conditions or unqualified students.

Before getting to the main objective of this study, which is the attitudes of teachers towards blog integration in teaching writing, it was primordial to unveil the respondents' attitudes towards the use of technology in the teaching of writing. 65% use technology to teach writing (mainly via Moodle); however, a good portion (35%) do not use technology and provided the following justifications:

- "Writing is better taught face to face"
- "Technology might be used only for transmitting the theoretical knowledge".
- "I have no idea how we can teach writing by technology"
- "I believe that writing can be better taught and assessed in-class. We can rely on technology just in matters of giving students reading tasks related to the essay to be covered."
- "I use it mainly to provide feedback. It is neater than providing feedback in the paper".
- "Apart from the Corona period and regarding the nature of writing process, teaching WE is a better face-to-face task where a novice writer will be easily directed and guided in the different steps before reaching the final version".

Regarding the teachers' perceptions of blogs and web 2.0, 80% of the respondents do not know what web 2.0 is (40% are not familiar with the term web 2.0 while another 40% have heard about it but are not sure what it means). Moreover, though 60% reported that they know blogs, 95% of the informants admitted they had never used them in teaching writing because:

- "I have other alternatives ".
- "I don't know how to use them".
- "I do not have access to the necessary technology or support systems required to effectively integrate blogging into the curriculum".

At last, with regard to teachers' attitudes towards using blogs in writing instruction. The respondents partly agreed with most of the statements on the utility of blogs in ELT, their efficiency in: developing writing proficiency, enhancing learners' vocabulary, increasing learners' interest and motivation and enhancing their grammatical proficiency as it is shown in the table below.

Table 03: Teachers' attitudes towards blog utility in ELT and impact on learners

Statements	Agree	Partly agree	Disagree
Blogs are useful in ELT	35%	60%	5%
Blogs are a very effective tool in developing learners' writing proficiency.	15%	80%	5%
Blogs enhance learners' vocabulary	45%	55%	0%
Using blogs fosters learners' interest and learning motivation	40%	60%	0%
Blogs enhance learners' grammatical accuracy	25%	55%	20%

However, teachers had a more positive view towards the use of blogs as a tool of creating and sharing materials, for learners to express themselves, and for promoting learner-learner interaction and collaborative learning (**table 04**).

Table 04: Teachers' attitudes towards using blog for sharing materials, self-expression, promoting learner-learner interaction and teacher interaction

Statements	Agree	Partly agree	Disagree

Using blogs facilitates the creating and sharing of materials.	50%	45%	5%
Blogs help learners in expressing themselves	65%	35%	0%
Blogs promote learner- learner interaction and collaborative learning	60%	40%	0%
Blogs promote teacher-learner interaction.	45%	50%	5%

These findings imply that the informants' caution or uncertainty towards blogs is basically because they do not have much knowledge about blogs especially that half of them (50%) believe that blogs are hard to use and time consuming and prefer using other tools.

Conclusion

The study at hand sought to unveil the attitudes of written expression teachers at the ENSC towards the use of weblogs in teaching the writing skill. The data obtained reveal that teachers hold a neutral or cautiously positive attitude towards using blogs in teaching. Teachers recognize the potential benefits of blogs in certain areas like fostering learners' self- expression, learner-learner interaction and promoting collaborative learning, yet they seem uncertain about blogs' efficiency particularly in writing classes. Though many teachers have expressed their willingness for technology integration in writing classes, a good number, however, believe that writing requires the direct interaction and supervision of the teacher and prefer the face-to-face instruction.

These attitudes stem from several factors. First many teachers are not so familiar with web 2.0 and its tools such as wikis and blogs and own very limited knowledge on their benefits in ELT. They believe that blogs are complex and time consuming and are a means of sharing materials or fostering learner-learner communication rather than a tool of teaching; therefore, they do not use them and prefer more 'traditional' tools with which they are more familiar such as Moodle. Second, an important portion of the informants did not receive an adequate computer-based training, which might justify their reluctance and fear of innovation with regard to recent digital means and methods of teaching.

Recommendations

In light of the above findings revealing a significant gap between teachers' knowledge and the evolving requirements of the modern world, we put forth the following suggestions:

➢ Teachers should be offered regular courses or workshops on the different technology- based tools to raise their awareness on the benefits that modern technology offers for their instructional practices, which goes beyond the preparation and posting of materials.

➢ The authorities should make a call for a more digital and more concrete learning by ensuring the availability of the necessary resources such as internet access at universities and campuses.

Limitation of the study and further research

Despite the use of random sampling, all the participants in this study were female which might reflect a purely female perspective and affect the gender diversity that might impact the findings of the study. Further research could investigate certain variables such as gender and age and their effect on the respondents' attitudes. In addition, more elaborate longitudinal studies could be conducted to investigate teachers' attitudes after a certain period of training or use of blogs.

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Appendices

Teachers' Questionnaire

Dear Colleague,

This questionnaire is part of a research study investigating higher education teachers' technological awareness as well as their attitudes towards the use of web 2.0 technology in English Language Teaching, more particularly, the use of blogs in the teaching of written expression. Your responses are of great value to the research and will be kept anonymous and confidential.

You are kindly requested to tick (⌞) the corresponding box or provide a complete answer when necessary.

Thank you for your cooperation.

Section One: Personal information

1. Gender (Male /Female)

2. Age (25-35, 35-45, More than 45)

3. Academic degree (Master/ Magistére, Doctorat, Professor)

4. Teaching experience

Section Two: Teachers' Technological Awareness

5. How would you rate your digital proficiency? (Good, Average, Bad)

6. Have you ever participated in any educational technology or computer-based learning course? (yes, no)

7. If yes, please specify the courses in which you have participated.

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8. What are the technological tools with which you are most familiar? (**search engines, mobile applications, Moodle, social networking sites, Wikis, Blogs, others (please specify**)?

……………………………………………………………………………………………………

9. When do you most use technology? (**Preparing lessons, posting lessons, lesson presentation, assessment, delivering feedback, others (please specify**)?

……………………………………………………………………………………………………

10. What challenges do you face when using technology in teaching? **Your low motivation, poor internet connection, your lack of digital proficiency, your students' poor digital proficiency, students' lack of interest, others (please specify**).

……………………………………………………………………………………………………

11. Do you use technology for teaching written expression? (Yes, no)

12. Please justify your answer in either case.

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13. What are the technological tools you use for teaching written expression?

(**Moodle, social networking sites, blogs, artificial intelligence tools, others (please specify**)……………………………………………………………………………………………

Section Three: Teachers' use of web 2.0 tools

14. Are you familiar with web 2.0? (Yes, no, I have heard about it but do not know what it means).

15. If you are familiar with web 2.0 technology, which web 2.0 tools do you use often?

(**Social networking sites, blogs, wikis, RSS, others please specify**)
……………………………………………………………………………………………………

16. Do you know blogs? (Yes, no, I have heard about it but do not know what it means).

17. What type of blogs do you read usually? Personal, travel, fashion, science, education, food, news, others (please specify).

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18. Have you ever used blogs in your teaching? (Yes, no)

19. Please justify your answer in either case.

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Section Four: Teachers' Attitudes towards the Use of Blogs in ELT

Indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with each of the following statements

20. Blogs are useful in ELT.

a. Agree   b. partly agree   c. disagree

21. Blogs are a very effective tool in developing learners' writing proficiency.

a. Agree   b. partly agree   c. disagree

22. Blogs enhance learners' vocabulary.

a. Agree   b. partly agree   c. disagree

23. Blogs enhances learners' grammatical accuracy.

a. Agree   b. partly agree   c. disagree

24. Using blogs fosters learners' interest and learning motivation.

a. Agree   b. partly agree   c. disagree

25. Using blogs facilitates the creating and sharing of materials.

a. Agree   b. partly agree   c. disagree

26. Blogs help learners in expressing themselves.

a. Agree   b. partly agree   c. disagree

27. Blogs promote learner- learner interaction and collaborative learning.

a. Agree   b. partly agree   c. disagree

28. Blogs promote teacher learner interaction.

a. Agree   b. partly agree   c. disagree

29. Blog are hard to use and are time consuming.

a. Agree   b. partly agree   c. disagree

30. I prefer using other technological tools.

a. Agree   b. partly agree   c. disagree

31. Further suggestions

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Thank you