

Using Blogs As An Extension Of The Class To Enhance Communicative Competence

Esteban Cuastumal Pérez

Submitted to the Faculty of Human Sciences in partial fulfillment

of the requirements for the degree of B. A.

in the English and Spanish program

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Las ideas y conclusiones aportadas en el siguiente trabajo son responsabilidad exclusiva del autor.

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Dedicatoria

Este proyecto de grado fue realizado gracias a mi familia, su incondicional apoyo fue la más grande motivación para alcanzar este logro. Además, doy gracias especialmente a mi madre por todo el esfuerzo y el aliento entregados. A todos, mil gracias.

Resumen

Este proyecto de investigación explora algunas ideas que validan la afirmación de que el uso de blogs como extensión de la clase mejora la competencia comunicativa de los estudiantes. Al mismo tiempo, este proyecto incluye un breve análisis de algunos autores quienes han usado blogs en diferentes situaciones y explican las ventajas y desventajas de este uso.

Adicionalmente, el papel del docente y el del estudiante son tomados en cuenta con el objetivo de dar una apreciación de la función y las tareas que llevan a cabo los participantes. Por último, pero no por ello menos importante, algunas conclusiones serán dadas con el fin de proporcionar algunas recomendaciones.

Palabras clave: blogs, CALL, enseñanza, aprendizaje, tecnología, materiales, comunicación, Internet, variedad, ventajas, desventajas.

Abstract

This research paper explores some ideas that validate the statement that the use of blogs as an extension of the class enhances the students' communicative competence. At the same time, this paper includes a brief analysis of some authors who have used blogs in different situations and explain the advantages and disadvantages of this use.

In addition, the roles of the teacher and the students are also taken into account with the objective of giving an appreciation of the function and the tasks performed by each participant. Last but not least, the conclusions will be given as a way of recommending some ideas.

Keywords: blogs, CALL, teaching, learning, technology, materials, communication, Internet, variety, advantages, disadvantages

Table of Contents

Using blogs (as an extension of the class) to enhance communicative competence.....	8
Computer Assisted Language Learning – CALL – CALL Impact on the Language Learning World.....	8
Using technology in language learning	13
Communicative competence: the development of different skills and the advantages of blogs to improve them.....	15
Variety and interactivity: key features when learning a language.....	21
Interaction: interactivity as a way of finding a lot of resources	23
Computers and autonomous learning.....	26
Blogs: advantages and disadvantages of using blogs as extension of the class.....	27
Advantages.....	27
Disadvantages.....	29
Teachers’ role and students’ role: commitment inside and outside the classroom.....	30
Teacher role.....	30
Student role.....	32
Conclusions.....	34
References.....	36

Using Blogs (as an Extension of the Class) to Enhance Communicative Competence

Historically, the process of teaching and learning a language has been changing thanks to contributions done by many different authors like Jean Piaget and his theory of cognitive development or Howard Gardner and his theory of multiple intelligences in the early 1980's, among others. Those contributions have been focused on making learning more dynamic, participative, interactive and creative. Thus, when talking about the present, the development of the skills like listening and speaking or reading and writing is deeply related with the role technology plays in the daily life with great impact (Hubbard, 2016).

In other words, it can be said that with the appearance of new technological devices like computers, laptops, cell-phones, smart-phones and tablets; languages have been supported inside and outside the classroom with a great variety of materials, with new activities, with better means of communication and with some better alternatives of knowing a language. For example, computers have become a great tool since the middle of the eighties not only in languages, but also in other fields of knowledge as it is mentioned by Hubbard (2009). The integration of technology into communities has opened many different ways of exploring, watching, and being up to date with the changes in culture, nature or social phenomena, among others. In this way, it is easy now to see the uses of technology in education and language learning. Some of these new uses are reflected to how people communicate, how people learn or how people understand the world.

Computer Assisted Language Learning – CALL – CALL Impact on the Language Learning World

When talking about languages and technology, Kilickaya (2005) argues that much different software (computers programs) like PLATO (Programmed Logic for Automatic Teaching Operations) or TICCIT (Time-shared, Interactive, Computer Controlled Information Television)

has taken place in education due to the exercise it brings in language learning and all the opportunities technology offers. These programs had a specific function that helped students to develop their skills. In most of the cases, these programs were grammar-oriented; it means, they were mainly developed to help students improve their grammar and vocabulary. Thus, the activities included; filling gaps with a previously given word, clicking on a word (the one considered as the best option), moving parts of words to complete sentences, matching, among others.

Through time, PLATO and TICCIT were improved in order to show more useful content in more organized ways, also; with the emerging of the Internet and more powerful computers PLATO and TICCIT paved the way for the emerging of new software like Encyclopedia Encarta® with the main aim of helping students develop not only their grammar or vocabulary (Kilickaya, 2005). Thus Hubbard (2009) found evidence that the students' skills like pronunciation, listening, speaking, reading and writing were improved (all with significant advances) thanks to the use of technology. Besides, tools like Internet have opened the accessibility to information through the World Wide Web (www). This new term represents "a vast network of linked hypertext files, stored on computers throughout the world, that can provide a computer user with information on a huge variety of subjects" (*Dictionary.com*, 2016). Now, it can be said that information is put, shared, edited and shown on the Internet to be manipulated by all Internet users; and although through time the sources of information have changed (like books, magazines, researches), learning a language is an activity in which experts are still working on.

Nowadays, the learning of a language can be supported by technology, and methods have changed and evolved. The use of computers in educational institutions like high schools, academies, universities among others is very common thanks to the advantages that computers and the Internet provide. In such a way, Beatty (2003) affirms that new ways of learning and teaching

languages have appeared in order to improve the quality, the rhythm and the way in which lessons are taught according to the trends that technology has created.

One of those new approaches in language teaching and learning is CALL or Computer Assisted Language Learning. According to Davies (n.d. para. 1) CALL “is often perceived, somewhat narrowly, as an approach to language teaching and learning in which the computer is used as an aid to the presentation, reinforcement and assessment of material to be learned, usually including a substantial interactive element.” also in contemporary definitions, CALL has included other devices which have similar functions to computers. What is more, CALL also has been called as TALL or Technology Assisted Language Learning because technology encompasses an extended selection of tools (Kennedy, 2013). It means that CALL symbolizes a change in the way of learning.

When using CALL as a tool that provides enormous implications for teaching and learning, knowledge can be presented in an innovative way and offers amazing prospects for improving language learning (Hubbard, 2016). Consequently, CALL can be focused on task-oriented learning or goal-oriented learning due to the fact technology supports, in a great amount, the situation and conditions of the experiences teachers and students live when being inside a classroom. In this case, technology is considered to have a higher position in learning because it seems to be more influential, practical, functional and in a different way, positively interactive due to the ability of computers and electronic devices of recording the students’ progress and comparing them through time (Osorno & Lopera, 2012).

CALL is not only based on computers, but also on different devices with an Internet connection. This new approach is one of the most powerful tools in learning nowadays (Jarvis & Achilleos, 2013). The expansion of technology and communication allows other fields of knowledge spread all their potential with the main objective of improving, supporting and

sustaining the ideas, concepts and theories that teachers and students manage in the process of acquiring information. Moreover, all these new channels of communication permit having different kinds of input represented in audio-visual material; it means, having principally pictures, sounds, texts and links that can expand the activities; all of them given or shown at the same time or separately.

These entire recent characteristics take CALL out as a current way of expanding the experience inside the classroom. Audio-visual materials make learning easier due to the fact that students can retain information in a simpler way thanks to the use of their auditory and visual memories (Thorne, 2003). In other words, interacting with a computer that presents information with great variety, influences enormously in the process of learning of the students (Hubbard, 2009). The interest of the learner about learning a new language has been increasing since computers and other devices support the teaching of a language. The whole community in scholar environments receives technology as a tool that can hardly be replaced at least in a vast number of years.

With all this in mind, variety is a very relevant issue regarding CALL and its advantages. The fact of having different sources when presenting materials makes lessons more interactive, interesting and less boring (Villas, 2011); all this, considering that students are sometimes attracted by colors, shapes, puzzles, contents or anything that differs from the normal or traditional materials in a class, considered as the book, the pen or pencil and the board (Villas, 2011).

In this fashion, another of the most important features CALL provides is the integration of skills. When using computers inside or outside the classroom, teachers and students can interact with other people directly thanks to the modern technology; and in other words, a person can interact immediately with a few resources. Chat rooms and Internet-service shops can be found everywhere with low prices and sometimes, the use of Internet is free in places like universities,

schools, libraries among others. Nowadays; according to Beatty (2003), “CALL is promoted as a complete method of learning a language...” (p. 8) due to the use of computers inside or outside the classroom. Therefore, this use permits the exposure of students to different kinds of activities with different kinds of materials. In this way, the present materials that a computer offers include; images, sounds, reading, text processing programs, videos, links to other Internet sites and a really important one, immediate communication, *inter alia*.

In addition, it should be taken into account that technology has changed the way of learning a language, especially due to the ease of communicating with any person in the world through tools like Internet and text messaging, but it is not true for all EFL settings. For example, in Colombia in 2002 (more than a decade ago), a study with students of first and second semester of Languages was carried out taking into account the use of CALL at Gran Colombia University in Bogotá. The author of the project had as the objective to analyze “the potential benefits of interaction with multimedia software environments...” (Agustin, 2002) (para. 1). Here the students had to interact with software in a computer in order to improve the management of the target language, in this case English. At the end of the study, the results showed that although in 2002 in Colombia there was a great variety of technological aspects into society and specially Gran Colombia University, the implementation of computers inside the classrooms was in great amount difficult due to “the absence of current knowledge about effective use of technology and empirical knowledge about the best way to interact with multimedia” (Agustin, 2002) (para. 11). In other words, the author concludes that the lack of knowledge about how to focus and use computers in language learning created a sense of dissatisfaction among teachers and students because their expectations were not accomplished; and also, the study created a new concern and need for researching in methodological trends using CALL at least in our context.

As a consequence, these days, because of the use of technology is a global trend, it is easy to see that many teachers have included computers as a tool in their lessons in order to make the class interactive and full of opportunities to develop the language and its use. For example, in Colombia, a program called “Computadores para Educar” was developed in 2001 by the Ministry of Education, the Ministry of Information and Communications Technology (ITC) among other organizations. The main aim of the program was to provide educational institutes with computers and other devices and train teachers for its use. After more than 10 years running the program, according to the Ministry of ITC, teachers have increased their performance in many different areas including the English subject; their practices now include more dynamic and participative lessons thanks to technology, besides, students have increased their interest and the sense of interaction among classmates. Additionally, the inclusion of technology in classrooms showed a decrease in the levels of truancy and an increase in the accessibility to tertiary education.

However, although it is clear that Colombian teachers are using computers and the Internet, it is very difficult to determine what kind of specific tools are being used. And even if technology is present, there is no clear evidence that teachers are including blogs inside classes.

Using Technology in Language Learning

Granting the objective of CALL seems very elemental or easy to understand, it is important to remember that all advantages CALL brings to literacy are accurate for language learning, and that the way how computers are used has to be taken as already learnt on the part of the teachers. In other words, CALL is not about how to use computers. There are lots of reasons which somehow support the idea that CALL provides knowledge only about computers and their use (for example, the training of teachers in order to work as instructors in the management of the tools computers and Internet bring); and although it is true in a really minimum part, Bonk, Lee and Wisher (2008) affirm that it is a new teachers’ duty to know that CALL is only a true

powerful tool which has come into language learning and that its proper use depends completely on the way how lessons are planned and on the use teachers or instructors give.

Consequently, due to the quick grow of CALL as a tool and its use, Beatty (2003) also mentions that CALL is the term that encloses other terms. One of those new terms is TALL or Technology Assisted Language Learning. This new term and many others have been derived from the use of technology and the invention of new devices like the previously named; Smart-phones, Tablets, Laptops. According to Kennedy (2013), the term TALL was originated and has been part of "...the very early innovations created at the University of Illinois in the form of the PLATO project in 1960." (para. 1) All these new tools, with an online connection, open a giant access to information anywhere a person is. TALL can be considered as an extension of CALL as this first one not only uses computers, but also different kinds of devices. With this, the appearance of on-line instructional lessons or technology-based lessons was a reality. When a teacher intends to use CALL or TALL, should consider the possibility of extending the class with on-line activities or tasks. Here Beatty (2003) talks about the Multimedia and Hypermedia terms normally taken into account if we use technology and Internet connections. Multimedia is the term used to talk about different combinations of elements in a single place or site.

Multimedia and Hypermedia can be found in software and Internet platforms. Multimedia is in language learning the feature computers (and other devices) offer when a student confronts, analyses, manages and acquires information. And with the use of Internet, Hypermedia corresponds to the ability of having different connections or links of a single thing with others of the same type; for example, hypertext or different types of texts, hyper video as different types of videos or hyperlink as different kinds of links. The very term Hyper denotes a large use of something in a determined field.

Additionally, when a lesson is planned and carried out in the classroom, a few features should be considered. First, teachers should reflect on their own understanding regarding computers, Internet and the mix of both. A teacher has to be competitive enough to manage and take numerous advantages of technology in a general view. Second, when planning, teachers should consider the ability students have with computers. Learners are the core of the lesson, so teachers do not have to omit any detail when applying their strategies. In here, the technology literacy of students should be thought over; in other words, teachers have to contemplate if their students know enough about computers so as to use them correctly. And third, the teacher has to have a clear aim or objective to the end of the lesson. As every lesson, the objective must be clear, well-organized, coherent, cohesive and realistic (Chapelle & Jamieson, 2008).

Thus, teachers have to review all the materials, all the stations where students will be working, all software or programs to be used, all the connections and all hardware specially the screen, the keyboard, the mouse and the speakers or headphones.

On the other hand, if a lesson is planned bearing in mind the use of computers, teachers should remember that all the situations shown must be realistic and meaningful. Although computers offer an innumerable amount of information, the lesson will have to contain meaningful situations understood as grammar and vocabulary carefully chosen in order to have a more realistic class full of valuable contents in appropriate contexts.

Communicative Competence: The Development of Different Skills and the Advantages of Blogs to Improve them

According to Gonzales (2008), communicative competence is nowadays the ability not only of a student, but also of a person in general, who can use language effectively in order to establish communication and interact with others inside a community or specific social group. The appropriate use of language features enables a person to send and receive information

successfully. In other words, this makes someone able to manage properly information that at the end of the day would express that the user is able to handle different kinds of situations where language is involved.

As a matter of fact, communicative approaches have been an important item in terms of language teaching and learning. Consequently, the main objective of learning a language is being able to communicate in different contexts, with a broad amount of vocabulary, with a good use of pronunciation, with very well-structured grammar and ultimately, having the means to understand what others say in order to exchange meaningful messages. As a consequence, cohesion and coherence are two terms involved in communicative competence that should be tried to be reached. Cohesion refers to the good organization of the lexical items that sentences should have inside a discourse. It is that sentences have to be perfectly structured with an appropriate use of subjects, verbs, predicates or complements. Additionally, coherence refers to the good organization of sentences and messages inside a text. Thus, the use of linking words, punctuation, redaction and the meaning of sentences should be considered to reach a good development of the ideas put inside a text, all of them with a sequential order.

When considering computers, historically the teaching of languages has been primarily carried out with inaccurate translation programs. It means that learning was essentially grammar-centered and that its use was limited to written texts where students had to choose the best option to complete a sentence. Here, only grammar and vocabulary were contemplated and not in a total and effective way, but these were not enough if the aim of teaching was at the end that students could communicate adequately. Along these lines, it is suitably as in present that computers focus on different parts of language and not only in a specific one. Hence, one of the most powerful features computers offer are blogs.

Blackstone, Spiri and Naganuma (2007) cite the following “Historically, a weblog, or ‘blog’ for short, is recognized by its regularly updated, time and date stamped posts, running down the computer screen in chronologically reverse order (i.e. the most recent post comes first). Crucially, there is an ‘Add Comment’ feature so that readers of posts can leave their opinions, questions or thoughts. Finally, there is a writing style element: blogs are written by one individual who gives his or her thoughts in a generally relaxed, ‘spoken’ style” (p. 03). Besides, as highlighted by Quintero (2008), “a weblog is a website that is updated regularly and organized chronologically according to the date, and in reverse order from most recent entry backwards. Weblogs can also provide decentralized access rights which allow(s) multiple authors.” In a more general view Quintero (2008) argues that; “the weblog is usually motivated solely by the need of self-expression, and often communicates something about the personality, or adopted person, behind the blog, through the style of writing and choice of topics.” (para. 28)

Blogs offer the ease of grouping different hyperlinks related about a specific topic in the same place; thus, Campbell (2003) offers 3 types of blogs:

- The Tutor Blog: This kind of blog is normally administered by the teacher and he/she is the person who determines what kind of content to show. As the teacher is the organizer of all the information about the lessons, information about the syllabus, assignments or extra activities can be shared easily in order to let the students know the mechanics of the group. Besides, the content of the blog can promote the exploration of English websites allowing the student to choose pages that fit their interests or promote their confidence. In addition, this kind of blog “encourages online verbal exchange by use of comment buttons” (para. 6) and “serves as a resource of links for self-study” (para. 7)

- The Learner Blog: can be run by a single learner or a group of them. The main idea is to foster the use of English webpages or in general English sources with the objective of start a discussion about a specific topic. As Campbell (2003) argues, the idea is that students "...develop a sense of ownership, and get experience with the practical, legal, and ethical issues of creating a hypertext document." (para. 8)
- The Class Blog: is one of the most important kinds of blogs due to its collaborative format. The idea is let students start a discussion through different kinds of entries, images, photos, comments, experiences, links, etc., with the objective of presenting an environment of acceptability and promotion of practice about a specific topic. Moreover, the language exchange takes its place and students start developing their skills.

Like this, Al-Ghamari, (2004); Bose, (2003); Faydi,(2003); Mekheimer & Aldosari, (2013) argue that the implementation of blogs into the lessons "...could lead to noticeable improvements in the overall proficiency of the target language" (as cited in Alharbi, 2015, p. 4). It means that all the skills can be worked out in language learning and can be studied deeply; and at the same time, can be used meaningfully thanks to the contextualization of lessons. In here, the experience can be taken away the classroom and its positive characteristics can be simply set up.

On that account, many different advantages can be easily found with blogs use inside and outside the classroom. In general terms, blogs confer particular features to learning. These features can be taken as:

First: as Capmbell (2003) argues, learning is more practical than theoretical; it means students can access to different kinds of contents which can possess better explanations about an individual topic. For example, if one of the objectives of a lesson is the use of Regular Past Verbs,

students will be able to come across distinct web-pages which are the same in deep; although in a general view the organization of the information could be different. Strictly speaking, students will find various explanations that can make their understanding be more accurate and clear.

Second, theoretical knowledge can be represented with variety of practical elements. Internet presents innumerable pages which are full of activities, exercises and tasks that can help improve the students' process of learning (Alharbi, 2015).

Third, blogs can be managed easily by a person who gets basic knowledge about computers and Internet. Just like this, the administration of a blog can be carried out in a cheap and fast way. At this time, it is easy to find a computer with an Internet connection in different places, which makes even easier the experience of showing The Extension of a Class through this media (Campbell, 2003).

Fourth, the extension of a class gives a deep control and management of the topics seen while in class. Teachers will extend the experience of students when acquiring information. Like this, knowledge can be more meaningful and the memory of learners will be used for a longer period as a consequence of including extra or "outside" tasks in a normal scheduled-class lesson.

And fifth, maybe the most important feature of blogging is that learners will have the opportunity to develop their skills simultaneously or separately. In such a way, teachers will be disposed to give lessons focusing on a single skill or on two or more of them. Naturally, it is well known that skills can be connected through their own features; it means, skills will be developed more rapidly and with clear appreciations. Either singular or plural, students' skills will find the best way of being corrected and used (Koochang, Riley, Smith and Schreurs, 2009).

Bearing all this in mind, the contents teachers use in blogs are the key when looking for more tools in order to enrich the objectives of lessons. When extending the class, the blog used for this purpose will have to have information about the task the teacher wants their students to work

on and improve. At this stage, teachers have a big role selecting and filtering the information they want to show to learners. This part, although it can be seen as very elementary and easy, is maybe one of the most complex ones. Teachers are completely required to select, analyze, manage, test and assess all the information their blogs will contain. All this, presented with the aim of offering learners meaningful ways of improving their experiences (Aggarwal, Ahluwalia & Gupta, 2011).

Hubbard (2009) argues that one example of the above described is that the growth of listening in CALL has been developed in a high, fast way thanks to advances like Internet and global communication. All over the Internet, it is very common to find recordings, radio stations, videos, video-clips and lyrics, movies, programs and activities (free of charge) all focused in the development of Listening. Different from the other skills, listening had not had a big role on learning in the past years. Its progress lied on activities of listening to a variety of sounds as in phonetics; different conversations performed in a specific place as a contextualization of the vocabulary or the grammar seen as the topic of the class. But in a general view, listening had improved in the way that technology has allowed the interaction in real time with other people around the world; and that interaction can be carried out with real native speakers of the target language (Hubbard, 2009). Thus, the exchange of information in general has permitted to build open relations between learners with an increased interest not only in learning the language, but also in knowing other cultures always expecting being part of a group or specific circle of people.

Consequently, the development of speaking has grown significantly (Hubbard, 2009). With the expansion of technology and therefore of communication, speaking has been mainly supported by the use of first, mobile phones with enormous telecommunication networks and second, by the use of specialized software like Skype™, Messenger™ or Facebook®, all of them allowing to have video-calls with an internet connection. Thus, although it is not using blogs, Romaña (2015) from Universidad Distrital Francisco José de Caldas in Bogotá, argues that “Skype™ conference

calls (a tool that can be used inside blogs) might be considered as an influential computer-mediated communication tool in order to promote English as a foreign language adult A1 learners' speaking skill, especially for social interaction purposes and oral reinforcement of both language fluency and course contents outside of classroom settings" (p. 143).

On the other hand, Aggarwal, Ahluwalia & Gupta (2011) argue that the use of blogs for language learning is "a highly productive, communicatively meaningful and effective approach to helping students refine and develop their language skills". After carrying out their study the majority of students showed great acceptance to blogging reflected in improvements in their communication skills, especially for the writing and reading skills due to activities of posting in their blogs or other students' blogs, or reading the material or contents of their own blogs or other students' comments/blogs. Their study was based on the objective of making students create a blog, interact with the contents and post their assignments in order to share the experience meanwhile English was put into practice.

Besides, students highlight that the use of different contents in the blog gave way to "interaction and the development of their analytical skills" (Aggarwal, Ahluwalia & Gupta, 2011). In their studies, Godwin-Jones (2003) and Warlick (2005) argue that "...through blogging, students take ownership of the virtual space and the work they publish – an outcome that replaces traditional acts of passive information consumption by acts of active information creation" (as cited in Aggarwal, Ahluwalia & Gupta, 2011).

Variety and Interactivity: Key Features when Learning a Language

As it was previously said, blogs offer different kinds of contents. Those contents turn into an enormous variety of new examples, software (some with chat features) and features which are shown as pictures, texts, links and hyperlinks in different sizes, colors, shapes, order, intensity and

fonts. In other words, learners are exposed to a bigger amount of elements or variety (compared to the past); at the same time, it can be said that variety provides interactivity.

Interactivity is a term widely used in communication and new technology fields. According to Mahmoud and Auter (2009), this term refers to the relationship between an individual with another one, or with an object; thus, the individual will have an exchange of information with the other part of the process. In technology, Mahmoud and Auter (2009) also cite that with computers exclusively, there are two different kinds of interactivity; the first one is called Human to Computer Interactivity which describes the exchange of information that a person can have with a computer. Here, the individual obtains information from the workstation, software or web-page he/she is using. The second one is called Human to Human Interactivity; this relation is based on the use of computers as media of communication by two or more people. In here, computers play the role of transmitter and receiver of information (all this to be shown), this feature is mainly determined by the use of chat software with Internet connections. The exchange of information can be very meaningful for students if the lesson is well structured and planned. When using Human to Human interactivity, the lesson can turn a bit personal so the learners will be able not only to learn, but also know other people, cultures and customs. In other words, learning will appear naturally because it has its bases in a real situation that can be accompanied by a shooter environment (Mahmoud & Auter (2009)).

Hence, computers offer the possibility of watching sample presentations and examples on how to do something. Modeling is one of the key features computers have. The fact of using a material once, twice, or in this case, thousands of times makes learners clarify their doubts about any topic they feel focused on, grammar, vocabulary, writing, etc. In this case, self-correction appears on a role that works perfectly for learners and teachers. As quoted in “Communicative competencies...” “Students may know the rules of linguistic usage, but be unable to use the

language (Widdowson, 1979)", it means that learners need more practical activities than theoretical ones. The use of grammatical items can be easily noticed in English students as they seem to be good in a general way in written exams which do not require the use of Pronunciation or Speaking in general, but when assessing the students' Speaking and Pronunciation skills (and taking into account my experience as student and novice teacher), most of the learners appear to have difficulties due to primordially the lack of practice and also, there is no interaction of any type. In other words, learners do not receive enough practice in English, and that can be reflected when they are unable to speak fluently and with good pronunciation; what is more, the listening skill is sometimes extremely difficult to develop. Here, the negotiation of meaning is difficult to achieve due to the deficiency on the learners' skills. In addition, in most of the cases the learners are unable to interact because the input received is not well comprehended or misunderstood. Thus, interaction is broken and communication in a general or effective way is not present.

Interaction: Interactivity as a Way of Finding a lot of Resources

With the use of Internet and a simple singular device with online connection, students can get access to different kinds of sources and resources at any place they are. The easy interaction people have with new appliances allows to have and produce new experiences that each time enrich the knowledge of the students. Multimedia and hypermedia are ways in which pupils grow intellectually and develop themselves academically (Hubbard, 2009).

For example, nowadays it is relatively easy to find devices which reproduce audio and video at the same time or separately, it means that technology has been taken as a great support to develop the listening and speaking skills. Since the grow of new devices, technology has been proved as a magnificent tool thanks that audio recordings were applied in listening exercises for learners and the community in general. Thus, the development of those exercises and activities brought a big pedagogical tool that made classes varied in content and action. In here, and with the

fast advances in technology, it is not difficult to find nowadays software and web pages which allow people to get instant communication with others around the world. Video, as another important tool, has allowed to increase the development in terms of acquiring information about another culture and people. The fact of having video in a class can awake the students' interests about a language and other cultures (Farias & Obilinovic, 2009).

Besides, the combination of video and audio has been proven to be a media of building natural speaking conversational spaces. Even more, audio-visual materials and software offer spaces where learners can listen to a variety of contents; some of them taken as simple recordings fixed to be followed by learners; some seen as videos where students have to try to follow the previous records in order to reach a similar score as presented in the video; and others seen as more complex spaces (generally software) in which learners have to record their voice and give opinions about a previous recording. This type of use is generally found in software employed for international tests and certifications. All these different uses can be also taken to work on pronunciation and vocabulary being that skills are connected and cannot be developed independently (Lizarazo, 2012).

On the other hand, the previous characteristics can be useful for developing reading and writing skills, especially with software that offers a chat feature or chat rooms. Much software nowadays puts forward a tool for writing into their way of working. For example, webpages like Facebook® allow teachers create groups that allow students chat, post, edit or share different kinds of contents, all free for any user. Facebook® is not exactly a tool for language learning, but its features of easy interaction can be used as a way of encouraging students in language use. Discussion, debate or just leisure activities focused on the use of language can be carried out with a few participants and it is not required much knowledge about the use of these features. Furthermore, paid software like Rosseta Stone® is available nowadays as a pack of software to be

downloaded or to be used as an online tool anywhere in the world. This final one consists on a series of exercises in which different situations are presented for the user be exposed to a great variety of language uses; in other words, grammar, vocabulary or other skills exercises are used in specific contexts to be used by the learners. Therefore, the interaction between the content and the students comes up.

Like this, and talking about chatting activities, when a learner is exposed to formal chatting, it can be taken as a tool for developing their skills when using written language. Thus, the interaction a learner has with the computer and with another person can expand the experience of learning thanks to the student has to read and analyze the other person's messages in order to give an answer or a response. In addition, when using blogs, it is common that teachers make students read an article, news, tales, dialogues or any written piece of information as a way of presenting them with input to be worked out.

Rátiva, Pedreros and Núñez (2012) argue that although it can be complex to monitor the development of reading in special, teachers are the responsible of making students gain expertise in such a skill. They will have to track their students' development specially in reading fluency and pronunciation. Besides, the selection of readings done by teachers must encourage the learners' interest in extensive reading and motivation; those readings should promote a better quality on writing, text length and composition.

And eventually, computers have a significant tool for accomplishing these aspects; especially thanks to the feature of collaborative writing in blogs and web pages. In consequence, different activities can be designed and carried out to expand the learners' experiences always with hope of achieving feedback considered as meaningful knowledge in students (Velandia et al., 2012).

Computers and Autonomous Learning

When learners show interest and commitment about learning in general, it can be said that they can take responsibility for their own learning according to the objectives and goals themselves have set. Hence, learners can follow their own strategies on their processes of learning; they can monitor their own advances and can make comparisons about their progress with previous scores and marks. Consequently, students can have a sense of evaluation on their own ratings about the topic in discussion. They will be somehow in charge of their own learning and that gives them permission to decide what to visit and see, what to analyze and manipulate, what to interpret and suggest something, what to learn and keep as valuable in their own basis of items or areas to be learnt.

With the use of computers, Paracha, Mohamad, Jehanzeb and Yoshie (2009) affirm that teachers and learners must be aware that there are many ways of learning a language, computers offer a widely open variety of activities and easy access to Internet can be taken as an opportunity to review contents and hence to improve the knowledge already learnt. All these features show how learners can develop some autonomy and how this can have a place inside and outside the classroom. Besides, learning can be focused on self or peer assessment as a proof of support among learners and cooperation among students in general or institutions, programs or alliances.

With Internet, students go beyond the boundaries of the classroom and school. They can make use of their own progress in language learning in other fields of knowledge or in other activities they practice or frequent; and in an opposite way, they can bring inside the classroom new points of discussion through the use and explore of all the different items they can find in the web or as suggested topics. The variety of subjects can make students learn in a more autonomous way if they and their teachers discover what can encourage the learners to continue working in a

specific area or issue. Here, blogs can offer a space to develop the learners' autonomy and promote the use of language in a more meaningful way.

Blogs: Advantages and Disadvantages of Using Blogs as Extension of The Class

Advantages

The key advantage of blogs is that they can be easily used as an extension of the class. When talking about this characteristic, we can say that this can go beyond teachers think. Nowadays technology allows knowing almost anything about the world; thus, lessons can be planned with the main objective of expanding boundaries on learning and culture knowledge as it is suggested on a research carried out on Universidad Distrital Francisco José de Caldas in Bogotá. In this research, with the main objective of fostering EFL Writing, a group of the first-year English program students was exposed to English through blogging with a group of Canadian students. Here, Quintero (2008) describes that students were given three different blogs; the first one was given to write about themselves or their personal views, the second one was given to work on group activities and the third one was given to discuss and argue about the entire work students have done. In this case, the results can be considered as pretty good. After analyzing the results of the activity, it was found that the Writing skill was developed enormously thanks to the contact learners had with other people, especially with native English speakers. The learners felt enthusiastically inside a community which was thousands of kilometers away. Besides; the fact of sharing personal interests as the one corresponding to the target language, made students give one hundred percent on this activity. Hence, students expressed all their opinions and points of view about different topics in a real context in which the possibilities of showing and pursuing their ambitions were bigger.

With regard to the basics of the whole activity, teachers were more than completely committed. Using Internet to overcome boundaries was an idea that proves learning has no limits.

All of them took advantages of the alliance that a few universities had as an agreement of exchanging experiences and cultural knowledge. As it is said in the project, “The object of this collaborative project was to give students the opportunity to use technology to communicate and create mutual cultural understanding through the interaction among people with different cultural backgrounds.” (Quintero, 2008 para. 7).

Thus, the use of technology shows how the intention of teachers inside the classroom can be appreciated and conceived as the improvement students did in their Writing skill. Besides, students were part of a specific virtual community where they were not only learning English but also they were broadening their knowledge about computers and what is more meaningful, they were enlarging their experience with people from other cultural views.

In such a way, it can be easily said that technology offers advantages that can be absolutely significant for learners and teachers. Short-term and long-term feedback is another advantage learners find in blogs. Through posting, the fact of receiving feedback makes learning more meaningful and supplements the normal way of acquiring information, especially if learners are conscious that their work is seen as a way of expanding their knowledge, their communicative skills, their own thinking and their personal experience. And that is not all, students can get with less effort, in an easier way or faster the understanding or knowledge of a language. The practical steps of a lesson can be grabbed faster and more accurately (Rojas, 2011).

Hence, students retain more the information provided in classes thanks to the different ways how data is shown. Pictures, sounds and texts make the learning process more significant in the way that it is well known people naturally use different kinds of features when learning. In this case, the stimulation with colors, shapes and different organization can help in learners’ memory (Thorne, 2003). Consequently, the simple fact of knowing that classes will include something of

technology motivates students to address themselves in learning. The expansion technology and new devices offer includes new activities that can be used inside and outside the classroom.

Students have a great sense of access. The accessibility of information is cheap, quick and can be manipulated effortlessly. Students can study, practice and review information wherever they are with an Internet connection and a simple device. It means that a lesson can be reconsidered over and over. And the variety of the materials can be considered as infinite. As it was previously said, hyperlinks expand the boundaries of activities, examples, explanations, demonstrations and samples in a specific topic. For teachers, it is not needed to possess too much information in order to use computers and its advantages. The basic activities that computers offer can be adapted without difficulty to classes in positive ways with lots of different sources of information. Besides, the contents and information are presented in multiple representations, the system and mechanics of the activities can be negotiated among teachers and students. The objects or goals of the lesson can be exposed to learners as a media of presenting results; thus, the results of the activities work as conclusions on the topic of the lesson (the use of knowledge) and as conclusions on how well the learner are using the language or a specific skill.

Disadvantages

On the other hand, disadvantages can be found too. Although sometimes the main objective of CALL is providing ease when reaching materials and improving the experience of learning, Internet could make the objective not be accomplished due to the contents that other web-pages and links have. In these cases, the biggest problem might be that learning is affected and the aim of the class could not be reached. Consequently, the attention of students can be deflected effortlessly for the reason that Internet offers content that cannot be definitely connected with the objective of the lesson. Web-pages featuring games, social communication or just leisure activities can interfere in the process of managing a computer.

Also; if teachers are only using software, the classes can be turned into repetitive and boring considering that the contents of the lessons can be always the same or very similar.

Besides, it is relevant to consider that the lack of a well structure place to study or laboratory (computers room) in schools, universities or institutions in general, can be working as another interference in the process of learning due to the fact that lessons must be planned taking into account 100% of effort, so laboratories have to be well administrated and optimized every time they are used. Here the commitment of teachers and students relays on the moment of carrying out lessons.

Teachers' Role and Students' Role: Commitment inside and outside the Classroom.

Teacher Role

Rojas (2011) argues that the teacher's role is one of the most important elements in these kinds of projects due to the following:

First, it is necessary to name that each subject to be taught must belong to a previous consideration as this can be something new in a school, a previous planning and a previous design. In this way, the curriculum for this way of teaching and learning must include (as many other ones) different theories, concepts, strategies, methods, procedures and all the elements that can be in a normal class; in addition, all these features must be adapted and adopted according to the new trends technology offers.

Second, the teacher is the tutor, guide and supervisor of all movements in the lessons inside or outside the classroom. Their tasks include considering all the implications given while in class as well as the implications given by the students' process of learning. It means, watching the development of students in terms of how useful the use of computers is, monitoring the students' processes when retaining new information, their ability to create or generate spaces for learning outside the classroom, the adaptability students show in front of a task, how innovating this new

trend can be; and last but not least, the teacher must be able to make a compilation of pros and cons when using computers and its tools.

With this, teachers are opening a new space in the field of teaching a language. Their commitment and compromise can generate in a community; a new view on how students behave inside a society, more functions, roles and tasks for learners according to the use of languages and technology; and finally, it can give clues and directions about what to do next as open possibilities of building new experiences.

Inside the classroom and in a more practical way, CALL allows teachers to 1) design and create different kinds of materials like workshops, flashcards or videos, 2) use different kinds of sources about a topic with the objective of making the topics of the class broader, 3) use (www) or Internet as a an extension of the class. Their digital competence known as a set of abilities, capabilities and the fact of knowing about how to handle with information and technological devices should reflect a broad and remarkable use of new technology (Ferrari, 2012). The teacher must be able to deal with any kind of issue or concern not only inside, but also outside the classroom.

Moreover, teachers must consider CALL as a tool that should be used with different purposes. For example, Beatty (2003) argues that CALL “in classrooms it can be used both as a reward for better learners or a remedial aid for weaker ones.” Here, tutoring and extensive tasks can be shown to students in more attractive ways. Additionally, technology can be highly supportive in traditional classes or lessons; its new way of showing the contents can be more practical and innovative. Hence, adapting technology to traditional activities would be a great step to the integration of experiences with the main aim of providing and receiving interaction in the class. Finally, the collaborative part of the tasks can increase the interest of students regarding learning and sharing while learning. In a broad view, the contact students experience makes the

reality of lessons change in a more diverse social context, learners are being adapted to change inside a situation and as a result, education starts being more practical and cultural.

Student Role

When learning a language, it is obvious that having a computer to interact in class is maybe the best feature of a lesson. Thus, the role of a learner will include; 1) exploring the applications, functions and the hypermedia computers have; 2) analyzing the contents given in all the stages of a page, software or program and activity; 3) manipulating the content or information the computers provide, this as part of the interactive function of learning; 4) modifying previous data, it is possible that learners make mistakes when developing their tasks, in this way, computers offer activities in which self-correction is allowed; 5) considering and reconsidering not only the tasks they are developing, but also the position they have had in the class and how their roles help to increase the interactivity of the lessons, students will have to exchange information specially if they are specifically working with a blog, or they are posting information to be shown, manipulated, analyzed or subjected to reviews and evaluations.

Besides, students will have to be permanently aware of posts made by other students with the main aim of keeping themselves updated with the information other learners are manipulating and discussing. When using blogs, the students' opinions, ideas, thoughts and findings can be easily seen, analyzed and shared in order to create an open discussion platform where learners will have the opportunity of providing and showing how meaningful a class was in terms of knowledge (Farias & Obilinovic, 2009). As it can be seen in many social networks, a person can post or write an opinion, state or news and all their acquaintances can freely write a response below showing their interest about that piece of writing. In most advanced cases, other people can post responses with links to a video, pictures or even songs related about the previous topic.

With this order of ideas, as well as the teachers, students have to be pretty active and innovative to keep a blog or webpage working. The commitment of teachers and learners will have to be seen as symphony, all their movements (posts) will be open to discussion so it makes all the contents shown in a web or blog will have to be well-structured, clean as well-organized, easy to follow, easy to handle and last but not least easy to find and enjoy.

Conclusions

The aim of the current paper has as notion to provide teachers with different perspectives of various authors about the use of technology considering Internet, computers, blogs and other devices as a way of extending English classes outside the classroom; and in such a way, getting a better use of English from part of the students. Besides, some common aspects and definitions are shown in the way that teachers and students can obtain more information about the experience of working with technology.

Moreover, it is considered that the new trends or the ones developing in the world claim a deeper knowledge of the tools of today and their implementation or adoption on the process of learning a language.

With this respect, and based on the use of technology, it can be said that students can improve their skills with significant advances. Also, those advances can be easily monitored in order to have a sense of self-evaluation and at the same time, review the weak parts of a lesson and decide what step to take next. Besides, the students' autonomy can be present due to the fact computers and blogs offer interactive and interesting resources.

What is more, the variety of resources allows teachers work on activities that expand the students' experiences. Projects for the expansion of cultural boundaries can be carried out with the aim of presenting students with other kind of practices as extension of the lessons.

Additionally, a brief review about the advantages and disadvantages of using blogs is presented with the aim of exploring new ways of exposing students to materials offered by technology in general. In here, the idea is showing that new materials and trends can help transform the language learning by the use of technology inside or outside the classroom.

Consequently, the teachers' and students' roles are taken into account due to the necessity of knowing how these individuals can proceed in this kind of lessons. The commitment shown by

the teacher is highly considered thanks to the great responsibility managing a blog requires. In the case teachers do not have enough knowledge about computers, it is recommended to take an instructional information technology course in order to improve the understanding and comprehension about the role technology may have in the use of all its tools.

Besides, it is indispensable to keep checking the students' role in order to see how to achieve good results when using actual equipment and devices. The performance of students can determine a positive or negative result, so their role is analyzed and discussed.

In addition, the use of blogs is recommended because its use and the practice they offer is cheap, with great accessibility, easy to manage and easy to implement. Moreover, teachers can list up the pros and cons of this kind of practice to improve future activities and the planning of lessons using technology.

Finally, one of the most positive impacts was found in the reading and speaking skills thanks to the content of blogs always allows keeping on reading and producing oral texts.

In our context, the implication of using blogs might open a wide variety of new experiences to students and novice teachers. The cultural and pedagogical practice of the language including technology can pave the way to exercise the language skills in a more integrated way. The lack of practice of students can be improved if teachers innovate with the adoption of technology in their lessons.

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