

ENHANCING WRITING SKILLS OF ESP LEARNERS THROUGH BLOGGING: INSIGHTS FROM ENGINEERING STUDENTS

Sunanda M. Shinde¹, Mahesh B. Shinde²

¹D. Y. Patil College of Engineering and Technology, (Autonomous) Kolhapur, India

²KIT's College of Engineering (Autonomous), Kolhapur, India

ORCID iDs: Sunanda M. Shinde

<https://orcid.org/0000-0003-3078-0864>

Mahesh B. Shinde

<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-9767-5615>

Abstract. *The study explores students' perspectives on utilizing blogs as a supplementary tool for language learning activities within the classroom. Blogs serve as an easily accessible platform for students to sequentially publish their work, enabling online interactions and promoting independent learning, thus enhancing writing skills. The research assesses the integration of blogging into a Professional Communication/Business Communication course involving 250 first-year engineering students across two prestigious autonomous engineering institutes in Western Maharashtra. Participants were tasked with selecting topics of their choice and composing blogs during practical sessions. Analysis of collected data suggests that while students encountered difficulties, they generally held a positive outlook on the incorporation of blogs into their English learning journey.*

Key words: *Blog writing, ESP Learners, Writing Skills, Business Communication*

1. INTRODUCTION

Blogs, or weblogs, have been a familiar concept since the early days of the World Wide Web, with their emergence acknowledged by Winer (cited in Campbell 2004). These online writing spaces, easily editable and publicly publishable through web browsers (Zhang 2009), function as digital journals allowing individuals to independently share day-to-day experiences (Oravec 2002). Blood (2000) notes that the widespread use of blogs gained momentum around 1999, as the platform was developed to assist web users in various areas.

The traditional method of teaching languages through lectures is no longer sufficient. There exists a plethora of new technologies that can enhance the language learning experience for students, making it more interactive and engaging. These technologies aim to shift the focus from rote memorization to practical application, analysis, and comprehension of language concepts.

Among these innovative tools is the utilization of blogs. Blogs have revolutionized online interaction, evolving from mere platforms for reading to spaces where individuals

Submitted October 16th, 2024, accepted for publication November 30th, 2024

Corresponding author: Sunanda M. Shinde, D. Y. Patil College of Engineering and Technology, (Autonomous) Kolhapur, India

E-mail: sunandapatil@gmail.com

can freely express and share their ideas. Essentially, blogs serve as accessible online diaries, easily set up and navigated with just internet connectivity. This accessibility makes them an ideal medium for students to showcase their writing abilities to a global audience, akin to sending an email. Blog posts are typically arranged chronologically, with the latest entries displayed first, and can incorporate text, images, and hyperlinks to related websites, enriching the learning experience. A blog serves as a practical choice when there is a need for a platform to showcase students' work publicly or facilitate the sharing of experiences, opinions, or creative endeavours that highlight their learning achievements.

Mastering academic writing is a gradual process involving techniques like word choice, proper structure, and language skills (Pratiwi, K. D. 2016). Proficiency in English, crucial for EFL students, relies on honing writing abilities (Jones, S. J. 2006). To achieve this, students should engage in creative writing through methods like weblog practices, making the learning process engaging and exciting. The traditional or offline method of learning writing relies heavily on teacher feedback and may be less effective for a large student group.

On the other hand, the use of Information Communication Technology (ICT) offers an alternative approach, potentially addressing the limitations of the traditional method by providing more comprehensive feedback and engagement opportunities for students. Advancements in learning include the adoption of weblogs as a tool in writing classes. The increasing popularity of weblogs among young students is attributed to the continuous improvement and progression of technology and modern lifestyles. Nowadays, students utilize weblogs for academic purposes, posting their writings on this platform.

2. USING TECHNOLOGY IN EDUCATION

The educational potential of blogs has garnered widespread recognition in academic circles due to their multimedia capabilities, user-friendly web publishing tools, interactive features, and capacity to facilitate collaborative and independent learning. Through blogs, users can engage with a global audience, read, and comment on other blogs, and reference external sources in their posts.

Numerous studies support the notion that blogs can effectively support language teaching and learning by enhancing learners' language complexity, grammatical accuracy, and fluency. Moreover, bloggers often feel more empowered to express their thoughts and construct arguments compared to traditional classroom settings. Blogs also broaden users' exposure to diverse perspectives and experiences, fostering a greater sense of interconnectedness.

Within educational settings, particularly in the realm of English language learning, blogs have gained popularity among both teachers and students (Noytim 2010). The appeal of blogging lies in its emphasis on sharing written content and engaging in discussions through comments (Oravec 2002). The creation of personal blogs proves to be a motivating endeavor for students, offering them the opportunity to publish content aligned with their interests. In this context, blogs enhance learners' engagement and sense of ownership by enabling them to independently author and search for information to include in their updates (Ferdig & Trammell 2004). Additionally, students have the flexibility to upload various types of data, including audio-video files, hyperlinks, visual content, and text data on their blogs (Du & Wagner 2007).

The integration of blogs in educational contexts and English language learning is a relatively recent development (Zhang 2009). Currently, there is limited research dedicated to the use of blogs in these areas, with experts in blog technology primarily providing insights into the functions and utilization of blogs while overlooking their educational advantages (Du & Wagner 2007). In the context of English language learning, the inclusion of blogs in course design has the potential to be an effective tool for language acquisition (Wu 2005). Consequently, this study specifically investigates the advantages of incorporating blogs into English language learning, as well as the challenges associated with blog authoring.

3. SIGNIFICANCE OF WRITING SKILLS IN ENGLISH FOR SPECIFIC PURPOSES

English for Specific Purposes (ESP) refers to a specialized approach in language education tailored to meet the linguistic needs and communication requirements of learners within specific professional or academic contexts. Its importance lies in providing targeted language instruction that equips individuals with the skills necessary for effective communication in their chosen fields, ensuring practical language use in professional or academic settings.

Writing is a primary mode of communication in various professional fields, such as academia, business, law, medicine, and engineering and technology. Developing strong writing skills ensures that professionals can convey their ideas clearly, concisely, and persuasively to their intended audience. Well-written documents reflect positively on an individual's professionalism and competence. Employers often value employees who can produce high-quality reports, proposals, emails, and other written materials tailored to specific purposes and audiences.

Writing for specific purposes requires attention to detail, accuracy, and precision. Whether drafting technical manuals, legal briefs, scientific research papers, or marketing materials, writers must convey information accurately to avoid misunderstandings or errors. Writing for specific purposes necessitates an understanding of the intended audience's needs, interests, and background knowledge. Tailoring the language, tone, and content to resonate with the target audience enhances the effectiveness of the communication. Different types of writing serve distinct purposes, such as informing, persuading, instructing, or entertaining. Developing writing skills for specific purposes involves mastering the conventions and techniques necessary to achieve these objectives effectively.

Proficiency in writing for specific purposes can enhance career opportunities and advancement prospects. Whether applying for jobs, seeking promotions, or pursuing entrepreneurial ventures, individuals with strong writing skills are better equipped to succeed in various professional contexts. English is widely used as a global language in business, academia, diplomacy, and other fields. Proficiency in writing English for specific purposes enables individuals to participate effectively in international communication and collaboration.

4. BLOG WRITING AS A TOOL FOR ENHANCING WRITING SKILLS

Writing blog posts regularly provides consistent practice, helping writers develop and refine their skills over time. The more often one writes, the more comfortable and proficient they become. Blogs often allow for reader comments and feedback, providing valuable insights into how an audience responds to the writer's style, tone, and content. Engaging with readers can help writers understand their strengths and areas for improvement.

Writing for a blog requires considering the interests and preferences of the target audience. This encourages writers to develop audience awareness and tailor their content to engage and resonate with specific readers. Blogging allows writers to explore a wide range of formats (e.g., listicles, how-to guides, opinion pieces) and topics, providing opportunities to experiment with different styles and voices. This diversity can help writers discover their strengths and preferences.

Learning about search engine optimization (SEO) and incorporating relevant keywords into blog posts can improve writers' understanding of how to structure content effectively and increase its visibility online. Blogging can serve as a platform for writers to showcase their work and build an online portfolio. Having a collection of well-written blog posts can demonstrate writing proficiency to potential employers, clients, or collaborators. Engaging with other bloggers and writers within the blogging community can provide opportunities for collaboration, feedback, and learning from peers. Networking within the blogging sphere can also lead to new connections and opportunities.

Blogging allows writers to express their ideas, opinions, and experiences in a creative and personal manner. This freedom of expression fosters creativity and encourages writers to develop their unique voice and style. Overall, blog writing offers a dynamic and interactive platform for writers to hone their skills, engage with audiences, and build a professional presence online. Through regular practice, feedback, and exploration, writers can improve their writing abilities and achieve their goals.

Utilizing blog writing as a tool for improving writing skills involves leveraging the interactive and dynamic nature of blogs to foster language proficiency. Blog writing encourages learners to express their thoughts, ideas, and analyses more informally and engagingly, thereby enhancing their overall writing abilities. Through this platform, students can receive feedback, engage in discussions, and refine their writing skills, making blog writing an effective and interactive approach to bolster proficiency in expressing ideas through written communication.

5. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Writing is considered one of the essential language skills alongside reading, speaking, and listening (Spratt, M., Pulverness, A., & Williams, M. 2005). Brown, H. D. (2001) emphasizes that writing involves thinking, drafting, and revising, requiring specialized skills such as setting goals, brainstorming ideas, organizing drafts, ensuring coherence, editing for grammar, and producing a final product.

Writing in FL is significant for improving creative and critical thinking skills. It promotes learners' thinking skills to use the language creatively, to express and organize their thoughts, and to improve their critical thinking skills (Rao, 2007).

Papalazarou, C. (2015) argues that creativity has an important role in culture and societal development; therefore, it should be incorporated into the process of language teaching and learning.

Alkhaldi (2019) maintains that creativity helps students to develop their thinking skills and language skills, creating new and different things that stimulate their creativity and motivate them to stretch their imaginative thinking.

Education aims to enhance students' critical thinking and problem-solving capabilities, which are crucial for skill development alongside acquiring content knowledge K.W. Platts (2004).

Anderson (2001) Bloom's taxonomy highlights those higher levels of learning entail activities such as application, analysis, evaluation, and creation, which involve active engagement and reflective thinking. Engaging students in small-scale projects enables better comprehension of content, fosters a deeper appreciation for the discipline, and yields optimal outcomes, particularly when these activities align with course material and are coupled with reflective exercises like directed writings, group collaboration, and class presentations.

These studies collectively highlight the potential of creative writing to complement traditional engineering education by fostering creativity, communication skills, and innovative thinking among students. They suggest that integrating creative writing into engineering curricula can produce well-rounded engineers capable of addressing complex challenges in both technical and humanistic dimensions.

The present research outlines the study conducted within language courses at engineering colleges in India, detailing the integration of blogs into the classroom environment. It discusses the study's methodology and explores how participants perceived the use of blogs to enhance language learning activities conducted in the classroom.

6. STUDY

The present study was carried out in two top autonomous engineering institutes from Kolhapur district in Maharashtra, India. These institutes are in the western region and affiliated to Shivaji University. The students admitted to these engineering colleges are from different parts of Maharashtra. Not all students have the same level of proficiency in English, especially in writing. Generally, students from urban areas, from convent, English medium background have better writing skills than those who are from rural areas, regional medium background. Students from English medium and convent backgrounds can complete written tasks properly on the other hand, vernacular medium students face many difficulties in writing thus, they hesitate to write. The present study aimed at encouraging all such students to write.

7. PARTICIPANTS

Using simple random sampling method, 250 (85 Female and 165 Male) first-year undergraduate engineering students from various branches such as Computer Science and Engineering (CSE)-Data Science, CSE-AIML, Mechanical Engineering, Chemical Engineering, and Computer Science and Business Systems were selected from the two select autonomous engineering institutes affiliated to Shivaji University, Maharashtra, India.

8. METHODOLOGY AND DATA SOURCES

Selected engineering students were given the task of blog writing as a part of their practical activities. Initially, the instructors (the researchers) explained the term blog writing to them. They were told the history of writing blogs, various types, and major

points to be considered while writing blogs. The instructors also demonstrated the students how to open an account on bloggers.com. They were encouraged to identify the areas of their interests on which they wish to write a blog and share their blogs with at least 3 of their friends and get comments. Also, each student was told to read at least three blogs of their friends and comment. A questionnaire was prepared and administered to check the perceptions of 250 selected students on writing blogs and its role in improving their writing skills. The purpose was to identify and quantify the areas in which students faced problems.

9. METHOD OF ANALYSIS

The questionnaire on blog writing to check students' perceptions was analyzed and studied. Retrospective interviews of selected students were analyzed to learn about their experience of writing blogs.

10. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The provided data (table 1) presents the results of a questionnaire or self-assessment regarding the impact of writing blogs on the participants' writing skills and motivation. The responses are presented in a structured format, with each statement (QN) followed by the frequency of agreement (SA, A) and disagreement (SD, D), represented in both absolute numbers and percentages. The responses indicate a generally positive impact of blogging on various aspects of writing, with most participants agreeing with statements such as improved carefulness about sentences, paragraphs, word choice, spelling, grammar, and the use of academic writing style. Additionally, there is a consensus that blogging has positively influenced motivation, creativity, imagination, and the reception of feedback on their writing.

Furthermore, the data suggests that blogging has led to increased attentiveness to various aspects of writing, such as sentence and paragraph structure, word choice, spelling, grammar, and academic writing style. Many participants also noted that blogging has enhanced their motivation and interactivity in writing, as well as their imagination skills. Additionally, the feedback loop, including comments from readers and teachers, has been identified as a significant source of motivation and improvement. The participants also expressed enthusiasm for incorporating multimedia elements, such as pictures and videos, in their blogs and sharing their work with friends and relatives.

Additionally, it indicates that blogging can motivate students to be more active and interactive in their writing, use academic writing style and vocabulary, carefully revise their arguments, and engage in creative writing. Furthermore, the data suggests that incorporating relevant pictures and links to videos in blogs, sharing blog links with friends and relatives, and receiving feedback from readers and teachers can all serve as motivating factors for students to write and publish more. Finally, the high percentage of participants recommending weblogs as a writing medium in writing classes further supports the potential benefits of incorporating this platform into the curriculum.

Table 1. Students’ responses to the questionnaire

QN	Statements	SA,A	%	SD,D	%
01	Writing blog made me more careful about sentences and paragraphs.	235	94	15	6
02	Writing a blog made me check word choice and word spelling more carefully.	228	91.2	22	8.8
03	Writing blog made me check my grammar more carefully.	229	91.6	21	8.4
04	I enjoyed writing blogs for developing my writing skills.	231	92.4	19	7.6
05	I think that my argumentation and description in writing can be improved by blogging on the internet.	224	89.6	26	10.4
06	Blogging can improve the quality of my writing.	227	90.8	23	9.2
07	Writing blog motivated me to be more active and interactive in writing.	220	88	30	12
08	Writing blog made me use academic writing style, register, and vocabulary.	219	87.6	31	12.4
09	Writing blog made me carefully revise the way I present my argument.	219	87.6	31	12.4
10	I think creative writing like Blogs can improve my writing skills.	230	92	20	8
11	I think writing a blog can help me to improve my vocabulary.	223	89.2	27	10.8
12	I think blog writing has helped me to improve my imagination skills.	221	88.4	29	11.6
13	I think writing and publishing blogs on online platforms can be better than traditional ways of expression	212	84.8	38	15.2
14	I think inserting relevant pictures, and links to videos in blogs excites me to write more and publish.	221	88.4	29	11.6
15	I think sharing links of my blog with my friends and relatives encourages me to write and publish more.	222	88.8	28	11.2
16	I think when readers read and provide comments below my blog, I get motivated to write and publish more.	224	89.6	26	10.4
17	I think when the teacher reads my blog and provides suggestions, it helps me improve my writing.	231	92.4	19	7.6
18	I think doing creative writing on the Weblog has benefits to my writing skills.	223	89.2	27	10.8
19	This blog writing activity was very interesting.	223	89.2	27	10.8
20	I recommend Weblogs as a writing medium in writing classes.	214	85.6	36	14.4

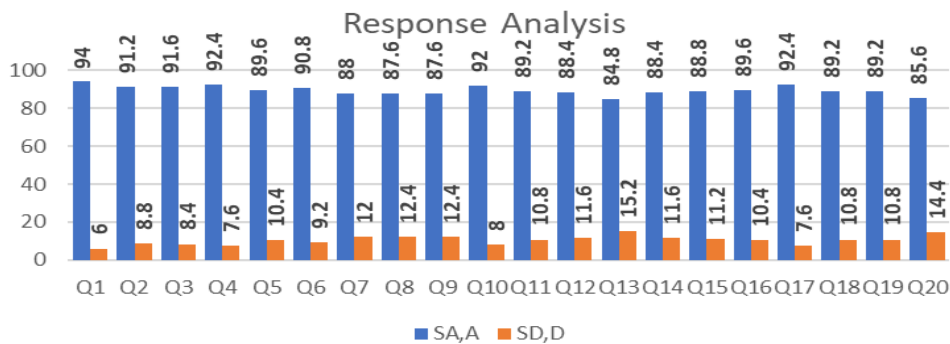


Fig. 1. Response analysis

11. CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTIONS

In this study, the researchers offer insights into the pedagogical benefits of incorporating blogging into English language teaching and learning. The findings are based on feedback from 250 undergraduate engineering students in India who participated in structured blogging assignments. Results from a questionnaire reveal that students responded positively to the blogging activities. A majority enjoyed posting, reading classmates' posts, and receiving comments. Many students involved in the study expressed a desire to continue writing activities and reported high satisfaction with blog usage. Despite some drawbacks, such as those mentioned above, the study found that blogging experiences can enhance students' writing skills, particularly in grammar, vocabulary, and punctuation. Blogs were seen as encouraging, active and constructive participation among students, fostering independence while promoting collaborative learning.

They particularly appreciated feedback from peers and the teacher. Blogging's appeal lies in its global readership, instant publication, creation of e-portfolios, and interaction through comments. These features make it a valuable tool for enhancing language skills. Pedagogical relevance is crucial for motivating student engagement in blogging activities. Students may be more inclined to participate if they see a link between blogging and language proficiency or course grades. Educators should carefully consider the integration of blogs into course content and address issues such as topic assignments. However, there were some divergent views regarding the preference for traditional versus online expression and the use of weblogs in writing classes, indicating areas where further exploration and discussion may be beneficial. Further research is also needed to explore the impact of factors like gender, age, field of study, computer literacy, and learner personality on the blogging process and its potential contributions to language learning.

REFERENCES

- Alkhalidi, A. A. "Language Theories Donation Through Materials Development: A Case Study in Jordan," *International Journal of Applied Linguistics and English Literature* 3, no. 3 (2014), <<https://doi.org/10.7575/aiac.ijalel.v.3n.3p.112>> (2 April 2024).
- Božena Horváthová, Lýdia Nad'ová. "Developing Critical Thinking in Reading Comprehension of Texts for Specific Purposes at all Levels of Bloom's Taxonomy," *The Journal of Teaching English for Specific and Academic Purposes* 9 (1) (2021): 1–16.
- Blood, R. "Weblogs: A History and Perspective," 7 September 2000, <http://www.rebeccablood.net/essays/weblog_history.html> (2 April 2024).
- Brown, N., & Leigh, J. "Creativity and Playfulness in Higher Education Research," *Theory and Method in Higher Education Research* 5 (2018) <[10.1108/S2056-37522018000004005](https://doi.org/10.1108/S2056-37522018000004005)> (5 April 2024).
- Du, H. and Wagner, C. "Learning with Weblogs: Enhancing Cognitive and Social Knowledge Construction," *IEEE Transactions on Professional Communication*, 50 (1) (2007): 1-16.
- Ferdig, R.E. & Trammell, K.D. "Content Delivery in the "Blogosphere," *T.H.E. Journal* 31 no.7 (2004) <<https://www.learntechlib.org/p/77152/>> (12 April 2024).
- Jones, S. J. *Blogging and ESL Writing: A Case Study of How Students Responded to The Use of Weblogs as a Pedagogical Tool for The Writing Process Approach in a Community College ESL Writing Class*. Texas: University of Texas, 2006.
- K.W. Platts "Developing Knowledge and Skills in Engineers: A Learning Laboratory," *Education & Training* 46 (4) (2004): 206-213.
- L.W.Anderson, D.R. Krathwohl, P.W. Airasian, K.A. Cruikshank, R.E. Mayer, P.R. Pintrich, J. Raths, & M.C. Wittrock. *A Taxonomy for Learning, Teaching, and Assessing: A Revision of Bloom's Taxonomy of Educational Objectives*. New York: Longman, 2001.

- Noytim, U. "Weblogs Enhancing EFL Students' English Language Learning," *Procedia - Social and Behavioral Sciences* 2 (20) (2010): 1127–1132.
- Oravec, J. A. "Bookmarking the World: Weblog Applications in Education," *Journal of Adolescent & Adult Literacy* 45 (7) (2019): 616-621.
- Papalazarou, C. "Making Thinking Visible in the English Classroom: Nurturing a Creative Mindset." in A. Maley & N. Peachey ed., *Creativity in the English Language Classroom* London: British Council, 2015.
- Pratiwi, K. D. "Students Difficulties in Writing English: A Study at the Third Semester Students of English Education Program of UNIB in Academic Year 2011-2012," *Journal of Linguistics and Language Teaching* 3 (1) (2016).
- Rao, Z. "Training in Brainstorming and Developing Writing Skills," *ELT Journal* 61 (2) (2007): 100-106 <<https://doi.org/10.1093/elt/ccm002>> (15 April 2024).
- Spratt, M., Pulverness, A., & Williams, M. *The TKT (Teaching Knowledge Test) Course*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005.
- Winer, D. "The History of Weblogs," *The Internet TESL Journal* 9 (2) (2002): 1-4.
- Zhang, D. "The Application of Blog in English Writing," *Journal of Cambridge Studies* 4 (1) (2009): 64-72.