

# Bloggging as an Integrative Technology to Improve Language Proficiency: An Investigative Study Among Engineering Students in India

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**Abstract**—Technology has become an inevitable part of learning these days and the popularity of blogs and web forums is increasing exponentially. The purpose of blogging is to encourage discussions on a particular topic or concept, thereby throwing more light on the point of discussion. These discussions generally focus on knowledge sharing and acquiring, but in a way, they help the participants and the readers to enhance their language skills like listening, reading, writing, grammar, and vocabulary both directly and indirectly. The present study consolidates the opinions of the researcher about the use of blogs as educational technology and the opinions of the learners about the role of blogs in their language learning aspects. The result shows that blogs have a considerable impact on one's language proficiency.

**Index Terms**—blogging, e-learning, online learning, language learning, technology-enabled learning, vocabulary enrichment, weblogs

## I. INTRODUCTION

'Blog' is the short form of weblog. The one who creates or maintains a blog is called a blogger and the act of sharing information through blogs is called blogging. A blog is a webpage that is used to convey information, communicate one's viewpoints, and discuss a common idea or concept. All these communications and exchange of information are shown in a reverse sequential order which enables the users to look at recent updates. A blog can be used for texting, sharing pictures, audio, and video files. Even the links to other blogs and websites can be sent through blogs. Blogs can be used exclusively for teaching-learning purposes. Any information can be communicated to the students from the teacher's desk at his convenience. Discussions, exchange of ideas, and sharing of learning materials are possible not only between the teacher and the students but also among the teachers. Language teachers and learners can use these blogs constructively for the purpose of learning a language alone. Especially, in an English language classroom, it can be effectively utilised to develop one's language proficiency. Poth (2017) writes in an article published in *Kidblog* that using blogs in a "foreign language classroom has proven to be an imperative tool for promoting student's voice and enhancing communication and collaboration" (p. 1). The foregoing paragraphs analyse the possibilities of learning language skills using blogs and the opinion of bloggers about language learning.

## II. NEED FOR THE STUDY

Blogs provide the learners a lot of opportunities for autonomous learning which helps them to have wider possibilities for learning. Also, they provide potential online instructional resources. Apart from that, using technology in a language classroom is becoming the order of the day as conventional classrooms are replaced by virtual learning environments and blogs serve the purpose. Many a research work has proved that "digital fluency is a prerequisite for sociability, lifelong learning, and employment opportunities" (Huffaker, 2005, p. 95). Teaching and learning take place even outside the classroom. Among the four primary language skills (listening, speaking, reading, and writing), listening and reading require the use of multimedia files (audio-visual and text files) as source files that can be shared through blogs. Reading blog posts and replying to them motivate the learners to become good readers and writers. Creativity is one of the key aspects to be promoted among the learners. It can be stimulated among the learners through discussions. Poth (2017) insists that "blogging provides a means for students to become more expressive and creative in their writing and to continuously develop confidence as they write" (p. 1). Instant publication of study materials, whether it is a text or an image, simplifies the task of the instructors. Setting up a blog is easy and quick, and does not

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require much technical knowledge. If the reader wants to read others' blogs, millions of blogs are available at a single click.

Blogs facilitate the learners a shift from teacher-centered learning to learner-centered learning. According to Paul and Jefferson (2019), teacher-centered learning is considered to be passive learning because the teacher "controls the classroom dynamics" (p. 2). In a teacher-centered classroom, the teacher's role is active whereas the learner's role is passive as he or she simply listens to the lecture, takes notes, and raises questions. As far as the language learning environment is concerned, it should be learner-centered. Active participation will help the learners to learn the nuances of a language easily and quickly. Though online learning is a self-paced process, there is a scope for autonomous learning which in turn paves way for free and flexible learning. In the case of the young learners, parents can also be a part of this group and they can either participate in the discussions or monitor the progress of their children. Huffaker (2005) writes that "users find this blog to be not only an effective form of communication but also an excellent way to archive knowledge, creating an institutional history" (p. 95). Communication between peers leads to collaboration and enhances the learning environment. Learners become creative and take up leadership roles in the classroom (Poth, 2017).

### III. OBJECTIVE

As blogging is considered to be an effective avenue for independent learning, the researcher deliberates that the following objectives can be worked out in this paper:

- (i) To find out the knowledge of the respondents with regard to the use of blogs for language learning,
- (ii) To create an interest among the learners to effectively utilise a blog as a tool to improve their language proficiency
- (iii) To integrate technology in English language classroom and
- (iv) To find out the advantages and disadvantages of using blogs especially for language learning purposes.

### IV. REVIEW OF THE EXISTING STUDIES

Luján-Mora (2006) states in her research work that blogging is a fascinating methodology in the teaching-learning process as the learners can authenticate "their learning activities and learning results in a concurrent journal (log)" (p. 1). Baker (2003) writes in his article entitled "The Learning Log" that "a learning log is a tightly-focused academic journal that is created as the student becomes knowledgeable on an individually assigned topic" (p. 1). Also, it can "support class discussion and provide the basis for the creation of a class presentation and web site" (p. 1). Wagner (2003) points out that there are advantages in using blogs which include "ease of publication, sharing of results and instructor monitoring" (p. 131). Williams and Jacobs (2004) express their opinion that "blogging has the potential to be a transformational technology for teaching and learning" (p. 232). Du and Wagner (2005), in one of their research presentations, speak about the impact of blogging on an individual in a university environment. And they further conclude that the cognitive skills of an individual learner become intense along with social awareness. Montero-Fleta and Perez-Sabater (2010) consider that writing in blogs is done with a purpose that naturally encourages the bloggers to be more proficient and fluent in using language. In addition, they concentrate on using accurate language. Therefore, blogs can be considered "as a potential tool for the development of linguistic skills" (p. 773). Felix (2003) in his article entitled "Teaching languages online: Deconstructing the myths" puts forth his argument that "there is ample evidence that the most significant educational contribution of the new technologies lies in the opportunities for adding quality to what has always been difficult to achieve in the language classroom" (p. 126). However, he adds that "facilitating interpersonal communication in authentic settings, sustaining meaningful information gap activities, and involving students in creative problem based and project-based learning with native speaker partners" will give the learners enhanced learning experience (p. 133). Huffaker (2005) articulates in his research paper that blogs enable the users to "have a personal space to read and write alongside a communal one, where ideas are shared, questions are asked and answered and social cohesion is developed" (p. 95). He also states that blogs are functioning as an excellent medium for progressive learning both for individual and cooperative learning. Today's educational technologists should bring forth this technology across the globe for an enhanced teaching and learning experience.

### V. METHODOLOGY

A study was conducted among the budding engineers belonging to a technical university in Vellore District, Tamil Nadu, India to collect their opinion about the blogs in the field of education. A survey was conducted among 110 first-year B.Tech. students belonging to various branches of study. Since it is a co-educational institution, responses were collected from both boys and girls. The age group of the respondents was between 18 and 20, and they were doing their second year or third year courses. A questionnaire was circulated among them and responses were collected in google forms. Since most of them are from a sound academic background, they have good knowledge about blogs and blogging. Moreover, every respondent possesses his or her own computer which is an added advantage as they can tap the technology at their fingers, at their convenience.

## VI. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The university where the respondents belong is a technical university hence most of the teaching-learning activities are recorded in the university intranet. Intranet is a free interface for them to look at their timetable, check attendance, verify grades, know examination-related information, download study materials, and upload their digital assignments or projects in the intranet class group for evaluation. Hence owning a computer is mandatory for a student who has enrolled in a course. Similarly, the survey result indicates that all the respondents have computers.

TABLE 1  
STUDENTS PARTICIPATION DISTRIBUTION

S.No.	Degree	Specialisation	Girls	Boys	Total
1	B.Tech.	Computer Science and Engineering	6	11	17
2		Civil Engineering	0	4	4
3		Computer Science and Engineering with Specialization in Internet of Things	2	6	8
4		Computer Science and Engineering with Specialization in Data Science	3	6	9
5		Electronics and Communication Engineering	3	7	10
6		Electrical and Electronics Engineering	4	7	11
7		Information Technology	8	9	17
8		Mechanical Engineering	0	9	9
9		Production and Industrial Engineering	1	3	4
10		Electronics and Instrumentation Engineering	1	2	3
11		Biotechnology	3	3	6
12	M.Tech.	(Integrated) Software Engineering	3	3	6
13	B.Sc.	Multimedia and Animation	1	5	6
Total number of Respondents			35	75	110

The table above shows that the responses have been collected from students belonging to 13 different branches of study. Most of them are B.Tech. students and a few i.e. 12 students belong to Multimedia and Animation, a three-year undergraduate programme, and six respondents are from M.Tech. five-year integrated Software Engineering programme. Apart from these 18 students, the rest of them are from B.Tech. courses namely, Computer Science and Engineering, Civil Engineering, Computer Science and Engineering with Specialization in Internet of Things, Computer Science and Engineering with Specialization in Data Science, Electronics and Communication Engineering, Electrical and Electronics Engineering, Information Technology, Mechanical Engineering, Production and Industrial Engineering, Electronics and Instrumentation Engineering, and Biotechnology. However, their age group and year of study are equal. The ratio of the responses collected from both boys and girls is 35:75 which means out of the 110 responses, 32 percent are girls and 68 percent are boys. More than two-thirds of the respondents are boys and less than one-third are girls.

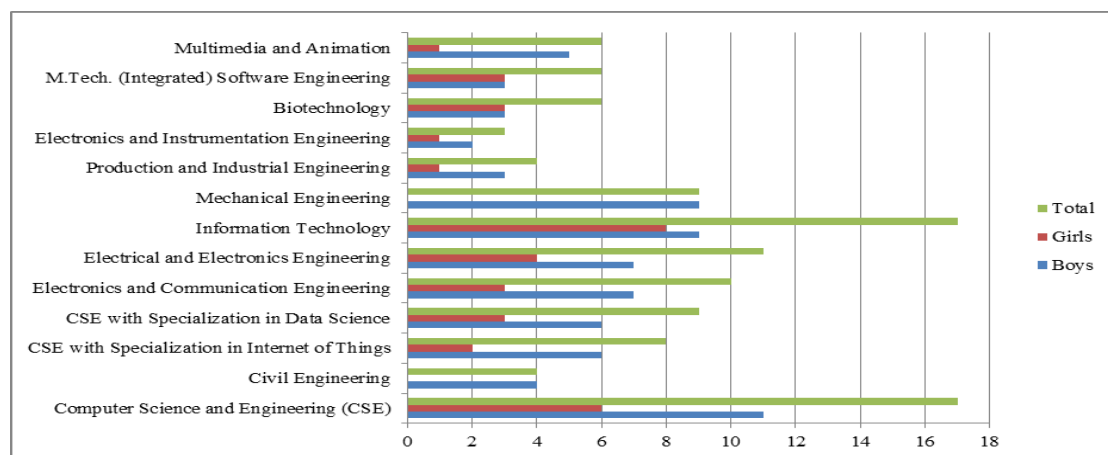


Figure 1 Respondents Distribution

From the chart above it is inferred that the maximum number of respondents are from the branches related to computer science related branches. The distribution between boys and girls is not equal because the number of boys in all branches of study in the institution is higher than the number of girls. Another inference is that there are no girl respondents in the non-circuit branches like civil and mechanical engineering.

More than 50 percent of the respondents have their own blogs. While asked about the frequency level of their visit to the blogs, only 20 percent of the respondents agree that they visit their blogs daily. 40 percent say that they are frequent visitors and the remaining respondents are occasional visitors. In an answer to the question about the preference of

blogs over vlogs (video blogs), 30 percent of the respondents prefer blogs over vlogs, 35 percent prefer vlogs and an equal number of respondents prefer to use both.

Consistent contribution to blogs will have an impact on the user's language proficiency. Rahmany et al. (2013) have proved in their research article that blogging has paved way for a significant contribution in improving one's grammatical accuracy. Also, they have seen a dramatic change in reducing the number of errors committed by their students. Publications in blogs both inform and educate the bloggers. When the respondents were asked whether the blogposts and publications had any influence on language proficiency, the maximum number of respondents (60 percent) positively replied that their proficiency had increased to a great extent. One-fourth of the respondents said that there was a significant improvement in their writing skills. A few respondents believed that they were able to catch up with a few words and phrases if they went through a particular content repeatedly. One of the respondents brought out the fact that he had learnt to write for the readers of his blog amusingly as he felt that the purpose of a good blog would be to "entertain and inform its readers".

When they were asked whether they preferred blogs over video blogging, they gave mixed reviews where 45 percent of the respondents brought out that it depended on the topic being searched for and 25 percent said that blogs were extremely helpful while looking for readable information; nevertheless, 35 percent of the students pointed out that video logging was the best source. The question of improvising language proficiency through the writing style of content creators was put forth and where 60 percent of respondents agreed that it influenced them when it was read frequently whereas 25 percent of the population agreed that they opted for it when a change of style in writing was required, and to an extent of 15 percent said that they got extremely influenced by the content creators as they used descriptive language.

In the hasty digital era, everyone is running fast and the attention span is remarkably less. The situation demands the bloggers to respond positively. The writing style should engage the readers. If they fail to grab the attention, they will move on to the blogs that educate and entertain them. Using unprofessional language, vague modifiers like 'really', 'actually' and 'very', and thought fillers like 'I mean' and 'you know' will mar the beauty of the language and discourage the readers to visit the blog. When asked if a blog had a counter-productive influence on users' language proficiency, 55 percent agreed that they were exposed to blogs that held writings that had poorly-framed phrases. On the contrary, 10 percent of the respondents believed that one's language proficiency cannot be affected due to counter-productive influences and 35 percent said that when the reader was exposed to wrongly-framed content, they got a counter-productive influence. The picture below evidently illustrates the same:

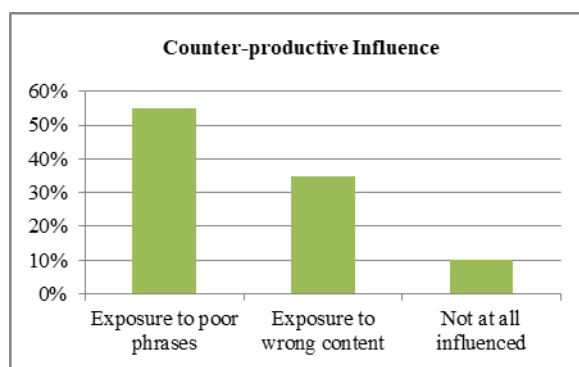


Figure 2 Counter-productive Influence Among the Respondents

When a question was raised as to whether readers learned any new words through blogs, 70 percent responded that any writer would want to impress the reader through catchy phrases and words, 10 percent pointed out that when there were unique words, they too got impressed and 20 percent of the students responded that they could never learn any new words since blogs nowadays are simple and comprehensible.

The next question tossed was whether blogging was a bad way to improve language proficiency as the user might interpret things in a wrong way, for which 20 percent of the students said that only when the reader did not have the capacity to comprehend the language, he misunderstood the concept. 40 percent of the students strongly refused the assumption because the descriptive style of writing would enhance the learning skill of any inquisitive learner, and 40 percent of readers said that there were blogs that belonged to language learners who belonged to the beginner level. A relevant inference is pointed out by Maslen in his article published in the *University World News* that millions of academicians "around the world have become internet bloggers while universities are increasingly establishing blogging sites on their web pages" (p. 1). Blogging was once considered to be the pastime of unemployed youths but now it has taken a different form and become "an accepted communication medium within the academic community" (Maslen, 2011).

When the readers were asked whether they would consider active blogging as a good exercise to improve language proficiency, a definite 70 percent of students agreed because practice makes a man perfect; hence, practice is necessary. 10 percent of students grabbed the option that sometimes blogging was helpful for a short-term improvisation of speaking skills and 20 percent said that only by tuning the listening skills one can enhance his language proficiency.

Baisel (2020) infers in his article that “e-learning is cost-effective and flexible” (p. 49). He further adds that the content can be retrieved online as many times as possible and concentrate on improving oneself. Subsequently, the bloggers can go back to their posts, edit the content and post afresh.

The next question was whether students should be encouraged to go through blogs to improve their language proficiency for which 70 percent of the students agreed but they also mentioned that it had to be narrowed down to quality-filled literary blogs; 10 percent of the students said that sometimes they should but not always as it would create an addiction to surf on the internet. A bunch of 20 percent opted that books were the best source to improve language proficiency. When asked whether the forums on blogs would be useful to improve language proficiency, the majority of them (nearly 55 percent) agreed because they were able to pick up blogs belonging to their area of interest. 25 percent pointed out that never would they agree because nobody was interested in paying heed to forums and 20 percent said that they rarely did when there was a lot of time to spend on the internet.

The next question tossed was, “Could forums on blogs have an influence on one’s behaviour?” In response to this question, 40 percent agreed that it was possible when the comment of a writer convinces the thought process of a reader, and another 40 percent opted that they were never influenced since everyone has his own ideologies and style of language. For another 20 percent, it is neither influencing nor discouraging but entertaining as they feel themselves as the forum lovers. The picture below illustrates the level of influence clearly:

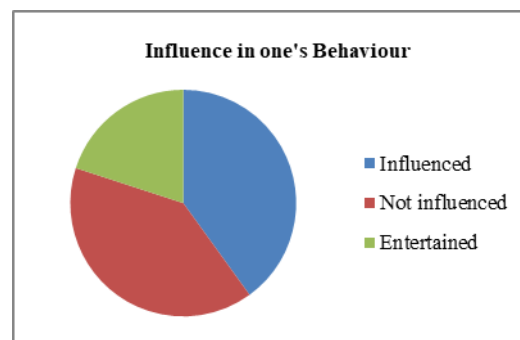


Figure 3 Influence in One's Behaviour

Finally, the last question put forth was whether they aspired to be bloggers, for which 40 percent of the students chose that they would aspire if they were paid a lot through advertisements apart from working elsewhere, 40 percent opted that they neither liked blogging nor wished to blog at any point in life as it was a waste of time and 20 percent of students picked the option that when there was nothing to do in life, it could be carried out.

## VII. FINDINGS

1. Blogs help the learners to express themselves freely and encourage autonomous learning.
2. Possibilities are more to learn the language skills especially the writing skill.
3. Intensive exposure to commonly-used expressions plays a major role in one's vocabulary acquisition.
4. Bloggers have increased access to the essential aspects of language skills such as spelling, syntax, vocabulary, idioms and phrases.
5. The question of gender bias is eliminated as blogging encourages any individual to contribute and manage online identity.
6. Communication takes place among the contributors beyond social and cultural boundaries.
7. Reading blog posts enhances one's reading skills.
8. Interaction with international peers encourages the blogger and is motivated to attain the international dimension in learning a language.
9. Blog posts and blog publications help the users to develop their language proficiency.
10. Efforts are taken by the bloggers to give quality content in the grammatically correct language.
11. The suitability of the blog depends on the choice of blogs.
12. Active blogging is a good exercise. However, too much into it will lead to internet addiction.
13. An individual's blog may be subjective and contain inaccurate data.
14. People are willing to take it as a profession if they can earn through it.

## VIII. LIMITATIONS

The study was conducted among the elite group of learners who had the advantages of having their formal school education through English medium schools or CBSE schools. The respondents not only belong to different states of India but also belong to different countries of the world. Though they belong to different regions of the country and the world, the learning environment demands everyone to communicate only in English to be understood better by their peers. This demand enables them to be good communicators and makes them fluent in English. Therefore teaching-

learning through blogs is not a big deal for the teachers as the learners already have the inclination to use good English. When the research is conducted among such elite groups, the results will naturally be positive and favouring one-sided.

The number of girls who participated in the survey is quite lesser than the number of boys. If the responses are collected from an equal number of boys and girls, the result will have a greater impact on the findings of the study. This conclusion is arrived at based on past studies. Some studies state that girls outperform boys and some other studies state that boys are better than girls in using technology. Kadijevich (2000) has mentioned in his article that “males showed a more positive attitude toward computers than females, even when computer experience was controlled” (p. 149). The article entitled *Gender Difference of Confidence in Using Technology for Learning* concludes that “male students have more confidence in using technology for learning than do female students in higher education” (Yau, 2012, p. 79). On the other hand, a recent study by Ullah and Ullah (2019) articulates that “girls’ outperformance and boys’ underperformance in education have become an established fact in the developed world” (p. 169).

If the study is conducted in an educational institution where the beneficiaries are the regional medium students belonging to the local community group, the results may vary. Their understanding of technology may be limited as they have limited exposure to electronic gadgets and technology (compared to the students of a technical university where the incumbents have the privilege of learning through online platforms). Also, the results may vary if the study is conducted among different levels of learners and grades of institutions. Another limitation is that the research was conducted by the researcher among his students and there is a possibility that the respondents have over-reported about the effectiveness of the usage of blogs.

#### IX. SUGGESTIONS AND CONCLUSION

Blogging is an ideal technology to be used in the classroom for language learning purposes. It can be used at all levels of learning, from elementary to higher studies. It also functions as an effective tool from the teacher’s end. He can use it, apart from guidance and mentoring, to document the programmes, to broadcast materials, and to carry out discussion both among the teacher and the learner community. Online communication creates interest among young learners as their attraction towards technology is more than face-to-face communication. Blogs offer a wider learning environment where the learners can pick up methods and materials of their interest and choice. Time is not a constraint for the learners as they can access blogs at their convenience which is contrary to conventional classroom learning. Regular participation and contribution to blogs will surely enhance the reading and writing skills of the users. During the process, the users get higher levels of motivation when their posts are commented on and given feedback. They not only become familiar with the structures of basic English sentences but also acquire knowledge about the content.

Bloggers with outstanding writing skills and a huge fan base are in great demand. Many publishing agents run after the bloggers for contemporary content. Renowned organisations invite them for expert interviews and guidelines. As they are good at creating content, they are even sought after by advertising agencies. The process not only involves acquiring vocabulary and language skills but also the technical skill related to starting and developing a blog.

Generally, bloggers are matured and self-motivated learners. They are very much aware of the need for learning a language. This participatory, as well as interactive pedagogy, suits their prerequisites and expectations. Multitudes of people start their own blogs in a fresh flood of inspiration but fail to continue it as they lack motivation. If one is encouraged or motivated to maintain and publish content regularly, one will learn the process of writing blogs that will educate oneself and others. A blog post with poor spelling and grammar cannot attract an audience. Regular contribution to blogs will help the bloggers to understand and engage their audience. Over a period, they can see that their communication has encountered a drastic improvement. Simultaneously, they have to learn relevant technical tools that help them to post schedule or meet the deadline.

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