

Teachers and Learners' Attitudes towards the Incorporation of Weblogs into the Writing Classroom: The Case of Badji Mokhtar University – Annaba

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Abstract

This paper aims to outline teachers and learners' attitudes towards one of the most innovative technological tools used in the writing classroom, weblogs, for pedagogical purposes. Hence, the research opted for exploring and describing the opinions of teachers of writing and second-year students of English enrolling at Badji Mokhtar University through a qualitative research design. The participants received surveys which included Likert-type statements. Results showed that the correspondents have positive attitudes about integrating weblogs to enhance English as Foreign Language (EFL) learners' writing abilities. Weblogs' use endures a beneficial impact on students' achievements.

Keywords: Attitudes; blogging; EFL classroom; weblogs; writing abilities.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Due to the emergence of Web 2.0, interchangeably named social media or social technologies, to the field of pedagogy, there was a paradigm shift from traditional tools of learning using board and pen to the modern one or as it is called e-learning. This shift was not limited to the tools and the learners' interests who immersed themselves in technological development. The teacher's role also changed since he is no longer the information provider but rather a facilitator guiding the learners' appropriate use of technological facilities. Recent research highlights the significance of new generation social media tools supporting learning blogs, online forums, wikis, and Facebook as they tremendously influenced their users.

Nowadays, teachers and learners are consumers of the different platforms they only have to log in. The core idea behind using these innovative means is to create a shared space where participants with mutual interests exchange ideas and collaborate. Blogging, then, provides teachers and learners with the necessary platform to cope with the field's dynamic shifts. Hence, weblogs in the EFL context are gradually developing that nearly all teachers and learners have access either for academic or personal drives.

1.1. Research Problem

Teaching writing has a particular stand in language teaching since it requires considerable effort, acquaintance, and guidance. Writing is the last skill that learners face when acquiring a language, preceded by listening, speaking, and reading. Accordingly, it demands grammar, vocabulary, syntax, and mechanics to present a well-structured and coherent written account. However, learners and teachers of writing often find it challenging to achieve the written task appropriately for the different intertwined features that shape writing. Although teachers support their learners with different tools, techniques, strategies, and guidance, they are still unable to produce coherent pieces.

Teachers regularly attempt to innovate their practices, strategies, and techniques to help their learners gain control over their productions. Since blogs

rendered shared spaces for learners to practice their writing under the direction of their teachers, EFL teachers integrated them to make their tasks more manageable.

1.2. Research Aims and Questions

Many researches highlighted the importance of integrating weblogs as innovative teaching tool, that few studies encompassed its use in the Algerian context. This study sheds light on the significance of using weblogs in teaching. The paper also depicts the different attitudes teachers and learners have regarding blogging to enhance EFL learners' writing achievements. The following questions require answers to achieve the main aims of the research:

- How are Weblogs significant in the teaching context?
- What are the attitudes of EFL teachers and learners considering the integration of weblogs into their writing classroom?

2. Literature Review

With the spread of internet facilities, blogs gain increasing popularity, varying from fashion to sport, health, research, and education makes no exception. Thus, weblogs immersed language teachers and learners for the variety of media and materials it provides. It supports out-class activities to practice as the time allocated to given modules might be insufficient. Blogging, then, is the act of participating in online platforms sharing ideas or media with common correspondents. It gains influence because of the facilities it provides to its users.

2.1. What is a Weblog?

According to Blood (2000), John Barger was the first to use the term "Weblog" in 1997, referring to an online space for espousing ideas. The term weblogs is a contraction of two words: web and log, i.e., to log on the web. Jones (2003) defines a "blog" as short for weblogging and interchangeably utilized, an online journal where users often update what they write (Ozkan, 2011). Blogs are linked to other blogs by their authors, thus creating networked communities of writers and readers known collectively as the blogosphere.

Moon and Lim (2013) outlined Weblogs as open-access platforms that do not require any pre-requisites for use, providing enormous innovative learning tools and encouraging users to think outside the box. The concept "weblogs" typically define a website representing an online account where users discuss multiple topics, influence others, reflect on important issues, and share viewpoints, mostly allowing the readers to comment. The entries of the weblogs have reverse chronological order, they are easy to set up, and posts are simple to comment on (Boas, 2011).

According to Baysal (2012), communicative blogs are allowing the users to interact with the blogger. These blogs are of different types: personal, political, social, and economic commentaries; and information technologies (Baysal, 2003). Richardson (2009) claimed that weblogs evolved from an online chronicle to a popular reference for people to use in different aspects and interests. Regarding the pedagogical field, the use of blogs increased within the development of educational technology to enhance learners' achievements.

Educators encouraged the integration of weblogs as tools for teaching and learning (Zhang, 2009). There are three types of blogs in foreign language (FL) classes: the instructor or tutor blog, the student blog, and the class blog, wherein the blog is an additional communication channel between the teacher and learners, providing them with diverse resources and feedback (Campbell, 2003). Wagner (2003) defined students' weblogs as a learning diary, created simultaneously with the learning experience, and reporting on the learning content and process related to writing assignments, reading materials, or reflecting on previous lessons. The class blogs are shared spaces between teachers and learners (light & Polin, 2010).

2.2. Weblog as a Pedagogical Tool

Devers (2011) argued that weblogs enhance the teaching and learning situation in which they offer multiple contributors, rich content type, multiple purposes, more exchange of ideas, and efficient information retrieval. The commenting function allows others to interact, render proper feedback, and exchange opinions (Good & Whang, 2002). Bakar & Kemboja (2009) stated that weblogs offer collaborative learning platforms, enhance knowledge acquisition and sharing, and improve creativity. They also develop reflective processes, analytical analysis, and critical thinking, empowering learner-learner and teacher-learner

relationships (Wang, 2010; Yang & Chang, 2012; Oravec, 2002). In a learner-centered learning environment, blogs help students develop persuasion and argumentative skills by providing a logical claim for the audience, setting the objectives of posts, and giving credibility to the writings. They offer a comfortable atmosphere for users to write on the blog, share ideas and support arguments by providing freedom to write than in the classroom setting (Baggetun & Wasson, 2006).

Additionally, weblogs offer a high level of autonomy and an environment where students can learn from each other. Weblogs represent a platform where learners can get learning experiences through online learning since they are social spaces for shared practices that offer a flexible setting for students to create resources and share them with others. They also foster opportunities for interaction with the audience and improve students' listening, speaking, reading, and writing skills (Noytim, 2010).

2.3. The Use of Weblogs to Teach Writing Skills

During recent years, blogs emerged as a language-learning tool in EFL classes, that different researches investigated the importance of adopting weblogs into EFL classes, especially its effects on the four language skills and other subskills. Sun (2009) noted that blogging develops skills conceptualization, brainstorming, articulation, monitoring, evaluating, self-presentation, and information exchange skills. Other researches proved the efficacy of using weblogs to improve learners' oral performance, reading skills, and writing abilities (Downes, 2004; Hsu et al., 2008; De Izquierdo and Reyes, 2009; Palombo, 2009).

Blogs can be a supplementary tool to support students' writing abilities (Hall & Davison, 2007). Kennedy (2003) stated that web publications give students an authentic audience to address through writing. Zhang (2009) advocated that writing for an audience improves writing and enhances the learners' capacities to tackle different topics. Said et al. (2013) indicated that blogs help create an environment where learners can write freely without limitations in which the learners are free to write, receive feedback from others, and update their knowledge.

Besides, using blogs to promote writing skills has a significant effect on developing rhetorical strategies such as organizing ideas into relevant discourse and

supporting claims by citing outside texts (Bloch, 2007). In addition, blog writing leads to more varied and appropriate vocabulary use (Ducate & Lomicka, 2008).

2.4. Obstacles to Use of Weblogs

Notwithstanding the positive aspects of using the blog, there seem to be some challenges for its use in FL classrooms (Wanger, 2003). When implementing blogs to teaching writing, instructors may find students with technophobia and anxiety, students who lack materials, others with poor technical skills (Wanger, 2003). Campbell (2004) highlighted the lack of participation from readers outside the classroom, which may hinder achieving the aim behind creating the blog. Sometimes they are not motivated to interact. The use of weblogs also addresses the issue of plagiarism.

Since the posts are available on the internet, this will cause a straightforward act of plagiarism (Devers, 2011). Ward (2004) described challenges regarding lack of security and problems associated with technology; there are numerous concerns related to the security of the information logged in the weblog with the audience, credibility, authenticity, and other variables. If the weblog is public, it may suffer troll infestations, people who intentionally try to disrupt by posting inflammatory, insulting, incorrect, inaccurate, or off-topic messages, with the intent of provoking a person's reaction from others (Wanger, 2003).

The concept of educational scaffolding is of high importance in which learners should acquire the necessary skills on how to post, include information, interact with others, and give and respond to feedback (Devers, 2011). Before initiating the lecture, the teacher should introduce the students to the weblog and the way they function.

3. Methodology

The research aims to explore the attitudes of EFL teachers and learners towards the use of blogs as means to write. It opts for the qualitative research method designed under the survey method as the target aim of using qualitative research is to gain an in-depth knowledge of the phenomenon. Fraenkel et al. (2012) defined the survey method as to collect data through interviews or questionnaires.

After working online for one semester, both teachers and learners received a multi-sectional questionnaire due to the COVID-19 distancing requirement. Learners' questionnaire included two sections: (1) background information, (2) attitudes towards the use of weblogs. However, the teachers filled out a two sections survey to outline their use of internet facilities and their perspectives concerning using weblogs to teach writing. The answers, thus, required a Likert-type response.

Piloting research tools before administering them to the target population is a significant step in scientific research. Cohen et al. (2018) claimed that piloting the questionnaire allows the researcher to check its validity, clarity, readability, and authenticity, eliminate ambiguities, and identify irrelevant items. The learners' questionnaire was piloted with a small group of 11 students almost parallel to the target population. In general, they spent from 15 to 20 minutes fulfilling the questions. They had ambiguities regarding the open-ended questions and opted to skip them, so multiple-choice questions and Likert-scaled statements were the best choices for more clarity. Regarding the teachers' questionnaire, it was piloted with two Written Expression teachers, and following their recommendations, some questions were reformulated.

This investigation took place after the first semester of the university year 2020-2021. Teachers of writing and second-year students of English enrolling at Badji Mokhtar University represent the sample population of this research. The reason behind choosing second-year students is that they studied the first year traditionally, before the COVID-19 lockdown and the exceptional circumstances it applied for distant learning. Thus, the number of students reached 325, and the number of teachers who teach the written expression module was 18.

Subsequently, only 115 students filled out the form completely, and 15 teachers responded to the teachers' questionnaire. Results obtained from the participant's answers related to their attitudes about weblogging were analyzed quantitatively using descriptive statistics (the means and standard deviations SD) through the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences program (SPSS Statistics).

4. Results and discussion

4.1. Learners' questionnaire

General information

This study comprised 115 second-year students from Annaba University in which (27.82%) of them were less than 20-year-old, (33.04%) of them were between 20 and 22-year-old, (17.39%) of the learners were from 23 to 25 years old, and (21.73%) were older than 25-year-old (Mean= 3.944, Sd.=1.235). Hence, some of the correspondents (26.08%) have regular access to the internet facilities, the majority (29.56%) often get connected to a technological device, others (14.78%) do sometimes use the internet, wherein (17.39%) of them rarely use the internet, and the minority (11.3%) never use it (Mean= 3.967, Sd.= 1.180).

The majority of participants (25.21%) revealed that they always log in to weblogs, (23.47%) claimed that they often visit weblogs, (17.39%) stated they sometimes sit for weblogs, (14.78%) of them rarely use the internet facilities for blogging, and (19.13%) never followed a blog (Mean= 2.213, Sd.= 0.705).

Accordingly, some students (68.69%) revealed that they follow sports weblogs, (60.86%) of them prefer fashion and lifestyle blogs, (59.13%) of the learners are interested in educational weblogs, the majority (69.56%) are keen on entertainment weblogs, others (61.73%) login for food and drinks weblog, and (60%) of them enjoy travel weblogs (Mean= 2.151, Sd.= 0.706).

The majority of participants (25.21%) responded that they constantly interact in educational weblogs, (20.86%) of them often interact in blogs related to their education, (21.73%) sometimes communicate in academic blogs, (17.39%) of the learners rarely join educational forums, and the minority (14.78%) never interact in blogs for educational purposes (Mean= 2.073, Sd.= 0.818).

Consequently, the majority of correspondents (75.65%) claimed that the use of weblog facilitates the writing tasks through providing various ideas and resources. Others (70.43%) stated that weblogs promote the smooth and logical transitions when they write, (66.95%) of the learners indicated that weblogs offer them a free space to write creatively, and (69.56%) pointed out that weblogs render real

audience to address through their writings (Mean= 2096, Sd.= 0.888).

Attitudes towards the use of weblogs

Table 1. Learners' attitudes towards the use of weblogs

Statement	Percentage	Mean	Sd.
1. I am satisfied with the innovative technological tools we use to learn.	1	23,47 %	1.414 0.517
	2	18,26 %	
	3	21,73 %	
	4	20 %	
	5	16,52 %	
2. I feel anxious and stressed when it comes to weblogging.	1	17,39 %	1.732 0.512
	2	15,65 %	
	3	20,86 %	
	4	23,47 %	
	5	22,60 %	
3. Blogging helps me share ideas and provide my friends with feedback.	1	21,73 %	1.816 0.865
	2	24,34 %	
	3	14,78 %	
	4	20 %	
	5	19,13 %	
4. Blogging helps me establish good relationships with teachers and friends.	1	25,21 %	1.788 0.758
	2	18,26 %	
	3	16,52 %	
	4	21,73 %	
	5	18,26 %	
5. Blogging helps me develop my language skills.	1	22,60 %	1.732 0.512
	2	23,47 %	
	3	17,39 %	
	4	20,86 %	
	5	15,65 %	

As shown in the table above, learners' responded to five statements to express their attitudes towards the use of weblogs. The statements required a particular choice numbered from 1 to 5 (1 → strongly agree, 2 → agree, 3 → undecided, 4 → disagree, 5 → strongly disagree).

Comparing the Mean values of the learners' answers demonstrates that they are satisfied with integrating innovative technological tools into the EFL classes

(Mean= 1.414). However, they face specific difficulties when using these facilities. The majority indicated that they feel anxious and stressed regarding the use of weblogs (Mean= 1.732).

Accordingly, the learners showed a reasonable approval of weblogs, referring to their importance in providing ideas, exchanging thoughts with colleagues, and supporting others with feedback (Mean= 1.816). They also indicated that weblogging helps them build healthier interpersonal relationships with their colleagues and teachers (Mean= 1.788). Finally, the participants pointed out that their language skills develop and progress (Mean= 1.732).

It is evident that second-year learners are moderately aware of the importance of weblogs and their role in enhancing their learning situation. They revealed their acceptance of implementing this innovative tool, which seems promising to provide different resources, space to reflect and interact with others, and practice the target language.

Some students showed anxiety about using weblogs, which may refer to poor knowledge in digital literacy, lack of technical support, or unavailability of materials to experience the utility of this tool. However, the majority of learners expressed their positive attitudes towards weblogging to practice writing. It helps them build coherent and cohesive structures and allows them to write for a real audience.

4.2. Teachers' questionnaire

General information

The research also targeted teachers to identify their perspectives concerning weblogging in the writing classroom. Only 15 teachers responded to the online survey out of 18. The participants' ages varied in which (40%) aged from 25-years-old to 30-years-old, others' age (33.33%) ranged from 31 to 35, (20%) were from 36-year-old to 40-year-old, and only one (6.66%) was older than 40-years-old (Mean= 1.081, Sd.= 0.448). The majority of correspondents (40%) expressed consistent access to internet facilities, (33.33%) depicted that they log in frequently, two teachers (13.33%) revealed that they sometimes use technological features, and the others (13.33%) rarely use them (Mean= 1.095, Sd.= 0.361).

Regarding the teachers' use of weblogs, some of the participants (33.33%) depicted that they always use educational weblogs as means to teach, others (20%) demonstrated that they often employ weblogs features for their teaching, the majority (40%) manifested the integration of weblogs into their classes, only one teacher (6.66%) expressed a rare use of blogging activities in the classroom (Mean= 1.141, Sd.= 0.331).

Many teachers under investigation (26.66%) believed that weblogs are of high importance to enhance the learners' language development, the majority (40%) advocated that using weblogs to teach is moderately essential, others (26.66%) perceived it as a powerful tool for better teaching results, and one participant (6.66%) disfavored the implementation of weblogs as a teaching tool (Mean= 1.095, Sd.= 0.361).

Teachers' perspectives regarding the use of weblogs

Table 2. Teachers' attitudes towards the integration of weblogs into the writing classroom

Statement		Percentage	Mean	Sd.
1. I feel comfortable to use weblog as teaching tool.	1	46,66 %	1,264	1,264
	2	33,33 %		
	3	6,66 %		
	4	6,66 %		
	5	6,66 %		
2. My learners' have problems regarding the use of blog.	1	6,66 %	1,048	0,271
	2	13,33 %		
	3	6,66 %		
	4	33,33 %		
	5	40 %		
3. Blogging helps learners establish better interpersonal relationships.	1	33,33 %	1,095	0,361
	2	40 %		
	3	13,33 %		
	4	0		
	5	13,33 %		
4. Blogging helps learners to exchange ideas with others.	1	40 %	1,341	0,297
	2	40 %		
	3	0		
	4	20 %		
	5	0		
5. Blogging helps learners develop their language skills.	1	40 %	1,141	0,331
	2	33,33 %		
	3	20 %		
	4	6,66 %		
	5	0		
6. Blogging helps learners develop their critical thinking skills.	1	46,66 %	1,378	0,431
	2	33,33 %		
	3	0		
	4	0		
	5	20 %		

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7. Blogging helps learners brainstorm ideas and order them.	1	33.33 %	1,048	0,271
	2	40%		
	3	6.66 %		
	4	13.33 %		
	5	6.66 %		
8. Blogging helps learners build new lexical items.	1	40 %	1,264	0,291
	2	40 %		
	3	0		
	4	6.66 %		
	5	13.33 %		
9. Blogging helps learners memorize different grammatical structures.	1	46.66 %	1,303	0,443
	2	33.33 %		
	3	13.33 %		
	4	6.66 %		
	5	0		
10. Blogging helps learners develop their writing skills	1	40 %	1,264	0,291
	2	40%		
	3	6.66 %		
	4	13.33 %		
	5	0		

The above table depicts the teachers' responses to ten statements about the importance of using weblogs as an educational means. The statements require a choice of a number from one to five (1 → strongly agree, 2 → agree, 3 → undecided, 4 → disagree, 5 → strongly disagree).

Results revealed that most teachers under investigation were comfortable using weblogs to teach a foreign language (Mean= 1.264). Accordingly, the participants claimed that weblogs represent a virtual space for learners to establish good relationships with their colleagues and tutors (Mean= 1.095) and communicate their ideas (Mean= 1.341). However, the teachers expressed that many learners find difficulties in weblogging (Mean= 1.048).

The participants considered weblogs as a boosting means to develop language skills (Mean= 1.141), wherein learners can develop their critical thinking skills actively (Mean= 1.378) and brainstorm ideas logically (Mean= 1.048). They also showed the importance of weblogging to build appropriate vocabulary knowledge (Mean= 1.264), memorize different grammatical structures (Mean= 1.303), and promote the learners' writing abilities (Mean= 1.264).

According to the results, teachers showed a significant interest in weblogs as an innovative tool to enhance teaching and learning. The participants would likely recommend blogging to their learners that would foster the relationship

between learn-learn and teacher-learn as they mutually collaborate, communicate and interact in the shared space. Additionally, the correspondents favored integrating weblogs to teach writing skills specifically as it promotes creativity, critical thinking skills, vocabulary knowledge, and grammatical structures

5. CONCLUSION

Technology changed the way people think, act, and react. It dominated all fields humans are interested in, even academic profiles. The availability of internet resources affected teaching and learning, wherein teachers and learners updated their traditional tasks into more advanced ones. One prominent feature of this modern era is blogging. Accordingly, this research investigated EFL teachers' and learners' attitudes towards blogging as an instructional tool in the writing classroom. Blogging, then, come to constitute an important place in EFL classes.

Considering the apparent use for writing, students often lack the appropriate content and skills to write, which makes it challenging to produce a well-structured coherent whole. Accordingly, attempting to implement weblogs into the writing classroom is promising. Since technology and social media are almost everywhere, the writing task may become enjoyable and fruitful.

Results revealed the positive attitudes of both teachers and students towards incorporating the blog application into the writing classroom. Teachers and learners believe that weblogging would enhance the learners' achievements in the written expression module. In addition, including weblogs supports learners in building good relationships with their teachers and classmates. It promotes collaborative learning, the apprenticeship of the target language, acquiring more lexical items and grammatical structure, and provide real readers with interactive feedback.

Despite the benefits weblogging renders to the EFL classroom, learners face anxiety and stress regarding blogging. These problems are due to being digital illiterate, lack of technical support, or adequate material for use. In this regard, the educational institution is responsible for providing support to teachers and learners for a better learning environment.

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7. Appendices

7.1.Learners' questionnaire

Dear students,

You are kindly inquired to fill in the following survey, designed to gather data as a part of research work. The study aims to investigate EFL students' attitudes towards using weblogs in writing classes. Your contribution is highly appreciated, so make sure to answer all the questions.

I. General information

1. Indicate your age:

- a. Less than 20 years b. [20-22] years c. [23-25] years d. More than 25 years

2. Do you have a regular access to internet facilities?

- a. Always b. Often c. Sometimes d. Rarely e. Never

3. Do you tend to visit weblogs?

- a. Always b. Often c. Sometimes d. Rarely e. Never

4. What kind of weblogs do you visit?

- a. Sport weblogs b. Fashion and lifestyle blogs c. Educational blogs
- d. Entertainment blogs e. Food and drinks blogs f. Travel blogs

5. Do you interact in scholastic weblogs for educational purposes?

- a. Always b. Often c. Sometimes d. Rarely e. Never

6. How can the weblog facilitate writing tasks? (You can tick more than one answer)

- a. Providing ideas and resources b. Promoting smooth and logical

- c. Offering spaces to write creatively flow of ideas.
- d. Rendering real audience to address.

II. Attitudes towards the use of weblog in EFL classes

On a scale from 1 to 5 (1 → strongly agree, 2 → agree, 3 → undecided, 4 → disagree, 5 → strongly disagree), choose the appropriate answer for you.

1. I am satisfied with the innovative technological tools we use to learn.	1	2	3	4	5
2. I feel anxious and stressed when it comes to weblogging.	1	2	3	4	5
3. Blogging helps me share ideas and provide my friends with feedback.	1	2	3	4	5
4. Blogging helps me establish good relationships with teachers and friends.	1	2	3	4	5
5. Blogging helps me develop my language skills.	1	2	3	4	5

7.2. Teachers' questionnaire

Dear colleagues,

You are kindly inquired to fill in the following survey, designed to gather data as a part of research work. The study aims to investigate EFL teachers' attitudes towards using weblogs in writing classes. Your contribution is highly appreciated, so make sure to answer all the questions.

I. General information

1. Indicate your age:

- a. [25--30] years b. [31-35] years c. [36-40] years d. More than 40 years

2. Do you have a regular access to internet facilities?

- a. Always b. Often c. Sometimes d. Rarely e. Never

3. Do you use weblogs as educational tool in your classroom?

- a. Always b. Often c. Sometimes d. Rarely e. Never

4. Do you find weblogs important at classroom?

- a. Very important b. Moderately important c. Important d. Slightly important e. Unimportant

II. Attitudes towards the use of weblog in the writing classes

On a scale from 1 to 5 (1 → strongly agree, 2 → agree, 3 → undecided, 4 → disagree, 5 → strongly disagree), choose the appropriate answer for you.

1. I feel comfortable to use weblog as teaching tool.	1	2	3	4	5
2. My learners' have problems regarding the use of blog.	1	2	3	4	5
3. Blogging helps learners establish better interpersonal relationships.	1	2	3	4	5
4. Blogging helps learners to exchange ideas with others.	1	2	3	4	5
5. Blogging helps learners develop their language skills.	1	2	3	4	5
6. Blogging helps learners develop their critical thinking skills.	1	2	3	4	5
7. Blogging helps learners brainstorm ideas and order them.	1	2	3	4	5
8. Blogging helps learners build new lexical items.	1	2	3	4	5
9. Blogging helps learners memorize different grammatical structures.	1	2	3	4	5
10. Blogging helps learners develop their writing skills	1	2	3	4	5