

THE USE OF TRAVEL BLOG WRITING IN A TERTIARY LEVEL ENGLISH FOR SPECIFIC PURPOSES COURSE

Abstract: Blogs can be used as constructive means in EFL teaching allowing learners to exert control over their own writing and enabling them to communicate with the global community of internet users. Among different types of blogs, travel blogs can be employed as pedagogical means for real life based learning and L2 writing improvement. Through travel blogs, learners can both explore different places and write about their travel experience in L2. However, the use of travel blog writing in teaching English for Specific Purposes (ESP) has not yet been investigated. In this study, travel blog writing was integrated into a tertiary level ESP course aiming to improve learners' linguistic skills in the fields of tourism and travel. The research investigates the learners' views about blog writing as a part of their ESP course through a questionnaire and interviews. According to the findings, travelling and writing about the tourist attractions of one's city via a personalized blog was found to increase writing motivation but the experience was also defined to be demanding as it requires heavy workload. Overall, this experience was reported to enhance autonomous, reflective and collaborative learning, increase cultural awareness and contribute to learners' self-expression and L2 writing improvement.

Keywords: travel blog writing, travel blogs, blogs in education, travel blogs in English language teaching, English for specific purposes (ESP)

Kemaloglu-Er, Elif

Assistant Professor
Department of Translation and
Interpreting
Adana Alparslan Türkeş Science
and Technology University
Turkey
E-mail: ekemalogluer@atu.edu.tr
ORCID: 0000-0003-1238-1018

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INTRODUCTION

Thanks to information and communication technologies and digital media, many language learners practice writing skills synchronously as is the case in chatting or instant messaging or asynchronously through means like blogs. Blogs are websites authored by an individual and organized in a reverse chronological order over a period of time and they are convenient means of digital communication due to their multifaceted merits over many internet tools (Akdag and Ozkan, 2017; Godwin-Jones, 2003; Palombo, 2011). First, they are easy to make and quick to create as they require no HTML knowledge. In blogs, it is possible to enhance the content and intensify the attractiveness of appearance with multimedia features including external links, digital photos as well as audio and video clips. The “comment” feature of blogs enables readers to interact with the author paving the way for the co-construction of knowledge. Also, through the “hyperlink” function of blogs, one can easily link and crosslink to online processes, discourses and communities. Above all, they can be free or of very low costs. Hence, blogs supply authors with a dynamic, interactive and cost-effective medium where they can not only create and update the content easily in their own ways but also share and exchange ideas (Nepomuceno, 2011).

Blogs have been cited as useful sources in L2 education contexts since with their asynchronous mode, they can give students a chance to write at their own pace without time pressure, possibly leading them to reflect critically and creatively on the content (Huffaker, 2005; Lin and Yuan, 2006; Pinkman, 2005). They also increase students’ literacy through the ubiquitous and easily-accessible content they offer and the network of authentic sources they potentially incur (Arena, 2008; Jones and Nuhfer-Halten, 2006; Oravec, 2002). Additional advantages include enhancing analytical writing skills, intellectual confidence, and student autonomy (Richardson, 2006). Thus, students can often make their own decisions in such settings as to what, when and how much to publish their work online and take advantage of independent learning (Kovalchuk and Krasnokutskaya, 2017). Besides, students’ works that accumulate in the form of archived entries over time cause both the students and teachers to assess writing improvement. A further benefit is that by means of blogs, students open their works to a broad audience, which potentially increases their motivation to produce works of high quality (Sun, 2009; Ward, 2004). Consequently, blogs set the grounds for not only personal but also social spaces for learners to express thoughts and feelings, and develop a digital identity to make connections with others within a wide virtual learning community (Mabuan, 2018).

Drawing on Vygotsky's (1978) educational theory, the use of blogs in language learning can be defined as a social constructivist approach (Fageeh, 2011; Ferdig and Trammell, 2004; Sun and Chang, 2012). In this approach, learning is seen as a form of knowledge construction that develops through the social process of language use over time. Knowledge is fluid, not fixed and construction of knowledge is discursive, relational and conversational in nature. Blogs are social constructive means in the way that they afford a space for L2 students to voice their unique experience with their surroundings and their ideas and feelings about them (Sun and Chang, 2012). Moreover, blog publication offers an opportunity for collaborative feedback, which, in turn, scaffolds a learner in his or her quest for knowledge construction (Fageeh, 2011). Students can also understand the relational and contextual basis of knowledge, knowledge construction and meaning making through the comment and hyperlink features of blogs (Ferdig and Trammell, 2004).

Blog writing can also serve as useful means in contexts where English as a lingua franca (ELF)-aware pedagogy is applied. In the pedagogy of ELF, non-native varieties of English are acknowledged in their own right and non-native users of language with their own unique characteristics (i.e. with their own use of English, L1s, and sociolinguistic and sociocultural

backgrounds) and it is argued that this non-native speaker reality should be integrated into English lessons (Kemaloglu-Er and Bayyurt, 2018, 2019a, 2019b; Kemaloglu-Er and Deniz, 2020). In English language teaching (ELT) settings which emphasize variability and functionality in ELF use deviating from native norms, blog writing can be an effective way to highlight each student's English with their own unique characteristics and make it visible to a global community and help them interact with other users of English. This form of blog writing would also pave the way for intercultural exchanges and aid the incorporation of local cultures into the English classroom.

BLOGS IN WRITING INSTRUCTION

Blogs can be employed as vehicles for meaningful and purposeful writing tasks in L2 learning environments. They are reported to act as promising tools in the key areas of L2 writing instruction affording several advantages including motivating learners intrinsically and extrinsically, allowing them to exert control over their own writing, presenting them a real-life setting and a great range of authentic materials, and enabling them to communicate with real audience (Ducate and Lomicka, 2008; Fotos and Browne, 2004; Throne and Payne, 2005). According to Warschauer (2003), interaction on the internet including blogs encompasses a complexified view of literacy that goes beyond decoding and encoding texts. Today, as he indicates, to know English means to know how to effectively read, write and communicate in electronic environments. Blogs, therefore, lay the grounds for multiple literacies among learners.

To this end, blogs can well be employed as supporting means in L2 writing instruction to increase writing fluency and literacy skills (Bloch, 2007; Fellner and Apple, 2006; Ward, 2004). Jones and Nuhfer-Halten (2006) state that by blog writing, students can become more and more confident in writing and develop their own personal writing styles. Lin and Yuan (2006) underline the audience awareness feature of blogs mentioning the fact that blogs derive students to think critically about how their views might be conceived by the target audience. As stated by Arena (2008), blogging helps students to develop metacognitive skills to regulate their own writing. According to Lee (2010), blogs increase students' motivation to write as they now address not only the instructor but also a broad audience. As Ward (2004) remarks, exposure to multiple views via blogs can cause learners to develop their interpretative and critical thinking skills, which is also likely to affect the quality of their writing content.

Several studies display students' views on the advantages and challenges of blog use in English as a foreign language (EFL) instruction. Blogs are reported to develop linguistic skills, particularly writing and reading as well as grammar and vocabulary, enhance interaction and collaboration, build confidence in writing, encourage autonomous learning, augment analytical and critical thinking skills, increase writing and reading motivation, sense for responsibility and desire for life-long learning (Akdag and Ozkan, 2017; Aydan, 2014; Aydin, 2014; Campbell, 2003; Featro and DiGregorio, 2016; Grami, 2012; Gunduz, 2016; Kovalchuk and Krasnokutskaya, 2017; Kuimova and Zmekov, 2016; Johnson, 2004; Lee, 2010; Mabuan, 2018; Musa, 2016; Nepomuceno, 2011; Pinkman, 2005; Sun and Chang, 2012; Zhang, 2010). On the other hand, blog use in English lessons is said to have some challenges like complicated tasks, intense workload, and technological limitations like internet problems or unavailability of computers (Aydan, 2014; Featro and DiGregorio, 2016; Kovalchuk and Krasnokutskaya, 2017; Mabuan, 2018).

Among blog types, travel blogs can present certain benefits to language learners, yet this type of blogging has received little attention in ELT literature. As stated by Pascual (2019), travel blog as a digital genre allows the implementation of communicative language teaching, task based learning and process based writing in the English classroom and has the potential to develop students' communicative and digital competencies and raise their genre awareness. Romaniukha,

Shelomovska and Sorokina (2020) suggest integration of travel blog writing into the ESL classroom through project work activities since such form of writing leads students to introduce cultural concepts and this offers opportunities for enriched use of language and enhanced verbal creativity. The only study about travel blogging in ELT was conducted by Pascual Oliva (2017). The study aimed to measure the attitudes of secondary education students towards the use of travel blogging in the EFL classroom. The findings displayed the general need to further learners' awareness of the genre of travel blogging since most of the participants were found to have some basic information about blogs and not to consult travel blogs before embarking on a trip. However, learners were also found to be in favour of using travel blogs in the English classroom and view it as a functional resource to improve linguistic skills and enhance learning motivation.

Although travel blogging has been proposed to be a useful pedagogical means to improve L2 communicative skills, there is no research on the integration of travel blog writing in EFL or ESP contexts. This study aims to introduce a sample implementation where travel blog writing was integrated into a tertiary level English for Specific Purposes (ESP) course and investigate the students' views on travel blog writing experience. More specifically, the study aims to explore the descriptions of the students about the blog writing process, their opinions on the effects of travel blogging on L2 writing improvement, and their views on the advantages and challenges of incorporating travel blog writing into the ESP course along with their suggested solutions.

The study addresses the following research questions:

1. How do the students describe travel blog writing process as a part of their ESP course?
2. What do the students think about the effects of travel blog writing on their writing improvement?
3. What do the students think about the advantages of travel blog writing within their ESP course?
4. What do the students think about the challenges of travel blog writing within their ESP course?
5. How should the challenges be addressed according to the students?

METHODOLOGY

This qualitative case study was conducted in an English for Specific Purposes (ESP) class given in the Translation and Interpreting Department of a state university in Turkey. The course entitled "Translation of Travel and Tourism Texts" is a multi-modular course adopting a real life-based learning approach which primarily aims to have students make translations about travel and tourism-related subjects and write their own travel writings. The course primarily focuses on the tourist attractions, historical places and local events in Adana, where the university is located. In this course, students not only make translations of texts about the given locations/events but also visit these locations, attend local events and write about their own travel experience. More specifically, in this course, the students are asked to

- i) visit the tourist attractions and historical places in the city and experience local events attracting tourists in the location like a local festival,
- ii) make translations of texts related to the chosen location and/or the local event and critically analyze the translations,
- iv) write travel writings about their travel experience in English,
- v) post their writings on the blogs they particularly prepare for the course,
- v) exchange opinions on their travel experience and travel writing with their classmates, instructor and the blog audience.

Thus the course mainly has two modules with respect to ESP improvement: Translation of tourism- and travel-related texts in the languages of English and Turkish and travel writing in English. In the travel writing module of this course, blog writing was applied as a pedagogical means to increase the students' writing motivation and encourage them to actively and reflectively take part in real-life based writing, knowledge generation, personalization and sharing. Every other week the students were expected to visit a location in their local settings or experience a local event, learn about the qualities of this place/event and introduce this place/event and write about their travel experience and their own feelings and thoughts about this experience and then post their travel writings with the visuals they select for their blogs.

In the course, the students were assigned to

- 1) visit and write about their travels to main tourist attractions in Adana namely,
 - (i) Adana Museum, which mainly houses the archaeological and the historical heritage of Adana,
 - (ii) Adana Cinema Museum, which introduces the cinematographic works of directors, producers, actors and actresses from Adana as well as films shot in Adana, a city which is known to give significance to art, literature and cinema and where Adana Gold Cocoon Film Festival is held every year,
 - (iii) Adana Atatürk Museum, the old Adana house, where Atatürk, the founder of the Turkish Republic, was hosted when he came to Adana in 1924,
 - (iv) Sabancı Central Mosque, the second largest mosque in Turkey with six minarets and the interior intensively embroidered with tile work and calligraphy,
 - (v) Central Park, a large urban park located on both banks of the Seyhan River in Adana,
- 2) recommend a restaurant or a café in town to the target audience and write about it since Adana is known for its cuisine, particularly *kebab*, a common meat dish made with minced meat, and
- 3) attend the well-known festival of the city they lived in, namely Adana Orange Blossom Festival, named after the scents of orange flowers dominating the city in early April and held to celebrate the arrival of spring with activities, and write about this experience.

The students were told to not only give information about these places and events but also write about their personal opinions and feelings about their travels and make their blog writings personalized pieces of work that reflect their own perspectives as travelers. The course lasted 14 weeks and there were 7 pieces of writing assigned to be written and posted on the blogs.

Blog writing was defined to be a compulsory part of the course and assessed as a part of the overall course assessment. Each task was given points and evaluated on the basis of the established criteria including accuracy, clarity, coherence, inclusion and reflection of author's voice, and verbal and visual appeal. The participants were trained about how to start blogs and how to use blog features before the training. Samples of travel blogs were also shown to the students. Systematic and comprehensive feedback about blog tasks was provided by the instructor to each student on a regular basis. The students also received collective feedback via classroom discussions and group interactions.

PARTICIPANTS

9 sophomores majoring in the Translation and Interpreting Department of the research setting, who were enrolled in the course entitled "Translation of Travel and Tourism Texts" and wrote their own travel blogs as a part of the writing module of the course, participated in the study. 6 of them were female and 3 of them were male. Their ages were between 20 and 22. Their level of English proficiency was advanced (C1) according to the proficiency test of the setting and their native

language was Turkish. The participants were informed about the study, the procedures and confidentiality and voluntarily participated in the research.

DATA COLLECTION

Data collection was performed through a triangulation process to ensure validity and reliability. The data were collected via an open-ended questionnaire given to the students and semi-structured interviews conducted with each student. The open-ended questionnaire was designed to elicit in-depth data about the participants' views concerning blog writing as a part of the ESP course. The participants were asked to describe the blog writing process and comment on the advantages and challenges as well as ways to address these challenges. The semi-structured interviews were conducted to provide comprehensive and supportive data on the same themes to maintain validity and reliability.

DATA ANALYSIS

The data were analyzed via qualitative data analysis. In qualitative analysis, patterns in textual data are defined, investigated and interpreted to address research questions through pertinent themes, categories and descriptions (Patton, 2002). As a qualitative analysis method, thematic analysis was implemented. For this purpose, the salient and recurring themes are identified and categorized by moving back and forth within the data by means of multivariate readings (Creswell, 2013). To this end, iterative readings and in-depth analyses were performed to scrutinize the data from the open-ended questionnaires and interviews and repetitive themes were attentively refined, categorized and defined.

FINDINGS

DESCRIPTIONS OF TRAVEL BLOG WRITINGS

Writing travel blogs was defined to be an experience that gave the writers a sense of belonging, confidence, motivation and a sense of freedom since they were able to create their own content about the places they personally visited and write about them in their own words with their own styles. Thus autonomy and personalization were found to be factors differing blog writing from the essays and formal reflection papers they had to write in their department to get grades. Here is a sample excerpt displaying this situation:

For the first time in my life I felt so free about writing in English. Through such writings I wrote with intensive care, I felt like an experienced world traveler and I became so engaged with the weekly tasks that my mind was often occupied with travelling tasks of the week and how to make my blog as attractive as possible to the audience.

There were some students who described blog writing as a satisfying and enjoyable experience since they had a chance to express themselves and show what they did and achieved to the internet community while some others found the process extremely demanding as described below. There were some other participants who expressed their concerns about intimacy and said they felt uncomfortable with displaying what they had personally experienced and put into writing to an unknown audience.

The participants who were found to describe blog writing as hard work pointed out it requires regular and intense writing and regular follow-ups. Designing the pages by selecting appropriate and attractive visuals was also defined to be pretty difficult by some students and they said this post-writing process where they were busy with visuals took a great deal of time and energy. Some

of the participants said they started writing blogs in high school but could not go on with them since blogs need discipline and control. Most of them also found blog writing obsolete and effortful compared to relatively novel social sharing platforms like Instagram and they stated blogs necessitate more profound analyses and effective and intensive writing presented with attractive visuals and designs and all these were exhausting for them compared to the new social media platforms where they can practically convey their messages by simply posting their photos with limited number of words.

The participants were asked to use a metaphor for travel blog writing and the expressions in general have revealed a feeling of contentment despite the hardships. Here are some examples:

- It broke my taboos. I was kind of against the idea of opening a blog and sharing what I would name as personal. But I liked it once I opened the blog. Travel blog writing is like jumping into a pool at once and getting used to the cold water and enjoying it gradually.
- Travel blog writing is like a sweet torture because I don't like writing as much as translating. But it was still a lovely experience.
- Travel blog writing is something that can be difficult but enjoyable. It is like hosting guests in your house, loving them and pampering them with treats.

EFFECTS OF TRAVEL BLOG WRITING ON WRITING IMPROVEMENT

The participants mostly emphasized that unlike the other forms of writing they write in English classes, blog writing was a type of writing where the writer feels free to form and convey their own content to the audience. As they maintained, this freedom led to more creative pieces of writing produced with their own initiative and aesthetic power, where memorized phrases and mechanical expressions of typical school essays are avoided. In addition they were content about the fact that they honestly told their opinions and feelings to the audience without being restricted by the strictness of formal writing and possible forms of hierarchy in the relations between the author and the audience as in conventional teacher-student relationship. Here is a sample excerpt displaying such a case:

Normally I don't like writing. But the idea of blog writing aroused my interest. You have your own page; you can create a name that tells about you. I think blogs are very useful for everyone because there are always honest thoughts about the subjects.

Apart from freedom, being more attentive and careful about not making mistakes was stated to be a difference experienced in the participants' writing process. That is, blog writing made the students pay more attention to what they wrote as they knew that their audience was not only their teacher and classmates but the whole internet community. Most of them said they did not want their English to be thought ineffective and insufficient and this paved the way for their intense care about their writings. They were found to check their writings several times in order that they can be quality pieces with almost no mistakes. They stated they also paid attention to the tone of their writing and made it semi-formal and put emphasis on sounding as natural as possible with their own voice. The following excerpt exemplifies the participants' efforts for effective writing:

I can say that both the quality and quantity of my writing increased thanks to my travel blog. In the middle of the day I caught myself thinking about what to write in my blog and making stylistic sentences I had never made before. And I was so motivated that I constantly advertised my blog writings in my Instagram account.

As seen by the sample excerpt above, most participants said blog writing required drawing the attention of the reader and keeping them hooked as in advertisement writing and this brought about a new change to their school writing as they weren't used to such genres as a part of their educational life. As stated, they tried to create flamboyant titles and make attractive sentences to catch the attention of potential readers. Also organizing the coherence, content, and mechanics of writing were now meaningful to them as the writings served specific and real-life based purposes, namely, introducing the places they visit, sharing their real life travel observations and experience as well as their opinions and feelings with the audience.

The students also said through the comments they received from their instructor and classmates, they were able to understand the parts that they were successful at and the parts they should improve in writing in English. Collective assessment also helped them to see the views of different people on their writing, which led to a multidimensional revision process. Furthermore, with the help of blog facilities, they were also able to receive comments from the blog readers and the comments increased their motivation to produce more and write better as exemplified below:

It was amazing when I received the first comment about my blog from a person from Ukraine and the words she used were so positive that I just wanted to write more and more.

ADVANTAGES OF TRAVEL BLOG WRITING

Travelling in one's local setting and writing a blog about the travel experience for a real audience was widely mentioned to increase the learners' knowledge and cultural awareness of the city they were living in. The participants said travel blog writing helped them discover the local assets in their own surroundings and get to know the historical background and the cultural value of their location. As most of the participants stated, although they had been living in the local setting all their life, they had never been to such places and this experience gave them a new vision about their own location and its value. Some participants also mentioned their discovery about the fact that travelling does not necessarily mean going to distant places, they can even do this in their own local settings. To illustrate, one participant said:

Travel blog writing has shown me you don't have to go so far to be a traveler. Even your hometown can be full of adventures. It is a perfect way to express the feelings you have during travelling and sharing them with people.

Also by travel blogging, the participants said they had realistic aims to achieve so this kind of writing practice was said to give the participants a sense of purpose and a sense of achievement. They also stated blogs created a sense of belonging since they now saw themselves as the owner of a personal site and a guide of a specific internet community. Thus they felt confident and motivated in their writing:

I have never associated myself with the idea of sharing my travel experiences by posting it on a website let alone having my own travel blog and designing my own website. I have started blogging for the first time on account of this particular course. It made me change my views on traveling in many ways and also gave me a feeling that I'm the one who is in control of what the audience is exposed to.

Blog writing was also found to be a supportive means to improve the students' translation skills and translation perspectives regarding travel- and tourism-related texts. Since the participant group of the current study consisted of students majoring in translation and interpreting who need to acquire knowledge about different genres of texts and discourse, they said travel blog writing

enabled them to gain deeper insights about travel- and tourism-related subjects, strengthen their knowledge about this text genre and improve their genre-specific vocabulary. By visiting tourist attractions and historical sites in their city, the students also said they were able to read the informative texts there both in their native language, Turkish, and English and analyze the translations from Turkish into English, which also gave them an opportunity to acquire knowledge and real life experience about tourism and travel texts and their translations. Thus travel blog writing was said to contribute to not only the literacy skills but also translation and translation criticism skills of the students. As one participant said:

It was enjoyable to take photos of the texts written in Turkish and English about the museum objects and analyze them afterwards. I realized how difficult it can be to give the meaning to the audience and be that visible to public as a translator because even a small mistake you make will remain there forever.

Furthermore, some participants said they found translating from their native language, Turkish, into English more difficult than vice versa so analyzing Turkish-English translations on site was defined to be an effective real-life based opportunity for improving this type of translation. Some participants also pointed out as they were in a translation department, they were expected to translate more than writing and the blog writing practice was said to give them an opportunity to improve their writing skills in an intensive and enjoyable way.

A further advantage of blog use in ESP learning was said to be the ease of accessibility to all pieces of writing in one setting and within a chronological order, thus blogs also served the function of an electronic portfolio for the participants. Also, as elaborated above, independent and autonomous writing, i.e. taking initiative and responsibility in forming the content and format of their own writing was found to be a feature emphasized by all the participants. Moreover, the students not only wrote their contents but also talked about them and received relevant feedback from their peers and teacher on their blogs and how to improve them, thus blog writing integrated with speaking and reflective thinking was defined to be an advantage contributing to their improvement in active use of English.

CHALLENGES OF TRAVEL BLOG WRITING AND SUGGESTIONS TO DEAL WITH THEM

The hardship of creating an effective blog writing accompanied with attractive visuals was stated to be the biggest challenge by the participants as the whole process was found to be onerous. Furthermore, the course load was deemed to be heavy since the students were demanded to do various things as a part of the multimodular course. They were expected to not only make translations of texts relevant to tourism and travel but also travel different places, prepare a travel blog, and write about their travel experience in this setting. Besides, as the course focuses on action accompanied with reflection, there were reflective interactions conducted systematically on both students' translations and blog writings. All these course-related aspects were stated to be beneficial as well as challenging by the participants.

The other challenges included technological accommodation to blog writing as some participants had difficulty adapting to blog technology in the beginning stage. Another difficulty was said to be arranging the tone and content of the writing and the design of the blog page to attract readers. The travel blog as a part of the ESP course was stated to require longer and more intensive posts compared to mainstream social media means like Instagram and this was also a feature the new generation digital native participants found strenuous and hard to adapt.

Despite the challenges, a great majority of the students found blog writing in the ESP course a beneficial experience. The following excerpt exemplifies this mixed type of conception:

It is not an easy job, let me tell. You have to be aware of your surroundings, you need to be into the place you're visiting in order to write something about it. And you have to know about the use and editing of websites, otherwise you'll have lots of difficulties. I have started to respect more those who travel and share their experiences with us but also I have gotten envious as to how many places they visit and how well they write about them. I think it is one of the best duties a person can have.

As the blog writing and heavy course load were found to put pressure on the students, a common suggestion was that the course load can be reduced or the current program can be extended to two terms so that the course content with multiple dimensions can be handled more feasibly. It was also emphasized that teacher support and feedback should be given at all stages of blog writing, that is before, during and after the process and peer collaboration must again be integrated into blog writing in the forthcoming courses as they had been helpful and motivating components within the process. All the participants said that although blog writing was demanding, it acted as a meaningful and purposeful means increasing their writing enthusiasm and joy and improving their writing skills thus it can be incorporated into future courses.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

It was seen that travel blog writing helped EFL students increase their cultural awareness and build a great sense of autonomy and empowerment. By travelling to the significant tourism sites and experiencing a local festival and an aspect of culinary culture in the city they were living in, they learned about the specific cultural assets in their environment, took pleasure in travelling, discovery and exploration, read authentic texts written in English and presented with Turkish translations, and communicated with new people. Most importantly, they wrote about their authentic experience and presented it to English-speaking internet community with their own English and blog-specific content. The content was informative and entertaining and the tone of writing in general was lively and informal, which gave them a context different from formal school writings. This experience was defined to provide them with an intense sense of freedom in L2 writing and a chance for self-expression.

Travel blogs were also reported to give the participants a clear purpose for writing and contribute to their L2 writing improvement. By sharing the same goal of travelling and travel writing, the students felt a sense of belonging to their class community as well as the community of travel blog writers. In order to write a specific genre, travel blogs in our case, they analyzed different samples of travel blogs and then created their own travel blogs. Writing a specific genre raised their awareness of genre-based writing and had positive contributions to their genre-specific vocabulary and organizational skills. They also said being pressurized by public visibility, they did their best to make accurate sentences and adopt a professional style in writing. The raised awareness of the genre of travel writing was also said to support the translation skills of the participants regarding travel texts. As the ESP course also aimed to develop the translation skills of students concerning tourism and travel texts, the writing module of the course was said to fulfill the purpose of supporting this type of translation education through authentic and genre-specific reading and writing experience.

Also, addressing a global community was found to contribute to an increase in the students' extrinsic motivation for L2 writing and their texts' being published was seen to create an aura governed with commitment, carefulness and revision. Seeing one's own piece of writing as a publicly visible blog was also reported to increase confidence and willingness to write more pieces.

As a whole, all these positive features can be said to help the participants construct an authentic L2 writer identity.

The collaborative nature of blog writing was also observed to improve students' communicative and reflective skills and help their own Englishes be heard by others, as intended by ELF-aware pedagogy (Kemaloglu-Er and Bayyurt, 2018, 2019a, 2019b; Kemaloglu-Er and Deniz, 2020). Through student-student and teacher-student interactions, the learners were able to share information about their travel blogs and receive feedback about them. The interactional nature of blog writing allowing interacting with the global audience through comments also enabled the learners to receive feedback from people outside their classroom group and this aided the participants form ELF-aware interactions and become aware of their own use of English as well as others'. These interactions were also reported to encourage the participants to write more.

As for challenges, the complaints were centered on heavy workload. The course was found to be demanding and most participants said it was difficult to design a blog with intensive content and attractive visuals. Also having to draw the attention of the target audience with appealing language use was found to be laborious. The course was stated to be loaded with several tasks aiming at both translation of travel and tourism texts and travel blog writing after real life visits. Together with technological adaptation, all this content was seen to be demanding. Thus it was commonly suggested the number of tasks be diminished or the course content be given in two terms. Despite the challenges, a great majority of the participants were found to be in favor of travel blog writing and suggested its continuation in the following terms.

In this study, therefore, travel blog writing has been favored and defined as an effective pedagogical means for EFL and ESP education. The experience of travelling and writing about the local attractions of one's city via a personalized blog was reported to increase writing motivation, boost autonomous, reflective and collaborative learning, raise cultural awareness and have positive impacts upon learners' self-expression and L2 writing improvement. These findings are in line with those of several studies regarding the advantages of blog use in ELT (Akdag and Ozkan, 2017; Aydan, 2014; Aydin, 2014; Campbell, 2003; Featro and DiGregorio, 2016; Grami, 2012; Gunduz, 2016; Kovalchuk and Krasnokutskaya, 2017; Kuimova and Zmekov, 2016; Johnson, 2004; Lee, 2010; Mabuan, 2018; Musa, 2016; Nepomuceno, 2011; Pinkman, 2005; Sun and Chang, 2012; Zhang, 2010). The findings of the study about the affordances of travel blog writing also support the suggestions of Pascual (2019), Pascual Oliva (2017) and Romaniukha et al. (2020) in that integration of this genre into EFL settings would develop linguistic skills, enhance verbal creativity and increase learning motivation. On the other hand, the study also highlights the hardships of blog writing, intense workload and technology-related challenges, similar to Aydan (2014), Featro and DiGregorio (2016), Kovalchuk and Krasnokutskaya (2017) and Mabuan (2018).

Different from other studies on blog use in ELT, this study for the first time has shown that a specific genre of blogging, travel blog writing, can be incorporated into EFL and ESP learning and display positive psycho-educational impacts in terms of autonomous knowledge construction, self-discovery as well as reflective and collaborative learning through scaffolding and feedback. Moreover, contribution of travel blog writing to translation skills has never been a mentioned aspect in ELT literature, thus it is another novelty of the current study. This implies the fact that if travel blog writing is applied as a part of an English course centered on travel and tourism as subject matters, this may pave the way for students' improvement in the use of English regarding these specific topics. Another implication is that travel blog writing can also be used as a part of a task-based curriculum in General English instruction and be integrated as a series of tasks to be applied for a certain period of time among several other tasks intended for communicative language teaching.

The study implies travelling and writing about this experience in a travel blog can be a beneficial pedagogical implementation in EFL and ESP contexts. The practice would primarily contribute to students' writing development since writings in such settings would be enriched by students' raised cultural awareness about their surroundings and their own reflections and collective interactions about their meanings and significance. The students' being autonomous in their travels and forming their own travel writing platforms would also distinguish this form of writing from formal school writings and this would then be likely to keep their writing motivation high. Besides, through travel blog writing, students' linguistic skills would develop as they would read more texts in the field of travel and tourism for their blogs as well as explore introductory tourism texts and their translations on site, and interact with their classmates, teacher, English speaking people they may encounter in their travels, and the global internet community about their travel experience and blog writings. Thus it is highly suggested travel blog writing be incorporated into L2 teaching contexts.

In the times of emergency situations like COVID-19, where online education gets into the center of education, blog writing about students' different forms of life experience and / or interests can also be an enriching activity for all L2 learners. COVID-19 experience has shown us the very fact that even if we are locked down in our houses, it is possible to explore the world through virtual tours. Thus travel blog writing can also be adapted to online English classes in the form of virtual explorations and reflections upon them.

This study has shown that on the path of appropriating and transforming knowledge, it would be illuminating for learners to have authentic opportunities for discovering their environments, reflecting on and writing about this travel experience and sharing them with the people in their learning context as well as the global community. Travel blog writing affords such kind of self-actualization framework and a collaborative space for L2 learners to publish their own understandings of the world of travel in their own walks of life.

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