

Foreign language teaching: blogs and their repercussion**Ensino de línguas estrangeiras: blogs e sua repercussão**

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ABSTRACT

This article aims to show the concept of blog and the influence it has had during history and current communication, as well as its use in lessons of Spanish for foreigners. The blog format is one of the most used tools by teachers and students to interact with each other. Blogs provide a multimedia platform for the continuous flow of information which enriches educational content. A blog disseminates, informs, shares and agglutinates updated information at all times.

Key words: blogs; foreign languages teaching; Spanish as a foreign language; learning tool.

RESUMO

Este artigo tem como objetivo mostrar o conceito de blog e a influência que ele teve durante a história e a comunicação atual, bem como seu uso nas aulas de espanhol para estrangeiros. O formato do blog é uma das ferramentas mais usadas por professores e alunos para interagir uns com os outros. Os blogs fornecem uma plataforma multimídia para o fluxo contínuo de informações que enriquece o conteúdo educacional. Um blog divulga, informa, compartilha e aglutina informações atualizadas em todos os momentos.

Palavras-chave: blogs; ensino de línguas estrangeiras; Espanhol como língua estrangeira; ferramenta de aprendizado.

A blog is a tool to communicate specialized content. Blogs emerged in the late 1990s and have succeeded in revolutionizing the world of communication, influencing all sectors of society such as politics, economics and education.

Although they have been defined in various ways, we could say that a blog is a website in which messages or articles are collected in an orderly way so that readers can be informed about the subject being dealt with in it and also, they can participate actively by expressing

their opinions or their queries. It is an interactive learning which can be accessed by anyone with an internet access and for free. Blogs are also known as weblogs.

Blogs began to be recognized as a result of certain historical and political events such as the attacks of September 11, 2001, among others. And they began to be valued because they showed amounts of information that most daily media like the television did not transmit. There were many people who gave information about everything that happened, their testimony of what they had lived. This was the beginning, but today blogs are used for many purposes and different topics according to the interests or needs of people. With them, enrichment is sought through the interaction between people in different areas or sectors.

As for the educational sector, in the years 2005-2007, blogs aimed at the teaching of foreign languages became very relevant. In the beginning, these types of blogs did not seem to evolve nor were they supposed to have such an impact on the teaching of foreign languages.

The first blogs that were created only used to show news related to the teaching of languages in order to reach other users who were teachers like them and whose role was teaching foreign languages. But it evolved little by little and not only shared news but exchanged opinions, experiences and learning influenced both teachers who used to teach this topic and students who learned it. That is why, since 2006 until today, the blogosphere of foreign language teaching has undergone many positive changes, adapting to the new needs that are emerging in people.

Generally speaking, we can appreciate that the use and applications that can be given to educational blogs have been expanded, thus increasing their rate of growth. Also, they have taken advantage of many tools that emerged with Web 2.0 such as the use of podcasts with students and videos through YouTube channels, which are increasingly used as educational resources.

As can be seen, blogs have been evolving and offering different possibilities to users to complement their learning in the classroom, as well as, they have given teachers tools to improve the transmission of knowledge. Links, videos, images, audios ... that are shown through blogs offer users the opportunity to better assimilate the contents of the language they are learning. It is a loyalty tool thanks to its specialization and thematic information.

As mentioned before, there are many types of blogs according to the sector of interest of each of them. Next, we will show some types of blogs aimed at the education sector and in particular, the teaching of foreign languages.

Blogs about teaching foreign languages refer to academic or research blogs that aim to share experiences among teachers and discuss certain topics when teaching. Also, there are various blogs in which teachers offer recent news on the world of foreign languages teaching. In addition, there are blogs such as EcLEcTic, which consists of creating a cooperative space of punctual content such as that of a subject and the authors are both students and their teacher. Many times these types of blogs are linked to own student's personal ones, but at the same time they are connected to each other, allowing greater interaction between all the users. This allows a continuous exchange of information to improve the contents of the different subjects.

Blogs of foreign languages teaching are focused mainly on the teaching-learning process. They are used as a didactic tool and in turn, there are different types:

- Group blog of a teacher to his students, which consists of creating a blog in which both students and the teacher interact, creating different entries and contributing all their opinions and experiences on the theme of the created entry. In this blog the teacher can also propose tasks or work to be done by the students, upload notes, complementary activities and links to expand the contents seen during the lesson. It would be a kind of WebQuest with several tabs that the students and the teacher could access. Of course, it is open to discussions and comments with which the students and the teacher exchange information and enrich each other.

- Group weblogs or student-to-student try to link different blogs to each other, creating a kind of social network in order to exchange and analyze the experiences of production and distribution of content. An example of this would be 'Spanish in Dubai' or 'Aula-ELE'. Students can post comments in them, but they are always assigned to a qualified person who supervises and corrects the content.

- Individual blogs as diaries are widely used in education and their purpose is for students to reflect on their thoughts and in some way, also practice the language and communicate with other people who speak the language they are learning. Many blogs of this kind can be found on the net and they are a very useful tool for people who are learning a new language.

Previously, we have explained the evolution that blogs have had in teaching Spanish for foreigners and the great importance this has gained over the years. With this, its use has been increasingly greater, thus becoming a tool widely used by students and teachers. The objective of these blogs is for students to use them as an educational-communicative tool within a

foreign language teaching class to give them the opportunity to write, read, make and answer questions, comment, correct and learn, that is to say to communicate in the language that is intended to be obtained with tools that go beyond those used in the classroom.

In terms of its uses, we can say that a blog can work in several ways such as:

- A notebook for the student who is learning a foreign language.
- A learning journal.
- A discussion panel, favored by the comments of blogs in Spanish.
- A place to do tasks.
- A space for extracurricular communication.
- A site with links to other students' blogs and other pages of interest.
- A dictionary where we can add new terms.

Among all the described uses of blogs, we can underline that they provide many more possibilities, since they contain other 2.0 tools (*podcasts*, audio and video, images, etc.) and they must be understood this way in order to use them according to the purposes that are intended to be achieved with students. The use that can be made of them will depend, to a large extent, on the creativity of teachers and students and if it satisfies the objectives that are intended to be achieved with their use in the different areas of the curriculum.

According to contributions of several professors and researchers (Tíscar Lara, 2006, Orihuela, 2005; Richardson, 2006; De la Torre, 2006, among others) we could make a summary of the advantages of using blogs in the classroom:

1. Develop a critical attitude to what is read.
2. A blog ends the passive use of the Internet and provides full interactivity, thanks mainly to the comments at the end of each message.
3. Blogs provide students with a real audience. Normally students write and do the exercises for the classroom and the teacher, who becomes the only person who reads the texts. However, in blogs, readers are classmates, who are interested in communicating something.
4. Blogs work as social tools because we can meet people who are interested in similar topics.
5. The blog may help shy students or those who need more time to respond and have more difficulty participating in class.

6. It provides additional material to the student of Spanish, which is related and complementary to the one used in the classroom.
7. Internet becomes a place of cooperative work in which students and teachers use the blog as a tool to discuss, review and write news of general interest. Consequently, we talk about the creation of learning communities.
8. Promotion of debate.
9. It gives students their own voice and visibility to their work.
10. Blogs can be a support for *e-learning*.

To find out how blogs are contributing to the education of foreign languages teaching they need to be inside a 2.0 education, which provides a large amount of contents, tools and complementary activities and at the same time they are shared, since Web 2.0 is a network that allows a more active participation by users who are engaged in reading, writing, listening, speaking, collaborating, and commenting on it.

Nowadays, we can find on the internet that there is a growing dynamic community of blogs about this subject, which brings new users to be part part and collaborate with this tool, in an easy way that helps them find what they need or learn about what they are interested in. It may be necessary to link blogs of foreign languages teaching with the current employment status of teachers in language teaching.

In recent years both students and teachers have found blogs a resource with which to communicate and a tool that provides the ability to transmit the agreement or disagreement with the current situation, and to share knowledge and experiences among language teachers.

This resource is benefiting communication between members of the foreign language teaching educational community in a remarkable way, in which both teachers and students achieve better communication and regular learning. Above all, it has managed to know, understand and transmit that we are all a fundamental part of education and thus transmit the opinions and experiences we have lived. Blogs have achieved a major expansion and especially educational blogs are a reality that extends progressively. There are increasing reflections and opinions on the advantages of using these tools in the education sector.

Blog use has already been consolidated in Spain, also in the world of education, particularly in the teaching of foreign languages. Since 2006 until today, new perspectives in reference to blogs and other integrating tools of Web 2.0 have opened within the educational curriculum.

The mission of the teacher with this tool is to know and find out if blogs, as well as other 2.0 tools can benefit their students in learning the language. It is necessary that they analyze the options of this tool, what it will provide to them and how it will improve their learning both in the classroom and outside. As with any other resources for teaching it is imperative that teachers know their learning goal so that they can use these tools to help them achieve that goal. It is important to be aware that blogs are not a method, but a tool that aims to help or support teachers and students in the teaching-learning process. With blogs, as well as with other Web 2.0 tools, a more meaningful, collaborative and constructive learning can be achieved. The main purpose is to achieve better results in the acquisition of this new language in students.

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