

## **Weblogs on Language Learning: A Technology-Enhanced Instruction in a Tertiary-Level EFL Classroom in China**

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### **Abstract**

The use of personal web publishing and social networking tools has been an emerging practice in the field of Computer Assisted Language Learning or CALL (Campbell, 2003). Weblogging, for instance, has already established itself in the popular media. Given its educational affordances, the utilization of weblogs in English Language Teaching (ELT) and English Language Learning (ELL) is deemed indispensable. This paper presents the implementation of weblogging activities in English for Academic Purposes (EAP) program of Jilin University—Lambton College in China. Weblogs provide the students with extensive opportunities to put what they are learning in the classroom to use in expressive, interactive, and immersive ways. In addition to reading and writing practice, weblogs allow the learners to share their thoughts and ideas through blog posts made on the forum section and walls wherein the resulting language exchanges expose them to authentic uses of language that supplemented classroom activities and experiences. A convenience sampling from Jilin University—Lambton College (JULC) consisted of 71 Chinese university students from three different EAP classes participated in this exploratory action research based on weblogging experiences for language learning in English. A survey was distributed at the end of the course to all participating students to gather feedback and input on student views in relation to the classroom-blogging activities employed. Findings from an attitudinal survey performed reveal that the students had an exceptionally positive attitude for weblogging.

**Keywords:** CALL, EFL teaching in China, ELT, technology-enhanced instruction, weblogging

## Introduction

The emergence of weblogs in English language learning afforded educators in higher learning institutions new technological tools for students to explore the target language in a new forum. This pervasive existence of Internet technology and its application warranted boundless possibilities for its use in various fields. Infinite reasons have been provided why this technology plays a crucial role in everyday routines and how it gained substance in the field of education particularly in ELT practice.

Dudeny & Hockly (2007) discussed some of these reasons which are attributed not only to the fact that now is a technology-directed world where a lot of young learners are growing up with technology as a natural and integrated part of their lives, but Internet access and broadband are becoming more affordable and more widely used by means of cable, satellite or wireless connections either at home, at work, at cyber cafes, or at educational institutions. In addition, English is being used in contexts mediated technology especially the Internet as it provides teachers with new opportunities for authentic tasks as well as a wider range of ready-made materials.

Although some people have described blogs somewhat dismissively as ‘internet graffiti,’ there is a growing body of literature that discusses the use of blogs in education as learning and teaching tools (Pierce, Bailey, & Littler, 2007). Stanley (2005) identified numerous reasons for using blogs in education; for instance, to provide a real audience for student writing, to provide extra reading practice for students, to increase the sense of community in a class, to encourage students to participate, and to create an online portfolio of student written work. Weblogs can become online classroom extensions of language learners (L2s) for interactive exchanges, wider learning community, and L2 skills reinforcement in the target language. Modern computer technology provides a plethora of software applications, many of which are available online. The various social networking tools, with quite a lot of these web hosting services obtainable for no cost, made weblogging accessible. Weblogging keeps on drawing recognition and growing interest not only in the popular media but also in the field of education especially in the area of English language education, for instance, in China.

Weblogging offers students not just a convenient hub for information related to the course but also provides them digital platforms for interactive exchanges. This online discussion forum allows learners to share their thoughts, views, and ideas either synchronously or asynchronously. The resulting conversations expose the students to authentic uses of language which stimulate and challenge them in ways that supplement after-class activities and experiences. Williams & Jacobs (2004) stated that blogging has the capacity to engage the students in collaborative activity, knowledge sharing, reflection, and debate. Godwin-Jones (2003) added that this engagement is likely to establish a viable learning environment when the learners are more involved particularly in creating and commenting on entries.

In the course of classroom-based blog activities at JULC, students in the EAP classes took part in regular blogposts, either the wall or the forum section, for a collaborative learning and communication project wherein the blend of planned and spontaneous communicative exchanges made this language venture more meaningful and engaging. Integrating collaborative online tools like weblogs as digital learning spaces for reading and writing practice as well as

video and real-time chatting provided the learners with many opportunities to interact within their community of learners in the target language.

### **English Language Teaching in China**

The propagation of English was implemented alongside standardization of Chinese and development of minority languages since the establishment of the Peoples Republic of China in 1949; as a result, more attention has been paid to English for non-English majors and English in schools. Lam noted, “With Deng Xiaoping’s Policy of Four Modernizations in 1978 (or plans to modernize agriculture, industry, science and technology, and the military in China), the prominence of English escalated and it has not abated since” (Lam, 2005, p. 5).

The growth of China’s international ties in the global and market economy generates a growing demand for university graduates with exceptional translation skills and high-level of English language proficiency. However, the exigent task for producing competent English language speakers among Chinese graduates is still a challenge for institutions of higher learning throughout mainland China.

In 2007, the study of Liu of Tsinghua University that sought to determine Chinese university students’ attitudes towards and motivation to learn English revealed that majority of the respondents (73.76%) under study reported less motivation to learn English with little contact in the target language as one of the main reasons identified.

In response to this need, the Chinese Ministry of Education in 2004 formally highlighted the role of the computer and networking in its revised College English Teaching Syllabus (CETS). This is the guide for English teaching in mainland China featuring the integration of the computer and networking in College English learning to stimulate students’ motivation and to improve their communicative competence (Liu & Huo, 2007).

This declaration of commitment for recent innovations in teaching strategies and exploitation of the rising popularity of computer-mediated instruction bolsters the goals of creating higher quality programs and more opportunities for L2 learners to achieve maximum language proficiency. This era of large-scale interconnectedness not only challenges higher education institutions and ELTs in making these prevailing technological innovations serve their learning communities but also in becoming highly aware of the potentials of computer technologies in amplifying students’ interest and eagerness for English language learning.

Although ICT’s application in language learning has become very popular, there is a need to explore weblogs in education in other contexts. It necessitates an exploration not only on how blogs’ use is integrated in the course particularly on how multimedia blogging is incorporated but also on how it is helping the learners in target language development. In a research that summarized the existing studies on weblogs in higher education settings, Sim & Hew (2010) reported a continual need to study participants in other countries in order to understand how different geographical and socio-cultural contexts influence the use of blogs in higher education settings. In their review, “...a majority of the studies (77%) involved participants from countries in North America and Europe compared with other countries” (p. 8). While there is a growing body of literature focusing on the pedagogical implications of blogging in language teaching, this

present study is undertaken to contribute to this research area in documenting and investigating the introduction of this innovation in language teaching to obtain a more informed base of the learners' blogging experience within a Chinese context; specifically, the use of weblogs in English language learning and teaching in a Sino-Foreign context. Sino-foreign schools are Chinese institutions that have developed partnership with foreign counterparts enrolling Chinese students in a China-Foreign collaborative school using high-quality foreign education resources. The setting of this study is of such nature founded in 1999 and approved by the Ministry of Education as a joint Chinese-Foreign institution of higher learning of Jilin University—China and North American partner schools.

### **Purpose of the study**

To provide wider opportunities for interaction in the target language and to contribute to the aims of communicative competence through the utilization of ICT activities on English teaching in China, specifically at Jilin University—Lambton College, an English-medium campus that envisions to produce globally competitive graduates, the use of weblogs in an EAP class has been implemented.

This classroom-based study is generally exploratory. This is an attempt to gauge Chinese learners' interest on weblogging in an EAP class. These blogging activities for language development were implemented to provide the students a viable classroom extension for greater target language contact and on how well the learners perceive weblogging as a tool for English Language Learning (ELL).

Specifically, this study aims:

- a. To find out the attitude of the respondents, that is, whether they agree or disagree with the use of weblogging in an EAP class.
- b. To obtain information on the potential use of weblogs as tools in motivating and encouraging the students in their learning particularly reading and writing in the target language.
- c. To provide relevant findings on the importance of the role of language teachers in utilizing weblogs for ELT and ELL.
- d. To determine the perceived effectiveness of weblogging in English language learning and teaching.
- e.

### **Literature Review**

#### **Blogs or weblogs: Definitions**

The term 'weblog' was first used by Jorn Barger in 1997 (Blood, 2000) to describe the list of links on his Robot Wisdom website (Downes, 2004) that 'logged' his internet wanderings. Peter Merholz shortened the word to 'blog' in 1999 (Loving, Schroeder, Kang, Shimek, & Herbert, 2007). Shortly thereafter, Evan Williams, an American entrepreneur, used blog as both a noun and verb. As a verb, it means to edit one's weblog or to post to one's weblog. He also created the weblog authoring software—Blogger. Though 1997 to 1999 marked the expansion of weblogs' use, the technology gained a strong foothold on the Internet after LiveJournal.com and Blogger.com opened their weblog hosting sites in March and August of 1999 respectively (Scheidt, 2009).

Godwin-Jones (2003) defined blog as a web-based space for writing where all the writing and editing of information is managed and immediately and publicly available on the Internet through a web browser. It is a form of online journal where the person keeping the blog (a blogger) records his or her thoughts (blogging) updated on a regular basis with entries in chronological order (Pierce, Bailey, & Littler, 2007).

Within the framework of how the blog was used for the present investigation on ELT for EAP, the author of this research defines blog as an interactive webpage accessible to the members of an online community created through a software that enables one to engage in online exchanges in the target language in which the posts made by the writer to a particular focus are archived chronologically for immersive and meaningful interaction either synchronously or asynchronously. Succinctly, within the educational context, a blog is a learner-accessed network directed toward Building Learners' Optimal Growth (BLOG) in the target language.

### **Pedagogical Perspective of Weblogging in ELT and ELL**

Blog's nature of easy and trouble-free publishing lured a rapidly growing number of users across all sectors and fields for manifold uses ranging from personal and journalistic to commercial and now educational purposes. Its popularity continues to draw recognition from various sectors and disciplines.

A review of literature shows the use of blogs in educational contexts (Downes, 2004; Williams & Jacobs, 2004) and draws attention to their roles in information sharing, issuing news, encouraging the process of ideas development, personal reflection, creating potential content that can be shared and is available for discussion and recording events and capturing activity (Pierce, Bailey, & Littler, 2007). Other studies published include blogging's effect on learner autonomy, increasing writing efficiency, as a place for completing writing assignments (Wu, 2005), posting materials (Johnson, 2004), and as a way to open communication with bloggers outside the classroom (Pinkman, 2005).

Evidently, an increasing figure of foreign educators paid attention to this user-friendly technology by incorporating it into classroom instruction and language learning (Campbell, 2003; Johnson, 2004; Lankshear & Knobel, 2003; Richardson, 2004). This interest is also apparent among language learners. The novelty factor stirs learners' interest in the use of blogs, while at the same time, language educators also recognize its value as a versatile language tool rich in applications.

Several blog supporters imply that weblogs are balancing agents for self-expression, classroom interaction and participation, autonomy, and independence of language learners, especially in L2 environment. Blogs do not only provide authentic writing practice but also offer opportunities to recycle language learned in class (Pinkman, 2005) and afford learners an alternative form of communicating with teachers and peers (Mynard, 2007). Blogs give students autonomy over learning and the sense of ownership of a personal space—a sense of belonging that is not so easily achieved in f2f environments (Pinkman, 2005).

Historically, English teaching in China has been dominated by a teacher-centered, book-centered, grammar-translation method, with an emphasis on rote memory (Hu, 2003; Rao, 2002).

Such "...a teacher-dominated classroom teaching and centralized examination system in China result in students' strong reliance on teachers in English learning..."; undoubtedly, this "...essentially passive way of learning greatly inhibits most Chinese students from learning English efficiently" (Rao, 2002, p. 113). Likewise, the timid and obedient nature of Chinese learners frustrates them owing to that little progress despite painstaking efforts. According to Xiao (2007), Chinese students are not used to raising questions in front of a large group of classmates, and outside of the classroom they are usually too shy to go to the teachers to clarify any doubts about the teachers' corrections if their teachers do assign homework for practice and have time to provide written comments.

In this light that the use of blogs for ELT within the Chinese context is pedagogically deemed of potential—it becomes a digital learning equalizer in encouraging language learners to take a dynamic interest as active participants in getting significant progress in the language that they all strive to be proficient at. Blogging, in this sense, has the inherent capacity to empower language learners in overcoming language apprehension and in building up confidence in language learning through online interaction within its community of learners.

### **Weblog for Academic Purposes (WAP)**

Through a well-structured weblog plan, coalesced with systematic implementation and a well-directed set of blog activities, the blog technology provided the learners digital learning spaces not just for reading and writing practice but also in writing for academic purposes. Weblogs for Academic Purposes on the basis of this work is a pedagogic weblog designed for instructive aims targeting a particular group or community of learners in a scholastic milieu for interdisciplinary and educational purposes.

The author set up a tutor blog which is teacher-directed and restricted to the students of three EAP classes where each learner was asked to sign up an account at the start of the semester. To encourage reticent learners to take part and avoid unwanted commentaries, the blog is password-protected. At the same time, anonymity was ruled out to preclude irresponsible posting. The blog created was purposely designed in providing the students an online learning community as an after-class activity.

The students were brought to the school's computer laboratory when they first signed up and listened to a discussion on how to proceed, policies, and purposes of weblogging. The succeeding blog engagements happened in their spare time or at their convenience given that each of the learners owned a laptop and Internet access is available throughout the school's dormitory. This enabled them to engage in independent learning using Internet resources as well as work on their assigned tasks for in-class and after-class discussions via weblogs.

The browser-based hosting software used was SocialGo. It is one of the recently developed applications, and since it is a web-based service, it does not require software downloads making it even more convenient for the learners to access it from wherever they may be.

Generally, the blogging activities implemented by the teacher, specifically the posts on the blog's forum section, were assigned. Every week, the teacher posted selected topics, activities, links, and supplementary materials to reinforce concepts discussed in class and to extend content coverage of a particular focus that are of interests to the learners. The students

were expected to write their comments on each blog post. Their active interest and participation were apparent through a deluge of comments especially with the involvement of the teacher and the ease in the ‘push-button publishing’ afforded by weblogs to the language learners. The assertion of Johnson (2004) that the application of blogs is a useful supplemental aid to teachers is evident in this case.

The students were also asked to publish blogposts once or twice a week on a topic of their choice, and their classmates would read and respond. The prompting and inciting themes of every student’s post on a range of interesting personal and social concerns brought out a stream of interactive exchanges.

Based on other classroom blogging activities implemented, weblogs’ applications are summarized as follows:

- 1) A portal to online language learning resources.
- 2) An online hub for any information concerning the course like course content, class rules and guidelines, assignments, reminders, and upcoming discussion topics.
- 3) A digital decanter of vocabulary used in the class linked to their respective majors and idiomatic expressions (e.g. business idioms). New words and idioms were introduced each week in which students were made to write and post an example sentence to any of those posted.
- 4) A platform which addressed linguistic issues in the target language exchanges such as common orthographical, lexical and grammatical errors.
- 5) An e-space for pre and post-class discussion of assigned items taken from local or international online journals and periodicals in reading for main ideas and content analysis as well as for focused-writing tasks such as paraphrasing and summarizing.
- 6) An online bulletin for posting commentaries on English-language movies for film reviews and a certain language learning goal with thematic connection to the course and publishing achievements, exemplars or commendable written works of students.
- 7) An e-diary for student-bloggers who liked keeping an online journal of their interests, thoughts, feelings, and routines, of which, the majority of students made a weekly entry.

From these various blogging activities, not only was their ardent participation apparent, but the introverted students were also observed to have obviously taken an active interest in harnessing language skills and in learning in general since the digital spaces provided by the blogs reserved them a room to have gradually moved out of their shells. It fostered a sense of belongingness among the members of the blogging community and made this language learning engagement even more conducive.

The exposure that the learners had for this weblog undertaking prepared them to have accomplished another class writing project at the end of the term: a compilation of each student’s written work—Anthology of Selected Writings in English for Academic Purposes class.

Blogging and its effects follow the six principles proposed by Chapelle (2001) for CALL program evaluation: (1) language learning potential, (2) learner fit, (3) meaning focus, (4) authenticity, (5) positive impact, and (6) practicality. With the preceding discussion, weblog

implementation gave a convincing impression to fit the program and the learners of the course in English for Academic Purposes. Thus, weblogging was undertaken owing to its promising pedagogical affordances.

### **Methodology**

This section discusses the method of research employed in this study, the research design, the respondents of the study, data gathering instrument and data gathering procedure.

An attitudinal survey also known as an affective survey can provide information on student perceptions (emotions, feeling, and attitudes) of their classroom experience. This type of survey provides valuable information on student perceptions of their classroom experience which includes general attitudes toward the course, the discipline, and their own learning (Lewis & Seymour, n.d.). Since the primary objective of this study is to determine the efficacy of bringing weblogs into play in language teaching and learning through feedback and input from the students on their weblogging experience, the use of a survey design was employed for this research

### **Respondents of the Study**

The respondents of this study were the 71 students in three EAP classes of an English-medium campus in Northeast China, Jilin University—Lambton College, a private institution of higher learning that is part of Jilin University, the largest university in China. Twenty-nine participants were males and 42 were females, all 3rd year students and all in the business stream with majors in Business Administration (General), Management Information Systems, Banking and Finance, and International Accounting. Academic English courses, including English for Academic Purposes, at Jilin University—Lambton College are only offered to students once they have passed the Exit Test for EFL (English as a Foreign Language), which is given upon successful completion of the coursework required for this level. This Exit Test is administered to gauge whether their skills in reading, writing, listening and speaking are sufficient to continue with a college program. When they first arrived on campus, their communicative skills in English were tested and they were assigned to one of the three EFL levels (Intro, Level 1, and Level 2) based on the results of the placement test. These students spent a minimum of two semesters (a year) of EFL classes prior to acceptance into the regular college curriculum.

### **Data Gathering Instrument**

A specially designed questionnaire was developed and administered as an instrument for gathering feedback from the students on their perception of the use of weblogs in English for Academic Purposes class.

The survey instrument distributed to the students contained 30 items in total. Four items focused on demographic information, one yes or no response to a statement, one item required checking the appropriate box, 20 rating scale items on degree of agreement or disagreement in a Likert Scale format, and four questions which required a short answer response. The 26 non-demographic items focused on the attitudes of students on the implementation of weblogging, the potential use of weblogs as tools in motivating and encouraging the learners in their learning particularly in writing and reading in the target language, the usefulness and perceived effectiveness of weblogging, and the teacher's participation in this innovation.



### Data Gathering Procedure

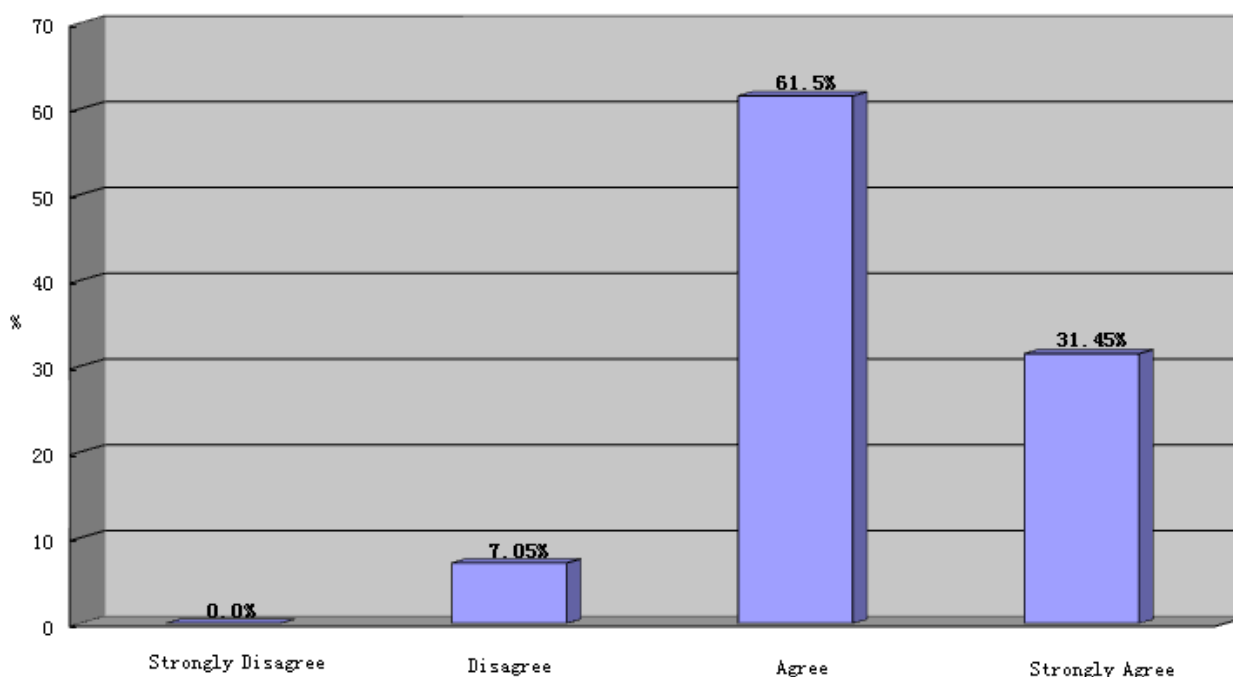
In gathering the data needed, a questionnaire was distributed to each student at the end of the term. The survey was administered to the three different EAP 300 classes: Class A (25 students), Class B (22 students), and Class H (24 students). The aim of the classroom-based research was explained explicitly to the students, and they were guaranteed anonymity. They were also informed that their responses will have significant bearings on refining instruction, effects of course innovations, and improving strategies and classroom activities that they find useful and engaging.

### Results and Discussion

This section deals with the presentation, analysis, and discussion of selected findings of the attitudinal survey.

#### ELLs' Attitude toward Weblogging for Academic Purposes

The survey results reveal that students considered weblogging an extremely interesting approach in ELL. Figure 1 shows an impressive 92.95% of the respondents chose "Strongly agree" and "Agree" for items 3.1, 3.6, and 3.7 (see Appendix).



**Figure 1. Aggregate percentage of respondents with positive attitude toward blogging (see items 3.1, 3.6, and 3.7 in Appendix)**

The majority of respondents expressed that weblogs provided them an extended learning space to communicate with the teacher and the members of the learning community. The responses for their exceptionally positive attitude toward weblogging can be summarized in the given feedback by one of the course-participants, "It's interesting because it can attract people to learn and use English. If one wants to learn English really well, using class time is not enough but weblogging gave us a wider stage to interact and to enhance our skills."

This result corresponds with the research of Walker (2005) who also applied weblogging in his classes. The majority of students said that they had enjoyed weblogging and found it valuable. Similarly, in the 2007 study conducted by Blackstone, Spiri, & Naganuma, which sought to gauge student interest in blogging and associated activities, survey results showed that 81.4% of the student-respondents (118/145) liked blogging as an activity.

Consequently, this highly positive regard on weblogging elicited a very affirmative stance that weblogs have the capacity to motivate and encourage the learners in their learning, specifically in engaging them to read and write in the target language. One of the students wrote, "Weblogs provided us a good English environment because English is used more, practiced more and spoken more. When you take part in the discussion or activities, you are learning and practicing English so it is a great practice site."

Another learner said, "Blogging is a very good venue for the language learners to discuss with each other and communicate in the target language because it can help us improve our skills." Sara, who chose to be identified, added:

I like weblogging because I can communicate with my classmates and teacher even if after the class, and it's a useful way to drive you to use English in a correct way because everything you write will be read by the blog community.

Campbell (2004) emphasized that due to the elements of ownership and online identity, most students will write more carefully if they know that they are going to publish their articles online for authentic readers who may comment on their postings.

The findings in this research corroborate with several researches examining the learning potential of weblogs. The study of Williams & Jacobs (2004) found that two-thirds of participants strongly agreed or agreed that blogging helped them in their learning while Kavaliauskienė, Anusienė, & Mažeikienė (2006) concluded that weblogging can "...enhance students' motivation due to the novelty and diversity of possible learning activities" (p. 227). In a study of teaching reading and writing English for Specific Purposes through weblogs, Arani (2005) reported similar accounts which detailed that approximately three quarters of the class of forty students preferred writing the weblog to the more traditional written journal and most of the students believed that weblog can improve English. Also, Zeng & Harris (2005) found out in their research survey that 55% of the undergraduate students of an online health information management course agreed that blogs could help them learn in class. The survey of 23 undergraduate students of Educational & Communication Technology in Portugal made by Coutinho (2007) generated similar results. Moreover, the investigation of Ellison & Wu (2008) showed that students perceived reading other students' blogs to be most helpful for understanding course concepts.

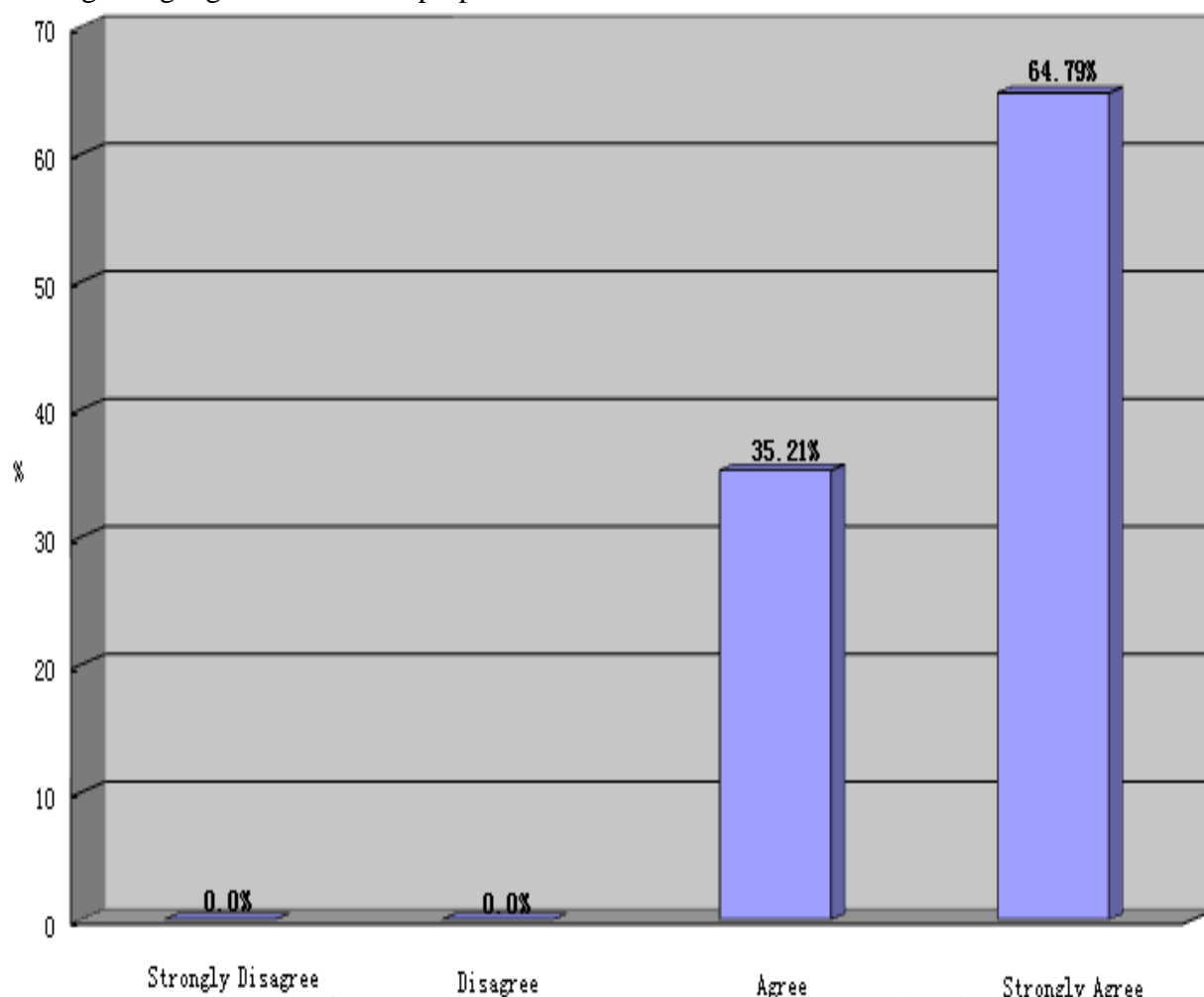
The technical advantages of the Internet such as online English dictionaries and related links for language skills development, interactive exchanges, authentic learning environment outside the classroom, readership extending across all members of the blogging community, peer collaboration and teacher's feedback, are construed to be among the blog aspects that motivated students in their learning and in expressing their ideas in a new forum. These responses of the

learners augur a great potential for weblogs as tools in learners' language development and advancement.

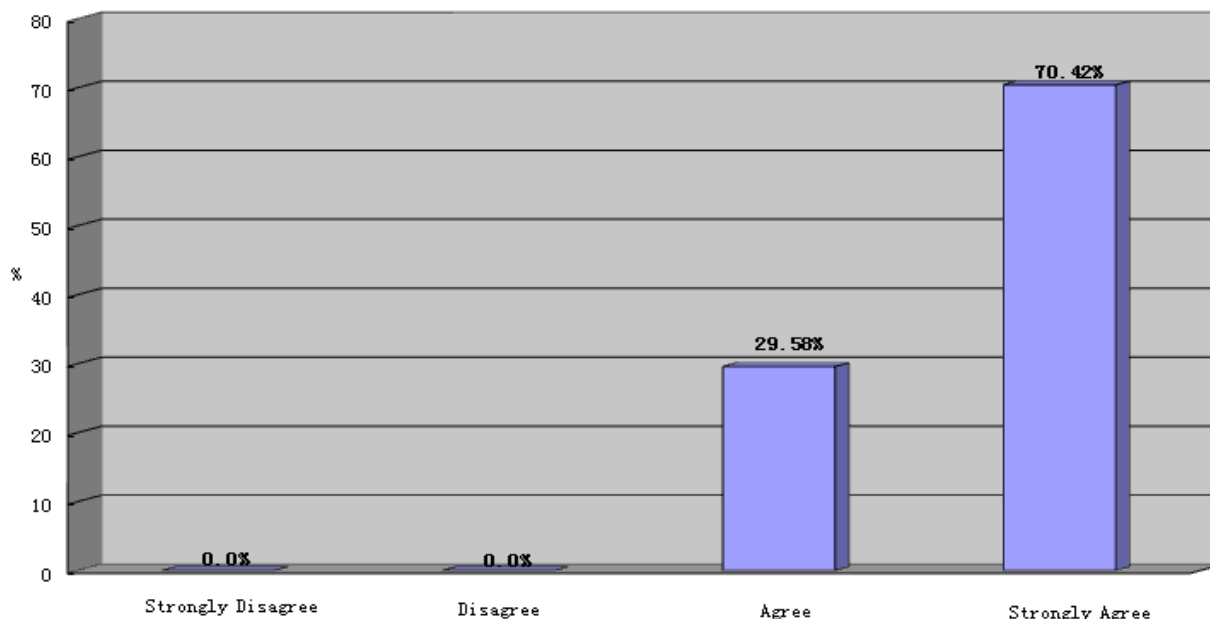
This positive agreement of the learners toward weblogging in this current investigation satisfies the first principle, "language learning potential," of CALL program evaluation proposed by Chapelle (2001).

### ELTs' Role in ELL

The results of the survey also revealed that the role of language teachers in implementing CALL activities such as weblogging, especially in L2 environment, was extremely important. Overwhelmingly, 100% of the respondents (71/71) chose "Strongly agree" and "Agree" to items 3.4 and 3.8 (see Figure 2 and 3). In a study on the effectiveness of weblogs to promote frequent extra reading practice in a freshman EFL Science and Technology reading program in Venezuela, Izquierdo & Reyes (2009) concluded that the role of the teacher is crucial in the creation of new learning environments beyond the classroom, and such innovation should not only be part of the role of technology in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century education but also a responsibility of foreign language teachers who prepare students to think



**Figure 2. Percentage of respondents who agree with statement 3.4: I like it when my teacher comments on my posts and writes on my blog wall**



**Figure 3. Percentage of respondents who agree with statement 3.8: I like it when the teacher gives feedback and comments in the class about our posts**

critically, take social responsibility, analyze problems, and provide possible solutions to them. Further, the impact of the involvement of the teacher in this engagement was also deemed to be of great value in Blackstone, Spiri, & Naganuma (2007):

At the same time, students did not see the teacher as excluded from this process. In fact, since 100% indicated that they appreciated their teacher's comments on the blogposts, input from the teacher can still be considered vital within the context of these *blogalogues*. (p. 14)

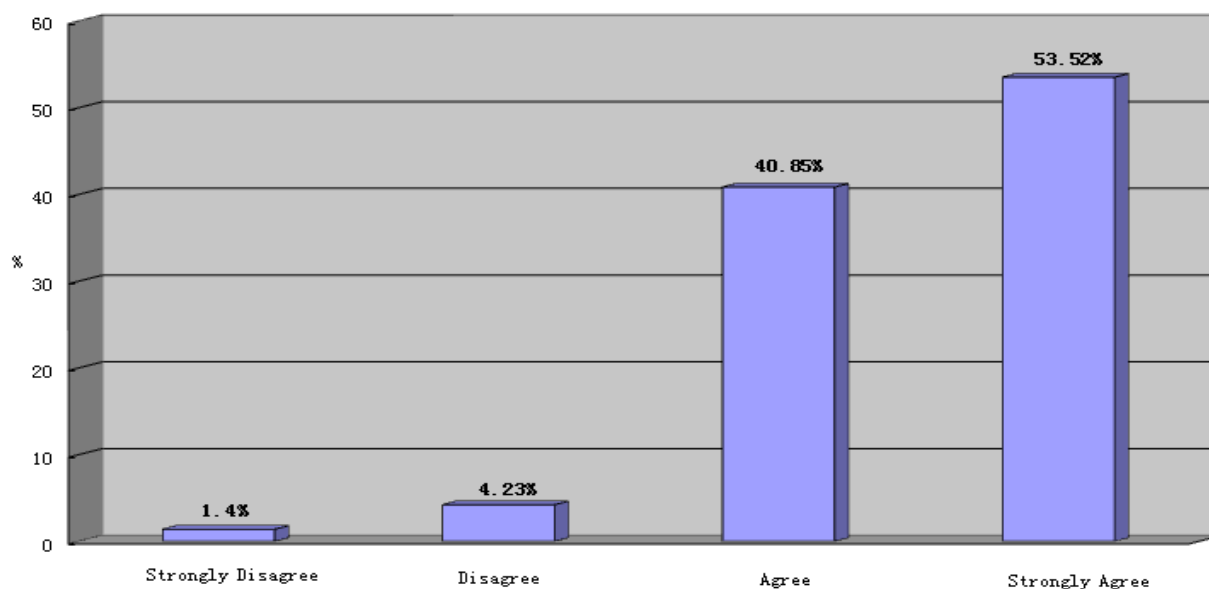
A number of respondents stated that the connection between the teacher and the students is one of the main factors that made weblogs an engaging classroom activity. One participant wrote, "We can enjoy a real English environment through the blog because learners can communicate with teacher and classmates, and it's an effective way to learn English." Another respondent expressed, "Blogs provide a chance to practice English skills with friends, and it's also a way to enhance the interaction between students and teacher."

It can be gleaned from the results that relevant classroom activities employed by the teacher generate motivation to students in becoming active participants in the learning process. The more positive the responses the students articulate, the more they take action to the teacher's instruction; hence, the better they become and the more inspired the teachers are in providing them more opportunities for language development.

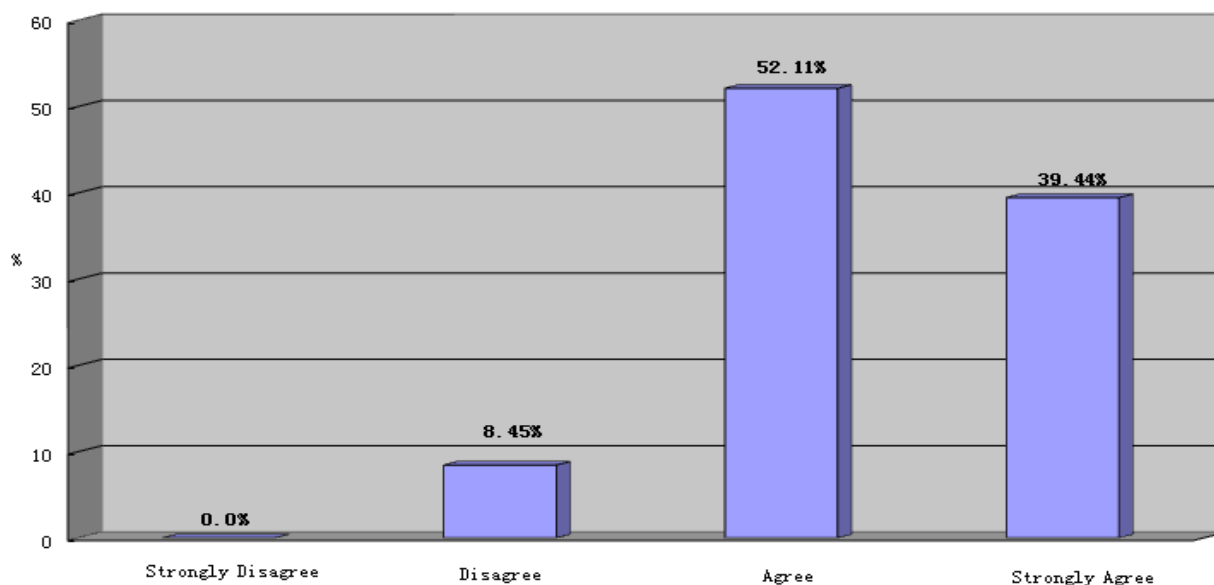
### **Effectiveness of Weblogging in ELL**

Figure 4 and Figure 5 illustrate substantive proof that the respondents perceived weblogging as a very useful and functional English language learning activity. Item 3.5, weblogging is very useful, 94.37% of the student-participants (67/71) chose "Strongly agreed"

and “Agreed” (see Figure 4) while 91.55% of the respondents (65/71) “Strongly agreed” and “Agreed” to item 3.14 (see Figure 5).



**Figure 4.** Percentage of respondents who agree with statement 3.5: I find weblogging very useful



**Figure 5.** Percentage of respondents who agree with statement 3.14: I find weblogging as a meaningful way of learning and practicing English language skills

These findings produced similar outcomes with the data from the attitudinal survey conducted by Blackstone, Spiri, & Naganuma (2007) which demonstrated that the students responded positively to the blogging activities in general. Similarly in the study of Izquierdo & Reyes (2009), the blog was very positively perceived by a significant number of students who

considered the blog useful, interesting, and helpful in practicing English. The blog was further perceived by their students as a positive activity for the benefit of their English progress especially in the areas of reading, writing, and vocabulary building.

To illustrate, the following remarks from the respondents provide further support to this claim: “Weblogging is a good way to learn English. It’s really useful for my writing, vocabulary, and reading skills besides we can all learn together and study in a relaxed way.” Further, “It’s a good way to let us study English out of class to practice reading and writing skills through the blogposts. I like this form to study English because it doesn’t have limits and we can see each other’s ideas and learn something from each other.” And lastly:

I learned new idioms especially business idioms, and it helped me to do thinking out of the box. It helped us a lot on communicating with each other, and we can also find out our mistakes from the posts we make and this helps us improve our English level. The things posted by our teacher are really worthwhile for us to learn and above all in weblogging we can have fun while we learn.

It can be deduced from the foregoing that students perceived weblogging to be a meaningful and supportive engagement in the English language learning process. In fact, a majority of the student-participants recommended weblogging to all English language learners, and it should be continued even if the course for which it was designed for is over.

### **Conclusion and Recommendations**

Overall, the results of this study show that the learners perceived weblogging a highly favorable and effective learning activity and a potential online cohort for target language development. Not only were the students afforded an after-class space for language practice and self expression under non-threatening conditions, but they were also given a broader learning community and a wider avenue in writing and reading for a purpose in the target language through weblogs used as a platform along with other authentic texts from a range of relevant materials online. The rapidly growing trends of blogs’ uses continually extend an array of variations in classroom activities. The student-participants found its utilization in English language learning highly motivating and encouraging. They have also expressed remarkable interest toward weblogging and regarded language teachers’ participation indispensable in this process. Indeed, this emerging phenomenon as an instructional medium according to Williams & Jacobs (2004) “...has the potential to be a transformational technology for teaching and learning” (p. 247).

This small-scale study also points out that the utilization of weblogs calls for teachers to know the purpose of its use in language teaching, and educators must also possess certain levels of computer skills especially on the technical aspect of integrating technology in language learning and the awareness of the ever changing and evolving nature of computer technologies to ascertain that it proceeds in the desired direction. Language practitioners must be attuned to these technological tools and its uses so as to better facilitate the application of this emerging language innovation in L2 environments and to enhance the efficiency of CALL activity like weblogs. Appropriate CALL training-workshop opportunities and collaboration of CALL teachers are recommended in this respect to every institution of higher learning that places great importance

on the role of technology in higher education settings. It would also be of great value to this research area if local and foreign teachers in the Chinese mainland and the Asian region employ blogging and survey their respective groups of English language learners on their experience for a broader exploration and analysis of how learners perceive weblogging. Investigation of blog participants' responses and attitudes in relation to the employment of weblogging in language classroom will be useful to researchers and teachers in continually studying and building a knowledge base of blog's use in second language teaching and learning. Finally, longitudinal studies for a more in-depth investigation of blog's pedagogical effects and affordances in language skills development, particularly reading and writing, underlying issues and concerns, and potential constraints and threats are suggested.

It can be assumed from the foregoing discussion on the results of this classroom-based study that blogs proved to be a functional technological support to ELT and learning communities. The course participants viewed this activity of enormous potential not only for a meaningful and useful target language engagement but also as viable digital conduits in bridging the gap in the traditionally sanctioned hierarchy of unquestioned authority of teachers inherent of a Chinese academic milieu.

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**Appendix**

Survey items rated on a Likert Scale and related to the present study

People's Republic of China

**JILIN UNIVERSITY—LAMBTON COLLEGE**

English for Academic Purposes 300

Name (optional): \_\_\_\_\_ Gender: \_\_\_\_\_

Year Level: \_\_\_\_\_ Major: \_\_\_\_\_

1. I have my personal computer/laptop:  Yes  No

2. I check my blog: (Check the appropriate box)

Daily

Every other day

Two to three times a week

Not at all

3. Check the appropriate column. How do you find weblogging as a classroom activity tool in English language learning? To what extent is weblogging helpful in English language learning?

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
3.1 I like weblogging.				
3.2 I like writing comments on my classmate's blog wall.				
3.3 I like it when my classmates post comments on my blog wall.				
3.4 I like it when my teacher comments on my posts and writes on my blog wall.				
3.5 I find weblogging very useful.				
3.6 I like reading blogs in the forum section.				
3.7 I like posting comments on the forum section's blogposts.				
3.8 I like it when the teacher gives feedback/comments in the class about our posts.				
3.9 The teacher's blogposts on various links in improving language skills are very useful.				
3.10 I regard weblogging as a language practice activity.				
3.11 I regard weblogging as a tool to communicate with the teacher.				
3.12 I regard weblogging as a tool for reflection and evaluation of my own language experience.				
	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
3.13 I believe weblogging will help me improve my reading and writing skills.				
3.14 I find weblogging as a meaningful way of				

learning and practicing English language skills.				
3.15 Weblogging creates a sense of online-community to English language learners in the class.				
3.16 Weblogging is a very good venue for language learners to discuss with each other and communicate in the target language.				
3.17 Weblogging should be continued even if the course for which it was designed for is over.				
3.18 Weblogging encourages me to use and practice my skills.				
3.19 I enjoy weblogging.				
3.20 I recommend weblogging to all language learners of English.				

4. I like weblogging because...

5. What factors/reasons will affect/stop a student from taking an active interest in weblogging? Why?

6. What are your suggestions in solving the factors/reasons you identified in question number 4?

7. I recommend weblogging to all English language learners because...

Thank you very much for your cooperation!