EFL Learners’ Perceptions of Blog Assignments and Instructors’ E-Feedbacks

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ABSTRACT

The use of blogs in EFL settings considerably supports learner-centered interactive learning and constructivist environments. Moreover, using blogs to provide instructor’s feedback has a crucial role in the language learning process. The present study aimed to explore Iranian EFL learners’ perceptions of blog assignments and instructor’s e-feedbacks thereof. To this end, assignments were established and teacher’s feedbacks were transmitted via the blogs for a period of one educational semester. Data were triangulated and collected using think-aloud protocols and reflexive journals during the semester, as well as semi-structured interviews at the end. Data analysis through grounded theory further revealed six major categories: educational effects, psychological effects, technological effects, social effects, teacher’s traditional feedbacks vs. e-feedbacks, and students’ preferences of e-feedbacks. Accordingly, implications are discussed in light of EFL settings.

KEYWORDS

Blog Assignments, EFL Settings, Instructors’ e-Feedbacks, Learners’ Perceptions

INTRODUCTION

The role of technology in language teaching and learning has increased remarkably over the past decades. From a constructivist perspective, virtual learning setting mostly benefitting learners and teachers to save time and energy (Nezam Hashemi & Yazdani Moghaddam, 2014) supports knowledge construction, active learning, student reflection, and critical thinking (Romiszowski & Mason, 2004; Olesova, 2013). The use of blogs in EFL learning is also highly supported by the constructivist approach. This is because their use underscores learner-centered and constructivist environments, learner interactions, and active and social learning (Ferdig, 2007; Kern, 2006). Blogging helping learners to construct knowledge from past experiences, provides opportunities for developing ideas collaboratively with peers and teachers (Jones & Brader–Araje, 2002) and promotes an interactive learning experience through ‘learning by doing’ and higher order learning and thinking (Cameron, 2011; Ferdig & Trammel, 2004). According to Fageeh (2011), a blog is regarded as a potential tool for the development of linguistic skills and provides real communication chances in which writing and reading occur in an authentic environment with real audience. As such, an appropriate and successful teacher feedback can heighten the efficacy of blogging.

As the availability of computer facilities increases, the role of the computer in mediating feedback becomes inevitable in practice and research. According to Seliem and Ahmed (2009), “electronic-feedback (e-feedback) is defined as feedback in digital, written form and transmitted via the web” (p. 1).
In other words, e-feedback is a hybrid of oral and written feedback (Hyland & Hyland, 2006) and is marked by its permanency, availability, its capability of encouraging group knowledge (Warschauer & Ware, 2006), interactive textual exchange and greater student participation (Guardada & Shi, 2007). Sending tutors’ comments via the internet or virtual learning environment (Denton, Madden, Roberts, & Rowe, 2008) can enhance the way in which students receive and engage with feedback. By the same token, using blogs to provide instructor’s feedback regarding language learners’ performance has a crucial role in the learning process (Lynch & Maclean, 2003; Yang, Badger, & Yu, 2007). Furthermore, e-feedback giving more democratic power to students offers spaces for academic student involvement and safe environments (Selfe, 1992). Yet, it is required to consider how the incorporation of technology in EFL instruction and feedback provision can highly affect the learners’ perceived linguistic, cognitive, and social outcomes.

RELEVANT PRIOR RESEARCH

Online Assignments and Learners’ Perceptions

Some studies have shown the role of e-tutoring and online instruction in the development of EFL/ESL learners’ variety of skills (e.g., Tuzi, 2004; Kol & Schcolnik, 2008; Motallebzadeh & Amirabadi, 2011; Fagheeh, 2011; Behjat, Yamini & Bagheri, 2012; Niazi & Pourgharib, 2013; Hung & Young, 2015). Kol and Schcolnik (2008), for example, indicated that online forums can be implemented in courses to encourage thoughtful communication in the foreign language and allow for the development of writing skills. Hung and Young (2015) also showed that e-readers facilitated EFL learners’ process of reading, annotation, and information retrieval in their academic writing classes. As a whole, an addition of virtual classes to actual classes can be more fruitful to boost whatever learned in classes.

As regards EFL learners’ preferences and perceptions of online assignments, several studies have been conducted in the recent decade (e.g., Yang & Chen, 2006; Alebaikan, 2010; Aliweh, 2011; Fageeh, 2011; Gómez Flórez, Pineda, & Marín García, 2012; Severo & Costa, 2012; Al Zumor, Al Refaai, Bader Eddin, & Aziz Al-Rahman, 2013; Jalali & Dousti, 2014; La Piana, 2014; Srichanyachon, 2014; Park & Cho, 2014; Fageeh, 2015). Similarly, learners’ positive perceptions of applying web-based learning in classes have been reported by some studies. Aliweh (2011), for example, revealed Egyptian EFL students’ positive perceptions of web-based materials because of benefits such as usefulness, enjoyment, accessibility, convenience, and richness of resources. Besides, Gómez Flórez, Pineda, and Marín García (2012) exploring students’ perceptions about an English reading comprehension course in a web-based modality found that learners perceived this course as an academic challenge, conducive to learning favoring students’ autonomous use of time.

A few studies have focused on the learners’ perceptions of incorporation of blog tasks in EFL classes. They have reported for students’ perceived blog assignments as more interactive and satisfactory and more conducive to learning (DeLacey & Leonard, 2002), meeting instructor’s instructional needs and providing an effective way for individualized oral feedback (Hsu, Wanga & Comac, 2008), and optimizing language learning process during meaningful language practice (Severo & Costa, 2012). Similarly, Fageeh (2011) revealed that weblogs can enhance motivation and opportunities for collaboration, authorship and readership and encourage “students’ self-expression in English, inducing a revolutionary engagement in writing” (p. 41). Considering the conducted studies, a further and deeper exploration of the influences of assignments and feedbacks retrieved through blogs on EFL learners’ perceptions and preferences can, to a great extent, add to the literature.

Teachers’ Feedback Provision and Learners’ Perceptions

Different kinds of teacher feedback have been characterized (e.g., uptake, recast, repetition, & elicitation) whose unavoidable impacts on different aspects of second language learning have been
Tackling Cognitively-Complex Collaboration with CoPe_it!
www.igi-global.com/article/tackling-cognitively-complex-collaboration-cope/37501?camid=4v1a

Redefining Web Users’ Optimal Flow Experiences in Online Environments: An Empirical Analysis
www.igi-global.com/article/redefining-web-users-optimal-flow/37500?camid=4v1a