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**Collaboration through Blogging to Develop Writing and Speaking
Skills in English for Specific Purposes (ESP)**

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M.A. Applied Linguistics

**Submitted in fulfilment of the requirements of the Degree of PhD
in Education**

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College of Social Sciences
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Abstract

The primary aim of this research was to explore peer collaboration through blogging to support English language learning within English for Specific Purposes (ESP) courses at a university setting. This thesis provides an exploration of whether the integration of a blog in university ESP courses might help support students' English language learning skills, as well as an exploration of the students' perceptions about using blogging in their ESP courses. I integrated blogs in the English for Specific Purpose courses that I teach: *Business Communication for Management* and *English for Computer Science Majors*. I evaluated the use of blogging through action research.

The use of weblogs for enhancing writing and speaking in a foreign language is supported in research literature, particularly through the use of peer feedback. However, the use of blogging in an ESP context has not been thoroughly researched. To provide an understanding of the role of blogging in my ESP courses, I gathered and analyzed three data sets: i) the students' blog posts, blog comments, and written and spoken assignments (which were analyzed using error analysis), ii) focus group discussions and iii) individual interviews (both were analyzed using thematic analysis). Data were gathered from five student groups over three teaching semesters.

The error analysis of the written tasks identified common patterns of error repetition. The error analysis indicated that, following posting and peer feedback on the blog, most of the mistakes recorded during the course were not repeated in the final examination. Findings suggested that the blogs had played a positive role in supporting students' language learning with respect to the accuracy of their writing and speaking skills. Interview and focus group analysis revealed that students felt positively about the integration of a blog in their English language courses. They felt that it was a novel, fun way to learn and practice language, it was easy to use, and it allowed them the possibility to learn in their own time and place and at their own pace. They also stated that engaging in peer feedback allowed them to become aware of their classmates' errors and then to reflect on their own work to check whether they had made similar errors and, if they had, to correct them.

Some implications that can be drawn from the findings are that the integration of blogging in an ESP course can support learners to enhance their English writing and speaking skills, by helping them become more aware of the learning process and more reflective of their own learning. The value of the learning designs used in this study lie in the use of blogging as a platform for language learners to engage in practicing their English language written and oral skills both inside and outside the classroom through written and oral tasks, as well as through engaging in online peer feedback. Students can also enhance their critical thinking skills via blogging and become autonomous and active participants in learning by engaging in online collaborative peer feedback.

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Glossary

BALL: Blog-Assisted Language Learning

CALL: Computer-Assisted Language Learning

ESP= English for Specific Purposes

LAN 111= the course code for the *English for Computer Science Majors'* course

LAN 201= the course code for the *Business Communication for Management* course

TELL: Technology-Assisted Language Learning

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Author's Declaration

I declare that, except where explicit reference is made to the contribution of others, that this dissertation is the result of my own work and has not been submitted for any other degree at the University of Glasgow or any other institution.

Printed Name: Angeliki Kleanthous

Signature:

Chapter One: Introduction

The main purpose of this study is to explore the integration of interactive blogging in undergraduate university English for Specific Purposes (ESP) courses to support the development of language learners' writing and speaking skills. In this chapter, I will firstly present the background of my study, where I will discuss the professional context of this research and my own interest in undertaking this topic as the subject of my thesis. I will then discuss the theoretical and pedagogical frameworks that underpin my work, my research questions, and finally, I will explain the structure of this thesis.

1.1. Professional Context for my Research

As an English language instructor at the Language Center of the University of Cyprus for the last 15 years, I have had an interest in educational technologies and have used different technologies in my teaching, such as digital storytelling, podcasting and online discussion forums. I was introduced to educational blogging in one of my courses during my postgraduate studies in Applied Linguistics. The collaborative and interactive nature of blogs appealed to me, as they can offer a space for communication and a place where other technologies can be hosted by adding hyperlinks to other webpages or by embedding video or audio clips.

The effectiveness of blogging in foreign language learning has been investigated in the field of education for several years. However, exploration of blogging in English for Specific Purposes (ESP) has not¹. I decided to explore blogging to assess its effectiveness in supporting learners' English language skills by undertaking a PhD. This was a major decision for me, since thesis research demands commitment and dedication and can be challenging when it is undertaken in tandem with a full-time teaching job. Nonetheless, I chose to take on the journey because I became fascinated by language research during my Master's degree in Applied Linguistics and I wanted to continue my studies and become more knowledgeable in my field. In effect, this journey led to the

¹ See APPENDIX A (p. 189-194) for a comparison of research on blogging for language learning and blogging for ESP.

formulation of the research questions that are presented in more detail later in this chapter.

I first decided to use blogging in my Academic English classes with my first and second-year undergraduate language students during the academic year 2010, by modelling different blogging activities to help students practice their writing as well as their research skills. During the semester, I identified a positive attitude from students about the integration of a blog in their course. I noticed that exchanging information and ideas on the blog allowed students to research their topics more thoroughly and prepare interesting presentations in terms of content. I believed that blogging was a more motivating process for students in contrast to previous courses I had taught in which a blog had not been used to facilitate the preparation of oral presentations. I decided to explore the use of blogs in a more formal manner, by integrating them to my higher-level English for Specific Purpose courses and evaluating them through action research. This would hopefully provide me with insight into new practices that I could apply in my teaching, making it more informed and, above all, beneficial for my students.

I use blogging as part of my overall approach to communicative language teaching on my courses. Communicative language teaching is one of the pedagogies that have guided our English language teaching at the University of Cyprus' Language Centre. Communicative language teaching refers to:

...teaching that places emphasis on helping students use the target language in a variety of contexts and on learning language functions. [...] Its primary focus is on helping learners create meaning rather than helping them develop perfectly grammatical structures or acquire native-like pronunciation. (Banciu and Jireghie 2012, p. 95).

In my teaching I used blogs to support communicative language teaching through social interaction. The nature of blogging allows for social interaction through negotiation of meaning and sharing of ideas rather than only helping users develop their grammar and/or spelling skills (Yang and Chang 2012). Further to this, the fact that students are aware that they are sharing their blogs with an audience helps them to be more careful with their grammar and spelling

(Vurdien, 2013).

I also use blogging to support collaborative learning in my teaching. There has been a great deal of emphasis over the years on collaboration and interaction between students in practicing language skills (particularly reading, listening, writing, and speaking) (see Fernandez-Dobao 2012; McConnell 2002; Ramhan and Yunus 2012). Collaborative learning refers to students "working in a group of two or more to achieve a common goal, while respecting each individual's contribution to the whole" (McInnerey and Roberts 2004). Fernandez Dobao's (2012) research indicated that student language learners' collaboration, either in pairs or in groups, led to more accurate written tasks in terms of grammar and vocabulary use (Fernandez Dobao 2012, p. 54). McConnell (2002) extensively researched the effect of collaboration on learners' increased motivation and engagement in the learning process. Students in McConnell's study seemed to strive for their maximum potential when there was an audience reading their work (McConnell 2002, p. 86).

The ability to communicate effectively with others is considered a crucial skill in language learning, as is the ability to collaborate and work together to achieve a common goal. My English language courses comprise of mixed ability groups. Students of different English language levels from the same study programme are grouped together in English for Specific Purposes (ESP) courses that aim to enhance academic language levels relevant to their field of study (for example, business or computing). I wanted to explore whether collaborative learning through blogging could support students' language learning in ESP.

From my experiences in working with technology in the classroom, I saw that use of social media in general, and blogs in particular, seemed to promote collaboration in learning. I had also been using peer feedback in my classroom and wanted to explore its use as part of blogging. The use of the blog comment features seemed to me to be ideal for encouraging shared feedback activities. From my practice and from my initial reading of the literature on blogging, I thought that peer feedback using a blog could enable learners to observe, interact, exchange viewpoints, evaluate information, negotiate meaning and offer constructive comments for improvement. Chung and Yang (2011, p.129)

suggest that these processes are all advantageous for learning. Asoodar, Atai and Vaezi (2016, p.246) also support the use of blogs in English language learners' virtual writing classes, as their findings indicate that students valued their classmates' peer support and feedback to help with their writing, and they also valued the exchange of ideas through the blog posts they shared.

Chung and Yang (2011) indicate that exchanging peer feedback encourages interaction among students and helps them engage in self-reflection during this process. Reflecting on one's own learning is an important part of learning a language. Reflection moves a learner from surface-level learning (memorizing and restating information) to a deeper level of learning which involves noticing new information, making sense, making meaning, working with meaning, and transformative learning (Xie Ke and Sharma 2008, p. 19). Zagal and Bruckman (2010, p.10) view blogging as a means of promoting reflective thinking which allows students to have access to different points of view, evaluate the opinions they read and offer their own views. Their research found that this reflective process encourages students to be more responsible as they engage in the process of evaluating their own learning tasks, approach the tasks from different perspectives, and think about how their own ideas and expressions will be perceived by their classmates or the instructor (Zagal and Bruckman 2010, p. 15).

I wanted to explore whether providing and receiving peer and instructor feedback through blogging might support language learners' writing skills and language acquisition in general. I chose to focus my research on writing and speaking skills because they are skills that my ESP students need to become more comfortable with and use in their respective fields of study. These are also skills which can be practiced effectively through a blog due to its message-posting feature. The English language courses that undergraduate students at the University of Cyprus take involve producing a high number of writing tasks. This required students to practice their writing skills extensively. As a practitioner, I wondered if using blogs would help students to practice writing in an interesting way and if publishing the blog posts for classmates to read and give feedback on, would also help students to reflect on and improve their written English. I also thought that blogging might be interesting for my

students, as they seemed to have found them interesting and innovative when I first introduced them in my classes.

As I discuss in Chapters Two and Three, the use of weblogs in improving English language learners' writing skills is supported in research (Akçay and Arslan 2010; Montero-Fleta and Perez-Sabater 2010; Noytim 2010; Wright, White, Hirst, and Cann 2014). In addition to sharing feedback and interacting via blogging, the existing research indicates that keeping language students active in their learning by asking questions, negotiating meaning, and offering feedback may enable them to develop their English language writing skills. My study focuses on student writing, but also emphasizes on developing speaking skills in the English for Specific Purposes courses I teach. In my experience, speaking is an area that students do not feel confident and comfortable in, as they are conscious of their difficulties when speaking in English. I wondered if the integration of a blog in my ESP courses might also enable learners to develop their speaking skills through recording podcasts which they could publish on the blog. This would allow students to exchange oral feedback through the blog's commenting feature. The use of weblogs for enhancing speaking in a foreign language is also supported by research findings (Harb et al 2013; Hsu, Wang and Comac 2008; Hung and Huang 2015; Kim 2011; Song 2009; Sun 2009).

The integration of a blog within any classroom is an example of Technology-Enhanced Language Learning (TELL). Technology-Enhanced Language Learning (TELL) is defined as “any language learning activity that uses technological means and/or tools for efficiency, motivation, and learning style flexibility” (Zhou and Wei 2018, p.472). TELL developed from the field of CALL (Computer-Assisted Language Learning) as new technologies emerged, and uses technology as part of the learner's environment, not only as an aid for learning but as a way of communicating (Walker and White 2013, n.p.). Blog use in my study is explored as a platform for additional practice outside the classroom: the purpose of my research is to help me to understand whether blogging can support students' writing and speaking performance in English, and if it can, how it might do this. Blogging is not suggested as a tool to replace face to face classroom teaching, but as an activity that can be combined with, and reinforce, face to face writing and speaking practice in the ESP classroom.

Students' feelings towards the addition of any new technology in their courses are also very important to take into consideration when designing a course and preparing a course curriculum. I noticed through my teaching that the method used to teach a course seemed to affect student motivation and engagement in the set tasks and in the lesson overall. Student engagement in a course can be considered an important factor for successful academic performance and in the acquisition of knowledge (Boekaerts 2016; Fisher, Perényi and Birdthistle 2018). I considered it important to include my own students as the participants in this study to explore their perceptions about blogging so that I could develop my teaching based on their views.

Technology-enhanced language learning is becoming common practice in schools and universities across different courses. However, Kakoulli-Constantinou and Papadima-Sophocleous (2020) indicate that blogging is not widely used in Greece and Cyprus by higher education practitioners who teach English for Specific Purposes. English for Specific Purposes is a distinct field in language learning. In the next section, I will provide information about the context for my study by explaining what English for Specific Purposes is and how it differs from English for Occupational Purposes and English for Academic Purposes.

1.2. What is English for Specific Purposes?

English for Specific Purposes (ESP) is defined by Dudley-Evans and St. John (cited in Robinson 1991, p. 4) as the use of English with the purpose to extend already-existing language knowledge to the students' particular field of interest. ESP students are usually adults involved in the same type of profession or specialist studies, and they usually have had some English language instruction for some years (cited in Robinson 1991, p. 4). Strevens (1988) groups English for Specific Purposes and English for Academic Purposes in the same category, but more recent studies draw a clearer distinction between them. Robinson (1991) divides the ESP family into two main branches: EOP (English for Occupational Purposes) and EAP (English for Academic Purposes). EOP courses differ from EAP courses with respect to the purpose each course serves. EAP courses address teaching English within an academic context, focusing on developing learners' academic

skills (for example, reading strategies for academic texts and academic writing). Conversely, EOP courses focus on teaching English for specific occupational purposes that address the learners' needs in the specific context. While EAP courses focus on more general academic content and skills, EOP courses relate to the specific context that reflects the learners' occupational needs (Robinson 1999, p. 2).

More recently, Basturkmen (2020) defines English for Specific Purposes as a:

theoretically and empirically based field of inquiry that aims to identify the linguistic features of specialist English varieties, the nature of ESP teaching, and to understand how specialist English can be acquired in instructed ESP and naturalistic contexts (Basturkmen 2020, p.8).

With this definition, Basturkmen shifts the focus of ESP to being less defined by teaching contexts and more defined by the linguistic theories and underlying views of teaching and learning that are inherent within the field. As a distinctive field, ESP instruction requires different methodologies from general English language course instruction because it addresses the learning of specialized terminologies that require specific materials and activities to support technical language learning (Mihaes, Dimitriu and Bocianu 2016, p. 168). Based on my own experience in teaching ESP, I would define ESP courses as specialized courses that require study of the English language within fields such as Business, Information Technology, Nursing, Medicine, Biology, Architecture, and Hospitality, for example. ESP courses focus on enhancing learners' language knowledge with respect to specialized terminology in their particular field of study, as well as oral and written communication pertaining to that field, and comprehension of readings related to their specialization. Use of authentic materials is integral to the successful acquisition of English for Specific Purposes in any specific field.

Campion (2016) describes ESP as an approach to language teaching based on a clear needs analysis. Needs analysis is defined as "the process of determining the needs for which a learner or group of learners require a language and arranging the needs according to priorities" (Richards and Platt cited in Holi Ali and Salih 2013, p.12). The learners' needs are viewed as a source of information

for syllabus and material design, so that it fulfils the learners' purpose for taking the course (Holi Ali and Salih 2013, p. 12). In effect, the learner's reasons for learning determines the instructor's decisions pertaining to content and method. ESP instruction must consider the learner, the language, and the learning context. ESP instructors must adopt a methodology that is different from general English courses, by putting emphasis on needs analysis in order to understand why a specific group of learners need to acquire the language. ESP instructors are faced with the challenges of adjusting their teaching approaches and classroom activities to address their learners' specific requirements (Chang 2017, p. 72). Further to this, there are no specialized textbooks for ESP courses addressed to university or advanced level students, so instructors must design their own materials. ESP instructors therefore face the challenge of either developing their own materials or adapting existing materials so that they will be suitable to their students' specific language learning needs. According to Belcher (2004), the ESP instructor is expected to fulfil different roles simultaneously, such as "needs assessor, specialized syllabus designer, authentic materials developer, and content-knowledgeable instructor, capable of coping with a revolving door of content areas relevant to learners' communities" (Belcher 2004 cited in Kavanoz 2020, p. 250). Exactly because ESP courses focus on teaching specialized content pertaining to specific professional fields, the instructor needs to gain expertise in the subject matter, relevant vocabulary, and technical documents the students will need to master in order to be able to function in the workplace. To manage the complexity of the role, Kavanoz (2020) argues that, by engaging in action research, the ESP practitioner will gain the ability to manage situations that involve varying demands by reflecting on their instructional practices in order to "improve their skills, expand their knowledge, and develop insight into their practices" (Kavanoz 2020, p.537).

Some of the challenges that I faced as an ESP instructor stem from the lack of time in class to practice the different skills students need. This pointed to the use of technology, both in a synchronous and asynchronous manner, in order to offer students more opportunities both inside and outside the classroom to practice different language skills. There is also limited literature exploring ESP learning, as noted earlier in this chapter, and the focus of most studies lies more on the language, methodology and skills used in EAP courses than on

technologies or the learners themselves (Campion 2016, p. 60). Basturkmen (2020) also discusses the limited literature that currently exists in ESP teaching and learning and highlights the need for more discussion of concepts and theories pertaining to teaching methodologies within the ESP field (Basturkmen 2020, p. 9). The literature on ESP and technology, in particular blogging, is quite restricted with few studies exploring the use of blogging in ESP. The existing literature focuses more on investigating the integration of blogging in EAP/EFL courses². This gap in the literature was one of my main incentives for studying whether and/or in what ways ESP courses might support language learning for ESP students, particularly through the use of online technologies such as blogging.

1.3. Aims and Theoretical Context

I am not compelled to prove that blogs are effective, but rather to explore whether or not blogging used for collaborative peer feedback might support learning of English for Specific Purposes with my students and, if so, how it might do this. When I began this study, I wanted to explore whether blogging could be used as a technology to support collaboration, particularly through peer feedback, critical thinking, evaluation, reflection, and effective learning in the context of English for Specific Purposes language learning class. The aims of the research are as follows:

1. To explore blogging as a way to support writing and speaking practice in my ESP courses.
2. To explore student perceptions of blogging for language learning in these ESP courses.
3. To reflect on the use of blogging in my practice and consider any implications for practitioners more generally.

The research framework that underlies this research study is action research. Action research in the context of language learning has been expanding significantly in the last few years. Language educators are increasingly

² In reviewing the literature on studies on blogging and language learning, I found 31 studies on the use of blogging in general language learning for my PhD research, and only 9 studies for ESP learning [see APPENDIX A, p. 189-194].

interested in research conducted by teachers as a resource for understanding and explaining classroom phenomena (Midgely, Ortiz, Romano and Ashworth 2005, p. 1). Action research constitutes a valuable method for enhancing instructors' teaching skills and it helps them gain more understanding of their own teaching practices, their students, and their classrooms (Nasrollahi, Krish and Noor 2012, p. 1874). By observing their own classes and their students' learning, teachers can discover, develop, and monitor any changes and incorporate them in their teaching practices as well as develop professionally. Through educational action research, teachers can also develop "their professional judgment and autonomy and encourage new teaching strategies and [...] a different way of generating knowledge" (Nasrollahi, Krish and Noor 2012, p. 1875). The nature of action research within a classroom is primarily about instructors obtaining knowledge about how to improve their teaching practices and how they can change their instruction in a way that will support student learning. Action research will be discussed in more detail in Chapter Four as it relates to my own study for this thesis.

The theoretical backdrop for this research is collaborative learning theory, drawing on Johnson and Johnson's (2009) social interdependence theory. Social interdependence theory posits that cooperation among students for a joint goal can have increased productivity and success as an outcome when positive social interdependence takes place (Johnson and Johnson 2009, p. 366). Underpinning my language learning pedagogy and understanding of blog-assisted language learning are theories of CALL, TELL, collaborative learning and blended learning methodologies. These theories will be more extensively elaborated on in Chapter Two.

1.4. Research Questions

I developed three research questions for my study:

1. What does research indicate about the use of blogs in English for Specific Purposes?
2. What are students' perceptions of the use of blogging in ESP, particularly the use of collaborative peer feedback?

3. How might language practitioners integrate blogging in their ESP classrooms?

The first research question was designed to be explored through studying the literature and through the findings of my study, especially the error analysis I carried out as part of my research. The second research question was designed to explore student perceptions on the integration of a blog in their language class and whether it supported their learning. The third research question relates to the nature of this study as action research. The fact that I am both the researcher and the practitioner who assessed blogging in my own classrooms adds value to the research by providing information to language instructors in terms of how to integrate blogging in their own language classrooms and whether or not blogging can assist their students' learning process.

My research questions were redeveloped as I progressed with my study, as I collected and analyzed my data. While at the beginning my focus was on examining the effectiveness of blogging in developing students' writing and speaking performance, it gradually shifted to a firmer focus on students' perceptions and attitudes towards the integration of the blog in their courses as well as the implications the blog has for both learning and teaching. The students' input highlighted the importance of the interactions with each other (through the peer feedback process) and with me as the teacher through the blogging process more than the specific outcomes or effectiveness in supporting their writing and speaking skills that was the original focus of my study.

1.5. Outline of the Thesis

Chapter Two presents the theoretical context of my research where I explore the literature that underpins the pedagogical and learning frameworks for my study. Theories of blended learning, CALL, TELL, and Collaborative Learning will be discussed. Finally, the learning theories of Social Interdependence Theory and Social Constructivism as the theoretical backdrops that underpin my research will be discussed.

Chapter Three presents the literature relating to the evolution of blogging and in

particular, it describes how it has been used in education and in language teaching. The literature discusses: the possible benefits of blogging in language learning; its value in fostering reflection while learning; the potential for blogging to motivate language learning; its usefulness for encouraging peer feedback; and how all these might benefit learners in the acquisition of a language. It also discusses some of the challenges with using blogging for language learning.

Chapter Four discusses the methodology that supports this research, as well as the methods used to collect and analyze my data. It presents in detail the action research framework that underlies this study. It also explains the narrative approach I took to exploring the literature and the qualitative research methodology that was used to collect my data (blog posts and comments, individual interviews and focus groups) and analyze it (through error analysis of writing and speaking, and thematic analysis of the interviews and focus groups). I also outline some data collection issues I encountered while collecting my data before I discuss the ethical considerations I had to make while conducting my study. The chapter closes with the steps I have taken to ensure the trustworthiness and integrity of the research process.

Chapter Five discusses the findings that relate to the first research question. More specifically, I present the findings from the error analysis of the students' language performance on the blog and course assignments to evaluate the role of blogging and how it may have assisted students' writing and speaking skills. These findings are linked to the existing literature in the field.

Chapter Six discusses the findings that relate to the second research question, examining student perceptions of blogging in their ESP courses. The themes that emerged from the individual interviews and the focus group discussions are presented in detail by discussing student engagement, motivation, and feelings towards blogs as being beneficial in language learning and more specifically, in their writing and speaking skills through reflection and exchange of peer feedback. These findings are also linked to research from the literature.

Chapter Seven presents a discussion of the findings of this study and the

implications of integrating a blog in the classroom for language teachers, as well as limitations and challenges encountered during the development of the thesis. In this chapter I also note where further research might be done to explore some of the findings.

The final chapter presents my reflections on the research and outlines some of the ways in which I used the findings of my enquiry to inform my teaching in ESP. Having reflected on my findings and my practice, I conclude that my research has highlighted opportunities for thinking about blogging as a means of communication and reflection.

Chapter Two: Theoretical Context

2.1. Introduction

This chapter explains the theories and research that have informed my practice and the design of this study. I designed my ESP courses drawing from theories of blended learning pedagogies, CALL (Computer Language Learning), collaborative learning and TELL (Technology-Enhanced Language Learning). I will discuss each of these theories in this chapter. I will first present the literature on blended learning in order to offer a context for my study before discussing Computer-Assisted Language Learning (CALL), Technology-Enhanced Language Learning (TELL), collaborative learning and peer learning. I will then look at research on collaborative learning, reflective online feedback, as well as the importance of motivation for student engagement and learning. I will finally acknowledge studies that address challenges and/or drawbacks in blog-assisted language learning.

2.2. Blended Learning

As I explained in Chapter One, my teaching combines face to face learning with online technologies through the integration of a blog in a university course setting. The purpose of integrating a blog in my ESP courses was to offer additional opportunities for language practice and learning in addition to classroom learning. The purpose was not for one method to replace the other, but primarily to enrich the learning experiences of students through blended learning. Asynchronous online communication technologies offer the ability for students to be more independent in their learning, but at the same time work collaboratively (Garrison and Kanuka 2004). When asynchronous learning is successfully combined with the rich, synchronous, spontaneous communication that takes place in the face-to-face classroom, educational opportunities and experiences can be significantly enriched (Garrison and Kanuka 2004, p. 97).

First, it would be helpful to define online learning. Early definitions of online learning point to the use of the Internet as a means for learners and instructors to interact. More specifically, Curtain (2002) presents the following definition for online learning:

Online learning can be broadly defined as the use of the internet in some way to enhance the interaction between teacher and student. Online delivery covers both asynchronous forms of interaction such as assessment tools and the provision of web-based course materials and synchronous interaction through email, newsgroups, and conferencing tools such as chat groups. It includes both classroom-based instruction as well as distance education modes. Other terms synonymous with online learning are 'web-based education' and 'e-learning (Curtain 2002 cited in Singh and Thurman 2019, p. 293).

More recent definitions of online learning point to integrating new technologies in education, and a distinction between different forms of online learning is made, such as distance learning, e-learning, hybrid or blended education (Miller, Topper and Richardson 2016 cited in Singh and Thurman 2019, p. 293). Other names have also been used for blended learning, such as mixed mode or flexible learning, but 'blended learning' is the term that dominates discussions of the combination of face to face and online learning (Smith and Hill 2019, p. 387). Regardless of the different definitions given to the term 'online learning,' they all include the use of technology as a means of enhancing interaction between the instructor and the learners.

Within the context of higher education, online learning often refers to courses that are taught completely online. However, in the last decade, an increasing number of courses have integrated both online as well as face to face instruction (Ryan, 2016 cited in Singh and Thurman 2019, p. 295). However, there appears to be a confusion in giving a clear definition of online learning and, with no clear definition of online learning, the definition of blended learning also becomes vague (Chigeza and Halbert 2014 cited in Singh and Thurman 2019, p. 295).

Several definitions of blended learning are presented in the literature, and these definitions seem to have changed over time. These varying definitions are deemed 'problematic,' as they describe several distinct practices (Smith and Hill 2019, p. 384). A simple definition of blended learning describes it as the 'thoughtful integration of face-to-face learning experiences with online learning experiences' (Garrison and Kanuka 2004, p. 97). This definition is quite general in that it does not specify the range and nature of the blend between face to face and online learning, but it provides a good working definition. With such a broad definition, the role of the learner and the instructor are not specified as

fully as they are in traditional learning (Chigeza and Halbert 2014 cited in Singh and Thurman 2019, p. 295). However, other definitions of blended learning focus on learner outcomes, collaboration, and 'connection and community building' (Smith and Hill 2019, p. 392).

Garrison and Kanuka's (2004) definition of blended learning, although it is quite broad, best describes the way I conducted the ESP courses used for my study, as well as my mode of teaching in general. My courses took place with the students' physical presence in the classroom, and I incorporated online platforms and tools to assist students' learning. I used the online learning experiences to provide additional opportunities for language practice and exchange of feedback online and to encourage interaction between students and their peers (as well as with me as the instructor) outside the physical classroom.

Literature cites research on the benefits of a blended learning approach on student performance and grades, and on engagement and satisfaction (Means et al, 2010; Owston et al, 2013 cited in Fisher, Perenyi and Birdthistle 2018, p. 5). In a study by Fisher, Perenyi and Birdthistle (2018), student attitudes about engagement, satisfaction and learning outcomes in a flipped and blended subject classroom were investigated by combining asynchronous online materials with face-to-face meetings in business marketing and management courses (Fisher, Perenyi and Birdthistle 2018, p.7). The findings of the study are consistent with previous research that suggests that blended and flipped learning can foster positive student perceptions of engagement, performance, and satisfaction (Fisher, Perenyi and Birdthistle 2018, p.1). However, the researchers suggest that blended learning can only be effective if it is properly designed and used to lead learning. They also claim that engagement is important in explaining students' satisfaction and performance (Fisher, Perenyi and Birdthistle 2018, p.13). Further to this, research highlights community as an important benefit of blended learning, particularly where blended learning facilitates a community of enquiry. Garrison and Kanuka (2004) point out that:

Community provides the stabilizing, cohesive influence that balances the open communication and limitless access to information on the Internet. Communities also provide the condition for free and open dialogue, critical debate, negotiation and agreement - the hallmark of higher education (Garrison and

Kanuka 2004, p. 97).

By combining synchronous verbal and asynchronous written communication, blended learning may be beneficial in supporting higher levels of learning through engagement in critical thinking and reflection in the learning community (Garrison and Kanuka 2004, p. 98).

However, teacher presence is also an important component to the effectiveness of blended learning since the teacher's presence is significant in managing the environment and facilitating the learning experiences. Teacher presence is defined as "the design, facilitation, and direction of cognitive and social processes for the purpose of realizing personally meaningful and educationally worthwhile learning outcomes" (Anderson, Rourke, Garrison, and Archer 2001 cited in Hosler and Arend 2012, p. 218). Teacher presence is further subdivided into three components: social presence, cognitive presence and teaching presence and teaching presence is found to be a key element in ensuring the maintenance of social and cognitive presence (that is, the students' thinking processes, grounded in critical thinking) (Hosler and Arend 2012, p. 219).

Miyazoe and Anderson (2012) investigated whether the use of discussion forums, blogs, and wikis in an EFL blended university course resulted in any changes in students' writing performance. Students reported enjoying the blended course (which included different online writing activities) as well as a qualitative improvement in their writing styles (Miyazoe and Anderson 2012, p. 152). Morris and Barber (2019) also wrote about the benefits of a blended learning approach through the use of asynchronous online media such as blogging. The researchers found that assessed blogs in a university Geography course helped students to feel more engaged throughout the course, and helped them to evaluate the subject knowledge base, personalize their learning, and deepen their comprehension of important ideas (Morris and Barber 2019, p. 357).

Lopez-Perez, Perez-Lopez and Rodriguez-Ariza (2011) investigated the effects of blended learning across different first-year undergraduate student groups studying Accounting at the University of Granada. Students revealed positive attitudes towards the addition of an online component to their course; they stated that they considered it to be a useful experience for understanding and

learning the subject content and stated that it helped increase their motivation to study that subject (Lopez-Perez, Perez-Lopez and Rodriguez-Ariza 2011, p. 822). However, they also stated that they preferred face to face instruction for learning the subject content and preferred having both methods in their learning rather than only e-learning. Instead, they suggested e-learning to complement traditional learning rather than replace it (Lopez-Perez, Perez-Lopez and Rodriguez-Ariza 2011, p. 822).

2.3. CALL and TELL

My study principally relates to TELL (Technology Enhanced Language Learning), but since TELL has emerged from the field of CALL (Computer Assisted Language Learning), I will first explain how CALL is related to my research before expanding on research relating to TELL.

Computer Assisted Language Learning (CALL) refers to the integration of computer technology into instructional material pertaining to language learning, with the purpose of assisting students reach their learning goals. CALL can generally be defined as “the application of any media, computational method or technique in language acquisition” (Wang and Liao 2017, p.3). Some platforms enabling computer-mediated language instruction that have proven to be powerful are Blackboard, WebCT and Moodle (Raman and Don 2013, p. 163). CALL presents a number of potential benefits for students’ language learning by “allowing students to access any online material to learn a language at their own space, time and speed application of any media, computational method or technique in language acquisition” (Wang and Liao 2017, p.3). Also, using the Internet, students have access to an online environment without having to be physically present in the classroom; it can facilitate immediate feedback to students’ work, and it can facilitate receiving answers to student questions in real time. Finally, it can also be helpful for instructors to track their students’ learning progress (Levy 1997 cited in Wang and Liao 2017, p. 3).

Technology Enhanced Language Learning (TELL) is defined by Zhou and Wei (2018) as “any language learning activity that uses technological means and/or tools for efficiency, motivation, and learning style flexibility” (p. 472). Patel

(2017) presents TELL as a theory of teaching and learning that is distinguished from CALL in the sense that in CALL the computer assists learning, whereas TELL is characterized more by the use of multimedia and the Internet, as well as the use of a wider range of technology in a more constructivist way (Patel 2017, p.1). Golshan and Tafazoli (2014) perceive TELL as synonymous to CALL and its main aims are presented as finding ways to use technology to teach and learn a language. Golshan and Tafazoli define TELL as “the study of applications of technology in language teaching and learning” and view TELL as a means of dealing with a large variety of tasks in different situations (Gloshan and Tafazoli 2014, p. 115). TELL can be used in addition to textbooks for more in-depth and extensive learning experiences, and for the promotion of learner-centered environments (Sangeetha 2016, p.12).

TELL reflects a theory of teaching and learning that integrates technological tools. It has goals and objectives like any other language learning activity (Sangeetha 2016, p. 2). Technological tools can help instructors to facilitate language learning for students, and technology currently plays an important role in supporting language learning (Sangeetha 2016, p. 4). Some technological tools that are used in the classroom to facilitate learning are social networking sites, blogs, wikis, video sharing sites, and hosted services. Blogging is an asynchronous mode of online communication, and it can assist both teaching and learning outside the classroom. As Sangeetha (2016) asserts, from the learners' perspective, blogging can be used to help learners write and post on their blogs and be engaged in extensive writing both inside and outside the classroom for a wider audience. From the teacher's perspective, a blog is a tool that easily allows the instructor to control teaching outside the classroom by posting assignments or tasks and have students post them and then offer feedback on their work (Sangeetha 2016, p. 5).

TELL followed Computer Assisted Language Learning as new technologies emerged. TELL uses technology not as assisting language learning, which was the case with CALL, but more broadly as part of any environment where language exists and is being used. People now use language to communicate through technologies such as tweets, social media and so on. Additionally, TELL includes a larger variety of devices apart from the traditional computer, such as phones,

game consoles and tablets. In effect, these devices and communication tools have become normalized in people's daily lives, so TELL becomes a part of the learner's environment as a way to communicate, not simply as an aid for learning (Walker and White 2013, n.p). As a result, there has been growing interest in incorporating social media in education generally, and language teaching in particular (Chum Chan and Tiwari 2012; Deng and Yuen 2011; Halic, Lee, Paulus and Spence 2010; Kang, Bonk, and Myung-Chun 2011). Different kinds of social networks (for example: wikis, blogs, Facebook, and Twitter) are now used not only for everyday communication, but for educational purposes as well.

The evolution of CALL and TELL (which has collaboration and interactive communication as its defining characteristic) with Web 2.0 comprises a critical element of foreign language learning (Carney 2009, p. 293). Web 2.0 points to a newer generation of the web as a platform offering rich user experiences, such as "more possibilities for communication, collaboration and interaction on the internet" (O'Reilly 2005 cited in Carney 2009, p. 293). Some examples of such possibilities are offered through video, voice and text chat, blogs, wikis, online gaming, and interactive worlds. Further to this, in the field of foreign language teaching, the emergence of new information and communication technologies that enable increased instructor-student and student-student interaction such as distance learning and virtual classrooms are becoming more popular. The issues of time and space have been reduced through these technologies and the interaction and sharing of information among people has become easier. Distance learning in higher education now encompasses online learning, digital learning, e-learning and virtual reality (Traxler 2018, p. 1).

Buchem and Hamelmann (2011) conducted a study through which they introduced Web 2.0 tools in two university courses. Students used different Web 2.0 tools such as wikis, blogs, and microblogs to collaborate, which led to their final written assignments and oral presentations (Buchem and Hamelmann 2011, p.2). Overall, students stated that they felt more confident about using these tools after the course and that the blog provided them with valuable insight from experts. According to the instructors, combining pedagogical methods with Web 2.0. tools is challenging but it makes university courses livelier and more

enjoyable (Buchem and Hamelmann 2011, p.4). They also thought that this approach supported students to develop important skills like collaboration, critical thinking, and reflection (Buchem and Hamelmann 2011, p.4).

Social software tools have also gained importance in learning (Avci and Askar 2012). Social software refers to “applications such as wikis, blogs and social networks, used for sharing multimedia, audio or visual content, as well as text” (Avci and Askar 2012, p.194). Social software tools allow learners to share resources and learn collaboratively, as well as share information resources of other users and receive feedback. They also facilitate peer-to-peer learning, independent learning, and the shared contribution of each member within the group in a learning community (Avci and Askar 2012, p.194). Buchem and Hamelmann (2011) consider that using technology and social networks in education is important to help students develop important 21st century skills such as digital learning, collaboration, information, and technology skills, and problem-solving, competencies that are considered significant in life and work environments today (Buchem and Hamelmann 2011, p. 1). Digital literacy has also become an essential skill. Digital literacy “describes those skills, attitudes, access and competences necessary for individuals, perhaps communities, to flourish in an increasingly digital world” (Traxler 2018, p. 9).

A study by Dooly and Sadler (2013) investigates the use of CMC (Computer-Mediated Communication) for communicative language learning using teleconferencing and *Second Life* with university undergraduate student-teachers in the USA and Spain. Students used the online presentation application *VoiceThread* to give personal introductions and exchange comments (Dooly and Sadler 2013, p.9). They also used Wikis to post teaching sequences on which they exchanged constructive peer feedback (Dooly and Sadler 2013, p. 9). The following semester, they were asked to work together to create podcasts using *Second Life* as a virtual space to hold meetings. The study found that students engaged in more critical thinking through self-reflection because of the interaction with their classmates through peer assessment (Dooly and Sadler 2013, p. 21). Student responses also indicated that this multimodal experience of blended learning offered them a feeling of self-achievement and confidence on how to use technology in their own teaching. The process of selecting the

appropriate technology for their own teaching also helped students engage in more critical thinking and reflection (Dooly and Sadler 2013, p. 23).

Research indicates some benefits to using CALL and TELL in language learning. CALL offers the ability to learners to use computers and the internet in language education to provide access to information at any time and place at their own pace, and also to receive feedback from instructors. From an instructors' perspective, the use of CALL enables them to track and assess students' learning through the different online tools available (Wang and Liao 2017, p. 3).

Wang and Liao (2017) investigated whether the use of CALL could enhance first-year undergraduate university students' English language proficiency. The addition of CALL also had a positive impact on learners' attitudes towards the technology added to their course. They stated that they enjoyed the online discussions with their classmates and felt that they could make contributions to the group. Some students also stated that they felt more comfortable with the online speaking tasks, because they did not feel that they would be corrected in front of their classmates (Wang and Liao 2017, p. 12). Salovaraa's (2005) study also emphasized the benefits of CALL. Student participants took a computer-assisted literature class that involved writing essays. The study design included a comparison group that was involved in the same written activities, but with no use of computers (Salovaara 2005). The results indicated that the students who used the computer-assisted approach used a variety of deeper cognitive learning strategies such as monitoring, creating representations, memorizing, evaluation and sharing information than the comparison group (Salovaara 2005, p. 49). On the benefits of TELL, Yang and Chen's (2006) research explored the attitudes of senior high school students in Taiwan towards the integration of TELL in their language learning courses. Overall, students reported that the TELL approach to learning was more effective than traditional learning. An important area of consideration from the part of researchers pointed towards the importance of making learners aware that learning English through multimedia requires self-directed learning, and the course design should accommodate for more time towards students who are not accustomed to this type of learning strategy (p. 877).

Gleason and Suvorov's (2012) research looked at language learners' perceptions of asynchronous computer-mediated communication used to enhance their oral proficiency in English at a large American university. The study found that using the online software *Wimba Voice* helped students improve their pronunciation in the target language. Students found *Wimba Voice* convenient and user-friendly, and helped them to notice errors in their spoken language (Gleason and Suvorov 2012, p. 110). Its interactive features also enabled them to exchange their ideas asynchronously which supported students to 'reflect upon the form and meaning' of their language use (Gleason and Suvorov 2012, p. 110). Students also recognized some drawbacks, such as technical problems that arose, the similarity of the tool with other recording software, and the inability to interact in real-time with others if it was necessary to negotiate or clarify meaning (Gleason and Suvorov 2012, p. 111).

2.4. Social Constructivism and Social Interdependence Theory

My teaching of ESP courses is informed by theories of collaborative learning and social interdependence theory, which draw on social constructivism. Social constructivism puts emphasis on the significance of culture and context to comprehend what happens in society, with knowledge being constructed based on this understanding (Kim 2001, p.2). Amineh and Davatgari Asl (2015) describe social constructivism as a theory of knowledge as well as a theory of communication which "assumes that understanding, significance and meaning are developed in coordination with other human beings" (Amineh and Davatgari Asl 2015, p. 13). Leeds-Hurwitz (2009) breaks down this theory into two important elements: (a) the assumption that human beings develop a model of the social world and how this model operates to justify their experiences; and (b) the concept that language is the most important means that human beings use to construct reality (Leeds-Hurwitz cited in Amineh and Davatgari Asl 2015, p. 13).

A concept central to social constructivism is the role of social collectivism in individual learning and development. In particular, the mind is not viewed in isolation from the social cultural group, but the individual and the social interact

in the process of learning and development (Liu and Matthews 2005). Zhang and Lin (2018) state that social constructivism is founded on “cognitive theory, humanism and social interaction” (Zhang and Lin 2018, p. 653). Further to this, Borthick, Jones and Wakai (2003) describe constructivism as a theory that draws particularly on the work of Dewey, Piaget and Vygotsky. By the 1990s, a distinction between cognitive constructivism and social constructivism was evident in research literature and theory. Learning was being viewed “not as the individual acquisition of knowledge or skills, but as learners' construction of their own mental structures through collaboration with others” (Borthick, Jones and Wakai 2003, p.108).

Social constructivist theories put emphasis on interactive learning and place the social situation as an important element in helping learners develop their cognition. Vygotsky developed the concept *Zone of Proximal Development* (often shortened to ZPD) to explain how cognitive development occurs (Clapper 2015). Vygotsky explains the ZPD as the distance between the level of development shown through problem solving activities that learners are able to undertake autonomously, and the level of development that can potentially occur as a result of problem solving that is undertaken with the help of an adult or in collaboration with more proficient learners (Vygotsky 1978, cited in Borthick, Jones and Wakai 2003, p.111). According to Kinginger (2002, p.240), “the ZPD construct is a shorthand device capturing the emergence of cognitive development within social interaction, when participants are provided assistance from more-competent others (teachers or peers) as they engage in learning activity.” A learning process therefore “begins internally and individually with the learner” (Clapper 2015, p.150). A Zone of Proximal Development is then “created [...] when a learner interacts in cooperation with others but lags behind in internal developmental processes” (Clapper 2015, p. 150). Learning experiences should “support learners’ gradual development of capabilities so that they learn to do without assistance things that they could initially do only with assistance” (Borthick, Jones and Wakai 2003, p.110).

Zhang and Lin (2018) argue that social constructivism puts emphasis on socially interactive learning and places the social situation as an important element in helping learners develop their cognition. Development, student cooperation, and

active participation are also emphasized in social constructivism (Zhang and Lin 2018). The collective is perceived as larger than the sum of the individuals, as each individual brings their own personal contributions and understandings to the exchanges within a group (Liu and Matthews 2005). According to Kim (2001), social constructivism comprises a socio-cultural theory based on assumptions relating to reality, knowledge, and learning. Learners do not passively acquire knowledge but are active participants in learning through their construction of meaning by interacting with other social beings and achieving meaningful learning through engagement in social activities (Kim 2001, p.3). Additionally, it is important to note that instructional approaches that are based on social constructivist approaches emphasize the need for learners to collaborate with each other and with instructors to achieve learning (Kim 2001, p. 5). Goodyear and Zenios (2010) also highlight the importance of student collaboration in constructing knowledge. They argue that “an improvement in students’ understanding at the conceptual level without any direct engagement in collaborative knowledge building communities is inadequate for preparing for participation in the knowledge age” (Goodyear and Zenios 2010, p. 363). Social constructivism’s emphasis on the active participation of learners in the learning process has been seen as dismissing the role of passive perception, memorization, and mechanical processes of learning overall (Liu and Matthews 2005). Fox (2001) argues that small group or one-to-one interaction cannot always be effective, particularly with large classes of students (Fox 2001 cited in Liu and Matthews 2005, p. 389).

Socio-cultural theories of learning acknowledge that both practical activities and symbolic activities contribute to the development of cognitive functions. Therefore, effective collaborative instruction relies on different kinds of group work that involve all learners to accomplish a shared learning objective. By placing these roles on students, they learn to understand the social and collaborative nature of learning and development, but they also begin to become more active and reflective about the learning process itself (Eun 2010, p. 410). Liu and Matthews (2005, p.387) note that supporters of social constructivism “consensually hold that knowledge is not mechanically acquired, but actively constructed within the constraints and offerings of the learning environment.” The social environment and social interactions become significant

contexts to enable learning (Liu and Matthews 2005, pp. 387-388). In particular, learners “are believed to be enculturated into their learning community and appropriate knowledge, based on their existent understanding, through their interaction with the immediate learning environment” (Liu and Matthews 2005, p. 388). However, in order for learners to be engaged in constructing social meanings, intersubjectivity among individual meanings and knowledge is required (Kim 2001). Intersubjectivity is “a shared understanding among individuals whose interaction is based on communication and assumptions that form the ground for their communication” (Rogoff cited in Kim 2011, p.3). It is formed and developed through learners negotiating meaning within their communicating group (Kim 2001). In effect, inter-subjectivity not only lays the basis for communication, but also supports people to extend their understanding of new information and activities with their group members.

Cooperative and collaborative learning involve not only intersubjectivity, but also the application of Social Interdependence Theory (Johnson and Johnson 2014). Johnson and Johnson (2009) extensively researched Social Interdependence Theory, according to which cooperation among students can lead to increased productivity and success:

Social interdependence exists when the outcomes of individuals are affected by their own and others' actions. There are two types of social interdependence: positive (when the actions of individuals promote the achievement of joint goals) and negative (when the actions of individuals obstruct the achievement of each other's goals) (Johnson and Johnson 2009, p. 366).

Where there is positive social interdependence through cooperation, learners can develop more supportive relationships, as well as better psychological health, social competence, and self-esteem (Johnson and Johnson 2009, p. 367). Johnson and Johnson's research indicates that attitudes towards cooperation are also related to more emotional maturity, trust and optimism about other people, self-confidence, autonomy, and higher self-esteem (Johnson and Johnson 2009, p. 371).

Johnson and Johnson (2007) explain that the way that interdependence between students is structured affects the interaction between them and, in effect, plays

a determining role in the situation outcomes. For example, when there is positive social interdependence, it leads to “promotive interaction” where learners encourage each other’s efforts in order to achieve tasks and fulfill the group’s goals (Johnson and Johnson 2007, p.17). However, when there is negative social interdependence, it leads to “oppositional interaction” where learners discourage or disrupt each other’s efforts towards reaching their common goals (Johnson and Johnson 2007, p. 17). Johnson and Johnson (2007, p.19) also argue that cooperation has the tendency to lead to greater learning accomplishments, better acquisition of the learned material, more use of critical thinking skills, productive problem-solving, more willingness to take on challenging tasks, more intrinsic motivation, increased transferability of learning to other situations, and persistence towards achieving learning task goals. In addition to this, individual accountability also exists during cooperative learning, to ensure that each member is accountable and contributes their part towards the end product (Johnson and Johnson 1999, p. 71). By assessing the performance of each individual, the performance of each member is also strengthened in addition to the group’s performance (Johnson and Johnson 1999, p. 71). Improved psychological health benefits and higher self-esteem seem also to result from positive social interdependence among learners (Johnson and Johnson 2007). More specifically, cooperation can foster higher self-esteem than competitive or individual work, as well as lead to increased social skills, increased self-acceptance, and seeing oneself in a more positive light when compared to peers (Johnson and Johnson 2007, p.20).

2.5. Cooperative and Collaborative Learning

It is important at this point to explain in more detail the concepts of cooperative and collaborative learning. Earlier research makes a distinction between cooperative and collaborative learning, but more recent literature sees it as more of a continuum with the concepts of cooperative and collaborative learning being “comparable” (Scager et al 2016, p.1). Based on Panitz’s (1999) definition, cooperation “is a structure of interaction designed to facilitate the accomplishment of a specific end product or goal through people working together in groups,” whereas “collaboration is a philosophy of interaction ... where individuals are responsible for their actions, including learning and

respecting the abilities and contributions of their peers” (Panitz 1999, p. 1). According to McInnerney and Roberts, the term collaborative learning implies “working in a group of two or more to achieve a common goal, while respecting each individual’s contribution to the whole” (McInnerney and Roberts 2004, p. 221).

In addition, collaborative learning involves two or more learners working together in order to achieve a learning task. According to Gokhale (1995):

The term Collaborative Learning (CL) refers to an instruction method in which learners at various performance levels work together in small groups toward a common goal. The learners are responsible for one another’s learning as well as their own. Thus, the success of one learner helps other students to be successful (Gokhale, 2015, as cited in in Laal and Ghodsi 2011, p. 417).

Johnson and Johnson (1999) define cooperative learning as a process where learners work together to achieve a shared goal and the members of the group try to reach outcomes that will benefit the whole group. Within a cooperative learning group, students interact with each other on course material, help each other reach an understanding of the content, and provide encouragement to each other to continue working. Individual contributions are monitored on a regular basis to ensure that all students are equally participating and learning during the process (Johnson and Johnson 1999). The outcome is that “the group is more than a sum of its parts, and all students perform higher academically than they would if they worked alone” (Johnson and Johnson 1999, p. 68). In the cooperative model, even though students work in groups to complete a task, the teacher has control of the class, while in the collaborative model groups have more control of the learning and the teacher’s role is mainly restricted to consultations and facilitating group discussions (Panitz 1999, p. 2).

Rummel and Spada (2005) offer their own distinction between cooperative and collaborative learning:

Cooperation has been described as including a division of labor, the parallel, independent solution of subtasks, and the combination of individual contributions in a joint product. Collaboration, however, has been defined as doing the work

together (Rummel and Spada 2005, p. 204).

In collaborative learning, “students participate in small-group activities in which they share their knowledge and expertise. In these student-driven activities, the teacher usually acts as a facilitator” (Scager et al 2016, p.1). Collaborative learning emphasizes the social context of the learning environment; learning is a social activity, during which the instructor, students and peers work together as members of a learning community with the aim of gaining new knowledge and experiences, as well as engaging in problem solving (Neo 2003, p. 463).

Collaborative learning requires students to be more active in learning and work with their peers to solve problems; therefore, the lesson becomes more student-centered rather than teacher-centered where the instructor is the focus of the lesson and students have a more passive role; in the collaborative learning context, the instructor becomes a facilitator and guides the students by coordinating the lesson and monitoring peer feedback (Neo 2003, p. 464).

The qualities of effective collaboration involve coordinating the shared work, which includes time management, labor division, pooling unshared knowledge, and balancing individual and group work phases. Also, it is important for the partners who work on a common task to communicate effectively. This involves mutual understanding, giving feedback and turn-taking (Rummel and Spada 2005, p. 205). Johnson and Johnson’s (2016) research indicates that cooperative learning helps students to retain information on a long-term basis, have greater expectations for success, and enhances their critical thinking skills when they positively depend on each other to complete a task. Additionally, transfer of learning and more positive attitudes toward the learning task can be fostered through cooperation (Johnson and Johnson 2006, p. 371).

Developing critical thinking is an important factor for English language communication according to Qing (2013), who states that the “process of fostering critical thinking competence deals with stimulating students’ reverse thinking and cultivating their independent thinking ability; then students may consciously apply their previously acquired knowledge into practice” (Qing 2013, p. 6). Qing (2013) highlights the importance of critical thinking as a means to foster reflection; critical thinking offers learners the ability to analyze, criticize, share ideas, and reach conclusions. The development of critical thinking helps

students become independent and confident in the English language classroom and in education in general (Qing 2013, p.6).

Motivation is also important for effective language learning and can be enhanced through cooperative learning. Ning and Hornby (2014) explored how cooperative learning affects English learners' motivation at the tertiary level. The results of their study revealed that cooperative learning promotes learners' intrinsic motivation (which relates to a real interest in an activity) more than traditional teaching. This type of learning encourages students' satisfaction from helping others and it increases their sense of control and ownership of their work. Peer assessment also enhances their psychological need for being autonomous and competent, which can further encourage them to pursue goals, have a desire to succeed and enjoy learning (Ning and Hornby 2014, p. 111). Ning and Hornby's (2014) study showed that students have opportunities to use English communicatively when working in group tasks, and that led to positive feelings of satisfaction and accomplishment when they successfully completed a task. Assessing their own as well as their peers' work increased their sense of autonomy, which also contributed to enhancing their motivation. When the students realized that their own feedback and contribution was important and beneficial to their peers, they felt more positively about learning and seemed to be more intrinsically motivated (Ning and Hornby 2014, p. 119).

2.6. Collaborative Learning Research

My teaching and research are guided by collaborative learning theories and research. In particular, I used theories and research findings to inform my use of collaborative online peer-feedback to support language learning. In this section, I will discuss some of the research that has been of particular interest in informing my teaching and my research study. Research indicates that collaborative learning has a number of benefits that can be social and psychological, as well as academic (Laal and Ghodsi 2011). The social benefits of collaborative learning pertain to helping develop a social support system for learners and, overall, building learning communities (Laal and Ghodsi 2011). Psychological benefits relate to collaborative learning increasing students' self-esteem through focusing on student-centered instruction and establishing more

positive student attitudes. Academic benefits involve the promotion of critical thinking skills and active student engagement in the learning process and in improving classroom results (Laal and Ghodsi 2011, p. 487).

Collaboration among students is also believed to be helpful in encouraging students at any level to become more motivated and engaged in the learning process, as well as achieve set tasks (Fernández Dobao 2012). Recent research strongly suggests that collaboration may help with student motivation and engagement in the language learning process. For example, Fernández Dobao (2012) investigated the effect of collaborative pair and group work in supporting written accuracy, fluency, and complexity, as well as positively influencing the frequency and nature of Language Related Episodes (LREs). Her study indicated that collaboration, either in pairs or in small groups, helped students to produce more grammatically and lexically accurate written tasks. Students working in pairs needed more time to produce a written task than students working individually because they had to discuss the language they were going to use, but their final product had fewer errors than when they worked individually (Fernández Dobao 2012, p. 54).

As suggested by Kelly, Baxter and Anderson's study (2010), online collaboration can help students feel more engaged and active in the learning process. Student engagement is highly regarded as a factor contributing to successful learning and positive academic outcomes (Kahu 2013 cited in Fisher, Pereni and Birdthistle 2018, p. 4). Student engagement is three-dimensional: *behavioral* engagement relates to participation, effort, attention, persistence, and positive conduct, *emotional* engagement relates to the positive or negative attitudes towards the instructors, peers, subjects and the school overall, and *cognitive* engagement relates to the amount of investment in learning, thoughtfulness, method and willingness to make an effort to comprehend complicated ideas and undertake challenging tasks (Fredrick et al cited in Boekaerts 2016, p. 77). On the other hand, student disengagement relates to 'quitting', being passive, engaging in surface learning, and feeling bored (Jang, Kim and Reeve cited in Boekaerts 2016, p. 78). It is important at this point to separate engagement from motivation and situational interest: engagement is "publicly observable behavior", while motivation is "internal, unobservable, psychological" and not

easily observed (Boekaerts 2016, p. 76).

Jeong (2006) studied the effects of conversational language on the kinds and frequency of responses elicited and how the results supported collaborative argumentation in asynchronous online communications of graduate university students. The participants were graduate students who registered in a 16-week online graduate introductory course in distance education. The findings revealed that conversational language produced various interaction patterns when presenting arguments and challenges in group discussions - messages with more conversational language elicited more responses than messages with less conversational language (Jeong 2006, pp. 391-392). These differences suggest that conversational language can prove to be useful in aiding students to collaboratively produce speech acts (Jeong 2006, p. 390).

McConnell's research on collaborative assessment in e-learning (2002) provides evidence that collaboration among students makes students more motivated and engaged in the process of learning. Knowing that there is an audience seems to make students more motivated due to the fact that they strive to put more effort into tasks, do their best, and not let their partners down. According to McConnell, "sharing their work in this way and reviewing each other's assignments motivates them to extend their normal approaches to learning" (McConnell 2002, p. 86). This research also indicates that "students involved in collaborative e-assessment actively and critically reflect on their learning and on the benefits of collaborative assessment" and that asynchronous communication supports reflective learning, since students have time to read and think about their peers' work before they contribute with their own comments (McConnell 2002, p.86).

Kelly, Baxter and Anderson (2010) also investigated the use of collaborative assessment taking place online to improve the way students learn in large classes. Students were offered "a more structured, scaffolded learning environment to engage with their peers in collaborative assessments" (Kelly et al 2010, p. 535). The collaborative online assessment method fostered more reading, learning, interest, and student input than traditional teaching methods. Additionally, it was observed that students performed better on the final exam

rather than on the mid-term exam, which suggests that deeper processing of information took place (Kelly et al 2010, p.543).

Peer learning as a form of collaborative research has been gaining interest and has been incorporated in educational settings. According to Chung and Yang (2011), peer learning is:

...a form of cooperative learning that enhances the value of student-student interaction and results in various advantageous learning outcomes. By opening opportunities for peers to view blogs created by others and encouraging comments and suggestions after examining their viewpoints, exemplars are exhibited for observations and modelling, which, in the light of social modelling by Bandura (1986) should enhance observer knowledge levels in a task (Chung and Yang 2011, p. 129).

The benefits of peer learning are highlighted in the literature as contributing to increased academic performance. A study by Sato and Lyster (2012) examined peer interaction and corrective peer feedback in relation to the improvement of accuracy and fluency in university ESL classes. The research compared treatment and control groups (the control groups had not engaged in communicative tasks through peer interaction). The findings indicated that corrective feedback included in peer interaction was effective in developing learners' accuracy in the second language (Sato and Lyster 2012, p. 610). The groups that engaged only in peer interaction without exchanging any corrective feedback (CF), showed improvement in their fluency but not in their accuracy in the L2. The fact that the CF students also offered and received feedback helped them to notice errors in their peers' work, which contributed to the development of their own accuracy as well as fluency (Sato and Lyster 2012, p. 612). Corrective feedback offered between students seemed to support accuracy, while not impeding fluency.

Dippold (2009) also examined the effect of collaborative online peer feedback through blogging in an advanced German class at a UK university. The findings revealed the learners' positive attitudes towards working with blogs and receiving feedback from both the instructor and their peers, since they could gain different perspectives from their work and they also had the opportunity to compare their work with that of their classmates (Dippold 2009, p. 31).

However, the students reported that while they enjoyed receiving feedback, they did not enjoy offering feedback to their classmates because they did not feel that they had the expertise to offer feedback like their instructor (Dippold 2009, p.13). This led to less constructive feedback being offered to fellow students. This research suggests that while the blog was a medium that allowed for interaction among students easily, it might not be beneficial for peer feedback unless students are specifically trained to give feedback before engaging in peer assessment (Dippold 2009, p. 33).

2.7. Summary

In this chapter, I discussed the pedagogical and learning frameworks that informed my study by presenting an overview of the literature related to blended learning, CALL, TELL, social constructivism and social interdependence theory, and cooperative and collaborative learning. These theories informed the design of my course and the design of my research study. The research and theories reported in this chapter have helped me to understand the different ways that technology-enhanced language learning can assist language learning by incorporating Web 2.0. tools such as blogging in my classroom. Also, by reading the research on social constructivism and social interdependency theory, I have gained insight into the importance of learning through social interactions and the significance of positive interdependence between learners. Social interactions are important not only for learning to take place, but also for learners' confidence and psychological health (Johnson and Johnson 2009). By incorporating a blog in my ESP classes at the university level, my purpose was to help students to engage in such social interactions outside the classroom environment and foster more positive interdependence with each other through supporting one another in their learning process.

The next chapter will focus on the literature pertaining to the use of blogging to support language learning. It will present an overview of the literature addressing aspects of language learning in relation to blogging. In particular, the chapter will focus on presenting the literature on BALL (Blog-Assisted Language Learning), blogging to support writing and speaking skills, and blogging to support reflection.

Chapter Three: Research Context

3.1. Introduction

This chapter explains the research literature that informed my understanding of blogging and language learning. I used action research to examine the integration of a weblog in my English for Specific Purpose classes and to explore how this was perceived by my students. In doing this, it was important to inform my understanding of the field by studying the literature to become familiar with how action research has been used in previous research studies and how blogging has been integrated in language learning courses. I was driven to undertake this study by my interest in improving my teaching. I wanted to examine and evaluate different approaches that could assist me in making my lessons more motivating and interesting for students. I wanted to explore different ways to help students engage and participate in learning as well as offer more opportunities to keep contact with the language beyond the classroom. In my study, my focus was on exploring the students' learning process through the integration of a blog in two ESP courses (*English for Business Communication* and *English for Computer Science*). As I will explain in Chapter Four, I used a narrative approach to explore the literature on blogging and language learning. I did this with the aim to provide a broad overview of my topic with the purpose to improve my understanding of the area in depth.

I will begin this chapter by discussing the literature related to Blog-Assisted Language Learning (BALL) and I will present existing research on blogging on learners' writing and speaking skills. I will continue this chapter by discussing the research pertaining to the role of blogging for online peer feedback, as well as explaining what the literature can tell us about using blogs to enable reflection. Next, I will focus on studies that were conducted on blogging and ESP courses before I finally address the challenges that are reported in relation to the use of blogging in language learning.

3.2. Blog-Assisted Language Learning (BALL)

As I mentioned in Chapter Two, there has been growing interest in incorporating Web 2.0. tools in education in general, and in language teaching in particular

(Chum, Chan, and Tiwari 2012; Deng and Yuen 2011; Halic, Lee, Paulus and Spence 2010; Kang, Bonk, and Myung-Chun 2011). Different kinds of Web 2.0 social networks (such as wikis, blogs, Facebook, and Twitter) are now used for educational purposes. For instance, blogs (or weblogs) are proving to be effective in enhancing writing and/or reading skills (Akçay and Arslan 2010; Montero-Fleta and Perez-Sabater 2010; Noytim 2010). Blogs have also been received very positively by the educational community due to their interactive platform that incorporates different multimedia features, as well as their “interactivity and ability to support cooperative and autonomous learning” (Ahuwalia, Deepti and Aggarwal 2011, p. 30). Bloggers can read other blogs, comment on them, and refer others to their own blog. In the same way, students can also communicate with each other and have their work available for others to see and comment on, both inside and outside the classroom. The archiving feature of blogs, which lists posts in reverse chronological order, allows both the learner and the instructor to monitor the progress of learning and also reflect on the learning that is taking place (Richardson 2006 cited in Ahuwalia Deepti and Aggarwal 2011, p. 30).

Blogs or weblogs are online electronic journals, where individuals can create their own online space and post their thoughts. As Efimova and de Moor (2005) point out:

Weblogs are perceived as low-threshold tools to publish on-line, empowering individual expression in public. Although a weblog is a personal writing space, its public nature suggests a need to communicate and it invites feedback (Efimova and de Moor 2005, p. 1).

Tools like blogs can enable collaborative and communication skills that make learning more student-centered (Wright, White, Hirst, and Cann 2014, p. 126). They format towards a more “dynamic user-based experience where users generate the content on social platforms” (Cormode and Krishnamurthy 2008 cited in Wright et al 2014, p. 127).

Ward (2004) devised the term BALL (Blog-Assisted Language Learning) to refer to the integration of blogs in language courses. The concept of BALL (Blog-Assisted Language Learning) has been widely explored in the last few years, and the

literature cites its application in a variety of courses, ranging from primary school courses to graduate university language courses. BALL is suggested as a beneficial approach that is authentically communicative and that can help learners have a creative outlet to express themselves, especially shy students who cannot express themselves in class in front of other people (Ward 2004, p. 5). Ward (2004) investigated the effect of blogs on writing, reading and communication skills, writing that:

the weblog provides a genuine audience, is authentically communicative, process driven, peer reviewed, provides a disinhibiting context and offers a completely new form with un-chartered creative potential (Ward 2004, p. 3).

By integrating the weblog in his courses, Ward (2004) observed that some of the shy students in class were actually very vocal bloggers, who expressed their opinions and offered insights which they were not willing to do in class. In effect, learners were able to distance themselves from expressing opinions in front of a large group of people in the classroom, and this helped students who felt insecure about participating in class to use language more on the blog (Ward 2004, p. 13). However, because students were aware that there was an audience, they stated that they had to put more effort in writing to their best potential; therefore, they spent more time on their assignment because others would read their work apart from their instructor (Ward 2004, p. 13).

The interactive feature of social media such as blogs can be useful for language teaching, since learners can collaborate to achieve a common goal by researching, producing language, giving feedback through posting comments, reflecting on their own work, and in general becoming more active in their own learning. Ariffin and Yaacob (2014) examined the effectiveness of language learners' attitudes towards the use of blogs in their learning, by incorporating a blog in the English language course of a group of Malaysian secondary school students. Overall, students had positive responses to the integration of blogs in their English language learning process, but they had time constraints in participating more actively due to other school and course commitments (Ariffin and Yaacob 2014, p. 127). Students felt more comfortable posting virtually without the instructor's presence and felt that they were more willing to share their reading experiences on the blog rather than in face-to-face discussions, as

they felt that their classmates supported them during the blog discussion (Ariffin and Yaacob 2014, p. 128). Finally, all students agreed that blogs could help them improve their language skills as they offered more opportunities to use the language and they felt more independent in choosing their own reading materials to be shared with their classmates (Ariffin and Yaacob 2014, p. 130).

The use of blogs seems to have a positive impact on written language development. A range of studies indicate that students who collaborated through blogs to produce a piece of writing or exchanged peer feedback as a means to improve their own writing revealed overall positive attitudes towards their use; students also revealed a perception that using blogs to give peer feedback helped them reflect more and improve their own writing skills (Amir, Ismail and Hussin 2011; Chen, Liu, Shih, Wu, and Yuan 2011; Kelly, Baxter and Anderson 2010; McConnell 2002; Ning and Hornby 2014), as well as their speaking skills (Hsu, Wang and Comac 2008; Hung and Huang 2015; Kim 2011; Song 2009; Sun 2009). The use of blogging as a learning activity also offers students opportunities to become more analytic and critical (Zagal and Bruckman 2010, p.10). However, while there has been extensive research on the use of blogging in education and in language learning and teaching, there has not been much focus on how blogging may affect written and spoken development in ESP (English for Specific Purposes) courses.

Technology and online environments (particularly asynchronous modes of communication such as blogging) are also cited in the literature as being useful in preparing language practitioners in their teaching careers (Yang 2009, p. 18). Zardi et al (2014) examined the use of a blog by EFL teachers as a way to share their knowledge with each other and with students. Seven teachers in Iran participated in the study and reported positive views on integrating technology to teach writing. The teachers stated that communicating with each other on the blog was an enriching experience both for the teachers and the students (Zardi et al 2014, p.534). Most of the teachers thought that their students were encouraged to write on the blog and that it was an enjoyable and motivating experience that facilitated teaching. They also reported higher levels of student engagement in writing, which was attributed to student support (Zardi et al, 2014, p. 534).

Arnold and Ducate (2006) also investigated the potential of asynchronous communication mediated by computers to support language teachers in their study with graduate teaching assistants. Asynchronous computer-mediated communication, an example of which is blogging, provides a time interval between reading and posting, which allows the participant to think, formulate, revise, and then send the post, and allows for more reflection because the factor of time pressure is removed (Arnold and Ducate 2006, p. 44). Additionally, it is important to note that as students write for an audience and can also read their classmates' posts, this helps broaden their knowledge and their understanding of the subject. They can build on each other's thoughts, learn from each other and co-construct knowledge (Arnold and Ducate 2006, p. 44). Arnold and Ducate acknowledge that the instructor plays a major role in the success of using technology depending on decisions made about how to integrate technological tools in their courses, the types of tasks used, the assessment, and the number of students per group (Arnold and Ducate 2006, p. 45).

3.2.1. Blogging and Writing Skills

The literature generally supports the effectiveness of blogs in improving students' writing skills. Godwin-Jones (2006, cited in Amir, Ismail and Hussin 2010) lists the advantages of using blogs in developing students' writing skills, as a tool that encourages feedback, critical thinking, and articulation of ideas. A blog also "offers opportunities for collaborative learning; provides an environment in which students can develop skills of persuasion and argumentation; creates a more student-centered learning environment; and offers informal language reading" (Godwin-Jones 2006 cited in Amir, Ismail and Hussin 2010, p. 538).

Miceli, Murray and Kennedy (2010) also examined the effectiveness of integrating a blog in an Italian language course with respect to the extent of student contribution and collaboration and whether the blog fostered a sense of community. Students in this study stated that the blog gave more opportunities for reading and writing in their target language, and they showed a desire to collaborate and connect with each other through the blog, which strengthened

their sense of community (Miceli, Murray and Kennedy 2010, p. 338).

Lin, Groom, and Lin (2013) investigated university students' attitudes towards the integration of blogs in Applied Foreign Languages. Students were required to use their blogs both in-class and out of class to complete writing tasks and comment on posts (Lin et al 2013, p. 131). Students felt that blogging was a novel way of writing, and it was convenient to use in order to retrieve both their own past work as well as their peers' posts due to its archiving feature. Students stated that by looking at their peers' posts they could get ideas about language usage and review some words (Lin et al 2013, p. 133). Nonetheless, they also expressed anxiety and embarrassment over posting messages for a wider audience to read, as they were conscious of their limited language ability, so they spent a lot of time trying to write correct sentences; they also felt inhibited from sharing comments about their peers' posts (Lin et al 2013, p. 134). However, according to Amir et al (2010), students in their study appeared to be more comfortable expressing their ideas in writing through online tools such as blogs, since they were not nervous about any grammar errors. Their study indicated that students felt that their vocabulary usage and general knowledge increased, and that any grammar mistakes they had, through their peer and instructor comments and feedback, acted as a reminder for them not to make the same grammar mistakes in the future (Amir et al 2010, p. 541).

Asoodar, Atai and Vaezi (2016) found that the integration of a blog in writing instruction resulted in the learners' improvement in writing performance at the Iran University of Science and Technology, Virtual Campus. Students who used the blog outperformed those who only received in-class writing instruction in areas such as content and organization (Asoodar, Atai and Vaezi 2016, p. 227). Students overall felt that the use of blogging was convenient and allowed them to work at their own pace as they had time to reflect on their ideas before posting and while preparing their comments to their peers (Asoodar, Atai and Vaezi 2016, p. 242). They also expressed satisfaction over being able to revise their writings based on the comments received by their classmates. However, they expressed concerns over whether they had correctly completed the writing tasks and they also noted that there was lack of verbal communication which they felt was still important (Asoodar, Atai and Vaezi 2016, pp. 241-242).

Hajiannejad's (2012) study revealed that learners improved their writing skills in English after writing compositions on a blog and commenting on their fellow classmates' compositions. An analysis of the students' final compositions when compared to a control group that wrote compositions in class revealed that the blogging group had significantly improved their writing performance in different grammar areas such as missed verb forms, articles, prepositions and wrong verb forms and prepositions (Hajjanejad 2012, p. 85). Also, Ge's study (2011) comparing Chinese students' development in writing in an English course revealed an improvement in English writing skills throughout the semester, with the lower ability group showing the most improvement and the advanced group showing the least improvement. This led to the conclusion that peer comments led to positive results (Ge 2011, p. 82). However, the more advanced level group enjoyed giving feedback to their peers in the beginning but lost interest as they progressed through the semester and felt confident about their skills. On the other hand, the lower ability group felt frustrated because they felt they worked harder to give helpful feedback to their classmates but did not feel they received enough help from their peers, and they felt inferior as students when compared to their peers (Ge 2011, p. 83).

Literature also discusses the use of blogs as a means to provide feedback on writing. Chen, Liu, Shih, Wu, and Yuan (2011) examined the effectiveness of blogging in improving the writing skills of elementary students through peer feedback. The results of the study indicated that using peer feedback through blogging improved the quality of the students' writing skills due to the ease of editing and convenience of finding information online. Students also agreed that they felt the use of peer feedback improved their writing, since they could write and offer feedback freely because of the anonymity of the whole process, it was faster and easier than writing by hand, and it helped them understand the editing process (Chen et al 2011, p. 4). Baecher, Schieble and Rosalia (2013) also highlighted the use of feedback in their study which found that the use of blogs helped both TESOL teacher candidates and learners. Using blogs helped the teacher candidates to offer feedback on academic writing tasks to English Language Learners (ELLs) and helped their understanding of ELLs' academic writing needs. The teacher candidates stated that looking at the other candidates' feedback helped them to better structure their own feedback and

the blog exchanges increased the individual attention given to students (Baecher, Schieble and Rosalia 2013, p. 14). The blog exchanges also seem to have increased the individual attention given to students, and learners felt that their writing improved as a result (Baecher, Schieble and Rosalia 2013, p. 13).

Lin (2015) also found feedback to be important in their investigation of learner-centered blogging in EFL undergraduate English students in Taiwan. They examined whether the integration of a blog in class contributed to any improvement in the students' writing skills, with students receiving feedback on their grammar, vocabulary, content, and organization. The research found that students demonstrated significant improvement in their writing as well as increased motivation and self-efficacy (Lin 2015, p. 452). Students thought the blog was an 'innovative platform' where they could express their thoughts freely and receive feedback, and that they learned useful vocabulary and grammar from the bloggers' corrections and comments (Lin 2015, p. 453). However, the fact that students did not post regularly on the blog despite their positive attitudes towards it was associated with apprehension and self-consciousness about their writing abilities. This inhibited them from posting, since they were afraid that they were going to lose face before a wide audience if their postings were incorrect. The decreased blogging activity was also attributed to cultural differences, as Taiwanese students are used to a more teacher-centered approach to learning. (Lin 2015, p. 453).

Blogging has also been found to be effective in practicing and improving more sophisticated skills in writing such as literature reviewing and information searching (Terkinarslan 2008, p. 410). Terkinarslan (2008) examined the effectiveness of blogs in academic writing skills, as well as students' attitudes towards blogging. His findings revealed that students perceived blogging as a positive experience, improving their paraphrasing, citation and referencing skills, areas which had been deemed as problematic for the specific group of students (Terkinarslan 2008, p. 410). Students stated that setting up the blogs was an easy and quick procedure and they felt that the blogs encouraged them to be more responsible in their writing, as what they would post would be viewed by many people (Terkinarslan 2008, p. 409). Terkinarslan suggests that blogs can be effective tools for students to advance their writing skills and contribute significantly to the students' online information searching and

literature review skills when trying to develop content by citing sources (Terkinarslan 2008, p. 410).

A similar study by Ovarec (2003) found that blogs may be helpful for students to cite sources and avoid plagiarism when writing assignments due to its hyperlink feature, which allows students to see the link with the source of their borrowed material. Because they are aware of an audience accessing their work, students potentially become more aware of plagiarism and put more effort into making proper citations. It is also more interactive, so it is claimed to be helpful for students to properly learn how to cite source material due to the peer pressure they feel because their classmates will access their posts (Ovarec 2003, p. 230).

Hansen's (2016) study with undergraduate university students registered in a writing course compared students' writing on a blog with traditional essay assignments. An analysis of the lexical density (the richness of vocabulary) of the written tasks was carried out, as well as an analysis of the average grade on each assignment type. Hansen (2016) found that there was a significant difference in the complexity of words used in traditional essays rather in blog posts which emphasized a more concise and conversational writing style. The blogs were found to have more references than essays, which led the researcher claim that blog assignments enable students to synthesize a wealth of information in oppose to traditional essays, even though it was noted that they tended to use more professional sources on their blogs rather than academic sources, where a repetition of sources was noticed (Hansen 2016, p. 96). The findings confirmed the initial hypothesis that traditional essays promote better academic research skills than blogs which are more helpful with concise, conversational writing. Hansen (2016) therefore suggests that one type of writing complements the other. However, since this was a pilot study, further research is needed to examine the difference between essays and blog writing with respect to improving student research and writing skills (Hansen 2016, p.98).

Marsden and Piggot-Irvine (2012) integrated writing through blogs in a Level 3 vocational course with students enrolled in the Certificate of Automotive and Mechanical Engineering course at UNITEC in New Zealand. Although writing and ICT were an innovation met with some resistance by students, the findings of

questionnaires and interviews revealed more positive attitudes towards blogging. All students agreed that ICT would be useful in their lives, and they felt that they could combine blogging with practical work required in their field of study (Marsden and Piggot-Irvine 2012, p. 39).

These studies contribute to the literature suggesting blogging as a tool that helps learners be more responsible and active in their learning (Ariffin and Yaacob 2014; Kelly et al 2010). Nonetheless, there have also been studies that counter this argument, claiming that while blogging might be fun and engaging for students, it might not be very intellectually challenging when it is used more casually or where students do not follow the requirements set by the instructor (Ellison and Wu 2008, p. 117).

3.2.2. Blogging and Speaking Skills

Speaking in a foreign language is an important skill allowing people to express their emotions, thoughts, and attitudes (Harb, Abu Bakar, and Krish 2013, p. 1027). However, speaking in a foreign language can be anxiety-provoking for learners, as the way we speak reflects who we are. Language students can feel discomfort and anxiety which has a negative impact on fluency in speaking, as they feel inhibited during face-to-face interactions due to the risk of embarrassment or humiliation (Kessler 2010, p. 362). The design of a computer-assisted language learning environment can help alleviate speaking anxiety, and the use of technology in enhancing language learners' speaking skills has received some attention in literature. The internet has greatly facilitated the way people communicate with a variety of platforms, tools, and applications to enhance asynchronous communication such as podcasting software, *Skype*, *Viber*, and *Facebook*. Using these in the classroom allows students to be exposed to a real audience in authentic contexts (Harb, Abu Bakar, and Krish 2013, p. 1028).

Literature supports the benefits of blogging in enhancing learners' speaking skills (Hsu, Wang and Comac, 2008; Sun 2009). However, voice blogging seems to be under-researched and only a few studies have explored its role in language learning (Huang 2015). Huang (2015) investigated the use of voice blogging by having learners at a university English language class read online materials and

record their responses or descriptions in voice blog posts. The students' reflections indicated that they went through four stages in order to produce their voice blog posts: reading to learn, planning and organizing, speaking, and sharing (Huang 2015, p. 155). When going through these stages, and particularly during the speaking stage, students overcame their fear of public speaking, felt proud of their accomplishment, and gained a sense of ownership over their voice productions (Huang 2015, p 165). Huang (2015) concludes that these four stages of voice blogging help combine reading and speaking skills in novel ways that cannot be accomplished through traditional learning. This can be achieved by online reading, sharing opinions through voice-blogging, and overall, by using language with a real purpose and an audience (Huang 2015, p. 167).

Hsu, Wang and Comac (2008) investigated student attitudes towards the effectiveness of audio-blogs to assist English language learning. Audio-blogging is an extension of blogging, where bloggers can replace written posts with voice recordings. Findings revealed that students felt more confident in speaking English, as the audio-blog allowed for additional practice and repeated listening (Hsu, Wang and Comac 2008, p. 190). In addition, the instructor felt that the blog offered an effective method to evaluate oral assignments and give personalized feedback, while the archiving feature of the blog allowed all posts to be listed in a reverse chronological order so that students' progress could be easily tracked. The most important outcome reported by the researchers was the cultivation of relationships:

the key to successful integration of audio-blogs into such a course is the interaction between the instructor and the students. The instructor should use the audio-blog to give assignments regularly and, what is more important, should provide students with constructive and accurate feedback that helps the students correct their own problems (Hsu, Wang and Comac 2008, p. 194).

However, Hsu, Wang and Comac (2008, p.193) reported some problems identified with student motivation in using blogs as well as in the learning outcomes, since there was no significant progress over the course of one semester.

According to Sun (2009), the availability of blogs has provided more opportunities for oral language practice outside the classroom. The participants

comprised of 46 university students in Taiwan taking oral communication classes with the aim to enhance their oral proficiency in English. A class blog was created for students to keep oral diaries of their tasks. Participants in this study stated that using a class blog offered them more opportunities to speak in English and offer oral peer feedback, which helped them in turn to reduce their speaking anxiety, feel more relaxed, and speak more fluently (Sun 2009, p.97). Students felt that they could notice their own weaknesses by listening to their classmates' posts, and by comparing and contrasting them to their own posts. They also felt that this helped them to find different ways to express themselves (Sun 2009, p. 96). Sun posits that:

the blog's speaking environment, where freedom and safety were paramount, encouraged students to take risks with the target language and to emphasize content over form, which resulted in a sense of improved fluency. In addition, the task-based nature of blogging promotes authentic and purposeful language use, with the form playing a secondary role... This also aids students' fluency development (Sun 2009, p.98).

Nonetheless, some students recognized that they were more interested in the beginning but lost interest towards the end of the semester and did not post regularly or made several posts at once rather than evenly distributing them throughout the semester (Sun 2009, p. 98). It is important for students to feel that the integration of the blog in their language course is pedagogically relevant, so that they can feel motivated to engage in the activities and remain interested in blogging as well. Sun (2009) emphasizes the significance of helping learners understand that keeping and using a blog regularly will help them improve their language performance and their final course grade. Understanding how the blog is relevant to their learning will help sustain their interest in remaining active in blogging if they feel that it can help enhance their performance and in effect their overall course grade (Sun 2009, p.99).

Song (2009) also studied the effects of an online oral English diary through an English course at a university setting in Seoul. Students showed an improvement in their spoken performance and felt that their speaking skills in English improved, even though some also noted lack of feedback as a disadvantage (Song 2008, p. 134). Students also stated that they felt more confident and less

anxious about speaking in English even though they recognized that their speech still contained errors (Song 2009, p. 137). Further to this, the archiving feature of the blogs seemed to help learners keep track of their improvement and use as observation models to measure their own strong and weak points as well as against their classmates'.

Hung and Huang's research also indicated that when students observed their peers' posts, they were influenced in terms of presentation behaviors, which in turn enhanced their language learning (Hung and Huang 2015, p. 624). However, speaking skills like pace, diction, eye contact, body language, language use and vocabulary did not appear to improve significantly, a finding which was attributed mainly to lack of training and time (Hung and Huang 2015, p. 624). The researchers suggested that blended learning that combines both face to face and virtual presentations on the blogs can create more opportunities for rehearsal which can enhance learners' presentation skills (Hung and Huang 2015, p. 626).

In the United States, Kim (2011) investigated the effectiveness of podcasting and blogging with ESL teacher candidates. The participants saw the value of blogging and podcasting as tools that offer opportunities for revision and reflection of their written work. Their attitudes also revealed that they were motivated to learn through the blog, although they perceived podcasting as a challenge in that they found it time-consuming (Kim 2011, p. 637). However, they felt satisfied when they saw their projects published, and they saw the process as positive and productive that enhanced their confidence. They also felt that their new competence in using technology in their classes "enhanced their professional development" (Kim 2011, p. 638).

3.2.3. Blogging and Online Peer Feedback

Allowing students to offer feedback on their classmates' writing is an approach that has been widely adopted in language teaching classes as a method to enhance collaboration among students by offering comments on each other's written tasks, and ultimately improve their writing skills through their

subsequent revisions (Hansen and Liu 2005; Pham and Usaha 2016). Peer feedback supports the writing process of draft writing and enables both the reader and the writer to reorganize their knowledge of the target language (Hansen and Liu 2005). Peer editing helps learners gain more control over their learning and feel more independent, as they become more active in their learning (Hyland and Hyland 2006). By having access to their peers' writing and offering feedback, learners realize that their classmates have similar difficulties as them in learning a language and this helps them gain more confidence and reduce their apprehension (Hyland and Hyland 2006, p. 90).

Shehadeh's (2011) study examined student perceptions on whether collaborative writing and peer feedback had an impact on their writing in a second language. The results of his study indicated that peer feedback enhanced student confidence in their speaking and writing skills (Shehadeh 2011, p. 296). Some students also stated that through these collaborative activities, they realized that other students also make mistakes and that they are not the only ones who have difficulties. Peer feedback helped them overcome their anxiety about making mistakes in a foreign language and become more relaxed throughout the learning process (Shehadeh 2011, p. 296).

Engaging in online peer feedback can increase student participation and can enhance the motivation of less proficient students who may feel less threatened by feedback from their peers (Warschauer, 2002 cited in Hyland and Hyland 2006, p. 93). Peer feedback that takes place online, called e-peer response, moves the ability to offer feedback beyond the classroom, and is valuable in language learning (Pham and Usaha 2015, p. 724). The ability to collaborate online to engage in peer feedback allows students to become more active in the learning process, since they can engage in discussions with their peers, ask questions for clarification, negotiate meaning and take more initiative in the learning process (Warschauer 2002 cited in Hyland and Hyland 2006, p. 93). Learning becomes more student-centered and encourages a sense of community (Warschauer, 2002 cited in Hyland and Hyland 2006, p. 93). Finally, e-peer response increases the amount of writing students can produce, boosts motivation, makes writing more readily available to share and allows the instructors to monitor the students' writing and responses more easily (Hyland

and Hyland 2006, pp. 93-94).

Olofsson, Lindberg and Stodberg (2011) investigated the use of a video blog with written postings to gain insight into the students' meaning-making processes by analyzing their postings. Students' postings revealed that they showed deeper understanding of their learning through peer commenting and self-reflection. Presenting their comments and postings on the blog allowed students "to be seen, commented, helped or even judged by co-students and teachers" (Olofsson, Lindberg and Stodberg 2011, p. 51), which in turn allowed them to engage in a dialogue, exchange and negotiate meaning and reach a deeper understanding of ideas. In effect, the blog became a safe place for students to express their ideas and receive support from their peers through different opportunities for collaboration. Shih's (2012) study also revealed that students felt that they benefited from collaborative peer feedback during learning, by reviewing their peers' and their own work through blogging. They stated that giving comments to their classmates helped them improve their own writing as well, as they would go back to their own writing and check whether they had made the same mistakes as well (p. 208). This in effect shows that online peer feedback helps students engage in more self-reflection and become more critical of their own work.

Additionally, peer feedback activities help improve the writing and other language abilities of students by negotiating meaning (Berg 1999). It also helps learners develop audience awareness, since they edit and review their writing with an audience in mind (Berg 1999, p. 232). Berg (1999) emphasized the importance of training students to give feedback to their peers, as her study indicated that peer feedback proved to be more beneficial when students had prior training. Trained students gave more meaningful feedback of higher quality that helped their peers revise their written drafts more successfully (Berg 1999, p. 230).

3.2.4. Blogging and Reflection

Reflection is defined as "a mental process with purpose and/or outcome in which manipulation of meaning is applied to relatively complicated or unstructured ideas in learning or to problems for which there is no obvious solution" (Moon

1999 cited in Xie, Ke and Sharma 2008, p. 19). The reflective process comprises of many levels, such as association, integration, validation, and appropriation, and it is situated as an important part of learning. Ong (2000) suggests that the main goal of reflective practice is to support the process of thinking and in effect construct knowledge and make meaning for the learner (cited in Al Khateeb 2016, p.3). Self-reflection in education can be identified by concepts such as “reflective practice, self-review and awareness, critical evaluation, self-appraisal and personal cognizance” (Yip 2006 cited in Al Khateeb, p.3).

Blogs offer a personal writing space which can be easily shared and can encourage users to develop learning communities through exchanging links or leaving comments. In effect, blogs can be seen as tools that combine both self-reflection as well as interaction among peers through different learning processes (Richardson 2006 cited in Yang Chang 2012; Yang 2009). Dippold's study (2009) acknowledges that providing feedback through a blog commenting feature helps students engage in self-reflection. This process of self-reflection is described by the researcher as having a positive effect on students' learning which becomes more active through receiving feedback as opposed to more passive learning (Dippold 2009, p. 30). Xie et al's study (2008) found that students who engaged in online peer feedback through blogging increased the development of their reflective thinking over time. However, the researchers noted that students who engaged in blogging in isolation without being involved in peer feedback showed an even higher level of reflection over time compared to the group that engaged in peer feedback (Xie et al 2009, p. 22).

Yang (2009) explored the use of blogs as a reflective platform for EFL student teachers. Blogs were used to help students reflect on their own learning processes as well as engage in group reflective dialogues (Yang 2009, p. 11). The data collected revealed that most of the student teachers showed positive attitudes towards blogs as reflective tools. They felt that the discussions were inviting since there were no limitations of time and space, and the fact that there was no face-to-face interaction allowed their comments to be more critical (Yang 2009, p. 17).

Kang, Bonk and Kim (2011) also indicate that blogs can be used as social learning

tools, with which students can reflect on their own learning and experience a community of practice through information sharing, self-reflection, and deeper learning through peer feedback. In particular, blogs constitute a form of learning through which the instructor is no longer the one who has the power in the class. Students have more active participation in learning, reinforcing a more learner-centered approach, with collaboration, reflection, and knowledge-sharing being the educational values fostered in this environment (Kang, Bong and Kim 2011, p. 233). Furthermore, Farmer, Yue and Brook's case study (2008) drew on the university students' experience with blogging in the Cultural Studies program at the University of Melbourne. Students were instructed to reflect upon and discuss course content in their blogs and they were also free to use their blogs in any way they wanted as long as they used English. Student responses in a questionnaire revealed that they felt that they could voice their reflections for others to read and enabled them to have an online interaction with other students. In addition, Ducate and Lomicka (2008) found that blogs promote a sense of responsibility, because students feel that their fellow students depend on them via their comments.

A study by Olofsson, Lindberg and Hauge (2011) explored how blogs can support peer-to-peer learning and formative assessment and thus foster reflection in an online higher education setting. Students set up their own blogs and posted comments and reflections on the content of their classmates' blogs. Analysis of the blog comments revealed that the blogs functioned as a resource for communication among peers. It was also observed that students were willing to help each other understand the content rather than point out errors (Olofsson, Lindberg and Hauge 2011, p.189). The researchers highlight that their study was an example of educational technology use that involved a theoretically informed design (Olofsson, Lindberg and Hauge 2011, p. 189). The blogs were designed specifically to foster "reflective practice in which the blogs served both a meta-reflective function and as reflections concerning other learners' comments related to one's own blog posting" (Olofsson, Lindberg and Hauge 2011, p. 189).

Using blogs for journals as a means for self-reflection is widely used in teacher training; the nature of blogging as an online journal seems to help student teachers as well as novice teachers to reflect on their own learning and at the

same time learn how to use technology in their own teaching (Arnold and Ducate 2006; Zandi, Thang, and Krish 2014). Pinya and Rosselló (2016) examined the use of blogs in an Educational Reflection and Innovation course in an Early Childhood Education degree in Spain. The blog was utilized as a means to communicate and record the activities linked to the course, as well as a way for students to reflect on and self-assess their learning in relation to different professional skills (Pinya and Rosselló 2016, p. 1057). The majority of students recognized that the blog allowed reflection in a way that they had not experienced in their learning before. However, some students also stated that the integration of the blog entailed more work on their part since they had to reflect and recognize the competencies they had achieved, and that they also had to visit and comment on their classmates' blogs (Pinya and Rosselló 2016, p. 1065).

3.3. Blogging in English for Specific Purposes

As I mentioned in Chapter One, the integration of blogging in ESP courses has not been extensively researched so far, with only a few studies reporting the impact of blogging in ESP courses. Nonetheless, the limited number of studies that exist point to the positive impact of blogs in ESP learners' learning process. This section will present the studies relating to the use of blogging in English for Specific Purposes.

Cretiu (2016) emphasizes how helpful the integration of a blog was in her ESP class in terms of helping her prepare the course and the individual tasks for students, and by providing all the authentic texts needed for the students to read and comment on. The blog established a means of communication with the students outside the classroom and helped prompt students to study and practice their English language skills (Cretiu 2016, p. 35). Cretiu suggests the following:

The online medium can successfully facilitate the accomplishment of the ESP practitioner's roles [...]: being at the same time a teacher-generating authentic communication and providing the best teaching methods, a collaborator-with ESP colleagues and content specialist, a course designer, a material provider-of the best teaching aids, a researcher-continuously upgrading his/her knowledge of both the ESP context and of the specific field and an evaluator- of the students' response to the methods and materials

s/he uses (Cretiu 2016, p. 35).

She established the blog as a permanent medium of communication not only between the instructor and the students, but between students themselves, who were encouraged to produce their own online materials to use for their later professional lives (Cretiu 2016, p. 36). Apart from addressing different learning styles, Cretiu asserted that incorporating a digital component in the classroom helps lower the need to buy and constantly update textbooks, which can be costly for both educators and students. Electronic books and software are cheaper than paper versions and several online tools are accessible for free (Cretiu 2016, p. 27). For instance, there are many blogs available online that are completely free of charge and easy to use. These are important factors that can assist with both teaching and learning.

A study by Esteban and Tejedor Martinez (2014) explored the use of Web 2.0 technologies such as wikis, blogs, Blackboard, and online dictionaries to implement constructive, communicative, and task-based activities in ESP courses. Students worked both independently and collaboratively to build their knowledge and the researchers found that developing and using a blog allowed students to develop independent learning skills. By evaluating and analysing content, students engaged in the process of reflection, not only in finding language errors, but also in thinking more about the practice of carrying out different tasks in their field of study (Esteban and Tejedor Martinez 2014, p. 345). The researchers acknowledged that such virtual tools did not allow the evaluation of students' proficiency in the language, such as aptitude, or the evaluation of problems that occur with face-to-face interaction (Esteban and Tejedor Martinez 2014, p. 345-346). Nonetheless, they found that technology provided motivation for learners to engage with the English language related to their professional field.

Pop (2016) focused on examining the use of blogging for feedback and reflection in the context of an English for Medicine course in a Hungarian university. The intention was for the students to use the blog on a voluntary basis in order to have more opportunities to practice their writing skills, while also engaging in authentic reading and listening tasks related to their field of study. In addition to language practice, students engaged in feedback on teaching and learning

(Pop 2016, p. 177). The study revealed that most of the students engaged in the majority of blog tasks even though it was voluntary and wrote extensively outside the classroom. The blog allowed the instructor to provide personal feedback to all students, students engaged in peer feedback, as well as in self-correction with the purpose to improve their writing skills. Finally, students were seen as taking more responsibility in their own writing and in realising the significance of several revisions in improving writing (Pop 2016, p. 179). Pop suggested that a blended approach to writing can address the different learning styles and preferences of students. Peer feedback helped students become more reflective in their writing practice, more aware of the process of learning, more confident that their opinion matters, and more active in their learning (Pop 2016, p. 184).

Montero-Fleta and Perez-Sabater (2014) explored the use of online blogs in a university ESP course through the collection of both quantitative data via the measurement of students' participation in the blogs, as well as qualitative data through the administration of a questionnaire and individual student interviews in order to elicit their views on the integration of blogging in their course. Students completed course assignments by publishing posts, commenting, expressing their views, and engaging in online discussions (Montero-Fleta and Perez-Sabater 2014). The findings suggest that motivation increased because students actively engaged in authentic communication on the blogs relating to their field of study. The participants stated that they enjoyed the freedom of expressing themselves on the blog, which is important because enjoyment can enhance intrinsic motivation (Montero-Fleta and Perez-Sabater 2014, p. 413). They also enjoyed exchanging feedback with their classmates, reflecting on ideas and dealing with subjects relevant to their future professional careers. The students also seemed appreciative of the frequent communication with their instructor and the guidance and support they received through the online platform. Finally, students felt that their linguistic accuracy and fluency improved because they spent a lot of time developing their posts in order to attract their audience's interest. Therefore, it was suggested that because there was an audience reading the students' posts, they put more effort and were more careful with their writing (Montero-Fleta and Perez-Sabater 2014, p. 413).

Another study investigating the integration of vlogging (video blogging) in an ESP course is the research conducted by Hung (2010). Hung (2010) used vlogging to enhance the opportunities that students had to use the language they were learning. The research focused on the students' perceptions of integrating vlogs in their Business Oral Communication class and students reported positive feelings towards the vlog project. The vlogs helped them organize and reflect on their videos and offered them the ability to archive and easily track their video posts (Hung 2010). Students also stated that the blogs freed them from time limitations and offered them opportunities for self-evaluation, professional development, peer learning and technical competencies (Hung 2010, pp. 742-743).

Zeqiri (2013) explored the use of weblogs in an ESP for Communication Sciences university-level course. Blogs were used as a supplementary learning tool for the course, where students engaged in posting and commenting both in and out of the classroom (Zeqiri 2013, p.6). Both quantitative and qualitative data were gathered through student questionnaires, blog posts, plus teacher analysis and evaluations of the process. The findings of the study showed that students did not use the blog effectively unless they had sufficient motivation and encouragement from the instructor. However, it was suggested by the researcher that blogs can be used as an educational tool for any ESP course, as blogging can help increase student-student and teacher-student communication (Zeqiri 2013, p12). Blogging is a platform that allows students to self-reflect, engage in critical thinking, engage in collaboration and peer feedback, it can help students become more autonomous, and it can also help to build a learning community (Zeqiri 2013, pp.12-13).

Finally, Kavaliauskiene and Anusiene (2010) studied the integration of a blog and a wiki in an ESP course taken by first-year students in the Faculty of Social Policy in Lithuania. The blog and wiki were used separately on courses across different semesters to encourage students to practice writing and collaboration through the exchange peer feedback as well as through engagement in self-reflection on their skills. The students' comments revealed overall positive attitudes towards blogging even when they were not satisfied by their ability in writing their assignments (Kavaliauskiene and Anusiene 2010, p.58). The use of wikis was not

perceived as positively and it seemed to be unproductive despite the support received: one student commented that “wikis are full of chaos” (Kavaliauskiene and Anusiene 2010, p.58). The authors commented that “learners failed to use this technology for collaboration in improving their writing skills and expressed unanimous dislike to applying wikis in the future” (Kavaliauskiene and Anusiene 2010, p.58). This was attributed to the fact that students felt that their individual contributions to the wikis were lost (perhaps due to the editing feature of wikis that allows members to work and edit common documents posted). Students also felt that their edits on their peers’ contributions were not successful as they did not respond to them. This led students to feel demotivated and to think that working on the wiki was a waste of their time (Kavaliauskiene and Anusiene 2010, p. 54).

3.4. Challenges with Blogging in Education and Learning

Kerawalla, Minocha, Kirkup and Conole (2008) explored student attitudes towards blogging in a distance learning Master's course at the UK Open University. The course consisted of mostly mature self-motivated learners who were also educators themselves. While many of the students enjoyed blogging and found it beneficial, some found it problematic. Some students felt anxious about revealing their academic weaknesses to others and felt that they did not have anything interesting to say on the blog. They merely completed course activities. Others chose to use the blog for themselves, did not share content with their peers and were not interested in seeking or responding to any comments received (Kerawalla et al 2008, p. 31). The instructors designed their courses with specific pre-planned blogging tasks, but the researchers found that there were five different types of blogging behaviour across the students. The researchers suggested that blogging activities should be flexible in order to allow learners to adapt blogging to their own needs, while also completing the course activities (Kerawalla et al 2008, p. 32).

Ciampa and Gallagher (2017) discussed challenges which in-service elementary and secondary teachers in southern Ontario faced with the integration of blogging in their professional learning and development. The most frequently mentioned challenges related to lack of time, engagement, technical

competence, technical issues, immediacy, and synchronous interactivity (Ciampa and Gallagher 2017, p. 905-906). Fisher, Perenyi and Birdthistle (2018) highlighted challenges in the integration of blogging in blended learning. They characterized blogging as a medium related with time efficiency and convenience from the students' perspective rather than contributing to higher academic performance. Tasks must be carefully designed by the instructor. Students in the Fisher, Perenyi and Birdthistle's (2018) study felt satisfied with blogging more because of its convenience rather than as a tool that helped them reach the course learning outcomes.

Dalgarno, Reupert and Bishop (2015) examined university student teachers' attitudes and engagement in blogging while on professional placement in primary schools in Australia. An analysis of student questionnaires and focus group interviews of participants revealed a variety of responses from students as to whether they found reflection through blogging a useful activity. The majority of students (55%) did not find the blogging activities helpful or useful to them, and this was attributed to the fact that they found it time consuming and did not consider it a priority when compared to activities that helped them prepare for their classes. It was claimed that because blogging coincided with their school placement, which demanded a lot of their time and preparation, it affected their engagement and interest in the blog (Dalgarno, Reupert and Bishop 2015, p. 204). An additional reason that could have added to the students' frustration was also due to limited feedback received from peers, who reported that they did not feel they had enough credibility to offer feedback, they were concerned about being judged, and they valued the instructor feedback more (Dalgarno, Reupert and Bishop 2015, p. 204).

Finally, a study by Thomas (2017) focused on describing the challenges undergraduate university students faced by posting reflective blog posts as part of a composition class (p. 113). Students had to reflect on each writing assignment they had to complete for the course in the form of a journal, detailing their experience and then commenting on their peers' posts on the same assignment (Thomas 2017, p. 114). Some students showed lack of confidence using the blog and stated their fears of not being able to express their emotions through the blog (Thomas 2017, p. 117). Nonetheless, despite the

challenges students faced through the blog, they also showed a sense of accomplishment through their journals with respect to freedom of expression; they encouraged and provided help to their peers through the feedback they posted on their blogs (Thomas 2017, p. 118). The use of the blog also allowed the instructor to better understand the challenges their students were facing in writing and adapt the course accordingly (Thomas 2017, p. 120).

Research comparing AWE (Automated Writing Evaluation) and PE (Peer Evaluation) conducted by Lai (2010) investigated potential challenges and benefits of using new technologies in teaching English writing to undergraduate students in a college in Taiwan. Both assessment methods were favorably received by students; students engaged in more interaction and co-construction of knowledge through peer evaluation, while they stated that interacting with peers felt like having a real audience as opposed to AWE, which felt like an impersonal and dehumanizing method of instruction (Lai 2010, p. 442-443). Students also felt that the automated feedback was too vague, general, and fixed, while that was not an issue with peer feedback, as they received specific comments and identified errors and discussed how to correct them, which helped them revise their writing (Lai 2010, p. 443).

However, Vurdien (2013) reported hesitation from students in participating in blogging peer-feedback activities. Her study with ESL students reported that, while students found the integration of blogging in their class motivating and had positive attitudes towards blogging as a means of communication, they also had feelings of embarrassment in offering peer feedback and fear of offending their classmates with any negative comments. This led to very limited peer feedback exchange (Vurdien 2013, p. 137).

3.5. Summary

In this chapter I focused on presenting the literature related to the use of blogging and language learning (BALL), with more detailed discussions of the literature discussing the effect of blogging on learners' writing and speaking performance, as well as the impact of online peer feedback in learning, how blogging can support reflection and finally some challenges with respect to the

use of blogging in language learning. The use of weblogs as having a positive impact on English language learners' writing skills appears to be supported in research (Akçay and Arslan 2010; Montero-Fleta and Perez-Sabater 2010; Noytim 2010; Wright, White, Hirst, and Cann 2014). The interactive platform of a blog enables learners to exchange comments and offer feedback, which allows learners to reflect on their own work. Keeping learners active in their learning through collaboration by asking questions, negotiating meaning, and offering feedback may also allow them to write more effectively in English. The integration of a blog in language courses may enable learners to practice and improve their speaking skills as well through recording podcasts or recording videos of themselves, publishing them on the blog and sharing oral feedback through the blog's commenting feature (Harb et al 2013; Hung and Huang 2015; Hsu, Wang and Comac 2008; Kim 2011; Song 2009; Sun 2009).

The next chapter will focus on the presentation of the methodology and methods I used to develop my research study.

Chapter Four: Methodology and Methods

4.1. Introduction

In this chapter, I will discuss the methodology I used to inform my study, and the methods I used to collect and analyze the data. My study design is based on qualitative action research. Action research is an example of a methodology that lies within the interpretivist paradigm (in education in particular) which will be discussed in the next section as part of the discussion of my research approach. This section will also discuss my approach to the literature before looking in depth at action research. I will then outline the methods used to gather and analyze data in my study.

4.2. Research Approach

I employed a qualitative methodology for my study. Qualitative research is a broad term, but it can be defined as “an approach that allows you to examine people’s experiences in detail, by using a specific set of research methods such as in-depth interviews, focus group discussions, observations, content analysis, visual methods, and life histories or biographies” (Hennink, Hutter and Bailey 2011, p.8). Some features that characterize qualitative research include investigating a problem and creating a detailed understanding of a phenomenon; gathering data from speech in order to obtain the participants’ viewpoints; and analyzing data using text analysis to identify themes (Creswell 2012, p.16).

My research is situated within the interpretivist paradigm. The term ‘paradigm’ refers to the theoretical framework that underpins a research study (Mackenzie and Knipe 2016, p, 6). Guba and Lincoln (1994, p.105) define a paradigm as “the basic belief system and worldview that guides the investigator, not only in choices of method but in ontologically and epistemologically fundamental ways.” According to Katsarou (2017), the concepts that comprise the paradigm are: meaning, experience, understanding, interpretation and interaction. Research in the interpretivist paradigm aims to explore the meanings the subject attributes to their own action. The interpretivist paradigm contends that “the effect of people’s actions on their world creates the possibility that people may differ in their responses to the same or similar situations” (Gage 1989, p.5).

Katsarou (2017) states that one important objective of interpretivist research is to interpret “complex sets of data to interpret social life and action” (Katsarou 2017, p. 676). Interpretivist researchers see the world as subjective and socially constructed; in other words, there is not one reality, but multiple realities. From a methodological perspective, interpretivists use different methods and techniques to gain an in-depth understanding of the situation they are exploring (Yanow 2006 cited in Dean 2018, p. 3). Additionally, as discussed in Gage (1989), “individuals are able to construct their own social reality, rather than having reality always be the determiner of the individual’s perceptions” (p. 50). Therefore, research in the interpretivist paradigm aims at understanding human experiences (Mackenzie and Knipe 2016, p.3) and suggests that reality is constructed socially, with the researcher studying a situation based on the participants’ views of specific situations (Mackenzie and Knipe 2016). Additionally, rather than beginning with a theory, constructivists/interpretivists produce or develop a theory inductively during their research by developing theories or patterns based on their data. Constructivists do not “generally begin with a theory” (as with post-positivists), but “generate or inductively develop a theory or pattern of meanings” throughout the research process (Creswell 2003 cited in Mackenzie and Knipe 2016, p.3).

The term *Interpretivist Turn* “was coined to demark research practices that turn away from de-humanized, objective research towards a re-humanized, contextual and reflexive approach, which centralizes human meaning making and knowledge claims” (Yanow and Schwartz-Shea cited in Dean 2018, p. 3). Research in the interpretivist paradigm aims at understanding “the world of human experience” (Cohen and Manion cited in Mackenzie and Knipe 2016, p.3) and suggests that reality is constructed socially, with the researcher studying a situation based on the participants’ views of specific situations (Mackenzie and Knipe 2016). Interpretivist researchers usually use qualitative methods of data collection and analysis, or a mixed methods’ approach, in which they employ both quantitative and qualitative data (Mackenzie and Knipe 2016, p. 3). The choice of paradigm “does not prescribe or prohibit” using one method over the other (Mackenzie and Knipe 2016, p. 6).

In terms of my approach to the research literature, I used a narrative review rather than conducting a synthesis. I did this in order to provide a broad overview of my topic with the purpose of improving my understanding of the area in depth. The narrative review presents a “non-systematic summation and analysis of available literature on a specific topic of interest” (Gregory and Denniss 2018, p. 893). Narrative reviews describe research by presenting information on aspects such as the methodology, and/or the participants and findings, using some form of evaluation with the purpose to combine and coherently present different perspectives on a particular research subject (Cooper and Hedges cited in Rozas and Klein 2010, p. 390). Narrative reviews are considered important in social sciences because “they set the stage for understanding where a particular body of research began, is currently and should go in the future” (Rozas and Klein 2010, pp. 394-395). They also help identify any gaps that exist in research and offer the reader a detailed overview of the relevant knowledge that exists on the specific topic (Rozas and Klein 2010, pp. 394-395).

When I began reading through the relevant literature related to the use of blogging in language teaching with respect to its role in helping students practice their writing and speaking skills, my goal was to develop an understanding of the findings that exist in that area. Later on, when getting acquainted with previous studies on the use of blogging and ESP courses, which was the main focus of my research, I tried to gain insight into current knowledge in ESP that informs my field of study. The narrative review helped me realize the lack of research in the use of blogging in ESP courses in general, and in Cyprus in particular. Given that there is a gap in the literature, this brings added value to my thesis and my research could contribute knowledge to this area.

4.3. Action Research as a Methodology

This section will discuss educational action research, by presenting definitions of action research, its origins, and how it informs my own research study. Action research encourages change in practice. It is “a critical and self-critical process aimed at animating transformations through individual and collective self-transformation” (Kemmis 2009, p. 463). The origin of action research is

attributed to Kurt Lewin and his associates in the 1930s, who offered details on the ways social relationships of groups and between groups can be developed in order to maintain communication and co-operation through his action research. (Adelman 1993, p.7).

Action research in the field of education was introduced by Stephen Corey in America in the 1950s (Hendricks 2019, p. 34). Until that time, educators seemed disconnected from research and any application of research findings did not seem to translate into improvements in the classroom (Hendricks 2019, p. 34). Corey thought that the gap between theory and practice could be bridged by rejecting the idea that prevailed at the time that the role of the teacher was to read studies undertaken by professional researchers and apply those in the classroom in order to improve as teachers (Hendricks 2019). Instead, Corey supported the idea that practitioners need to “define a problem important to them, generate their own hypotheses about the problem, and engage in their own study of that problem in order for real changes to occur in the classroom” (Hendricks 2019, p. 37).

In England, Laurence Stenhouse implemented the Humanities Curriculum Project (HCP), which was instrumental in making action research viewed as a type of teacher research during the teacher-researcher movement in the decade of 1960-1970s (Hendricks 2019, p.41). This project was intended to be used as a way for teachers to examine significant problems in their schools and encourage a more critically reflective attitude to teaching rather than just apply a curriculum given to them by researchers (Hendricks 2019, p.41). Teachers assumed a more active role in causing change in education during this movement. Elliot, one of the pioneers of action research, along with Adelman, regarded action research as aiming at helping reach an understanding and find solutions to practical problems within the classroom, but also develop theories of teaching by studying whether any solutions suggested can be generalizable (Hendricks 2019, p. 43).

As action research developed further throughout the years in England and America, there was more emphasis on the collaboration between teachers and researchers with the purpose to enhance students' achievement rather than

focusing more on the teachers' practices. However, in other parts of the world, such as Australia, educational action research was viewed more as a self-reflective inquiry from the part of the teachers, with the purpose to critically examine and evaluate their own practices. Gradually, educational action research spread throughout the world and became part of both pre-service and in-service education. Educational action research was met with criticism by researchers questioning its rigor and the teachers' ability to undertake research, as well as by claiming that teachers doing research would depart from teaching, and this therefore would negatively affect the students' improvement (Hodgkinson 1957 cited in Hendricks 2019, p. 39). This criticism led to a decrease in educational action research in the several years that followed. In the 1950s, Shumsky and Taba started to change the approach to action research from viewing the teacher as a researcher, to viewing the teacher as a learner. So, in this light, action research was seen as a method for assisting teachers' professional development with the purpose to improve their own teaching practice (Hendricks 2019, p. 40).

With regards to educational action research, various definitions point to its contribution as a method for educators to explore their teaching practices with the purpose to improve their own practice, or students' performance, or ultimately their schools. Some definitions present educational action research as "a process of systematically evaluating the consequences of educational decisions and adjusting practice to maximize effectiveness" (McLean cited in James and Augustin 2018, p. 335). Educational action research can be referred to as 'teacher research,' 'teaching inquiry,' 'classroom research,' or 'practitioner inquiry' (James and Augustin 2018, p.336). Educational action research is characterized by either the identification of a problem pertaining to education and the suggestion of solutions through systematic examination of the teaching process, or the development of a new idea and critical reflection on whether it is effective (James and Augustin 2018, p.337). I will firstly discuss action research in depth before I discuss practitioner research as a form of action research.

Some broad types of action research as classified by Kemmis and McTaggart are participatory research, critical action research, classroom action research,

action learning, action science, soft systems' approaches and industrial action research (cited in Kemmis 2009, p. 469). Additionally, action research is divided into different categories in terms of the purpose each category serves. Kemmis (2009) states that action research can be:

- Technical, where improving the outcomes of practice consists of the practitioner's goal and the participants are the objects of the research, with no active participation or voice.
- Practical, where the practitioner aims at investigating the results and long-term impact of the practice in order to discover different types of criteria to assess the practice, and the participants are more involved in the research- they have a voice by having opportunities to express their views.
- Critical, where the researcher is engaged in examining social realities with the aim to discover if social or educational practices have any unsustainable impact and it is collective with people reflecting together on the type, conduct and impact of their practices (Kemmis 2009, pp. 469-471).

According to Elliot (1991), action research “is the study of a social situation with a view to improving the quality of action within it” (cited in Taber 2007, p.107). Action research focuses on effecting some kind of change in a situation that is personally experienced (Taber 2007). It has become very common in educational professions which focus on practitioner research and aim at solving a problem that occurs in the classroom or at improving teaching practices rather than bringing about new knowledge on a subject. In other words, action research is more concerned with making interventions and introducing changes in the practitioners' own practice within their own professional context rather than necessarily producing knowledge or developing new theories (Taber 2007, p. 109).

Action research does not necessarily have to be about identifying a problem and exploring possible creative solutions to this problem. It can be also derived by an

educator's interests or evaluation of new ideas with the purpose of improving their teaching (James and Augustin 2018, p.338). It can also be used by practitioners at any stage of their careers. For instance, a qualitative study at a university in Norway investigated how knowledge acquired through action research interacted with the experiences that student teachers gained through their teaching in action research projects, as well as the outcomes of conducting research while doing their practicum (Ulvik, Riese and Roness 2018, p. 273). Action research is presented here as being different from teaching, as it is "more systematic, more self-reflective and it can reach the wider public" (Ulvik et al 2018, p. 276). During their action research projects, student teachers were required to reflect on how the theory of teaching related to their findings from their teaching practices during their practicum. The students felt they were more critical of their teaching, learned how to organize their thoughts, felt encouraged to try new things and moved 'beyond their comfort zone,' taking thus control of their own professional development (Ulvik et al 2018, p. 281).

Some challenges identified with action research conducted by teachers pertain to the difficulty of individuals changing the way they think or act due to 'ambivalence and uncertainty' (James and Augustin 2018, p.344). Also, teachers might not have the capacity, confidence, expertise, or time to be involved in action research with the purpose to improve their teaching (James and Augustin 2018, p.344). Further to this, the issue of sustainability is a factor that limits teachers from conducting action research, due to the fact that teachers may not have the necessary resources or motivation (James and Augustin 2018, p. 344). Apart from this, the debate over whether action research is a legitimate research method can make teachers hesitant, along with feelings of whether teachers can be capable of being researchers (James and Augustin 2018, p.344).

Despite the challenges, action research has several advantages: "...participants and researchers are accessible, the 'problems' are specified and contextualized, it is collaborative, it is procedural, and proximity allows action to take place almost immediately" (James and Augustin 2018, p.345). It can have an impact on both teaching and learning and result in enhancing teaching practices, due to its proximity to where actual teaching and learning takes place. Teaching is "dynamic and without fixed answers" (Ulvik et al 2018, p.284) so when teachers

use action research to “relate their judgement to theory and discuss it with other involved parties, their decisions are informed” (Willis and Edwards 2014, cited in Ulvik et al 2018, p. 284). Additionally, it is recognized as having the potential to link theory with practice in a way that can “strengthen practice, empower practitioners, and... promote professional development in education” (Riel and Rowell 2017, p. 668).

When action research is linked to empowering or developing teacher practitioners, it is often called practitioner research. This refers to research that is carried out by teachers in their classrooms. It is informed by action research principles, such as identifying a problem or question, collecting, analyzing data and interpreting the findings (Ellis 2012, p.21). However, Ellis (2012) highlights that practitioner research does not follow action research principles rigidly because practitioner research is centered around the instructor’s classroom and the specific group of learners that they teach. Its contribution should therefore be to inform the teacher’s practice and contribute to the teacher’s development through the reflections that take place during this process (Ellis 2012, p. 26).

Ellis (2012) also presents different steps to practitioner research, which consist of: identifying a problem relating to a particular educational context; gathering relevant data; finding a solution to the problem and finding ways to ‘try out’ the solution; implementing the solution in the particular educational context; collecting data to evaluate whether the solution is effective; and, where applicable, revising the solution. Action research may therefore be cyclical if it involves constant research to find solutions to problems that may arise during the study (Ellis 2012, p. 27). On the other hand, a cycle may not be necessary if the solution is suitable, or new and different issues emerge for research (Ellis 2012). Finally, Ellis comments that research on language teaching is not about finding answers “about the best way to teach,” but more about gaining ‘insights’ for teachers who will make professional judgments as to whether insights are applicable to their own educational settings and classroom contexts (Ellis 2010, p. 49).

Practitioner research in the context of ESP teaching can be helpful for instructors to professionally develop by reflecting on their teaching practice

with the purpose of improving it (Chen 2000). Chen states that “in the context of language education, its [action research’s] primary goal is to foster teachers’ capacity to reflect on and improve their language teaching practice and thereby grow in personal professionalism” (Chen 2000, p. 391). However, Banegas (2018, p.4) states that even though action research is used in higher education settings, it is rarely used to show any developments in English for Specific Purposes. However, from his own use of action research, he argues that action research “can be a valuable research paradigm to examine not only ESP and its language-learning implications but also ESP pedagogies” (Banegas 2018, p.11).

Kavanoz (2020, p.248) also highlights the value of action research for ESP practitioners, since it allows them to be trained in dealing with complex environments involving a range of different demands. Since ESP instructors are mostly trained in general language teaching, they can often lack confidence and expertise in teaching English for Specific Purposes (Basturkmen 2010 cited in Kavanoz 2020, p. 251). Therefore, Kavanoz (2020) argues that the focus of ESP practitioners should be placed more on becoming proficient in the content of the ESP courses; their ELT language skills and knowledge of pedagogy is acknowledged but their ESP content skills are what need to be developed. To help them do this, practitioner research can provide them with the opportunity to enquire into their own practice. This can help ESP teachers to think about and reflect on pedagogies and practices and inform their practice with research (Kavanoz 2020, p. 251).

4.3.1. Using Action Research in my English for Specific Purposes Courses

My study was undertaken at the University of Cyprus in 2015-2016 over 18 months (across three semesters). In the first semester (Fall 2015), two groups of second-year undergraduate students (35 students) from the department of Accounting and Finance took the LAN 201: *Business Communication for Management* course³. In the second semester (Spring 2016), two groups of first-year undergraduate students (42 students) in the department of Computer Science took the LAN 111: *English for Computer Science Majors* course. Finally, in the third semester (Fall 2016), one group of 17 second-year undergraduate

³ See the course descriptions for LAN 201 and LAN 111 in APPENDIX B (p. 195-196).

students in the Accounting and Finance department used a blog in their *Business Communication for Management* course. (Each Fall semester has a duration of 13 weeks, while the Spring semester lasts 14 weeks.) All students in these groups are required to take these English for Specific Purposes (ESP) courses as a language requirement in their respective programs of study.

I thought carefully about integrating a blog in my courses and how I could explore the integration of a weblog in my ESP courses and the students' perceptions of how it affected their writing and speaking skills in English. I was particularly interested in exploring how the blog could be used to support language learning through extending writing practice beyond the classroom and facilitating collaborative peer feedback. Literature suggested that providing as well as receiving feedback from peers and their instructor could improve language learners' writing skills and language acquisition in general (Akçay and Arslan 2010; Asoodar, Atai and Vaezi 2016; Montero-Fleta and Perez-Sabater 2010; Noytim 2010; Wright, White, Hirst, and Cann 2014). I made sure that the activities I designed for the blog tasks would be collaborative and would encourage students to engage in critical thinking and self-reflection. After each task for which students had to publish their posts, a follow-up task ensued, which required them to visit two of their classmates' posts, evaluate them and offer feedback, either written or oral feedback, depending on the type of post.

I chose to focus my study on writing and speaking skills in particular since these are skills that my students need to become more comfortable with as part of their learning. They are also skills which can be practiced using a blog due to its message-posting feature. Social media, and blogs specifically, can promote collaboration through peer feedback, due to the interactive features they offer such as commenting on postings. I thought that this may allow my students to further practice writing through posting messages and recording their speech, as well as by commenting on each other's posts by offering feedback to their peers.

The student participants' perceptions on the use of the weblog were explored through individual interviews and focus group discussions. As I collected the data from the blog posts, as well as the students' responses in the interviews, I was reflecting on my decisions in designing the study as well as on the outcomes of

the blog use. I also engaged in reflection of my practice as part of the thesis writing process and the consideration of the findings of my research, and I will present my reflections more fully in Chapters Seven and Eight.

Campbell (2003) describes different ways of setting up a weblog that can be used for pedagogical purposes: the tutor blog, learner blog and the class blog.

- The tutor blog is run by the class teacher, and it is the space where the tutor can upload course information and resources for study. However, the tutor blog may restrict students to writing comments on the subject the teacher has published (Campbell 2003, p. 519).
- The learner blog is a blog created by the learner and functions like an online journal where each individual can post their thoughts. The learner blog gives more responsibility to the learner to upload their own content on their own platform, which offers a sense of ownership. However, keeping learner blogs in the classroom can be challenging for the instructor to keep track and follow, and requires a lot of time and effort to set up and moderate (Campbell 2003, p. 520).
- The class blog is “a joint effort between the students and the teacher” (Campbell 2003, p. 520). This type of blog can be best used as a collaborative space where students can contribute messages, images and links related to classroom discussion topics or assigned themes, as well as for project-based language learning. A class blog can be the best option for a collaborative discussion forum, which can extend to outside the classroom and foster in-depth reflection in writing (De Almeida Soares 2008, p. 520).

I set up a class blog for each course group, where I posted all assignments and tasks to be undertaken by the students. I sent invitations to all students on the courses to join the blog as authors in order to be able to publish posts. By having

one common blog, all student posts that followed my initial blog post (where the assignment was announced) were grouped underneath along with all the comments, so that students could access all posts in one space and easily comment on their peers' work. The archiving feature of the blog grouped all posts by month, in reverse chronological order, so it was easy for me as the instructor to track their learning progress through the students' posts. The same applied for students, who could go through their own posts from the beginning of the semester until the end to track their own progress.

The courses lasted 13 weeks and students were required to start posting from the third week of classes to the last one. Before posting their written tasks online, I engaged students in extensive writing practice in class through participation in writing workshops and peer editing tasks. Students engaged in online peer feedback collaboratively. They worked in groups to produce their written tasks and then each group exchanged their task with other groups and provided feedback that had to consist of both positive as well as constructive comments. Collaboration is the basis of my pedagogic approach in this study, which is linked to Johnson and Johnson's Social Interdependence Theory discussed in Chapter Two. According to this learning theory, when students positively depend on each other to complete a task, it can lead to higher achievements and increased psychological health (Johnson and Johnson 2009).

Students published their tasks on the blog on a bi-weekly basis and they engaged in online peer feedback the following week after posting. All the students were required to post their tasks on the blog, and they had to visit at least two of their classmates' posts to offer comments. The blog tasks were not assessed separately, but they were considered part of the overall course participation grade (5%). So, their posts counted as participation in the course apart from attending the classes but did not receive a separate mark for them, as it was considered part of their homework. The reasoning behind integrating the blog tasks was to offer additional practice apart from in-class writing and speaking workshops and in-class peer feedback activities. The students had no prior experience using blogs in their courses throughout their school/university years, or on a personal level, so they were initially hesitant to publish their written and oral work.

I took great care to encourage the students to start posting, and in order to ease their anxiety I ensured that the blog was set to a private instead of public mode and explained to students that only themselves and the instructor had access to the class blog. The blog interactions through the publication of their activities and exchange of peer feedback were also designed to enable students to engage in higher-order thinking such as evaluation of information, reflection and self-reflection and expression of their own ideas and opinions. This process aimed to allow students to become more active participants in learning rather than passively listen to the instructor sharing the information with them, go home and study, write and submit a task using the proper conventions as these were outlined by the instructor, and then wait for the instructor's feedback.

During the time the blog writing process was being carried out, I became more of an observer rather than directly teaching, and primarily monitored the procedure of posting and exchanging feedback, in order to allow the students to engage in a discussion more freely and be more independent in the process. While I assumed a facilitator role during the blog posting process, with minimum interventions in order to allow the students to feel more autonomous and active during the process of posting, I still intervened when I felt it was necessary in order to correct feedback comments that may have not been entirely accurate or add comments on points that had not been picked up by their peers. At the same time, I also tried to acknowledge comments by mentioning student names where they effectively pointed out areas that could be improved. Additionally, I posted 'thank you' messages for the students' contributions at the end of a blog task. In this way, students were given the space to be more active in the task, while also feeling that I was present as their instructor, read their comments and also offered feedback where necessary. Teacher presence is very important in online or blended classes where asynchronous modes of instruction are also in place. The instructor should find different ways of showing their 'presence' in order to encourage student participation. The instructor should actively intervene and therefore attract students who may be participating less, "acknowledge individual contributions, reinforce appropriate contributions, focus discussion and generally facilitate an educational transaction" (Garrison, Anderson and Archer 2000, p. 101). Zeqiri (2013) also acknowledges in her study

the important role the teacher plays in keeping students motivated in posting and effectively using an online blog.

Participation in the blog fluctuated during the semester, due to the students' study obligations and exams. They stated in the focus groups and interviews that the limited time they had did not allow them to be fully engaged in the blog tasks. The tasks students published on the blog consisted of written tasks for the first and second data sets, and both written and oral tasks for the third data set (Fall 2016). The written tasks required them to write a memo and a summary for the *Business Communication for Management* course, and a memo and an instructions manual for the *English for Computer Science Majors* course. After posting each task, students were required to visit at least two of their peers' posts and offer feedback by writing comments below their classmates' posts. I gave students specific criteria for feedback to their classmates, and I emphasized that both strong points and points for improvement should be discussed.

In order to help the students to give effective feedback, I referred them to evaluation criteria for writing successful memos, summaries and instruction manuals so that students could offer constructive feedback rather than passively complete the task ⁴. Lu and Law (2012) discussed the application of rubrics by student assessors. They found that applying rubrics for peer feedback enhances student learning because the assessors can increase their awareness and understanding of the assessment criteria and apply them to their own work in a more reflective way to enhance their critical thinking skills (Lu and Law 2012 p. 259). Lu and Law (2012, p.258) also stated that online peer feedback can be more beneficial than face to face feedback, since it enables learners to communicate with their peers, reflect, and continuously revise their work based on that feedback. It also allows the instructor to monitor the activities that take place online and in turn assess students' progress (Lu and Law 2012, p. 258).

Offering feedback to language learners and ESP learners is significant during the learning process. The use of corrective feedback is used in second language

⁴ Please see the list of criteria for evaluating memos, summaries, and instruction manuals in APPENDIX C (p. 197-198).

learning to support learner development. Sheen and Ellis (2011, p.593) define corrective feedback as “the feedback that learners receive on the linguistic errors they make in their oral or written production in a second language (L2).” Corrective feedback can be direct (that is, by directly presenting the learner with the correct form during a spoken task or on a written task for instance) or indirect (indicating the error to the learner and giving the learner guidance on how to correct it) (Sheen and Ellis 2011, p. 593). In either case, the feedback enables the learner to notice that they have made some errors in their language performance. In this way, the feedback should assist language learners to acquire knowledge about the correct language use, especially when they have the opportunity to correct the error following the corrective feedback. Sheen and Ellis state that corrective feedback “may help learners rehearse the correct form in their short-term memory and consolidate a form-function mapping and thus enable them to incorporate the corrected feature more fully into their interlanguage” (Sheen and Ellis 2011, p. 596). Nonetheless, there is some disagreement among researchers as to the benefit of indirect feedback, suggesting that only direct feedback promotes language acquisition (Sheen and Ellis 2011, p. 596).

Sheen and Ellis (2011) discuss corrective feedback within the context of sociocultural theory, which posits that learning takes place through social interaction with peers. This interaction allows scaffolding of learning in order to support learners to perform in a foreign language through the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD). As they develop their skills, the learner gradually moves away from learning by depending on others (other-regulation) to being able to learn language independently (self-regulation) (Sheen and Ellis 2011 p. 597). In other words, the type of corrective feedback provided should be customized to each learner’s level, so that it is not too advanced for learners who are at a less advanced linguistic level, or not challenging enough to more advanced learners. Therefore, “in sociocultural theory, corrective feedback is seen as a key element in how teachers (or other learners) can assist a learner to achieve self-regulation through self-correction and thereby ultimately learn how to use a feature correctly without assistance” (Sheen and Ellis 2011, p. 598). Through peer feedback, the instructor can shift this process to the learners in order to encourage them to become more autonomous and responsible in their own

learning.

My students engaged in online discussions as a group, communicating information and ideas to each other, agreeing and disagreeing with each other, and sharing new information learned in the course with their classmates. Before engaging in online feedback on the blog, they had writing workshops in class and exchanged peer feedback in the classroom by using the same criteria, which were explained and discussed before working in the peer editing tasks in class. So, they had some training and practice in the classroom before they engaged in a similar activity online. Students engaged in online interaction and communicated information to one another in order to revise and improve their written tasks and then used the information shared by their classmates to edit and improve their writing. The knowledge and information were shared among learners to achieve a common understanding of the conventions for writing a summary, memo, or manual instructions, and thus achieve a shared understanding, which constitutes the basis for intersubjectivity, as discussed in Kim (2001).

In the speaking tasks students had to undertake in the third data set (Fall 2016), they were requested to watch a video, such as a TED Talk on a topic related to their field of study, and they had to record and share a podcast on the blog. As part of blogging, they were asked to express their agreement and/or disagreement with the speaker's views in the podcast. The follow-up activity required students to listen to two or three of their classmates' podcasts and discuss on the blog whether they agreed with them or not and justify their responses. In this case, the feedback they posted was recorded orally in a podcast. An additional element to this task was also to comment on their classmates' speaking skills apart from the content, such as identifying and stating whether their classmates were reading the content from notes or speaking without notes and commenting on their volume and fluency. The focus here was on skills that were considered useful to practice for their subsequent in-class oral presentations.

4.4. Methods of Data Collection and Analysis

4.4.1. Blog and Assignment Data and Error Analysis

I used the class blog posts as the first source of data. I analyzed written posts, comments, and oral recordings by carrying out error analysis. Error analysis is a qualitative approach used in English for Specific Purposes, according to Khan and Khan (2016). The blog tasks that students participated in during each semester are more thoroughly indicated in Tables 4-1 and 4-2 below:

Data Set	Groups	Written Blog Tasks
Fall 2015	LAN 201.3* LAN 201.5	-Memo writing task -Written peer feedback on memo -Summary writing task -Written peer feedback on summary task
Spring 2016	LAN 111.2** LAN 111.3	-Memo writing task -Written peer feedback on memo -Manual Instructions' writing task -Written peer feedback on manual instructions' task
Fall 2016	LAN 201.4	-Memo writing task -Written peer feedback on memo -Summary writing task -Written peer feedback on summary task

Table: 4-1: List of data sets: Written tasks

*LAN 201: Business Communication for Management

**LAN 111: English for Computer Science Majors

Following the data collection and analysis of the first and second rounds of data, I found that students felt that blogging helped them to enhance their speaking skills as well as their writing skills and also suggested doing more listening and speaking tasks on the blog. I therefore decided to add a speaking component on the blog for the last data set and gather data to see if practicing speaking through blogging was beneficial during my students' language learning process. Table 4-2 below (see p.85) indicates the speaking tasks the students in the Fall

2016 cohort completed on the blog.

Data Set	Group	Spoken Blog Tasks
Fall 2016	LAN 201.4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Expressing opinions based on the topic of a TED talk video discussing a business topic -Exchanging oral feedback on peers' recordings on the TED talk video - Exchanging oral feedback on peers' business oral presentation

Table: 4-2: Speaking Blog Tasks

One challenge that I encountered related to the collection of data from the blog. Students had no prior experience using a blog, so there was hesitation in sharing their work for an audience as they did not feel confident sharing their posts with their classmates. The first blog posts only took place after a significant amount of encouragement, and I made sure to explain that the blog used was private and not public. Great care was also taken to explain how the blog posts would be used, as well as to inform the students that only me and their classmates would have access to the blog and that their posts would not be shared with the general public. As the semester progressed, they felt more comfortable with the process and posted more regularly. Another challenge that was met was to engage as many students as possible to post their tasks on the blog, particularly from the middle towards the end of the semester. I attributed this to the fact that students' workloads in their other courses increased, as they explained that they did not have a lot of time to post on the blog; in effect, the number of blog posts dropped towards the end of the semester.

At the end of each semester, I collected all writing samples posted on the blog along with the comments for each student post and analyzed them against each student's assessed tasks undertaken throughout the course of the semester. I analyzed students' blog posts and feedback comments, assignments, and exams, using error analysis. Error analysis is used in English for Specific Purposes teaching and ESP action research to give insight into the most common errors found in students' writing, such as the use of subject-verb agreement, sentence structure, and choosing the correct nouns to express ideas (Wu and Garza 2014,

p.1261). For example, Milaningrum, Damayanti and Gafur (2018) conducted an action research study to evaluate ESP students' writing skills. The researchers analyzed the students' writing skills and whether they could construct sentences accurately in a variety of writing tasks such as paragraph writing, comprehension questions, oral and written compositions and found that there was an improvement in their writing in English in terms of grammar, mechanics, and spelling (Milaningrum, Damayanti and Gafur 2018).

My students' progress could not have been evaluated unless a comparison between their writing tasks was made by tracking the errors that took place throughout the duration of the research. Learning to speak and write in a new language is a complex process. With regards to developing their writing skills, learners need to practice and learn how to write effectively in a second language through experience (Myles 2002, p. 1). Writing requires accuracy and proficiency in both the correct use of the language as well as different writing strategies, competencies, and methods, depending on the genre of writing they engage in (Myles 2002, p.1).

Particularly in the context of ESP courses, the focus is usually placed on technical writing and less on academic writing or narrating. Depending on the students' needs and professional fields, students may need to learn how to write technical documents such as memos, emails, manual instructions, process writing, reports, business plans, and so on. Therefore, they may need to compose information, describe processes, or restate information. As with any type of writing, technical writing also requires the correct structure of information, knowledge of the target audience, and the relevant sociolinguistic rules that are associated with delivering information to an audience (O'Malley and Chamot 1990 cited in Myles 2002, p. 7). Therefore, writing in a second language is a complicated process that requires the learner to be able to structure content accurately in a language that is not their native one and effectively express their ideas (Myles 2002, p.9).

There are two types of errors usually made by learners: errors of comprehension and errors of production (Vasquez 2008, p. 136). Some categories of errors proposed by Corder also relate to omissions, additions, misinformation and

misordering (Corder in Vasquez 2008, p. 142). Error analysis is an important way of evaluating student progress in language use in ESP. More specifically, error analysis is seen as supporting teaching and learning because it can indicate learners' overall language production, both successful and less successful. Therefore, ESP instructors should incorporate error correction and analysis into their teaching (Boncea 2015, p. 30). Error analysis involves data collection, identification and classification of errors, and then analysis of the source of errors (Wu and Garza 2014, p. 1259).

The error analysis approach dates to Corder's work in the 1960s which breaks down the process of analysis into five stages:

1. Collection of a sample of learner language
2. Identification of errors
3. Description of errors
4. Explanation of errors
5. Evaluation of errors (Corder in Vasquez 2008, p. 136).

Error analysis helps ESP instructors evaluate their learners' performance, identify their learners' errors so that they can offer support and help their learners correct and improve in the specific areas they make errors (Vasquez 2008). Error analysis also helps the ESP instructor to identify the source of these errors with the purpose of helping them to revise and improve their teaching practice (Vasquez 2008). Vasquez (2008) highlights the importance of error analysis as supporting the purpose of language teaching, particularly in English for Specific Purposes. Error analysis can help students become aware of their error which will lead them to acquiring new knowledge. It can also help them become more conscious of their errors as well as the instructor, who can better "understand what elements are playing a role in the students' learning process" (Vasquez 2008, p. 145). Finally, through the process of recognition and analysis of errors, instructors may realize the importance of errors as "the most significant evidence of their efforts to follow the path of the learning process" (Vasquez 2008, p. 145).

Supporting student understanding of errors is important in helping them to revise

what they have learned, and revision does seem to be important in language learning (Myles 2002). Myles (2002, p.7) argues that revising is a demanding procedure with respect to the learners' cognitive processes, because it encompasses defining the task, assessing it, choosing the appropriate methods to revise, making changes to the text, but also analyzing and assessing the feedback they receive on their writing performance.

To carry out the error analysis, I used tables to record the errors each student made in their initial blog posts. I recorded errors identified by their peers and by me in one column, and then added a column for each assessed task, listing the errors the students made in subsequent assignments and exams until the end of the semester. I studied the types of errors that were made and identified error patterns to understand if there were common errors that were repeated across all assessed tasks. Following this analysis, I created a list categorizing the common errors the majority of students made in each writing task⁵. The error analysis allowed me to gain insight into the students' understanding and progress in these areas. By identifying specific error patterns, I could also assess whether there was any improvement in language accuracy or not by monitoring the errors that might reappear in the course assignments that followed. The findings from the error analysis are presented in detail in Chapter Five.

4.4.2. Interviews and Focus Groups

In order to answer the second research question (to explore students' perceptions about using a blog in their ESP course) I conducted two focus group discussions and one semi-structured individual interview with students from each section and in each data set. A focus group is one of the most common methods of qualitative research for data collection. Longhurst (2016) defines a focus group as:

a group of people, usually between 6 and 12, who meet in an informal setting to talk about a particular topic that has been set by the researcher. The facilitator keeps the group on topic, but is otherwise non-directive, allowing the group to explore the subject from as many angles as they please (Longhurst 2016, p. 143).

⁵ The tables for each data set that indicate the types of errors in each writing task can be found in APPENDICES D, E & F (p. 199-212).

The goal of conducting focus group interviews is mainly to perform an in-depth exploration of a topic (Parker and Tritter 2006, p. 24). Focus groups can yield more data when compared to other interview methods and there is a different dynamic when compared to an individual interview due to the group approach and the researcher's role (Parker and Tritter 2006). The researcher's role is to facilitate or moderate the discussion that takes place between the participants rather than having a more active role as an interviewer taking more control over the discussion (Parker and Tritter 2006, p. 26; Williams and Katz 2001, p. 2). As described by Bloor et al (2001):

In focus groups... the objective is not primarily to elicit the group's answers... but rather to stimulate the discussion and thereby understand (through subsequent analysis) the meanings and norms which underlie those group answers. In group interviews the interviewer seeks answers, in focus groups the facilitator seeks group interaction (Bloor et al 2001 cited in Parker and Tritter 2006, p. 26).

Focus group discussions can offer a method of facilitating interactions within the group and encouraging deeper conversations, resulting in the emergence of new ideas through these conversations (Parker and Tritter 2006, p. 29). Focus group discussions can also be used to enrich data collected from individual interviews or surveys (Williams and Katz 2001, p. 5). According to Parker and Tritter (2006), "attention must be paid to the dynamic aspects of interaction within the group, for it is this dynamic nature which is at the heart of focus groups and which endows them with the power to generate insight often negated by other methods" (p. 34).

Individual interviews are viewed as a method of producing a text of the conversation between the interviewer and the interviewee (Hojjer 2008, p. 278). Arranging group talk by setting up focus groups can support exploration of how meaning is constructed in a social context (Hojjer 2008, p. 278). In addition, Williams and Katz (2001) posit that focus group discussions allow "some reflection regarding how accessing the feelings, attitudes, and beliefs expressed by students [...] can prove to be an enlightening and productive process" in educational research (Williams and Katz 2001, p. 4). The researchers also

describe this method as a suitable way to evaluate educational programmes or to decide whether a specific curriculum topic is effective. Williams and Katz (2001) suggest that focus groups can be a helpful method in helping instructors and researchers create learning approaches that are suitable for both learners and instructors, determine what kind of information learners have acquired in their classes, or assess how instructors and students feel about specific learning topics (p. 5-6).

Parker and Tritter (2006, p.29) suggest that “to help ensure that the greatest amount of information is gathered from each group, a set of participants might meet on multiple occasions.” They also discuss the importance of acknowledging the focus group participants’ characteristics, such as status, positions, and needs (Parker and Tritter 2006, p.34). They also suggest that offering information on data protection and confidentiality are important in ensuring that effective participation takes place (Parker and Tritter 2006, p. 34). Williams and Katz (2001) suggest aiming at forming homogeneous groups in order to help the participants feel at ease in conversations with each other. Making sure that all participants contribute to the discussion is an important aspect of facilitating focus group discussions and encouraging a balanced participation of the discussion. Not having specific participants dominating the discussion contributes to more effective focus group discussions (Williams and Katz 2001, p. 7).

Apart from the importance placed on the participants’ interactions with one another, facilitating the discussion through open-ended questions that allow all the group participants to share views and expand on them is also of great significance (Parker and Tritter 2006, p. 26). The development of open-ended questions in forming a semi-structured approach allows for discussion among the focus group participants and encourages individual interviews to become more conversational. A semi-structured interview is defined as:

a verbal interchange where one person, the interviewer, attempts to elicit information from another person by asking questions. Although the interviewer prepares a list of predetermined questions, semi-structured interviews unfold in a conversational manner offering participants to explore issues they feel are important (Longhurst 2016, p. 143).

The aim of semi-structured interviews is “to alternate existing views about certain topics or to reveal new insights into them” (Garova 2006 cited in Szombatová 2016, p.2). This allows for a more flexible discussion than a structured interview (DiCicco-Bloom and Crabtree 2006, p. 315). The interviewer prepares a set of open questions, but they allow the interviewee to develop and expand on the questions. The semi-structured interview allows the interviewee to go into detail and provide more information (Szombatová 2016, p.2).

I considered semi-structured interviews to be an appropriate method to collect data from my students, as my goal was to gather information to help me understand their perceptions and attitudes towards using blogs in their courses. I needed to understand their feelings and thoughts, which might not be as evident with structured interviews or questionnaires. Therefore, the nature of the interviews, being semi-structured, allowed participants to expand on their answers and more fully express their thoughts and feelings since there were no structured or closed questions that would lead participants to give specific or brief answers.

I invited all students in my Fall 2015, Spring 2016, and Fall 2016 ESP classes to volunteer for the interviews. Twenty-one students participated across the three courses (eight from the Fall 2015 data set; seven from the Spring 2016 data set; six from the Fall 2016 set) as indicated in Table 4-3 below (p. 92):

Semester	Course groups	No. of Students	Data collection
Fall 2015	*LAN 201 (group 3)	4	-Focus Group Discussion I (beginning of semester)
	LAN 201 (group 5)	4	-Focus Group Discussion II (end of semester) -Individual Interviews
Spring 2016	**LAN 111 (group 2)	4	-Focus Group Discussion I (beginning of semester)
	LAN 111 (group 3)	3	-Focus Group Discussion II (end of semester) -Individual Interviews
Fall 2016	LAN 201 (group 4)	6	-Focus Group Discussion I (beginning of semester) -Focus Group Discussion II (end of semester) -Individual Interviews

Table 4-3: Number of Participants by Course/Teaching Group

I used both individual interviews and focus group discussions in my research as methods of data collection to explore the second research question. The rationale behind using both types of interviews was to elicit both the participants' individual views with regards to using blogs in their language learning course, but also to also elicit the participants' perceptions through a group conversation. By discussing together in a group, the participants could exchange opinions via the focus group which would allow me to also explore the interactions that take place among the students (Parker and Tritter 2006).

At the beginning of each semester after the class blog was launched in the section, students participated in a focus group discussion. I elicited their background on the use of technology in general, and blogging in particular during their previous education, as well as their feelings towards blogging and language learning. At the end of the semester, and after each course was completed, the same participants engaged in a second round of a focus group discussion, during which they shared their feelings about having the blog integrated in their classes. The focus group discussions lasted between 20-30 minutes each. I asked participants to share their thoughts on online writing in contrast to traditional classroom writing and also to reflect on online speaking and face to face speaking. Participants also engaged in a discussion over their attitudes towards giving and receiving online feedback, as well as towards online collaboration overall.⁶

⁶ For an overview of the questions used in the semi-structured individual interviews and focus

The participants shared the same cultural background, age, and program of study, so they could be considered a homogenous group. They also knew each other, since they belonged in the same departments and took other courses together, and they also interacted socially outside the classroom. Before each of the interviews took place, students signed a consent form acknowledging that the interviews would be recorded, that the information would be de-identified and solely used for the purpose of the study, and that their responses would not affect their course grade in any way.

Towards the end of the semester, the same students were also invited to individual interviews, where they participated in a more detailed discussion on their perceptions towards the addition of a blog in their English course. I followed a similar procedure for conducting the individual interviews, during which each participant engaged in a discussion with me, answering similar questions as they did during the focus group discussions. The interviews were conducted in English and lasted between 15 and 20 minutes. The students provided interesting data and elaborated on their answers with examples. They might have developed their answers more fully had the interviews been conducted in their native language, but since they were taking a university English course at the high-intermediate level, I considered them able to express themselves proficiently in English.

4.4.3 Interview and Focus Group Analysis

I used Braun and Clarke's (2006) model of thematic analysis for the interview and focus group data. Thematic analysis is widely used in qualitative research studies and Braun and Clarke (2006) describe it as being a flexible and useful approach for research which yields a detailed amount of data (p. 78). According to Braun and Clarke (2006, p.79), thematic analysis is defined as "a method for identifying, analyzing and reporting patterns (themes) within data." A theme "captures something important about the data in relation to the research questions and represents some level of patterned response or meaning within the data set" (Braun and Clarke 2006 p.82).

group discussions, see APPENDIX G (p. 213).

Braun and Clarke (2006, p.87) present different phases of conducting a thematic analysis. These phases involve the researcher familiarizing themselves with the data, generating initial codes by coding interesting characteristics of the data systematically, looking for themes, reviewing them (checking if they can be applied within the entire data set), defining, and naming the themes, and finally producing the report (Braun and Clarke 2006, p.87).

I used inductive coding for the thematic analysis. The inductive approach reflects patterns that emerge from the data, "from the frequent, dominant or significant themes inherent in raw data, without the restraints imposed by structured methodologies" (Thomas 2003, p. 2). An inductive approach entails that the themes are strongly connected to the data; therefore, data collected is grouped into themes which do not have a direct link to the specific questions that participants were asked in an interview or focus group context (Braun and Clarke 2006, p. 83). The data coding process does not fit into a preconceived coding frame, and the research questions can evolve during the coding process. A theoretical or deductive approach to data analysis focuses more on deducing the themes from the researcher's theoretical or analytic interest, so it concentrates more on analyzing aspects of data in more detail rather than necessarily analyzing the whole data set (Braun and Clarke 2006, p. 84).

I transcribed the data for the individual interviews and focus groups and started reading the transcripts to familiarize myself with the data. I then began identifying common features in the data to organize the data into meaningful groups (codes) which I color-coded. I read through the transcriptions to familiarize myself with my data and looked for patterns to generate the initial codes by highlighting the key points. Then I compared the responses across all interviews and searched for themes by identifying common responses. For instance, on the question of how the students felt about offering feedback to their peers, several students responded that they also benefited from this process as they would go back to their own writing to check whether they have made the same mistake. This kind of response led to developing the sub-category 'Self-reflection on Giving Peer Feedback' under the 'Feedback Processes' category.

Table 4-4 below shows an example of an extract taken from the Spring and Fall 2016 data sets and how they were coded:

Data extracts	Coded as
<p>if I was reading a writing task for example and see their mistakes so I could think about my writing task and about where my mistakes were. [SB 1/18/12_16]</p> <p>I felt good about giving comments because I felt I was helping someone get better and it helped me express myself when I commented on others' work and it improved my writing as well. [SB 3/8/5_16]</p> <p>it is helpful giving comments as well because when you see other's mistakes, you correct your own as well. [SB 5/8/5_16]</p> <p>was helpful giving comments as well because I would go back to my work and check if I had done the same mistakes, so it was like double checking my work and make sure it was correct. [SB 6/8/5_16]</p>	<p>Feelings about peer feedback</p>

Table 4-4: Interview Data Extract

This was the longest phase of the data analysis process, as I collated coded data to derive thematic categories. As similar responses were identified from the interviews, they were grouped together and the theme 'Feedback Processes' was developed.

The responses pertaining to each code were grouped together and named into themes and sub-themes. Finally, I started refining the themes to determine if some thematic categories could be merged together, or whether some categories had limited responses or responses that were too diverse and could be discarded (Braun and Clarke 2006, p. 91). The themes that emerged from the interviews were:

- 1) Enjoyment, interest, and motivation
- 2) Benefits of blogging for developing language skills
- 3) Perceptions of face to face and online learning
- 4) Importance of collaboration
- 5) Feedback processes

The participants in the individual interviews and focus group discussions were Cypriot students, aged 18-20 years old. I did not analyze the data in terms of whether different response patterns related to participant age given the narrow age demographic. From the twenty-one participants, twelve were males and nine participants were females. During the analysis I explored the data to see whether or not different patterns of response were seen by gender. However, the gender demographic did not seem to play a role in the patterns of responses offered by the male and female participants.

A thorough analysis of the findings, presenting each theme and sub-theme clearly, along with extracts from the interviews is presented in Chapter Six, along with an interpretation of the findings.

4.5. Ethical Considerations

The research adhered to the ethical procedures of the University of Glasgow. The study was reviewed and approved by the Ethics Committee of the College of Social Sciences, University of Glasgow. The participants who volunteered for the interviews and the focus group discussions were given an overview of the study by reading the Plain Language statement, which outlined the aims of the study and described the procedure and types of data to be collected. They were also given a consent form, which they signed agreeing to participate in the study. The consent form also informed them that the interviews would be recorded and would be used only for the specific research study. It also informed them that their participation was voluntary, they could withdraw from the study at any time and that this action would not affect their course grade. A separate consent form was distributed to all the students in each section, and they were asked whether they agreed or not for their blog posts to be used for the purpose of the current research. Only one student out of the five class sections stated

that they did not wish their blog posts to be used in the current study. I ensured that none of the blog extracts included in this thesis was taken from the specific student's blog posts.

Ensuring that the data remained confidential was and still remains of paramount importance. The class blogs were developed as private, not public blogs. This setting ensured that all the published posts shared by the participants could be accessed only by the members of each blog. The class blogs could not and still cannot be accessed by the public, but only by myself and the students of each group. I made sure that all the students were informed that the blog was private; this helped them feel more comfortable sharing their written or spoken tasks, as they had indicated anxiety and nervousness sharing their work online at the beginning of the project.

A similar approach was used by Morris and Barber (2019) who also ensured the blog integrated in their course was private, since the students in the study were unfamiliar with blogging, so privacy when posting would give them confidence in using this form of academic interaction. The action researchers also felt that keeping the blog private instead of public would encourage students to take more risks as they would be aware that there is no wider audience viewing their posts apart from their instructor and peers (Morris and Barber p. 348). Finally, when analyzing the data, the real names of the participants were not used in either the data gathered from the blog, or the data collected through the interviewing process. Instead, codes to represent each interview and/or focus group participant were devised.

4.6. Trustworthiness and Integrity

Williams and Morrow (2009) describe three categories of trustworthiness that qualitative research needs to adhere to: (1) data integrity, (2) balance between reflexivity and subjectivity, and (3) clear communication of findings (Williams and Morrow 2009, p. 577).

(1) Data integrity

In terms of ensuring data integrity, the adequacy or the dependability of the data needs to be established. The methods used to analyze the data need to be

clearly articulated by the researcher, the interview protocol, recruitment of participants, the process of interviewing, transcribing procedures, as well as the data analysis procedures (Williams and Morrow 2009, p. 578). Evidence of sufficient quantity and quality of the data elicited needs to be provided as well by the researcher. The issue of data adequacy seems to be a complex one, as it is difficult to determine what comprises 'rich' data. Sometimes, the actual number of data might not indicate richness of data, but the different perspectives given which are communicated in different ways might also constitute 'rich' data (Williams and Morrow 2009, p. 578). In particular, the researchers explain that judging whether the data collected is sufficient is often left to the researcher's judgment, but some factors that help determine data adequacy pertain to the sample size. Even though it might be difficult to determine whether the data collected is rich, one way to ensure that would be through "diversity of demographics or viewpoints, and [...] triangulation of the data with other sources of data" (Williams and Morrow 2009, p. 578). Finally, the way themes or categories are filled out that would help the reader gain an understanding of how rich and complex the data is in relation to the issue under investigation can determine the richness of the data (Williams and Morrow 2009, p.578).

In order to ensure the richness of the data in my study, I asked open-ended questions in the focus group discussions and individual interviews which aimed at eliciting students' views in depth. During the interviews, apart from the core questions, I asked questions to clarify responses and participants were asked to also provide examples to illustrate and be as explicit as possible in their answers. Apart from this, two rounds of focus group discussions and one round of individual interviews were conducted during each semester, (one focus group discussion in the beginning and one at the end, and a round of individual interviews at the end of each semester as indicated in Table 4-4 on p.95). This was done in order to elicit as much information as possible from the participants, and to ensure that any gaps in responses that may have arisen during the first round of interviews was overcome by the end of the data collection process.

With regards to the data that emerged from the interviews, I discussed above

how I transcribed each interview verbatim and read through the transcripts carefully to identify common responses within each data set and among the data sets. I highlighted similar responses and took notes next to them to briefly summarize the content of the response. Then, I derived codes that were emerging from the responses and grouped common responses together in separate tables for each data set ensuring that the data supported my coding and the interpretation of the data. As far as my study is concerned, I have explained the rationale behind this study, the methods used, the participants' profile, the data collection methods, as well as the underlying theoretical, research and pedagogical frameworks that guide this study. The findings of my research are explained thoroughly in Chapters Five and Six. To ensure the trustworthiness of the data, evidence from blog posts is provided to support claims, as well as quotes from the student interviews to support the analysis of the data and the emerging themes. Highlighting quotes from the data as well as examples which are explained with clarity are illustrated, along with participant contributions explicitly linked with the researchers' interpretations (Williams and Morrow 2009, p. 579).

(2) Balance between reflexivity and subjectivity

Maintaining a balance between what the participants say and the researchers' interpretations of the meanings of their words is also a key factor for the trustworthiness of the data (Williams and Morrow 2009, p. 579). Subjectivity is acknowledged in qualitative research, but researchers manage their personal biases through reflexivity. Reflexivity entails the process of self-reflection and awareness of self in attempting to differentiate the data that comes from the participant and the interpretations that come from the researcher. Achieving a balance between the participant's meaning and the researcher's self-reflection to manage any personal biases on the data is key for the trustworthiness of the data. Some researchers keep a journal as a way to reflect on the process, or they keep receiving feedback from participants in order to check that the meaning intended by the participants is the same as the one perceived by the researcher. This process of constant relationship of collaboration between participants and the researcher also helps build trust (Williams and Morrow 2009, p. 579). As I analyzed my findings, I engaged in self-reflection while reading through the participants' transcribed responses and highlighted examples across

the data sets that supported their claims in order to ensure that I interpreted the meaning of their responses in ways the data supported. The fact that participants engaged in both focus group discussions and individual interviews helped enrich the data and also helped me to clarify any responses from the first round of discussions.

(3) Clear communication of findings

Communicating clearly what the findings are and why they are important is of utmost significance in ensuring data trustworthiness and integrity. The social validity of improving the outcome of different groups or individuals, revealing limitations, suggesting other alternatives to consider as well as suggesting new courses of action that are based on the data presented are all important (Morrow 2005, p. 253). Clear communication of findings also refers to the explanation of interpretations in a way that is comprehensible by the reader, and it should be supported by participant quotes. Evidence should be provided by the researcher that the research questions have been answered and that they also tie the current practice or findings to the existing literature in the field (Morrow 2005, p. 253).

I tried to write my thesis in a way that clearly explains the findings and presents answers to the research questions. I have supported my findings with the use of participant quotes and in reference to the current practice and literature. My findings are presented in Chapter Five (Error Analysis) and Chapter Six (Focus Groups and Interviews). The research questions are answered in Chapter Seven through a discussion of the findings.

4.7. Limitations

Any research approach has limitations. In this section I will discuss the main limitations for my research. The methodological approach I chose helped me through the use of error analysis to gain insight into the students' performance and what types of errors they made so that I could inform and revise my teaching with the purpose of improving my practice. The findings therefore cannot be generalized to other classrooms or ESP learners. In order to answer the second research question, which related to the student perceptions on the integration of a blog in their ESP course, I used focus group discussions and

individual interviews to collect my data. This methodological approach helped me explore the students' attitudes towards blogging during language learning by collecting their thoughts and feelings through extended speech and exchange of experiences rather than simply answering a questionnaire. The use of semi-structured questions was expected to allow students to expand on their responses and fully share their thoughts. However, this again gives information that is situated in a particular context with particular students and so these responses may not be typical of other students.

While students spoke freely during the individual interviews, they did not seem to discuss autonomously during the focus group discussions. I had to prompt the discussions by asking more questions. In focus group discussions, students are expected to have discussions as a group and the instructor mainly facilitates, with minimum interventions, focusing more on the types of interactions that take place within the groups. Parker and Tritter (2006, p.26) do recognize that achieving 'interactional synergy' is a common problem during focus group discussions, since the participants may not always be very eager to engage in a discussion with each other. Nonetheless, through the discussions that took place, I managed to gain an insight into how students perceived the integration of a blog in their language course and also study their own interactions with each other during the process. While they mostly agreed with each other, there were a few instances where some students shared a different view and others showed disagreement, while maintaining a polite and respectful tone. But during my study's focus group discussions, the students were more hesitant to participate in the discussion and there was not always an extended discussion between them. They rather focused on answering the question posed, despite the fact that they knew each other. This was the main limitation of the focus group discussions.

4.8. Summary

The research framework that informs my research is action research. As both the instructor and researcher, I conducted this study to inform and improve my own teaching practices. I have discussed the methodologies that inform my study and the methods I used to collect and analyze the data. The details of the participants in this research were presented, as well as the ethical

considerations in the methods used to collect data (focus group discussions, individual interviews, and students' published blog posts consisting of written and spoken data). I explained that thematic analysis was used to organize the data into categories by identifying common patterns, and I explained how an ethical approach was taken, as well as how I ensured the trustworthiness of the data.

Having discussed the research approach used in my study, I move on now to discuss the findings. This is done in two chapters. Chapter Five presents the findings relating to the first research question, following the error analysis of the blog posts. Chapter Six presents the findings from the student interviews and focus groups that explore the second research question.

Chapter Five: Findings (I): Error Analysis

5.1. Introduction

ESP courses involve content-based instruction that addresses grammar learning through reading and writing practice, where contextualized vocabulary is practiced (Hinkel 2011, p. 533). As part of teaching and research on ESP language learning, it is important to analyze students' work for errors, since it can help educators and syllabus designers develop the course syllabus based on the learners' needs, which is the main objective behind ESP courses (Corder 1982 cited in Salehi and Bahrami 2017, p.5). Error analysis is a qualitative approach according to Khan and Khan (2016). They note that it is "considered as the most reliable approach for the study of [language] errors because it is pertinent to the student's performance" (Khan and Khan 2016, p. 236). By systematically analyzing students' errors, instructors can understand the learners' needs and adapt the syllabus and teaching approach accordingly. James (2013) also points out that identifying learners' needs may also help in limiting their errors (cited in Salehi and Bahrami 2017, p.5).

In the ESP courses that are part of my research study, there is a strong focus on improving the structure of specific professional documents (memo writing, writing manual instructions, and summary writing) as well as the logical organization of information, coherence, content accuracy, and the use of direct and concise language in such technical documents. As I explained in the previous chapter, I first assessed and noted the errors students made in the initial tasks they had to complete on the blog. Then, I identified common patterns in errors and created categories.⁷ The error analysis demonstrated that thirty-six of the forty-four students who received peer feedback appeared not to repeat the errors pointed out in the blog tasks in their subsequent assignments. However, the analysis also showed that some students made new errors in the subsequent assignment and/or exam. I will discuss these findings in depth in this chapter to explore the error patterns made by students and explore what this might mean in terms of the role asynchronous online peer feedback through blogging might play in supporting students with their technical writing skills, as well as in giving

⁷ A detailed presentation of the types of errors that appeared in the students' assignments throughout each semester is presented in **APPENDICES D, E & F** (p. 199-212).

me, their instructor, insight into the students' learning processes.

As part of the action research I have carried out, the error analysis gives me an important understanding of the forms of the errors made and any change in the types of errors that emerged over the course of the students' learning. As a practitioner of English for Specific Purposes, and as a language instructor in general, I use error analysis to monitor my students' performance and to evaluate improvement in their writing by tracking any errors made in each assessed task and monitoring whether the same errors are repeated or whether new ones are made in the subsequent assessed tasks following practice. Some of the patterns that emerged from the error analysis in this study related to errors of coherence (for example, lack of appropriate paragraphing, and/or limited or wrong use of linking words), ineffective introductory and/or concluding sentences, and vague subject lines.

In terms of identifying the source of errors the students made, Burt (1974) categorized errors as either being developmental (relating to errors a learner might make in their first language), errors of interference (relating to errors that resemble the structure of the learner's first language), or unique errors (referring to errors that are neither developmental nor interference) (Vasquez 2008, 144). The errors that the participants in my study made may be classified as unique, as the types of errors students made in the process of producing technical documents were more structural rather than linguistic. They cannot be attributed to the process learners follow when acquiring their L1 (developmental errors) or as a result of L1 interference during the process of L2 acquisition (interference errors). The types of errors students made within the context of the ESP courses related more to the coherence and structure of the document and less on grammar or vocabulary.

However, the error analysis indicated that students were able to avoid the errors they made initially in the blog posts. However, new errors emerged in the assessments that followed the blogs - these errors did not appear in the initial blog task or in the first assessed task but appeared later in the midterm or final exam. These new errors included, for example, errors in the introductory or concluding sentences of a memo. The error patterns will be analyzed in more

detail in the next sections.

5.2. Context for the Error Analysis

As a brief reminder, I integrated a class blog in two ESP courses across five sections of students over a period of 14 months (October 2015-December 2016). The ESP courses focused on enhancing the students' skills in all four areas of language learning: namely, speaking, listening, writing, and reading. Specific focus was placed on practicing the speaking and writing skills pertaining to their field of study.⁸ The blog was integrated in each ESP group with the purpose of assisting learners practice their speaking and writing skills outside the classroom. Each group consisted of different students taking the same course in each data set. For example, the Fall 2015 data set consisted of two sections of the same LAN 201 course; in other words, all the students in the data set took the same course, but they were divided into different class sections, since each language section has a maximum capacity of 20 students according to the university of Cyprus' registration policies for the language courses. Students engaged in a variety of written and/or spoken tasks through the blog as presented in detail in Tables 4-1 and 4-2 on pages 85-86.

I taught students how to write specific genres of ESP writing by emphasizing the structure, content, organization of information, coherence, conciseness, and directness of language as well as the revised grammar items that were considered relevant when producing technical documents (active and passive voice, and consistency in point of view/ tense). Prior to engaging in the blog tasks, students produced each of the documents noted in Tables 4-1 and 4-2 (in Chapter Four on pages 85-86) in the classroom. They were taught how to provide peer feedback by engaging in peer feedback activities during the lessons. I did this through the use of specific evaluation criteria I provided them with, which focused on evaluating the above principles in their writing. In this way, they became more familiar with the process of exchanging peer feedback in the classroom before engaging in online peer feedback.

⁸ See APPENDIX B (p. 195-196) for the course descriptions of the courses used in this study.

All 96 students involved in the study (between October 2015-December 2016) engaged in the writing and peer feedback blog tasks that form the content of my analysis, and 17 students in the last data set also engaged in speaking blog tasks, as the need emerged following student interviews from the previous data sets.

Blogging was part of their overall participation grade for the course, but students did not receive a specific grade for their blog tasks. However, all students were expected to participate and contribute to the blog tasks as part of their homework, since these were completed asynchronously. The students produced a total of 145 blog posts and 181 comments from their peers [see Table 5-5 below]. Since the main purpose of the study was to explore blogging and peer feedback in students' learning, only the posts that received comments from their classmates were included in the analysis. Forty-three posts had no student comments associated with them; for these posts, I offered comments to provide feedback as the instructor, as there were points for improvement that had not been commented on by students, and it was important for these students as well to receive feedback on their work.

Number of posts	Number of overall comments	Positive Comments	Negative comments	No. of posts with no comments	Comments by Instructor
145	181	86	67	43	36

Table 5-5: Overall Numbers: Blog Posts and Comments

5.3. Error Analysis Findings

5.3.1. Error Types and Patterns in the Memo Writing Task

In order for my students to learn how to write a professional memo, I focused first on explaining the structure and format of the memo and then on the content and coherence (for example, logical flow of information, introduction, body and conclusion). Finally, I focused on the use of direct and concise language. With respect to memo writing, the types of errors that occurred in the students' initial blog posts in the two Fall 2015 sections pertained to the categories below:

- Inaccurate memo header.
- Unclear/general subject line.
- No paragraphing.
- Incomplete content.
- Use of negative language rather than more positive language.

As mentioned, Corder (1973) classifies errors into different categories: omissions, additions, misinformation and misordering (cited in Vasquez 2008, p. 142). With respect to the types of errors most commonly identified in my ESP students' work, these pertained mostly to omissions [for example, incomplete content/no paragraphing/general subject line] or misordering [for example, inaccurate memo header]. In the two *LAN 201: Business Communication for Management* sections studied in the Fall 2015, the majority of feedback focused on the structure, organization, and coherence of the content and less on grammar, spelling or vocabulary errors. Overall, the comments posted by the students accurately highlighted the areas that needed improvement in most cases, and students seemed to follow the list of assessment criteria I had provided them with. This helped them offer more well-rounded and constructive feedback to their classmates⁹.

Since these courses are more advanced and academic in nature, the teaching goal was for students to learn the format, structure, and organization of the information used in the specific types of documents. For instance, one comment on a memo task posted referred to the structure of the subject line: "Pay attention to your subject; it needs to become a bit more specific to the content of your memo." The subject that had been given for the memo was: "Selection of Candidates." In the midterm exam, the student who received the feedback improved the subject line of the memo by being more content-specific: "The Change of the Advertising Media for the Fall Clothes' Line," which more clearly reflected the content of the specific memo.

Additionally, another student comment referred to the use of transition words within the post: "...and you could use more linking words." There was a

⁹ See the list of assessment criteria for memo writing in **APPENDIX C** (p. 197-198).

successful effort by the student who received this feedback to use more linking words on the memo assignment and midterm exam that followed. This seems to indicate that the student remembered the feedback received by their classmate and retained information about the correct format. Research by Sheen and Ellis (2011, p.596) discusses the value of corrective feedback in helping learners notice the errors they made and so act to correct the error following the feedback. A study by Storch (2004 cited in Yu 2015) also explored peer feedback and the patterns that exist in group interactions and exchange of feedback. Storch found that, in response to peer feedback, students “incorporated most of the comments into their revisions. As a result, the quality of their writing was enhanced. This collaborative pattern was therefore conducive to their learning through peer feedback” (Storch 2004 cited in Yu 2015, p. 624).

Further to this, other comments students in my study offered to their peers in the two LAN 201 sections in Fall 2015 related to the language and the content of the memo. For example, they gave feedback on the style of language used and the content. Some student blog comments included the following:

- “However, the last paragraph of the body needs to become less threatening.”
- “The only suggestion I have is that you could give more information for company B so we could understand easier why the candidate 2 is the most suitable.”
- “However, I think you should make more clear the reason candidate 3 is not chosen.”

Students had correctly identified the majority of the errors that appeared in their peers’ posts. I offered comments on paragraphing, as this type of error was not picked up by students; however, I intervened only on two posts in this data set where I posted comments on the format of memos which lacked proper paragraphing. On reflection, the fact that students did not comment on improper paragraphing is perhaps due to this criterion not being included in the list of evaluation criteria. The students seemed to closely follow the criteria given to them for assessing their peers’ work. This may also suggest that students approached the task more mechanically, strictly following the criteria given to them and only focusing on identifying errors pointed out on the list, without paying attention to other types of errors not explicitly presented on the

criteria list, such as proper paragraphing. However, it might also be that understanding accurate paragraphing and commenting on the coherence of a text might be a more complex task for students to identify, as errors in these areas are less explicit than other types of errors such as omissions and additions (Vasquez 2011). It could be that students were not as able to identify less explicit types of error in the posts they were evaluating.

For the Fall 2016 cohort taking the *Business Communication for Management* course, the types of errors that occurred related to the following categories:

- Spelling errors.
- Format of subject line.
- Vocabulary errors.
- Wordiness in sentences.
- Vague concluding sentence.

In this group, student feedback focused more on grammar, sentence structure, and spelling errors, as well as the format of the subject line. Feedback focused less on the content and coherence of the text. There seems to be a divergence in the types of errors picked up by the students in this data set when compared to the 2015 data set for the same course. The Fall 2016 cohort seemed to be less reliant on the criteria list when offering feedback and pointed out errors that were not emphasized on the list (for example, vocabulary, spelling, and sentence structure errors). In the 2015 data set, students seemed to follow the criteria list more closely and not divert from it, while in the 2016 data set students appeared to read the posts more carefully and not focus only on identifying errors explicitly specified in the feedback criteria.

Overall, the Fall 2016 cohort were more proficient and advanced in their language than the cohort for 2015, and this may have affected the types of feedback they offered. The Fall 2016 cohort student feedback was more in-depth and more proficient in terms of helping peers improve than the Fall 2015 student feedback. Also, according to Kim and McDonough (2008 cited in Yu 2015, p. 621), the proficiency level of students plays a role in the types of relationships they form with their classmates during peer feedback, with student

learning taking place more effectively with interactions between more advanced peers.

Further to this, Storch (2004) posits that when students engage in collaborative interaction patterns, students who have a more collaborative interaction rather than a dominant/dominant, dominant/passive or expert/novice interaction tend to “seek to increase their understanding or competence,” while the students in the other patterns emphasize on their performance more and the product of their work rather than focusing on their learning (Storch 2004 cited in Yu 2015, p.622). Also, Yu (2015, p.622) argues that “the collaborative pattern of interaction with a high degree of equality and mutuality is more conducive to L2 learning and writing development than the other patterns”. I tried to encourage students to give peer feedback in a collaborative and mutually supportive way so that students felt equal even when they had different language proficiencies. Mixed proficiency groups are always the case in our cohorts, because students are grouped by department of study, not by language proficiency.

As I will discuss in the next chapter, the Fall 2016 Business Communication participants stated that the peer feedback tasks helped to keep them active in learning. They felt that they were sharing their opinions to their friends to help them and not for the sake of doing the task because they were expected to do so. During the focus group discussions with the participants from the Fall 2015 cohort, however, the approach to peer commenting was viewed more like a task that they had to do because the instructor required them to. The 2015 students still felt however, that having access to their classmates’ work and seeing their mistakes was helpful for them to identify their own mistakes as well.

In the Spring 2016 semester, for the two sections that took the *English for Computer Science Majors (LAN 111)* course, student peer feedback comments focused more on language use and style of writing (for example, lack of brief sentences, non-parallel structure, and grammar errors). Feedback comments pertained more to the technical aspects of language, as seen below:

- Less concise and direct language in writing
- Incorrect memo format of the memo (such as using a proper header,

- listing ideas in bullet points) and
- lack of important information

Student feedback seemed to focus less on coherence or on writing accurate subject lines. The fact that the students' background is Computer Science, which is a technical field, may have had an impact on the way the students approached the task. They focused more on the technical aspects of the document rather than giving feedback from a linguistic or structural perspective.

Overall, the Spring 2016 cohort students seemed to follow the correct structure and language use in their subsequent assessed tasks when compared to the initial blog posts where they had posted a memo writing task. In all cases, students followed feedback and wrote shorter sentences, used parallel structures effectively where there was a series of items to be listed, and effectively created numbered lists that followed a parallel structure. The process of peer feedback exchanged asynchronously may have helped students become more aware of the learning task and internalize the conventions of proper memo writing by being involved in the evaluation process and applying the same principles in their own writing. Sheen and Ellis (2011, p.606) support the use of corrective feedback as being effective in helping learners acquire the language when they know that they are being corrected. In particular, they state that "focused [corrective feedback] does lead to gains in linguistic accuracy and also that the more explicit the feedback is, the bigger the benefit for the students" (Sheen and Ellis 2011, p.606). In order to ensure that students offered explicit feedback to their peers, I shared a list of evaluation criteria for each writing activity, which could be considered and applied asynchronously, which may also have helped student learning¹⁰.

However, it is important to note at this point that some errors that had not occurred in the initial blog posts were found in the subsequent assignments and/or the midterm exam. For example, in the two Fall 2015 cohorts, four of the eight students who received comments from their peers made a different mistake in the memo assignment and repeated the new error in the memo task of the midterm exam, even though the error had been pointed out on the

¹⁰ Please see APPENDIX C (p. 197-198) for the evaluation criteria used for each writing activity.

assignment. For example, while the conclusion of a memo was effective in the initial blog memo task, the student wrote an incomplete conclusion in the memo assignment, omitting information such as requesting a response from the recipient and/or contact information and repeated the same error in the memo task of the midterm exam. This observation lends support to the students' responses in their interviews (discussed in depth in Chapter Six), in which they stated that they paid attention to the comments posted by their classmates and remembered these comments more, making sure not to repeat them in the assignments that followed. It appears that when students studied for their assignments or exams, they relied more on their peers' comments and less on reviewing the structure of the memo and therefore made mistakes that they had not done in the initial task.

With the Fall 2016 cohort, students who had received peer comments did not repeat the mistakes highlighted in the feedback on the subsequent assessed tasks. The fact that they did not repeat the errors pointed out to them during the peer feedback process may also indicate that learning had taken place (Sheen and Ellis 2011). However, 12 out of 13 student posts then showed different mistakes on the memo assignment (although these particular errors were not repeated in the midterm exam). For instance, in one student's memo blog post, comments received from peers indicated that the subject line was not properly formatted, which was improved in the subsequent two assignments, but in the memo assignment the conclusion was incomplete; also, on the memo task in the midterm exam, redundant information was included in the header, which had not been the case in the previous two tasks. Again, this might show that students did not properly review the format of memo writing to prepare for the exam tasks, but they relied more on the comments received by their classmates as part of their revision process. The fact that they paid attention to the comments received by their classmates is reflected in the interviews, where some students indicated that they tended to remember their peers' comments more than the instructor's.

In addition to this, students made new errors when they produced writing in the classroom that was assessed (written assignments, midterm exam, and final exam). It could be that affective factors may have contributed to the emergence

of new errors that had not been made in their initial tasks. The stressful environment of an exam or assignment may cause students to underperform or be more prone to making errors. Being in a more relaxed environment such as a blog where students know the task will not receive a grade but will receive feedback only, may have helped their language performance in unassessed tasks. Indeed, some students during the interviews and focus groups in the first data set (Fall 2015) described blogging as being a more relaxing way of learning. They stated that the blog allowed them to express themselves more freely, without worrying about being too formal.

Myles (2002) points out that:

Learner strategies can be effective, but they need to be internalized so that they can be utilized in adverse learning situations. For example, if an environment is perceived to be stressful or threatening, for example, writing as part of a job interview process, or performing under timed test conditions, learners' affective states can influence cognition. Emotional influences along with cognitive factors can account for achievement and performance in L2, to a certain extent (Myles 2002, p.7).

In effect, students in my study may have focused only on the errors they had made during the blog and peer tasks when preparing for the assessed writing tasks, leading to less focus on a revision of the conventions and structure of the technical documents as part of their learning. As a result, they perhaps did not internalize what they had learned when practicing writing or they may have underperformed due to the stress of taking a test or exam.

5.3.2. Error Patterns in the Summary Writing Task

In order for students to learn how to effectively summarize a business/finance article in the Fall 2015 and Fall 2016 cohorts, I focused more on teaching the structure of the summary. The introduction should correctly cite the source being summarized, identify the main ideas of the article and paraphrase them, use linking words/phrases to connect these ideas, and conclude effectively. The types of errors that were identified by students in the summary blog posts in the Fall 2015 and Fall 2016 cohorts pertained to the categories below:

- Ineffective introduction.
- Ineffective conclusion.
- Improper/insufficient use of linking words/phrases.
- Insufficient paraphrasing.
- Wordiness.

The majority of comments students posted related to the content, introduction, and conclusion of the summary task, as well as suggestions to paraphrase more and copy less from the original source:

“...you could paraphrase the phrase “sales driven.”

“...I believe your conclusion is too general.”

“The only thing I think you could change is the phrases “sales-driven”, ‘customer-driven’ and ‘market-driven’.”

“However, I think that your introduction sentence is very long and it doesn’t state clearly the author’s primary focus.”

“However, you could make it perfect by stating more clearly the author’s purpose.”

“The only thing I suggest is that she could have mentioned that the results of the two mistakes can lead to the dissolution of a company.”

“In my opinion though, there are some points that are missing in the text such as the third type of company or the mistakes the companies do.”

I posted comments on seven student posts (where students did not provide any feedback from a total of forty-four posts on the summary task), which related to insufficient use of linking words, improper paragraphing, formatting, inappropriate introduction, and inappropriate conclusion. Students stated in their interviews that they preferred posting comments to their friends’ posts, so this might explain the fact that some posts did not receive any comments from students.

I posted an additional comment on an error not identified by students only on one post that had received peer feedback. This error related to the introductory

sentence of the summary, which was inappropriate for a summary as it contained specific details and did not present the main idea of the article. Nonetheless, students in my study were overall accurate in the feedback they offered, and they were able to use the assessment criteria as a guide for constructive feedback. In general, they avoided giving more generic comments that might not help their peers revise their work. It is important to note here that learning to write at an advanced level and in different genres can be challenging and requires time to develop (Myles 2002). Learning to write in different genres in particular is ‘cognitively demanding’ (Myles 2002, p. 11). It should also be remembered that learning is an individual experience. Students learn in different ways and at different rates: individual students will find L2 learning processes differently challenging because ‘there is a variability in the process of L2 learning’ (Myles 2002, p.11).

My error analysis demonstrated that all the students who received the comments in the three sections studied in the Fall 2015 and Fall 2016 semesters did not repeat them in the summary writing assignment and the summary task of the final exam. More specifically, the introduction and conclusion of the summaries were more appropriate, and there was more effort to paraphrase and not copy information from the original text. Students produced more complete summaries and paid more attention to ensuring that they had included all the main ideas of the original text¹¹. However, in six summary assignments from the Fall 2015 cohorts, new errors appeared in the structure of the introduction and conclusion, as well as insufficient paraphrasing, which had not appeared in the summary blog task. It is interesting to note that new errors also appeared in the summary task as was the case in the memo writing task. In the Fall 2016 cohorts, two students made new errors in the summary assignments that pertained to improper use of linking words, unclear introduction, and insufficient paraphrasing. These errors were not repeated in the final exam summary task, but these students made new errors in the final exam by adding redundant information or details that should have been omitted.

¹¹ See **APPENDICES D, E and F** (p. 199-212) for a detailed presentation of the errors made in each data set.

5.3.3. Error Patterns in the Instruction Manuals' Writing Task (LAN 111)

For the instruction manuals' writing task, students were required to write a list of instructions that explains to users of a device or software how to properly operate it. The focus was on learning to write the instructions in a logical order, following a parallel structure, beginning with a verb in the imperative form (for example, 'click', 'browse', 'open', and so on) and conclude by using one of the following methods: summary of the benefits of the software/device; troubleshooting guide; an FAQ section. The types of errors identified by the students in the instructions' writing task for the two *LAN 111: English for Computer Science Majors* cohorts in the Spring 2016 semester related to the following areas:

- Insufficient conclusion (incomplete troubleshooting guide provided).
- Insufficient number of steps provided for explaining the function of a program.
- Incorrect formatting of the manual.
- Structures not being parallel.

The main comment offered by peers pertained to the organization of the conclusion, for which they suggested they should offer more items when choosing to offer a troubleshooting guide as a concluding item to the manual; they also offered comments on various grammar points. Additionally, comments offered related to the format of the manual, such as numbering of steps and to the overall organization of the manual. For example:

“You should add more troubleshooting guide, or FAQs, or communication details.”

“My only concern is that you could add some more steps to make your points more specific. You could also add some more points to your troubleshooting guide or you could involve in your guide the communication details.”

“But in my opinion, you could number your steps, which is easier for the reader, instead of using the alphabet. In addition to this, you could use highlighting techniques-different font sizes and styles, colour, italics to emphasize important information. Also, you didn't include a troubleshooting guide.”

"Some of your steps don't begin with a verb."

I intervened in two cases as the instructor, and my comments related to the organization of the content and to more appropriate paragraphing. The errors pointed out in the blog task were not repeated in the subsequent manual writing task included in the final exam. For instance, the students who had received comments about having an insufficient number of questions and answers in the FAQ section made an effort to add more questions and answers. The students who had received comments about the troubleshooting guide not having a sufficient number of problems made an effort to present a wider range of problems and suggested solutions to these in the next task.

5.3.4. Error Patterns in Speaking Tasks

Students in the *Business Communication in Management* (LAN 201) course engaged in several speaking activities during the Fall 2016 semester. Students in the previous data sets had engaged only in writing tasks on the blog, and during the focus group discussions and interviews of the second data set (Spring 2016), some students mentioned that they would have liked to practice more on speaking, watching videos, or listening to audio clips. They thought it would help them to practice the language if they could do this, commenting on videos or audio clips through speaking tasks on the blog. In response to their feedback, I decided to incorporate a speaking component on the blog that would also be used in my analysis in the next data phase of my study. The speaking activities took place both in class as well as through the class blog. In class students engaged in role plays and in exchanging oral summaries of business-related articles, as well as in offering oral feedback on each other's summaries. Table 4-2 on page 85 summarizes the types of speaking tasks students in the Fall 2016 data set engaged on the blog.

Since students stated they had never recorded a podcast in the past, detailed guidelines were given as to how they could easily record and upload their podcasts. Fifteen out of the seventeen students posted their tasks and students were asked to listen to two of their classmates' podcasts and provide feedback. I again provided criteria to assist students in giving constructive feedback to

their classmates on their speaking skills, which would also help them for the oral presentations they would give towards the end of the semester (See Figure 5-1 below).

Good feedback practice in speaking is significant in helping students reflect both on their peers' and their own work, it helps clarify what good performance is, offers learners quality information about their learning, fosters discussion between the teacher and the students about learning, enhances motivation and self-esteem, and it gives information to teachers that they can use to shape their teaching practice (Nicol and Macfarlane-Dick 2006 cited in Ličen and Bogdanovic 2017). In particular, the use of checklists is helpful in helping students develop metacognitive skills to 'enhance their learning strategies, and can assist them in becoming independent, confident learners' (Ličen and Bogdanovic 2017, p. 269).

Wednesday, October 26, 2016

Comment on Classmates' Podcasts

Thank you all for uploading your podcasts! You all did a great job in preparing, recording and uploading your podcasts.

For the next part of the activity, you will need to visit **two** of your classmates' podcasts and offer your comments on their speech through another podcast.

You can comment on:

- whether you agree or disagree with their opinions expressed (and justify your agreement/disagreement)
- the clarity of speech (clear pronunciation, appropriate speed, etc)
- whether you feel the speaker read the content or whether there was an effort to speak based on notes
- any mistakes in vocabulary, grammar, etc

You can record your podcast using Vocaroo, and upload it in the 'Comments' section below the podcast you will be commenting on.

Please upload your comments **by Thursday, November 3.**


Posted by Angela Kleanthous at 10:28 PM 

Fig. 5-1: Commenting Task through Podcasting 1- Fall 2016

Eight students posted feedback to two of their classmates' podcasts, and six out of the eight students pointed out areas for improvement (see Table 5-6 below). So, these six students were monitored until the end of the semester to analyze their future speaking tasks and identify any repetition of the same errors. The main comment that the students received related to mostly relying on their notes when speaking and not delivering the information orally when recording the podcast.

Code of Feedback Recipient	Peer Feedback on Blog Task	Feedback on Oral Presentation skills	Instructor Feedback on Oral Presentation skills
[EO/ST1/11_16]	'I couldn't hear clearly some words on podcast...'	-Good eye contact, efficiency, good body language -Good eye contact; fluency	Good speaking skills/body language
[PP/ST1/11_16]	'However, you could make an effort to try not to read from a paper like most of us'	N/A	
[YC/ST1/11_16]	'However, you could try not read your speech from a paper'	N/A	
[AA/ST1/11_16]	'...at some points she was reading the content...'	-Good eye contact, efficiency, good body language -Good eye contact; fluency	Good eye contact
[AC/ST1/11_16]	'Few grammar mistakes'	N/A	
[MC/ST1/11_16]	'I think she could speak a bit slower...'	-Excellent speaking skills; fluency -Good eye contact; comfortable giving presentation -Spoke clearly and loud; good eye contact -Good eye contact	Fluent and confident speech

Table 5-6: Peer Feedback on Speaking Tasks

After the podcast tasks were completed, students had a listening and speaking workshop in class during which they listened to a podcast, took notes of the key ideas, developed oral summaries within their groups, and exchanged oral feedback with other groups. A listening and speaking assignment took place in class the following week, which was graded. During the assignment, students

had to watch a video and take notes while watching. After the viewing ended, they were asked to use their notes to record an oral summary of the episode and send it to me by email for marking.

The last speaking activity took place towards the end of the semester, after students had completed their business oral presentations. Students had been given a checklist in class during the presentations and they had to evaluate their classmates' presentations and give their feedback to them. They then created and published a podcast expressing which presentation they found the most interesting and why, offering comments both on the content and organization, as well as on their classmates' speaking skills, again based on specific criteria given to them. According to Ličen and Bogdanovic (2017), students should be evaluated based on the content of the presentation, use of examples to support ideas, use of eye contact while presenting, coherence by making sure that the ideas flow in a logical manner, grammar, proper vocabulary, and speaking skills such as expression and use of vivid language. The figure below presents the speaking task completed on the blog, for which students offered their evaluation of the most interesting oral presentation. It outlines the criteria the students were required to use to evaluate their peers' oral presentations:

Friday, November 25, 2016

The Most Interesting Presentation

Well done on your oral presentations! I hope everyone got an insight into new topics in Business, Accounting & Finance. Your work is greatly appreciated.

For our last blog activity, I would like you to record a podcast on Vocaroo in which you will talk about the presentation you found the most interesting and explain what made it interesting.

You can consider the following points when making in your choice:

- the content of the presentation
- the organization of the information presented
- the design of the PowerPoint slides
- the delivery of the presentation (e.g. , eye contact, fluency, etc)

Remember to type your name in the title section of your post before publishing it.

You need to record your podcast on Vocaroo and upload it on the blog. Please upload your podcast by **December 2**.


Posted by Angela Kleanthous at 4:00 AM No comments: 

Fig. 5-2: Commenting Task through Podcasting 2 - Fall 2016

Eleven (out of seventeen) students posted comments on their classmates' oral presentations in the LAN 201.4 group in the Fall 2016 semester. They stated their choice of the most interesting presentation and supported their choice by offering clear, logical arguments. They commented both on the content, organization of slides, slide design and delivery of the presentation.

By the last speaking task of the semester, the oral presentation, the feedback the six students received from their peers and from me was overall positive. The students seemed confident in front of the audience, had good eye contact, and spoke fluently, without relying exclusively on their notes to deliver their speech. However, I would like to note that students who did not practice on the blog before the presentations also made an effort to deliver their speech orally and not rely on their notes. I believe the students that had additional practice on the blog felt more confident in speaking before an audience in the classroom by the end of the semester because they had more opportunities to practice outside the classroom. This was also discussed by the students during the interviews and focus group discussions (see Chapter Six).

Overall, students got more opportunities to speak through the blog rather than in class, as they had the opportunity to record, edit, and revise their podcasts before publishing them on the blog. That activity also helped build their confidence for their oral presentations: students stated in the interviews for my study that completing their spoken tasks on the blog helped them to feel comfortable and speak more fluently during their presentation. (This will also be discussed more thoroughly in Chapter Six.)

Students also had the opportunity to practice their listening skills, as they had to listen carefully to different podcasts uploaded by their classmates in order to offer constructive feedback. The listening process may have made students reflect on their own recordings and revisit and revise them before sharing them on the blog. Again, Myles' (2002) study seems to lend support to this claim. Myles (2002, p.2) suggests that opportunities for revision can be helpful for language learners when they are proficient enough to be able to implement different revision strategies.

The integration of spoken tasks through blogging appeared to be overall well-received by the students as well, since they stated that they felt they became more comfortable with speaking, and they indicated that their classmates' comments helped them improve. However, they offered mostly positive comments and only pointed out weaknesses in very few instances, as shown in Table 5-6 on page 119. This may be attributed to the fact that they refrained from negative comments so that they did not offend their classmates, as will be discussed in the next chapter.

5.4. Summary

The error analysis findings suggest that using online platforms to practice different language skills such as speaking and writing in addition to classroom practice can play a role in supporting students' learning and practice in written and spoken tasks. In this chapter, my focus was on presenting the error patterns in students' written and spoken tasks as these evolved from their blog tasks, assessed written and oral assignments and midterm/final exams. The purpose of exploring the error patterns was to identify areas that students needed to correct and develop, as well as indicate lack of understanding in some areas. Peer feedback helped students to focus on strengthening those areas by offering more opportunities to recognize errors, practice, review, and revise.

Error analysis helped me as the instructor gain understanding as to whether the same errors were repeated and in effect whether language learning had taken place. Error analysis of the students' errors demonstrated that the errors made in their initial blog tasks were recognized by the students and were not repeated in their subsequent assessed tasks in most cases following practice on the blog and exchange of peer feedback. This suggests that language learning did take place. Despite the fact that most errors were not repeated in the tasks that followed, in most cases, new errors emerged in the assessed tasks that had not been made on the initial blog tasks. According to Myles (2002, p.10), "repeating a previous mistake, or backsliding, is a common occurrence in L2 writing". This happens particularly where the errors become "ingrained, like bad habits, in a learner's repertoire, and they reappear despite... correction" (Myles 2002, p.10). However, in my study, previous mistakes were avoided, and new errors

were made. This phenomenon could be explored more fully in further research to understand why this occurred. It could be that students focused on the comments offered by their peers and remembered that feedback and so seemed to avoid repeating the same errors in the assignments that followed but failed to internalize learning in areas where they did not make errors initially. Further to this, the fact that errors emerged that students had not previously made may suggest that they simply did not review the structure and conventions for memos, summaries and manual instructions but mostly focused on the peer feedback they had received, believing they had mastered the other conventions, language, and technical aspects of the types of documents they were learning to write. It might also be that they made these new errors due to the stress that students may feel when taking exams and this may have affected their performance (Myles 2002, p.7). As Myles (2002, p.7) states: “emotional influences along with cognitive factors can account for achievement and performance in L2, to a certain extent”.

The value of peer feedback is that it helps students recognize their errors and revise them when they are proficient in the language, as learners are in the context of English for Specific Purposes. ESP requires students to be of an intermediate or advanced level in order to learn about more content-specific writing and/or vocabulary that would be relevant to their professional fields (Anthony n.d., p.2). My findings suggest on the one hand that peer feedback plays a role in supporting students' writing performance. By the end of the semester, students seemed to trust the feedback they received from their classmates as much as the feedback I gave them. On the other hand, focusing on the peer feedback might not be sufficient and offering further re-drafting and writing practice might help to avoid the appearance of new errors. Future research may focus more on exploring the reasons new errors may emerge following peer feedback.

My experience as a practitioner in using the blog as an online platform to offer students space to provide feedback to their peers helped me learn that peer interaction and support among learners is as important as instructor support. It can enable students to feel more active and responsible in their own learning rather than passively waiting for, or expecting, the instructor's feedback.

Although students felt hesitant and anxious initially about posting feedback because they had not engaged in similar tasks prior to this, once they became familiar and comfortable with posting for an audience and offering comments to their peers, they felt they benefited from their peers' comments. However, I will discuss in the next chapter how they also stated in their interviews that they still trusted my feedback as the instructor more than that given by their peers. They felt that I was the professional and so I was the person most suitable to provide feedback. Perhaps there was a lack of trust in their peers' comments to begin with, although this became less of an issue during the course of the semester as they collaborated in the feedback process. I will explain these aspects in more depth in the next chapter where I will present the findings of the interviews and focus groups. These findings relate to my second research question, which aimed to explore students' perceptions on the integration of blogging in their English for Specific Purposes classes.

Chapter Six: Findings (II): Interviews and Focus Groups

6.1. Introduction

This chapter presents the findings of the focus group and individual interview analysis. As a brief reminder, twenty-one students agreed to participate in two rounds of focus group discussions and one round of individual interviews at the end of each semester¹². Fourteen participants were second-year undergraduate Cypriot students in the Department of Accounting and Finance who were registered in LAN 201: *Business Communication for Management*. This course is a third-level ESP course focusing on the development of four skills (reading, listening, speaking, and writing) relevant to the fields of Business, Accounting and Finance. Seven participants were first-year Cypriot undergraduate students in the department of Computer Science, who were registered in the second level English course LAN 111: *English for Computer Science Majors*. (The data sets for the interview and focus group discussions are summarized in Table 4-1 on page 84). The LAN 111 course aims at developing students' reading, listening, speaking, and writing skills related to the field of Information Technology¹³.

Five themes emerged from the thematic analysis of the interviews and focus group discussions:

- 1) Enjoyment, interest, and motivation
- 2) Perceived benefits of blogging for developing language skills
- 3) Perceptions of face to face and online learning
- 4) The importance of collaboration
- 5) Perceptions of feedback processes

I will discuss each of these themes in detail in the sections that follow.

¹² At the end of the Fall 2015 semester, Spring 2016 semester, and Fall 2016 semester.

¹³ The full course descriptions for the LAN 111 and LAN 201 courses are presented in **APPENDIX B** (p. 195-196).

6.2. Enjoyment, Interest, and Motivation

Participants reported that they enjoyed the experience of using a weblog in their English course. They stated that it was the first time they had used blogging throughout their high school and university years and in their language learning. Twenty students saw the blog as a positive addition to the course and comments included the following:

“Really interesting because you see other classmates’ ideas and thoughts; easy to access, everyone can see it, you can ask anything you want.” [SB 1/1/5_16]

“Something different, interesting, a different way to give my papers and get in contact with my teacher; helpful; reading others’ posts helps understand the task better if I have difficulty.” [SB 3/1/5_16]

“A nice addition to the course, we saw what other people submitted, so it was helpful; beneficial for our learning because we got to share our answers and give and receive feedback.” [SB 6/1/5_16]

However, ten students stated that they felt nervous using the blogs at first, as it was a new type of activity for them:

“It was a bit awkward at first because it was the first time posting something and get criticized, but then I got used to it, it was interesting.” [SB 5/4/12_15]

“I didn’t feel well [posting on the blog] firstly but then it was ok because all the students had to upload; I know I had mistakes, but all the others had as well, so it was the same and for me and for them.” [SB 1/3/12_16]

“At first I was a little embarrassed because I didn’t want others to see my work because it may have some faults or mistakes, I didn’t want them to see my work, but then I saw that everyone do this exercise, so then I saw the positive aspects of it. How I could be helped in the process.” [SB 4/3/12_16]

“When we had to record our speech it was a little bit difficult because we had to repeat our speech and record it again, it was time consuming, but then when you feel more confident and you get more confident, you know how to use it, so it’s not time consuming.” [SB 1/2/12_16]

All students acknowledged that as they continued posting their work and exchanging comments, they felt more comfortable and confident using the blog. However, some students revealed in the interviews that they did not post any comments at all as they felt uncomfortable doing so.

Nineteen participants stated that they found the use of the blog motivating, as it was a novel and entertaining addition to the course and gave them the opportunity to exchange ideas with their classmates. One participant mentioned that it was motivating because he saw his friends' language level through the tasks they uploaded and felt motivated to try harder and reach their level [SB 7/3/12_15]. Other participants stated:

“It was more entertaining, fun, not boring; I wanted to check classmates' comments and if someone commented on my post.” [SB 4/3/12_15]

“[I felt] more motivated [to do speaking tasks] because when you practice more, you want to do more speaking, so you can be able in the future to speak fluently....yes.” [SB1/8/12_16]

“[I]t made me more motivated [to do speaking tasks], because I just had to upload a podcast from my house; I didn't have to stand up in front of 20 people and think about what I'm going to say. I could have practiced it before, upload it and it would be much better.” [SB 3/9/12_16]

During the focus group discussions, students stated that they were nervous sharing their work at first, as they were conscious about their language weaknesses, and they did not want to feel exposed. However, when they saw their peers post their work, they realized that they also had weaknesses in their language performance, so they felt more comfortable posting as well. An excerpt from the focus group discussions reveals some of the students' feelings towards sharing their work:

“[I]f you post it on the blog you can read other answers too, so it's not only you that's embarrassed, it's other people too, so you get other ideas and you feel more confident about yourself if you see that someone is struggling more than you.” [SB4/9/12_16]

“Yes, first I felt embarrassed about making mistakes in the lessons

or in speaking, but then, when you see the others then you feel good..." [SB5/9/12_16]

The Spring 2016 group said that the blog was motivating because they could discuss and ask anything they wanted, they could do the tasks assigned whenever and wherever, and the different media available made the tasks more interesting, such as watching videos and discussing them. Half of the participants in the Fall 2016 group stated that they found the blog motivating for completing their writing tasks, and all the participants stated that they found it more motivating to complete their speaking tasks on the blog rather than face to face, as they felt it was a new, different way to practice their speaking through recording podcasts.

Nineteen students felt that they were more involved in the lesson through posting their tasks, reading their classmates' tasks, posting comments, and reading the comments they received on their own work, so that helped them be more engaged in the whole process. One of the participants stated that "you instantly post your work, get feedback, see the other's work on the subject, so you are more active" [SB 6/10/12_15]. Another participant stated that "blogs help students become more active, because they are different, new, so they have more interest in the lesson and participate and improve themselves" [SB 8/10/12_15]. Kitchakarn's (2012) research study reports similar findings: students responded that they had never used a blog in their courses before, but that the blog helped them feel more motivated: they saw it as an interesting addition to the course (Kitchakarn 2012, p. 217). Amir et al (2011, p.154) found that "blog writing provided an exciting and motivating learning environment for students," and increased student interest and confidence in writing. Students in Vurdien's study (2013) also found that student motivation to learn increased with the integration of blogs in their writing class.

One participant in my study stated that she did not find the blog motivating and thought it was just a different way to do the assigned activities. Another mentioned that he did not find it motivating at first, but that as he continued working on the blog it was better. With regards to whether the use of a blog helped them feel more motivated to complete their written tasks, participants stated that the fact that more people besides the instructor would see their post

motivated them to do a better job and be more careful about what they would post in terms of checking grammar, spelling mistakes, and that they tried to use better vocabulary. A participant during one of the focus group discussions stated the following: “I think it can help you with the context of what you’re learning because you know that someone else will see it, so you have to be better” [SB3/9/12_16].

6.3. Perceived Benefits of Blogging for Developing Language Skills

Overall, the participants stated in both the focus group discussions and in the interviews that collaborating using blogs was helpful in improving their English language skills. The students felt that the use of the blogs helped them to improve: their reading skills by reading other posts; their writing skills by posting their own work and commenting on their classmates’ work; their listening skills by carefully listening to their classmates’ podcasts to offer feedback; and their speaking skills, as they had more opportunities to practice and improve their English-speaking skills by recording and uploading their podcasts on the blog.

Twenty participants responded that they felt the blog activities improved their writing because they had to take more care to avoid grammar and vocabulary mistakes. They put more effort into writing accurate posts because they were aware that other students would be viewing their posts as well as their instructor. Students also felt that identifying errors in their peers’ posts prompted them to go back to their own work and check whether they had made the same error:

“It helped me learn how to write a memo, summary, because you can see your classmates’ work, watch what others do; by looking at others’ mistakes you can improve yourself and not make the same mistakes.” [SB 8/1/12_15]

“...it improves writing because I was more careful since I knew others would see and correct my writing; online tools help with writing because you see mistakes and correct them right away, but in class you have to wait for a week to get feedback; everything is corrected immediately on the blog.” [SB 5/2/5_16]

One participant mentioned that blogs helped because they had:

“...more time to complete the task and not only 1 hour and a half in the classroom, and they can use the internet to check their mistakes, find out about some new words, some new techniques they have been using...I think it’s much... you can develop your writing skills much better on the blog rather than on paper...Because if you make something correctly any time, you get more confident and you can work on it a bit better.” [SB 3/4/12_16].

Another participant said:

“I think it was very helpful because by writing you can see the exercises of others, recognize their faults and avoid them, also you can search for your words you want to use and translate them, and they stay in your mind, and for these reasons, it is very helpful yes for writing.” [SB 6/5/12_16]

All eight participants interviewed in the first data collection set (Fall 2015) felt that blogs were more beneficial for writing but less beneficial for speaking because the blog does not allow for real time conversation. In the second data set (Spring 2016), more students felt that the blog helped improve their listening skills by providing the opportunity to listen to people talking from other countries and practice their listening skills.

Some participants in the Fall 2016 set also stated that they felt they had to put more effort and do a better job with their written blog posts because others would see them apart from the instructor. One student said: “I felt like I had to do more effort to make better because my classmates would see it...I took more time, I checked it more times” [SB 5/2/12_16]. This echoes Vurdien’s study (2013) in which students felt that they put more thought into their writing and invested more time in planning their task by carefully thinking about their grammatical structures, vocabulary, and spelling, as they were aware that they were writing for a wider audience rather than solely for their instructor (Vurdien 2013, p. 133). Additionally, one student mentioned that he felt more involved in the lesson because “you feel participating more in the lesson because you interact with your classmates” [SB 6/1/12_16]. The fact that students could see their classmates’ work on the blog also helped them get ideas about what to write if they were not sure about the task and it overall helped them complete

their own tasks.

Participants from the Fall 2016 cohort also emphasized how the use of the blog helped them practice their speaking skills:

“Because if you do it in class you can’t repeat your speech or when you listen. I think yes, it’s more than face to face because in this way you can’t practice I think in class because there are many people, but when you have the blog, you are alone.” [SB 2/6/12_16].

“It helps a lot because face to face sometimes not everyone will speak, but on the blog everyone has to say something, so everyone can participate, so it helps a lot.” [SB 5/8/12_16]

“...speaking assignments when you actually have to talk and record yourself, I think it’s much easier on the blog rather than in class full of 20 people you might not even know, and you feel a bit more confident talking just yourself rather than in front of other people.” [SB 3/5/12_16]

“...it improved speaking skills mostly because I had to record myself, tried more than once to have a good result, and that was good exercise; helpful for all skills; similar to giving a presentation, so I practiced that skill.” [SB 7/3/5_16]

Further to this, in the Fall 2016 focus group discussions, a student mentioned that he felt that completing speaking tasks on the blog helped improve his spoken language fluency. It did this because he used everyday language when recording his podcast, which helped him practice speaking naturally, without a script. Another student also acknowledged that these kinds of speaking activities would be helpful in the future in situations where they would need to speak in English.

In contrast to this finding, Huang and Hung’s (2010) study found that students felt that because they could rehearse their speech, it was far from authentic oral communication: they could re-record themselves many times and jot down notes, until the speech was perfect (Huang and Hung 2010, p. 87). However, in my study, the fact that students had the opportunity to rehearse as many times as they wanted and prepare their speech before sharing it on the blog was helpful in preparing them for the oral presentations they had to give towards the end of the semester. In this situation, they delivered their speech to an audience

and did not engage in a natural discussion or dialogue with others in the target language, so rehearsing and recording the language helped them better prepare and feel more comfortable undertaking this task.

For the podcast activity, the interview participants offered mostly positive feedback to their classmates relating to the podcast content and their speaking skills. The content of the podcasts was a response to a TED talk that they had watched on the blog about the importance of humour in the workplace. Students had to discuss whether they agreed or disagreed with the speaker's views. Some examples of student peer comments from the podcast are:

“I totally agree with’s views; using humour at work makes people more productive and less stressed, it relaxes their brain and helps them focus more easily. The clarity of her speech was excellent. At some points she was reading the content but she made an effort to speak based on her notes. I didn’t find any mistakes in vocabulary or grammar.”

“I totally agree with’s views. Humor is important in the workplace because it helps people enjoy their work and become more efficient.[...] Consequently, they earn more money and they are happier with their lives. There were very few grammatical mistakes but the clarity of her speech was very good. She used linking words and she made an effort to speak based on her notes.”

“In my view humour is very important in the workplace and it brings the employees together, the employees become more productive and they want to be at work. You spoke very clearly, you had a good pronunciation and I understood everything you said. You didn’t have any vocabulary or grammar mistakes. However, you could make an effort to try not to read from a paper like most of us.”

The majority of the participants stated in the interviews that speaking tasks like this on the blog helped them gain more confidence in their speaking. They had more time and opportunities to prepare for their podcast, which meant that they could rehearse their speech and record it several times until they got it right before uploading it on the blog. Students also felt that the podcast afforded more opportunities to speak and practice the language, in contrast to the classroom where opportunities are more limited. Student interview responses included:

“It helps a lot [speaking skills] because face to face sometimes not everyone will speak, but on the blog everyone has to say something, so everyone can participate, so it helps a lot.” [SB 5/8/12_16]

“....it improved speaking skills mostly because I had to record myself, tried more than once to have a good result, and that was good exercise; helpful for all skills; similar to giving a presentation, so I practiced that skill.” [SB 7/3/5_16]

“...speaking assignments when you actually have to talk and record yourself, I think it’s much easier on the blog rather than in class full of 20 people you might not even know, and you feel a bit more confident talking just yourself rather than in front of other people.” [SB 3/5/12_16]

Students also stated that the oral feedback they received from their classmates was beneficial and helped them to recognize their mistakes and remember not to repeat them:

“I saw their comments and I tried to improve my work, like for the recordings, they told me not to read so much from the paper, and in the next time we had an exercise for a recording I tried not to read so much.” [SB 4/17/12_16]

“It was more helpful rather than writing skills, for the example I told, not to read so much what I wrote but speaking more in my own words. I didn’t understand that I was actually reading, so by seeing that comment I understood it and I tried not to do it.” [SB 4/19/12_16]

“It was important again [feedback on speaking tasks] because if I spoke too fast, they wouldn’t understand what I was saying, and they would write it on the comments, so I would know that I need to speak in a lower pace, if I speak very loud or something like that, so I know what I need to do to improve my speaking skills.” [SB 2/17/12_16]

Students mentioned in the interviews that the speaking tasks completed on the blog helped them feel more confident in speaking and offered them more opportunities to practice outside the classroom:

“I think [online] helps them develop their speaking skills, because they are basically talking on the computer rather than a person, so they don’t feel intimidated by the other person, and they don’t feel afraid if they see something wrong, or [feel] embarrassed in

front of other people.” [SB 3/14/12_16].

“...the only helpful feedback I think was the podcasting one that we had to actually listen to what the other person said, so if you have to actually listen to the presentation, then the feedback is more real.” [SB 3/19/12_16]

“I think it’s helpful because you speak about the topic and you receive oral comments so it makes you feel a bit more comfortable about yourself rather than someone has listened on the podcast and leaves positive feedback, so it helps you in the future to be more confident talking.” [SB 3/21/12_16]

“I saw their comments and I tried to improve my work, like for the recordings, they told me not to read so much from the paper, and in the next time we had an exercise for a recording I tried not to read so much.” [SB 4/17/12_16]

“It was more helpful rather than writing skills, for the example I told, not to read so much what I wrote but speaking more in my own words. I didn’t understand that I was actually reading, so by seeing that comment I understood it and I tried not to do it.” [SB 4/19/12_16]

Students indicated that the fact that they practiced speaking on the blog helped them become more comfortable and confident speaking in English. They noted that this confidence helped them to participate more in the classroom during face-to-face learning.

Overall, students welcomed the opportunity to record, edit, and revise their podcasts before publishing them on the blog. They were also positive about having the opportunity to practice their listening skills, as they had to listen to different podcasts uploaded by their classmates carefully in order to offer constructive feedback. The integration of speaking tasks through blogging appeared to be well-received by the students, in particular those who became more comfortable with speaking. Participants also felt that their classmates’ feedback helped them improve their speaking skills.

This finding lends support to previous research, which also highlights students’ positive response to practicing online speaking through blogs. More specifically, the participants in Kim’s (2011) study mentioned that podcasting and blogging afforded them more opportunities to revise and reflect on their work, and it also made them feel more motivated to complete the set tasks (see Kim 2011, p.

637). Additionally, Hung and Huang's study (2015) presented the role of video blogs as benefitting students' performance in oral presentations. Hung and Huang (2015) found that the blog improved students' intonation, posture, introduction, and conclusion to their speech.

6.4. Perceptions of Face to Face and Online Learning

No matter how interesting and motivating students found the blog, they indicated that they still needed face to face learning and that the blog should not replace that. While they felt that they could learn through the use of a blog in the course, participants considered face to face communication as being more important, mostly in improving their speaking skills. Face to face communication allows for more productive communication with each other and students can socialize more and exchange ideas face to face. One student said: "I prefer face to face because when you speak you need to see others and their reactions, and you get instant responses" [SB 6/5/5_16]. Other students responded:

"Both of them have positive aspects; with face to face you see the body language of the others, but online learning is more interactive, more interesting, you can combine various ways of learning (videos, recordings, etcetera); I prefer face to face because you see others, with online communications, emotions can be misunderstood." [SB 4/5/5_16].

"Speaking in the classroom is more effective because you get real time feedback and the speaking is more spontaneous." [SB 6/6/5_16].

The only drawback students mentioned about online speech was that it was not natural and there was no real time conversation taking place between two interlocutors: it was a rehearsed monologue that was prepared in advance. Therefore, in terms of practicing speaking skills, the blog was found to be more impersonal for real-time communication because it does not allow for instant interaction. This finding is similar to Huang and Hung's study (2010) where students stated that electronic speaking portfolios undermined the role of face-to-face interactions, since real life interpersonal communication involves sending and responding to messages, which is not the case with e-portfolios, which encourage "a static one-way individual talk" (Huang and Huang 2010, p. 87). Nonetheless, students in my study still valued the fact that rehearsing a

monologue and having to prepare speech in advance was helpful for them when preparing for their oral presentations.

Some students in my study mentioned that they preferred speaking in class rather than on the blog, since it was easier to ask questions to the instructors immediately. One student said: “I like both, but I think I prefer face to face more because I like to feel close to the others” [SB 5/10/12_16]. However, participants did recognize that speaking on the blog is beneficial for more shy students who are not confident talking before their classmates:

“I think face to face you have more opportunities to ask if you have any questions, you ask the teacher immediately. On the blog it’s more easy for people who don’t express themselves easy in the class. They feel more free to write or record themselves.” [SB 2/9/12_16]

“Because you are not afraid if someone else listens to you at that time if you made a mistake you can record yourself again and correct it, you don’t have that pressure to make it correct.” [SB 3/11/12_16]

This finding lends support to Miceli, Murray and Kennedy’s (2010) research on the use of an L2 blog to enhance learners’ participation in an advanced Italian course, which revealed that there were students who favored speaking on the blog as they felt more confident rather than speaking before an audience. Rahman, Sidek and Yunus’ study (2012) also found that students gave positive feedback about their participation in blog discussions, as they felt that they could practice their English communication skills on the blog more confidently than face to face. Rahman Sidek and Yunus’ participants mentioned that the blog was “an alternative avenue to express their opinions minus the embarrassment of speaking bad English in front of the class. The experience is less traumatic and less risky, therefore creating a safer environment for making mistakes and taking chances” (Rahman, Sidek and Yunus 2012, p. 142).

In terms of developing writing skills in English, students in my study found online writing beneficial because they could search for any unknown words and improve their vocabulary. One student said:

“In class you can ask your teacher of course to help you, but you are more free at home to search as many words as you want, so I think it’s more useful to write at home. Because I will search for example 20 words, but in class I won’t ask the teacher 20 words, I will be a little bit shy but in the home I will search them and they will stay in mind and I will use them.” [SB 6/10/12_16].

Interestingly, another student mentioned that he prefers traditional writing because he can change something if he does not like it when it is written down; however, once he posts a task, everyone will read it, so he cannot go back and correct any mistakes. Other students pointed out that online writing allowed them to easily share their work with other people, get feedback and improve, which cannot be done as easily with traditional writing. In particular, one student said: “Online is more effective since you can share with other people more easily and get feedback and improve; traditional writing cannot be shared that easily.” [SB 5/7/12_15]

Finally, some students also pointed out that they felt that by practicing on different tasks through the blog, they had as much time as they needed to think about and complete their task, which is not always the case in the classroom, as time is often restricted during the lesson. For instance, one student said: “but it’s a useful tool to have. You practice, so when you practice you improve your English, and ok you can’t be in the classroom all the time and write. So, you have to have at your home something to practice.” [SB6/7/12_15] Also, another student said: “I agree with that on the blogs you can record yourself as many times as you want but in class you have one chance.” [SB6/8/12_16]

6.5. The Importance of Collaboration

Overall, participants felt very positively about collaborating with their classmates, either in class or online through the blog. They found it effective and beneficial, since they could see different opinions on a subject, they had the opportunity to share knowledge, get new ideas, ask questions, and complete a task. Collaboration with classmates to produce a piece of writing was perceived as important in the learning process since each student got to see others’ work and listen to others’ opinions. One student said that it was “exciting, it’s nice to cooperate with others; you get more ideas, you improve yourself because you get a lot of knowledge” [SB 1/7/5_16].

All participants felt that collaboration was beneficial in improving their language skills rather than working individually, as they felt that they could learn from each other and improve:

“I prefer to work with a team because you can help each other to do a very good exercise, you can listen to new ideas and open your mind and you learn to work with others, which is a very good point to learn.” [SB 6/13/12_16]

“Because after some years you might be at a job where you will have to work in teams and you have to learn to accept the ideas of others and not be like mine is the best, you have to listen to others.” [SB 6/14/12_16]

“[Collaboration is] effective because you see different opinions.” [SB 3/7/5_16]

“You can benefit because you get new ideas.” [SB 7/7/5_16]

“[Collaboration is] more beneficial, because when you work alone you can’t easily have mistakes corrected. It’s important to also see other’s work and opinions.” [SB 8/6/12_15]

“[V]ery helpful because you exchange opinions and tell each other if someone has a mistake.” [SB6 /7/5_16]

One participant reported that they felt that collaboration developed “a more kind, better relationship with classmates” [SB 4/6/12_15]. Another thought that it was “more comfortable to ask questions to your classmates” [SB 4/7/5_16]. These findings reflect previous research on collaborative learning by Dobao and Blum (2013), in which the majority of participants expressed positive attitudes towards working in groups to improve their writing skills. More specifically, they stated that working with others provided motivation, and that they gained more grammatical and vocabulary knowledge, which in turn helped to create work of a higher quality (Dobao and Blum 2013, p. 370). Working together produced more knowledge and ideas, therefore more creativity, and offered more opportunities to use the target language (Dobao and Blum 2013, p. 371).

However, three of the participants in my study stated that while collaboration is beneficial, it is also good to work individually:

“Sometimes it’s good to work alone because you don’t feel pressure from other people, but when you collaborate you can exchange ideas, see how they write, they can help you, help them... collaboration is important to a great extent.” [SB 5/6/12_15]

“[I] prefer working alone; lose focus when many people work together on the same thing, unless it’s marked, and they have set criteria.” [SB 2/7/12_15]

“Sometimes it works, sometimes it’s better alone.” [SB 1/6/12_15]

Nonetheless, the majority of students valued working with others in group tasks and thought that they had benefitted from classmates’ ideas and contributions.

6.6. Perceptions of Feedback Processes

Twenty students in my study stated that they enjoyed receiving comments from their peers on written and spoken tasks. They stated that they remembered the comments they received from their classmates and paid more attention to those comments than the ones given by the instructor. Two students added that they found peer feedback motivational, especially with positive comments. Yu’s (2015) research highlights the importance of the types of interactions and motives of students when exchanging feedback in order for the feedback processes to be beneficial for students. In her study, the students’ interaction patterns were described as primarily collaborative; students offered feedback on different areas of L2 writing, and the recipients of the comments included the suggestions from the majority of the comments they received in their revised documents. Yu (2015, p.624) suggests that this interaction pattern contributed to enhancing the quality of the students’ writing and to their overall learning. A student in my study (from the Fall 2016 focus group discussions) also noted that he felt that he was participating in learning by commenting on others’ work rather than passively receiving feedback from the teacher.

However, even though students liked receiving comments from their classmates and stated that they found them beneficial for their writing skills, eleven students stated that they preferred the instructor’s feedback, as it was more professional, concise, and honest:

“Of course the feedback of the teacher was more useful, because she told me the real mark that all the things that I have to correct, instead of my classmates who all of them said that it was a very good presentation and the real it wasn’t a perfect presentation.” [SB 6/18/12_16]

“It wasn’t very helpful [feedback on speaking tasks] because they didn’t tell me something that I could improve and understand where I did wrong.” [SB 1/15/12_16]

Some students felt that by judging their peers’ work, their classmates might feel insulted, so they resorted to offering only positive comments. However, the feedback recipients recognized that and felt that these comments were not as honest as they could have been, and so not as helpful for them, because they did not suggest any areas for improvement. Similar student attitudes were evident in McConnell’s (2010) study in which he examined students’ attitudes towards collaborative assessment in online settings. Even though students found the process of exchanging feedback to be enjoyable and beneficial, they felt that the feedback was not entirely honest (McConnell 2010). McConnell (2010, p.82) states that students were “sometimes unwilling to offer really critical comments in case it offends.” One student said that he “coped with this by trying to be ultra-positive” (McConnell 2010, p.82).

For the feedback on the podcast activity, four (out of six participants) in the Fall 2016 interviews felt they had benefited from their classmates’ comments on their podcasts, as they remembered the feedback comments and tried to improve. For example, two students said:

“I saw their comments and I tried to improve my work, like for the recordings, they told me not to read so much from the paper, and in the next time we had an exercise for a recording I tried not to read so much.” [SB 4/17/12_16]

“It was more helpful rather than writing skills, for the example I told, not to read so much what I wrote but speaking more in my own words. I didn’t understand that I was actually reading, so by seeing that comment I understood it and I tried not to do it.” [SB 4/19/12_16]

Two students mentioned that they did not find their peers’ feedback on their

speaking tasks helpful, as they trusted the instructor would give them more honest feedback to help them improve.

With respect to giving comments to their classmates' tasks, only six of the twenty-one participants interviewed felt awkward at first, since it was a task that they had never done before. Other students also reported they were hesitant posting comments for their classmates, as they were concerned about causing offence, so they opted for posting mostly positive comments on their peers' work:

“I don't like giving feedback, but I know it's helpful- it's hard to give comments because I may say something wrong and get misunderstood, but it was helpful because you want to be sure you give correct comments so you study before you write a comment, but I didn't do that when I did my own exercise.” [SB 2/8/5_16]

“Again, I would only give positive feedback because I didn't want to offend someone, I only gave a negative comment once, but I checked many times before giving that comment to be sure about that, but yes, I was feeling uncomfortable first, but I got used to that.” [SB 2/18/12_16]

“I don't like to criticize other classmates for their work, this is wrong I know it, but I did it and I gave only positive comments.” [SB 6/23/12_16]

“[I]t wasn't very nice to give comments to others at first because you didn't want to insult anyone, but it was helpful as well, because I learned not to make the same mistakes as my classmates;” [SB 7/8/5_16]

This finding is consistent with the study findings of Vurdien's (2013) and Lin et al's (2013) where students restricted themselves to giving messages of encouragement to their peers rather than more critical comments. However, as students in my study posted and received more feedback throughout the semester, they realized that their peers were not offended, and that the comments helped their classmates improve, so they felt more comfortable with the process. In fact, during the focus group discussions, it was interesting to note that one student's response to offering feedback to her peers was that she felt more comfortable giving 'negative' feedback to her classmates because she knew them and therefore felt comfortable expressing her honest opinion.

However, if she had to offer comments to people she did not know, she would only offer positive comments.

Overall, the students engaged in more critical thinking about their learning through the blog interaction, especially through exchanging feedback, since they were involved in a process of assessing their peers' work, making judgements on whether their classmates' work was correct, identifying mistakes and offering their own thoughts and ideas about their peers' work. The feedback process seems to have encouraged reflection on their own posts:

“[I]t was helpful giving comments as well because I would go back to my work and check if I had done the same mistakes, so it was like double checking my work and make sure it was correct.” [SB 6/8/5_16]

“I felt good about giving comments because I felt I was helping someone get better and it helped me express myself when I commented on others' work and it improved my writing as well.” [SB 3/8/5_16]

“When I gave comments, it helped me find my own mistakes as well because I checked all the points I had to mention (referring to criteria I gave to students to use for peer feedback) and by doing all these steps I found my own mistakes as well.” [SB 4/8/5_16].

“I went back to the criteria and I saw what I included in my work and what I had to improve.” [SB 4/22/12_16]

“[I]t helped me because before I gave comments I would see what I had to check on the assignment so that I don't do that as well, and most of the times the mistakes that I saw on other people's work, I did it on my own work as well.” [SB 5/17/12_16]

These findings are similar to Vurdien's (2013) study of the integration of blogging to enhance writing skills. She discusses that writing comments for their peers' tasks helped students engage in more self-reflection and taught them to be more analytical and critical in their writing (Vurdien 2013, pp.136-137).

6.7. Summary

In this chapter, I presented the findings of the thematic analysis that I conducted to analyze the participant interviews and focus group discussions. Overall, using a blog in my English for Specific Purposes courses was well-received by the students. The blog was perceived as an innovative method for practicing English

writing and speaking, although students seemed to value online writing more than speaking online. Students highlighted the importance of face-to-face interaction for effective spoken communication.

Students felt that online writing was motivating, since they would regularly visit the blog in order to check if they had any comments from their peers. Initially they were hesitant posting comments, but they realized quickly that these comments were useful for both their classmates and for themselves. Most students made a lot of effort to offer comments that would help their peers and this process helped them to be more critically engaged with the language. It also led to self-reflection: many students mentioned that they would go back to their own posts and check if they had made the same mistakes as the ones they identified in their peers' work. However, some students refrained from giving even constructive feedback to their peers fearing they would offend them, so they did not post at all. Other students only offered positive comments for the same reason.

On the other hand, students indicated that speaking online might be more helpful when preparing to give an oral presentation, which allows one to rehearse and practice their speech in advance, and less helpful for real time interaction between two or more people.

In the next chapter I will present a discussion of the findings to explore the research questions I posed at the beginning of this thesis.

Chapter Seven: Discussion

7.1. Introduction

The use of online platforms and social media to facilitate language learning has been extensively researched in literature (for example, see Chum Chan, and Tiwari 2012; Deng and Yuen 2011; Halic, Lee, Paulus and Spence 2010; Kang, Bonk, and Myung-Chun 2011). In particular, the use of blogging has become very popular in the twenty-first century with the emergence of an increasing number of educational blogs that are being used by both educators and learners either as a source of information, or more practically in the classroom. Blogs are argued to be effective in helping students enhance their writing and speaking performance (Akçay and Arslan 2010; Montero-Fleta and Perez-Sabater 2010; Noytim 2010; Wright, White, Hirst, and Cann 2014).

Blogging in education was an innovative technology for teaching and learning when I began my study. By the time I had completed my thesis, numerous other technologies had been launched to enhance language learning. Some examples of these technologies are the use of virtual reality and language learning, augmented reality, as well as gamification and language learning (Cruaud 2018; Kingsley and Grabner-Hagen 2018; Udjaja 2018). Since these are quite new technologies, there is not a lot of research yet on their effectiveness. More research is necessary, in particular about gamified teaching situations and in assessing gamified resources within school settings (Cruaud 2018 p. 341; Kingsley and Grabner-Hagen 2015). Additionally, purchasing related software and/or equipment to support new technologies can be costly. However, several free blogging sites exist that can be used easily and at no cost (Laborda 2011, p.106).

Technologies supporting language learning are not static. They are rapidly evolving, displacing older technologies, and sometimes making them obsolete as discussed above. I am familiar with those changes, and I understand that newer technologies exist which can be equally effective and innovative alternatives to blogging. Nonetheless, blogs do not seem to have been replaced by these new technologies, since a large number of studies support their positive impact in language learning, as presented in the beginning of this thesis. Despite the

extensive literature supporting the use of blogging for language learning, there is still limited research exploring the effectiveness of blogs in English for Specific Purpose courses.

The value of this thesis lies in the fact that it involves action research to explore this area. This kind of research entails that I am familiar with the context and the topic of investigation and that the findings may be beneficial for me but could also be beneficial for other instructors of English for Specific Purposes who wish to use blogs in their practice. By undertaking classroom action research, the instructor/researcher reflects and evaluates new methodologies implemented in their teaching with the purpose of improving their teaching practice (Adelman 1993; Kemmis 2009). My purpose as an instructor was both personal change and professional development, but also sharing my experience with other language practitioners who may also find blogging effective and beneficial for their students.

The three research questions addressed and examined in this research are:

1. What does research indicate about the use of blogs in English for Specific Purposes?
2. What are students' perceptions of the use of blogging in ESP, particularly the use of collaborative peer feedback?
3. How might language practitioners integrate blogging in their ESP classrooms?

In order to answer these questions, my study examined the role of blogs in English for Specific Purposes courses from three different perspectives. Firstly, I conducted a narrative review of the literature to understand the wider research perspective. Secondly, I studied the blog data gathered from each class blog along with the subsequent graded assignments that students were required to complete throughout the semester and carried out error analysis to identify any common patterns in the errors they had made and whether the students recognized and revised these errors following their peers' comments. Thirdly, I elicited and analyzed the students' perceptions and attitudes towards the blog, in particular the online collaborative feedback, and whether or not they felt it

supported their language learning process related to their academic studies. Through the findings from these three aspects, from a teacher's perspective, I am able to reflect on how a language practitioner might integrate blogging in their ESP classrooms.

This chapter will discuss the findings to answer these research questions. My interpretation of the findings with reference to theoretical and research frameworks will be discussed, as well as the implications for teacher practice, the limitations encountered in the study, and recommendations for future research.

7.2. What does Research Indicate About the Use of Blogs in English for Specific Purposes?

As discussed in Chapter One, the fact that the literature does not contain much research on English for Specific Purposes led me to broaden my search for blogging in language learning in a range of language learning contexts (English for Academic Purposes and English as a Foreign Language). I explored the use of blogging to support students' writing and speaking performance in these wider contexts. Overall, my study indicates that the integration of a blog in ESP courses at a university level can help improve the learning experience of students, and that it can help support their speaking and writing performance in English in particular when used in combination with in-class instruction (Hung and Huang 2015).

7.2.1 General Findings on Blogging and Language Learning

Blogging as a platform for student interaction and peer feedback is claimed in literature to be effective in enabling students to practice their writing skills outside the classroom, in their own time and space, and at their own pace (Yang 2009). It also helps them engage in higher-order skills such as critical thinking, evaluation, and reflection (Xie, Ke and Sharma 2008). Blogs enable different ways for students to express themselves; for instance, they can record their own speech and offer oral peer feedback, which can help reduce speaking anxiety, boost their self-confidence, and speak more fluently (Sun 2009, p. 99).

Literature on collaborative learning through online peer feedback supports that

blogging is beneficial for students' improvement in a foreign language. For instance, it is supported that when students create their own online space on the blog and upload their posts, receiving and offering feedback from their peers and teacher, they become more motivated (Blackstone 2007 cited in Ahluwalia et al 2011, p. 31). Ahluwalia et al's study (2011) indicated that student participants thought that the best part of blogging was commenting on peer work and that the peer review enabled the development of analytical skills.

Asoodar et al's study (2016) found that students who used a blog in their class outperformed a class that received only in-class instruction in the areas of content and organization of information. They suggested that the nature of blogging as an asynchronous medium of communication allowed more time to reflect on their ideas before they published their posts and comments to their peers (Asoodar et al 2016, p. 242). Kung's (2015) study revealed that students in an English academic writing class felt more motivated to learn and felt more independent as well as more confident in publishing their written work online. Video blogging (vlogging) can also help students improve their speaking performance when giving oral presentations (Huang and Hung 2010; Hung and Huang 2015). Students can keep editing and revising clips until they are satisfied with them, which lends support to the suggestion that repetition, which may allow opportunities for rehearsal, can promote language learning (Hung and Huang 2015, p. 622). Literature also cites research that supports the benefits of blogging in improving language learners' writing skills in addition to increasing motivation and self-efficacy (Asoodar, Atai and Vaezi 2016; Chen et al 2011; Lin 2015).

7.2.2. Blogging and English for Specific Purposes

The limited literature exploring ESP learning focuses mostly on the language, methodology, and skills used in English for Academic Purposes courses than on technologies or the learners themselves (Campion 2016, p. 60). Basturkmen (2020) discusses the literature that currently exists on teaching and learning in English for Specific Purposes. She highlights the need for more discussion of concepts and theories pertaining to ESP teaching methodologies (Basturkmen 2020, p. 9). My study lends support to the literature with respect to the role of

blogs in helping students practice and improve their English language performance in two different ESP courses. My error analysis of students' written tasks indicated that students who had engaged both in blogging and peer feedback improved their language skills by correcting their errors in response to feedback, and then not repeating the same errors in later assessments. This finding lends support to studies by Amir, Ismail and Hussin (2010); Asoodar, Atai and Vaezi (2016); Chen, Liu, Shih, Wu, and Yuan (2011); Kelly, Baxter and Anderson (2010); Ning and Hornby (2014). Assessment of the students' oral skills on the final spoken presentation indicated that most of the students showed confidence while delivering their presentation, fluency, clarity of speech, use of linking words/phrases, and eye contact.

My findings indicate that the use of blogging combined with in-class instruction can support language learning, with particular focus on the students' writing performance. Blogging offered students more opportunities to practice in writing and through the constructive feedback they exchanged with their peers they were able to recognize and not repeat errors and they were supported in assessing their work through evaluation and reflection; blogging might also have contributed to developing critical thinking skills in language learning. By supporting students in being able to "analyze, criticize, share ideas and reach conclusions" (Qing 2013), the blog may have reinforced students' critical thinking about their language use. Further research would be needed to explore this more fully.

Lu and Law's (2011) study indicates that students benefited more as assessors than as assessees when they gave comments that identified problems and suggested solutions. In particular, it was found that the more problems students identified and the more suggestions they offered, the better they performed in their own projects (Lu and Law 2011, p. 270). In my study, the interactive feature of the blog that allowed learners to collaborate and exchange feedback seemed to show positive results in terms of their learning. Students engaged in writing professional technical documents (such as business memos and instruction manuals) that did not require them to engage in deeper analysis of concepts, but rather to write more concisely and focus on getting their point across.

My error analysis revealed that the majority of the students who were actively engaged in blogging did not repeat the errors made in the blog posts in the assignments that followed until the end of the semester. The feedback comments that were exchanged between students related to the content, structure, cohesion and organization of the writing tasks. The types of errors that students in the *English for Computer Science* course identified related mostly to the technical specifications of the document, the format and structure, and less on the linguistic aspects of the documents, as discussed in more detail in Chapter Five. This may have been attributed to the fact that because they were Computer Science majors, the students had a more technical background. This may have led them to focus more on the technical aspects of the document and less on the linguistic aspects that business students focused more on (such as wordiness, vague subject lines or general introductory sentences, lack of sufficient linking words, and so on).

The blog also seemed to be an effective platform that offered learners more opportunities to practice, both in writing and in speaking outside of the classroom. Chen et al (2011) suggest that blogging helps students improve their writing due to the feedback exchanged between peers in relation to the wording, content, spelling, format, punctuation, and organization. However, Hansen's (2016) findings suggest that blogging may not be as intellectually challenging as other writing types or as effective in teaching concepts. Hansen's study also found that students were more likely to use greater lexical density in their essays rather than in their blog posts. However, in the context of the ESP courses in my study, the focus of writing to produce technical documents lies more on the conciseness and directness of the documents and less on the richness of vocabulary used, and this may be one reason why the blogs were helpful for my students.

7.2.3. Blogging and Peer Feedback in Language Learning

There has been extensive literature on peer feedback and, more specifically, on online peer feedback through blogging, in improving learners' performance and in helping them become more responsible and active in their learning. The

process of peer feedback enables students to think about tasks more critically, engage in self-reflection, and results in more active learning overall (Dooly and Sadler 2013; Olofsson, Lindberg and Hauge 2011; Pinya and Rosselló 2016; Salovaara 2005; Yang and Chang 2012).

My study found that blogging was an effective platform for peer feedback. One of the tools that a blog features is the commenting section below each post. This tool enables anyone to post their comments, views, questions, agreement, or disagreement below each post and interact with the author. In a language learning setting, the commenting tool is used as the space where students can exchange feedback, ask questions, and negotiate meaning. Student comments indicated that they engaged in self-reflection on learning through peer feedback and editing. Reflecting on learning is significant in the learning process, as it involves the learner in exploring and explaining rather than merely describing events (Al Khateeb 2016). Additionally, reflection is perceived as a significant prerequisite in one's ability to make meaning from new information, and to proceed from surface learning (simply memorizing) to deep learning (actively integrating new ideas into cognitive structure) (Al Khateeb 2016).

7.3. What are students' perceptions of the use of blogging in ESP, particularly the use of collaborative peer feedback?

Overall, student perceptions of blogging were positive as were perceptions of the use of collaborative peer feedback. The majority of the students who participated in my study welcomed the idea of a blog in their English language course as a novel and more interesting way to practice their writing and speaking skills. Most of the participants in my study (seventeen out of twenty-one students interviewed) felt that using a blog in their language learning was beneficial, primarily in helping them practice and improve their language skills. Several participants also stated that the interaction and collaboration they had with their peers through sharing and exchanging comments on their work helped them to remember the comments received and so avoid the same errors in the future. They also felt that their comments helped their classmates improve by providing feedback on their work. The collaborative learning they experienced helped them to realize that they were not the only ones who had some

difficulties with the language, and so felt more confident about themselves. I will go into more detail in the next sections about the students' perceptions of blogging and peer feedback.

7.3.1. Perceptions of Learning Benefits

The literature supports the view that students become more responsible and active in their learning through collaboration (Chen 2011; Kelly et al 2010; McConnell 2002; Olofsson et al 2011). The findings of my study indicate that the majority of the students (nineteen out of twenty-one) enjoyed collaborating with their classmates to complete a task rather than working on their own. Collaboration, either in class or through the blog was thought to be beneficial and effective, mainly because it allowed students to hear and discuss the different opinions that were exchanged during collaboration. These exchanges helped them to develop new ideas. Kelly et al's (2010) study found that offering learners a structured online learning environment that allows them to collaborate with their peers positively affected their learning. Kelly et al (2010) found that this method fostered more reading, learning, interest, and student input in the course when compared to traditional teaching methodologies.

Students in my study also felt that collaboration helped them feel more motivated and engaged in the learning process. Eighteen participants felt that writing online through blogging was more motivating than other forms of writing, as it was a new and interesting way for them to practice written language skills. Some participants also mentioned that they looked forward to going on the blog to check if they had any comments from their classmates. Students' motivation and engagement levels seemed to increase largely due to perceiving the blog as an innovative platform and a new feature added to the course that they had not been accustomed to previously. The fact that the blog allowed the learners to access and post material at any time and place made it convenient for students to complete their tasks at their own pace, without the time restrictions that often exist in the classroom. This finding is also supported by Fisher, Perenyi and Birdthistle (2018), Boekaerts (2016) and Laal and Ghodsi (2011). McConnell (2002) also found asynchronous communication supports reflective learning since students are allowed to have the time to read, think and respond to their

classmates' work before sharing their own comments.

Most students in this study stated in their interviews that they preferred online writing as opposed to traditional forms of writing. They mentioned that they liked how convenient it was: it allowed them the flexibility to complete their tasks whenever they wanted and wherever they wanted, without feeling the pressure to write a summary or a memo in class under time restrictions, and/or at a time when they may have not been feeling well or were stressed. Instead, they had the freedom to post their tasks at their own convenience, when they felt that they could perform at their best. They also stated that writing online helped them to proofread their posts before sharing them. My findings also suggest that sharing content online can be beneficial for language learners in increasing their confidence in using a foreign language. Baecher, Schieble and Rosalia (2013), and Lin (2015), also reported students' positive experiences as a result of written blog exchanges.

My findings indicate that the fact that students had access to their classmates' work helped them realize that they faced similar challenges in learning a language, and in effect lower their apprehensions in using the language. The process of sharing their work and helping their classmates by reviewing each other's assignments seemed to be motivating for students to participate more and be more active in their learning. Also, by having access and reading their peers' posts before posting seemed to make students think more critically about their classmates' writing. It also helped them to plan their own writing more carefully before sharing. The fact that the format and style of the blogs used was more relaxed than other forms of academic writing enabled students to be more flexible and creative in their writing. They also reported that they felt less pressure during the writing tasks. Further to this, they seemed to have more control and ownership of their learning using the blog than in the face-to-face classroom. Students did find blogging more time-consuming because they were not producing essays or exam responses in the traditional way. On the other hand, students felt that it made them think about their audience and appreciate the skill of writing as a means to convey their arguments. They were also able to see how they could transfer their new skills in future situations.

Several students in this study stated that they felt they benefited from the spoken tasks they had completed on the blog. However, eighteen students preferred face to face rather than online learning for practicing their speaking skills. They felt that having an interaction in real time within the classroom was more beneficial for them. Previous studies appear to lend support to this finding. Huang and Hung's study (2015) presents students' feelings towards online speaking. Overall, attitudes towards recording speech and sharing it on a blog were positive, but some students stated that rehearsing a speech cannot be regarded as authentic oral communication, as it is prepared, corrected, and perfected before it is posted, in contrast to interacting with others in real time which consists of more natural speech (Huang and Hung 2015, p. 626). A similar finding is echoed in Murray and Kennedy's research (2010), in which the use of an L2 blog to increase student participation in an advanced Italian course was examined. Murray and Kennedy (2010, p.322) found that students who were more active in the classroom made minimum contributions to the blog, as they stated that they preferred face to face communication. Students clearly valued the benefits of real-time conversation taking place in class, which is indeed valuable for improving language and conversation skills. However, blogs can help students when they have to prepare speeches and give oral presentations, by becoming more fluent and confident in speaking without facing an audience face to face, which is often intimidating and stressful (Buchem and Hamelmann 2011; Hung and Huang 2015).

7.3.2. The Benefits of Collaboration for Peer Feedback

My study found that blogging enables students to engage in peer feedback through the commenting feature that is available below each post. Exchanging peer feedback encouraged interaction among the ESP students and helped them engage in self-reflection on their language skills. The commenting feature below each post allowed readers to reflect on what they read and share their thoughts and reactions to the content. In my language learning courses, the commenting tool was used as a space where students could exchange feedback, ask questions, and negotiate meaning. Through the exchange of feedback, learners had the opportunity to observe, interact, exchange viewpoints, evaluate information, negotiate meaning and offer constructive comments for

improvement. These are all processes that are suggested as being advantageous for learning (Chung and Yang 2011, p. 129). Amil, Ismail, and Hussin (2010) examined the use of blogs in the classroom, and the student responses revealed that they felt their vocabulary knowledge increased and that the process of peer feedback helped them improve their grammar skills, as receiving feedback from their peers helped them remember the mistakes pointed out to them and not repeat them. Students appeared to be more relaxed and have less anxiety about making grammar or vocabulary errors when writing their assignments through a blog. Students also stated that they felt that their vocabulary knowledge has increased and that they have more general knowledge than before (Amil, Ismail and Hussin 2010, p. 541).

7.3.3. Challenges with Peer Feedback

Only two participants in my research reported that they did not benefit from their peers' feedback, because they only received positive comments from their classmates, and they felt this was not honest. They felt that only receiving positive comments was not beneficial for them in any way. Other students stated that they trusted the instructor's feedback more, as they felt it was more honest and helpful for them.

In terms of offering feedback, participants found the task challenging. Some of them felt particularly anxious offering comments to their classmates, since they feared they would offend their friends, and they worried that their peers would misunderstand their comments. They did recognize however, that it was helpful for both their classmates and for them. Some participants stated that it was only when they had to give feedback to their classmates that they carefully studied the criteria for effective summary writing, so that they could offer appropriate comments to their classmates and help them improve.

I was initially surprised to see my students' hesitation and anxiety in giving comments to their classmates. The students have a lot of access to social media, they own active social media accounts where they share personal content such as photos, comments on their friends' photos or posts that are public, and they are generally exposed to sharing content to a larger online audience.

Nonetheless, when it came to posting their work or commenting on their peers' English language tasks, they were more hesitant and self-conscious of their performance. They were not entirely positive about sharing their work for others to see, and they also felt concerned about posting negative comments to their peers. Similar findings were reported in a study conducted by Vurdien (2013), during which some language learners who had engaged in blogging reported feeling embarrassed about correcting their classmates' mistakes, as they were concerned about giving offence (Vurdien 2013, p. 137). One student also stated that they were not sure what mistakes to correct (Vurdien 2013, p. 137).

My findings may suggest that students in my classes felt more conscious of their learning because they had to post on the blog and so perhaps lacked confidence in themselves. None of the students had used a blog before for a language course so although blog use was intriguing for them, they were initially hesitant and nervous sharing their work with their peers. Some of the students stated that they felt embarrassed to share their posts at first but felt more comfortable as they saw other students posting. It was when they felt more comfortable that they started posting themselves, following encouragement from me as the instructor. Reflecting on my findings, it is important to note that teacher presence is significant in facilitating confidence through the posting and commenting process (see also Garrison, Anderson and Archer 2000; Zeqiri 2013). It is also important in monitoring learning, encouraging feedback, pointing out the good comments given, motivating, and showing students that the instructor is also present in the learning process (Garrison, Anderson and Archer 2000, p. 101; Zeqiri 2013). The fact that I intervened in some cases to point out some areas that had not been picked up by the students, and also to thank everyone for their contributions at the end of each task, may have helped students feel that I was reading through their posts and comments and so helped them to feel more secure and confident. However, it may have also meant that they felt that in the end they would receive 'proper' feedback for their work. Students did indicate that they did not have the same level of trust in the peer feedback: they indicated during the interviews that they felt the instructor was more suitable for offering feedback as a professional.

7.4. How Might Language Practitioners Integrate Blogging in their ESP Classrooms?

After conducting my research and reading the relevant literature on blogging and language learning, I can suggest that language practitioners can integrate blogging to support collaborative learning in their language classes in order to provide additional opportunities for students to practice their writing and speaking skills outside the classroom. They can also integrate blogging to support the exchange of peer feedback, help learners reflect on their language learning process, and engage in critical thinking. These are skills that may be transferable to other areas in their academic and professional lives. My study also contributes to the ESP and language learning field in general by demonstrating the usefulness of practitioner action research for ESP teachers in exploring teaching and learning.

Reflecting on my research, the integration of the blog in my English language courses was an enriching experience for me as the teacher. I was able to offer additional opportunities to my students to practice their writing and speaking outside the classroom. Time restrictions often do not allow for students to sufficiently practice the different language skills during the lesson. I felt that through the blog posts and the encouragement to comment on each other's work, I gave the space to my students to become more active learners and not passively expect and rely on my feedback. Students also recognized and indicated during their interviews that the fact that they engaged in the process of offering feedback to their classmates 'forced' them to study the criteria and conventions of effective writing in ESP so that they could offer helpful comments to their classmates and help them improve. At the same time, they would revisit their work to check whether they had made the same mistakes and improve the accuracy of their writing and speaking. My findings indicate that this process helped them to: become more reflective about their writing and speaking; engage in more critical thinking to identify aspects of the posts that would need improvement; and determine what they thought was effective about their peers' work.

7.4.1. Using Blogs to Encourage Online Collaboration

The research study and the design of the blog activities was informed by collaborative learning and social interdependence theories. As discussed in Chapter Two, collaborative learning refers to "working in a group of two or more to achieve a common goal, while respecting each individual's contribution to the whole" (McInnerey and Roberts 2004). Cooperative learning refers to a group of students working together as a team on a specific assignment with specific criteria and guidelines set by the instructor to facilitate the collaborative process. The term collaborative learning involves more the process of social interaction and engagement within a group to complete the learning task, while cooperative learning focuses more on the result and product of cooperation (Hutchinson 2007, p. 37-38). Dillenbourg (1999) also distinguishes between cooperative and collaborative learning, with collaborative learning being described as requiring more of a joint effort to achieve a task, as opposed to cooperative learning where tasks are clearly divided systematically among the group members (cited in Schoor, Narciss and Korndle 2015, p. 5).

My study was also informed by Johnson and Johnson's (2009) social interdependence theory which asserts that social interaction between learners promotes the accomplishment of common goals when there is positive interdependence (Johnson and Johnson 2009, p. 366). Social Interdependence theory supports that people working cooperatively can contribute to greater psychological health, along with helping people gain more motivation, self-confidence, autonomy and higher self-esteem. These values are also fundamental in helping learners achieve goals and overall succeed in learning (Ning and Hornby 2014, p. 111).

Drawing on both theories, I created opportunities for participants to be involved in online collaborative interdependent tasks through the blog, during which they engaged in the exchange of feedback on both oral and written tasks. It was important to use a class blog as opposed to individual blogs to encourage collaboration. The purpose of opting for the class blog was to allow all students to have access to a common space for posting and commenting, which also enabled students to easily see each other's posts and get ideas for their own

responses. In some cases, it helped them understand more about the content or the task at hand, as they stated in their interviews. A similar recommendation was offered by Xie et al (2008), who acknowledged that having students maintain individual blogs which were hidden from the rest of the class (apart from their peer feedback group) was a limitation in their study, as blogging seemed to have become an isolating experience for students. Not having access to all the blogs did not allow students to see the rest of their classmates' activities, which made some students feel lonely and bored, and eventually gave up blogging (Xie et al 2008, p. 24). Students in this study also reported during their focus group discussions that through the posting and commenting tasks on the blog, they also got the opportunity to get to know students that did not participate much in the classroom but expressed themselves on the blog.

Teachers could therefore use blogging to encourage online collaboration and positive social interdependence between learners in addition to face-to-face interactions and collaboration. The participants in my study stated that they tried to complete their blog tasks and were eager to visit the blog to see if they had received any comments from their peers. Also, they stated that they felt more confident in their English language skills, particularly through their practice oral tasks via the blog, which helped them feel more confident and comfortable speaking before an audience. It might be that as students progressed through the semester, and engaged in some online interaction through the blog, they felt supported by their peers as learners, and so grew more confident. Positive interdependence may also have been present in the group. Students positively interacted with each other in the social context of the blog, working towards the common goal of providing feedback with the purpose to help each other learn. Students seem also to have grown in confidence. Johnson and Johnson (2009, p.366) highlight that positive interdependence during collaborative learning can support students to develop motivation, self-confidence, autonomy, and self-esteem (Johnson and Johnson 2009, p. 366). It is important not to overstate this, however, as more research would be needed to look at this specific aspect of blogging and collaborative learning among my ESP students. Also, positive interdependence was a backdrop for my study rather than a focus of the research.

However, one challenge that emerged, was that students did not trust peer feedback as much as my feedback to them. Students felt that my comments as the instructor were necessary and that they should not rely only on their peers' comments. Nonetheless, they did still value the support they received from their peers and stated in their interviews that they put a lot of effort into giving accurate feedback because they wanted to help each other. Participants also indicated that they did not feel confident posting on the blog initially. Collaborating and sharing the feedback did seem to help their confidence. Of course, collaborative tasks can also effectively take place in the face to face classroom. However, when students collaborate online, they might feel more comfortable sharing their thoughts; shy students in particular may feel more at ease sharing their opinions online (Ward 2004).

7.4.2. Carefully Designed Blog Activities

The design of the blog tasks to encourage collaboration and learning should be carefully conducted and thought through. Since the technological tools are just the medium of instruction, I do not think that they should replace physical presence or the teacher's role in learning. What the blog offers is a medium of interaction among students and between students and the instructor outside the classroom. It can provide a space where all students can have equal opportunities to contribute in their own time and pace. The blog tasks were carefully designed to encourage collaboration and reflection by asking students to post comments to two of their classmates' posts. Emphasis was placed on making sure that students acknowledged the strong points of the post, in addition to pointing out areas where improvements could be made. Caution was given when presenting the task guidelines and when presenting information on my posts, so that students avoided using the words 'mistakes,' 'errors,' or 'weaknesses' in an effort to keep a positive attitude throughout the process. Through the peer feedback process, students went back to the criteria and studied them more carefully in order to offer helpful feedback. Some participants stated in their interviews that they had not checked the criteria when they were writing their own tasks, but only read them when they were going to offer feedback. This may suggest that the exchange of online peer feedback helped students study more fully the conventions and structure of

technical documents which they may have not paid attention to if they were only asked to produce a document and not engage in peer feedback.

However, in order for students to be able to engage in constructive feedback that will be beneficial to their peers, the instructor needs to design the task and consider training the students in advance in writing workshops where they will engage in peer feedback using the criteria that will guide them in assessing the tasks effectively. The instructor should highlight that positive feedback is as important as constructive feedback and that students should highlight both types of feedback by explaining why they liked the specific parts and offer suggestions as to how the 'weak' parts can be improved. This process will restrict the students from passively responding to the task, but it will encourage them to put more effort and thought into the feedback process.

Learners in my ESP classes engaged in online discussions as a group, communicating information and ideas to each other, agreeing and disagreeing with each other and sharing new information. Students engaged in online interaction and communicated information to one another in order to revise and improve their written and spoken tasks and then used the information shared by their classmates to improve. The knowledge and information were shared among learners to achieve a common understanding of the conventions of writing a summary, memo, or manual instructions, and thus achieve a shared understanding which lays the ground for intersubjectivity, as discussed in Kim (2001). This process of social interaction through the use of the second language seemed to be motivating for students and helped them feel more self-confident and less hesitant about sharing their work. Some of my participants also expressed that the blog helped them be more responsible and autonomous in the sense that they could take the initiative to complete their tasks in their own time and place without any classroom restrictions or specific instructions by their instructor for doing so. This finding is similar to studies by Fisher, Perenyi and Birdthistle (2018), Boekaerts (2016), and Laal and Ghodsi (2011). I also used mixed ability groups in my English language courses in my effort to enhance their language learning. Collaborative learning involves learners of different performance levels working together in groups towards a common goal. The ability to communicate effectively with others is considered a crucial skill in

language learning, as well as the ability to collaborate and work together to achieve a common goal (Gokhale 1995, p. 22).

7.4.3. Use of Blogs to Encourage Active Learning

My study also indicates that encouraging students to claim a more active role in the learning process rather than being passive recipients of information is also significant in language learning. Becoming more fluent in a language, either in writing or in speaking, requires practice in actually using the language in different ways in order for it to be acquired. The instructional method of collaborative learning enables exactly that: helping students to be more active and responsible learners, as well as more motivated and engaged in their own learning. The findings of McConnell's (2002) study showed that students become more autonomous through the process of evaluating others' work and by relying less on the instructor's feedback (McConnell 2002, p. 85). The blog is an environment that allows learners to collaborate, exchange ideas and become more autonomous learners as they share their work with a wider audience (Terkinarslan 2008).

Another way of keeping language learners active in their learning is by engaging them in critical thinking. Apart from practicing their language skills, students worked on their critical thinking skills, as they had to determine their viewpoint on issues discussed in videos and justify them, as well as think about their peers' responses more critically and express agreement or disagreement. In the same way as with the written blog tasks, students were encouraged to engage in self-reflection. They were asked to think about their own podcasts and whether they had fulfilled the criteria set out during the course, which they then used to evaluate their classmates' recordings. The process of peer feedback can encourage critical thinking, as students need to assess writing or speaking tasks and make decisions on correct or incorrect language use.

7.4.4. The Importance of Online Teacher Presence

In terms of collaborative feedback, as I noted in Chapter Six, students were initially hesitant to give feedback as they did not want to cause offence. As time

progressed, students grew more comfortable with posting and stated that they realized that they were in the same position as their classmates, who also made mistakes in their posts, so they did not feel inferior to their peers. They also recognized that by looking at their peers' posts, they would get ideas for their own posts and sometimes have a better understanding of what the task was about if they had not understood what they were required to do. However, they seemed to lack confidence in giving helpful feedback and also there seemed to be a lack of trust between them as being 'qualified' in giving accurate feedback.

When there are issues like this during blogging, it is important for the teacher to support students. I did this by indicating my presence on the blog as the teacher and ensuring that students felt that I was also monitoring their work to give feedback, as this made them feel safer and more confident that they were indeed receiving helpful feedback for their work. This could be attributed to the fact that I implemented changes following the analysis of the first data set interviews in response to this finding. I made more effort in encouraging students to post and exchange comments, I was more present during the discussions in recognizing accurate comments and thanking everyone for their contributions, and this may have boosted their confidence in posting constructive comments.

Reflecting on the students' posts and interviews, I understood that regular and timely feedback and acknowledgement of students' posts is important for students to feel that the teacher is 'present' and to reduce their anxiety waiting for their feedback. In the individual interviews, students mentioned that they received comments faster on the blog rather than in the traditional way of submitting homework and then having to wait for days in order for the instructor to return their work. It might be that feeling that the instructor is engaging with discussions or posts may help the students to be more engaged and participate more in the blogging tasks. Practitioners can integrate a blog in their classes and design motivating activities that can encourage collaboration, reflection, and critical thinking. However, encouraging participation that is maintained throughout the semester needs to be considered. I faced a challenge in encouraging students to maintain the same levels of activity on the blog throughout the semester. As workload in their other classes started to increase

around mid-term, their blog contributions decreased. Therefore, increased teacher presence and constant encouragement and support may help sustain their activity throughout a course of study. Additionally, including the blog tasks in the overall course assessment by allocating a proportion of the final grade may also offer motivation to students to remain active on the blog throughout the semester.

7.4.5. Using Blogs to Extend Opportunities for Learning

Classroom time is often limited in ESP teaching, and instructors find themselves struggling to cover the curriculum. By using an online platform such as a blog, instructors can offer students additional material and tasks to practice language in their own time and enrich their language experiences outside the classroom. The blog is a platform of asynchronous communication, which means that students are allowed time to think about, edit and revise their posts, as opposed to the time restrictions they often face in the classroom (Ariffin and Yaacob 2014; Asoodar, Atai and Vaezi 2016; Ducate and Lomicka 2008; McConnell 2002; Miceli, Murray and Kennedy 2010; Yang 2009). Additionally, the archiving feature of the blog can help the instructor as well as the students to monitor their progress throughout the semester by visiting all their posts and tracking their own progress, as well as by visiting their classmates' tasks throughout the semester. As the instructor, I could give feedback quickly to each individual post and track their progress throughout the semester, since the posts were easy to retrieve. The fact that I could only comment on the post within the comments' section, and I could not make corrections on grammar/spelling errors on the actual post, was a limitation I found on the use of the blog.

Through my study, I recommend that the blog can be used as an additional platform for further practice and collaboration between students. It is not being recommended as a tool to replace the traditional classroom or face to face communication with the teacher and other students in the classroom. The blog offers opportunities for students to further practice their writing and speaking skills outside the classroom. Through an interactive blog, I could facilitate online collaboration and exchange of peer feedback and encourage students to engage in more critical thinking and self-reflection of their work. Learners had the

opportunity to carefully think about and prepare what they wanted to post and also prepare the comments they wanted to offer to their peers at their own time and space, when they felt at their best. However, in the classroom, when students were asked to work together and exchange feedback on their work, some felt that they could not focus fully on the task. Some also felt that the time given for them to complete the task was not sufficient and they needed more time that was not available in the physical classroom. The fact that the blog supports asynchronous communication may afford students who are struggling with their academic performance to have enough time and resources at their disposal to plan their responses. This in turn may lead to higher quality task responses due to the opportunities given to research and plan their posts.

7.4.6. Consider Blogs as Part of Blended Learning

For an ESP course, the face-to-face interaction with the instructor is important. Within an ESP course, the writing skills inherent in course learning require the ability to produce specific technical documents that follow a particular structure. (For example, in my courses there is a focus on memo writing, manual instruction writing, and professional email writing). Teaching the structure and conventions of producing such documents can be more beneficial when meeting face to face with the instructor. In the physical classroom, I can explain the structure of different documents and show students examples. I can also respond to student questions and give responses on the spot. Reflecting on my findings, I would recommend a blended-learning approach for English for Specific Purposes, where both face to face and online learning are combined. Blended learning is a way to offer learners more opportunities for language practice and different language learning experiences that might not be available if only face to face learning is used. Blended learning can be enriching and can ultimately help students improve their language skills (Dooly and Sadler 2013). It can also encourage the students to be more active and responsible for their own learning (Eun 2010; Kelly, Baxter and Anderson 2010; McConnell 2002). However, it is worth noting here that when taking a course where blended learning is used, it is important to ensure that students have access to IT equipment and internet connections, so that the online learning experience does not become challenging or stressful.

Apart from the blended learning approach being enriching for students, I also found it enriching in the teaching process. It was an innovative way for me to have access to the students' work and offer feedback rather than through the traditional method of collecting piles of paper to correct. Also, the fact that the blog archives all the posts in reverse chronological order was helpful in sorting out each student's contribution and I could easily assess their progress throughout the semester. In addition to the technical aspects of the blog that were refreshing in the correction process, the constant contact with the students outside the classroom was also enriching for me. I had more opportunities to provide feedback on their work and communicate with them, which also allowed us to get to know each other and feel more comfortable with each other more quickly apart from the two times per week that we met in class. Also, receiving constant feedback throughout the semester and not only on a specific number of occasions, can help students feel more supported during the learning process.

7.5. Challenges

Despite the positive outcomes of the study, it also faced some challenges. One challenge pertained to the amount of posting required on the part of the students. As I noted earlier, students did find this more time-consuming than they would have if they had only been completing the course written assessments. Another challenge related to student confidence with blogging. The students had no prior experience to blogging, so it took an enormous amount of encouragement to help students overcome their apprehensions and start posting. This was also the case when they started posting their speaking tasks, as they did not have any prior experience of recording and sharing podcasts.

In addition, it is more challenging to edit grammar and spelling mistakes on the blog, which makes for another limitation that needs to be thought about. It was more time-consuming to post specific comments on grammar and/or spelling errors, as the only way to provide such feedback was through the comments rather than in the text. Currently, only text can be posted in the comments' section, thereby limiting the types of comments to be posted. Students mostly

preferred to post comments related to the structure, organization, and coherence, which were quite helpful for their peers. Nonetheless, comments on spelling, vocabulary and grammar errors were very limited. Although I discussed above that this may have been due to the different nature of one of the courses (the English for Computer Science Majors' course), I believe this might also have been due to the commenting feature. It is more challenging to point out spelling and grammar errors in separate prose comments rather than writing a note on the error directly into the text. A comment in the text is also easier for the recipient of the comment to identify and understand. It would be easier for students to comment on grammar and/or spelling errors if there was a feature on the blog that allows the editing of posts in different colors and enables track changes on the post so that the correction is shown directly. Comments exchanged seemed limited by this issue: students tended to comment on the structure of the task, organization of information, and coherence. Future teacher research on blogging could explore whether add-in tools could more easily facilitate linguistic feedback on written posts.

Another challenge was the frequency of posting. The number of students posting their tasks dropped after the middle of the semester, as the demands of their other major courses and final exams approaching kept them busy and they mentioned that they did not have a lot of time to visit the blog. While in the beginning more students started posting and commenting on each other's posts, after they overcame their initial anxiety at around the middle of the semester, their participation started to drop and they needed more encouragement from the instructor to complete the blog tasks assigned, as the students' other course obligations started to become more overwhelming, therefore affecting their engagement in the blog. Further practitioner research could explore what might motivate students to maintain blog posts more consistently across the teaching semester. The extent of teacher presence in online discussions should also be further explored in relation to blogging and how teacher encouragement can keep students engaged.

On reflection, I wondered if offering a higher percentage grade on the blog tasks as part of the overall final course grade, might motivated students to put more effort consistently. The blog tasks only counted as part of the 5% participation

grade for my courses. The literature reports that the degree of student engagement with activities differs according to whether they are assessed or not. For instance, Farmer et al (2007 cited in Dalgarno, Reupert and Bishop 2015, p. 192) presented the use of blog activities that were part of the course assessment showing very high levels of engagement (211 out of 220 students posted at least one entry); other studies such as Divitini, Haugalokken and Morken (2005) reported that very few students engaged in blog activities that were optional (2 out of 34) (cited in Dalgarno et al 2015, p. 192). Similarly, Xie et al (2008) reported that students failed keeping up with the blogs throughout the semester, and one of the reasons attributed to their lack of interest in keeping up with the blogs was that only 10% of the final grade was attributed to the blog task, which was believed not to be a strong incentive (Xie et al 2008, p. 24). However, it should also be taken into consideration that each group of students is different. Student motivation and language ability level may vary from group to group, and this could also affect their overall engagement. Most importantly, being explicit with students in the ways that blogs are intended to support their learning and focusing on the quality of the tasks to be assessed rather than the quantity, can help in making students engage more sufficiently (Dalgarno et al 2015, p. 192).

7.6. Summary

Students in my study had a positive perception of blogging as being beneficial in their English for Specific Purposes courses. Additional opportunities to practice their writing and speaking skills were offered and student attitudes showed a positive perception of blogging which was viewed as a welcome addition to the course for additional practice outside the classroom. Interactive blogging within ESP courses may be beneficial in enhancing students' written and spoken performance, and both online and in-class collaboration can benefit students' motivation and engagement in the lesson.

Blogging can also encourage students become more active learners rather than passive recipients of knowledge and can help students engage in reflection and self-reflection, improve their critical thinking skills, and feel more responsible in their learning. Students in my study valued the benefits of online writing in contrast to traditional writing, as being more fun, interesting, and convenient.

However, students preferred face to face speaking rather than online speaking, as they felt it is more personal, it is easy to see the interlocutor's body language and expressions, and perceived speaking face to face as more natural and authentic.

My study suggests that blogs can be used in combination with in-class teaching in a blended-learning approach with the purpose to offer additional opportunities for students to practice their writing and speaking skills, but also their reading and listening skills outside the classroom. Through online collaboration via peer feedback, students become more active in their learning by reflecting and critically thinking about the content, and in effect they gain more self-confidence and become more successful language learners. Blogging can also constitute a helpful tool for instructors to integrate in their courses as well, as it is a user-friendly platform where the educator can easily track students' progress and assess their work. There has been limited research in the investigation of blogging in ESP courses at the university level, so I believe that this study offers insight into the ways that this platform can be integrated in an English for Specific Purposes language course at the university level.

Chapter 8: Final Reflections

8.1. Introduction

This thesis has investigated the impact of an interactive blog in enhancing English language learners' writing and speaking performance within an undergraduate English for Specific Purposes (ESP) course. I set out to explore whether blogging used for collaborative peer feedback might support learning of English for Specific Purposes with my students and, if so, how it might do this. I found that blogging can support language learning within the context of an ESP course, helping learners by providing more opportunities to practice the language, reflect on their learning, and engage in critical thinking about their learning through the process of collaborative peer feedback. I also found that this process can help students to become more active and engaged in the learning process. Adding a blog in my courses and exploring different written and spoken tasks also gave me confidence as an ESP practitioner and I have felt more creative in using the blog in different ways since the end of the study.

One simple but effective thing that I have done is to start using the blog as a means of encouraging reflective feedback for students as part of the course evaluations at the end of the semester. The commenting feature allows the student to choose if they wish to comment as an anonymous user or as a member of the blog with their name displayed. I made sure to share this option with my students so that they could freely and honestly reflect on the course and highlight the areas they liked and the areas they felt needed more improvement. This anonymity allowed for more comments to be posted and it was a very helpful source of feedback for me to improve my courses and assess my learners' needs.

In the future, I am planning to use blogging more frequently to connect students from different courses and different universities. Especially for Business English courses, after the first attempt in using blogging with ESP students across two different universities, I believe it would be beneficial for students to blog and get in contact with students studying a similar course at a different university and exchange the business practices each country has. This should help students gain an insight into how people do business in different cultures, helping them

feel more ready to go into the market once they graduate. They will also use English throughout the discussions and written tasks, so their language skills can also be enhanced at the same time through tele-collaboration with students from foreign universities. Further to this, it would be beneficial to further investigate blogging across groups from different universities where students can engage in online peer discussions and peer feedback. Enabling communication from different groups across different countries and cultures can be beneficial for students not just by having them acquainted with different concepts and practices and by engaging them in discussions where they negotiate meaning, but by also allowing them to evaluate, exchange opinions, and engage in critical thinking and reflection.

Particularly during the time of the pandemic and the lockdown (which forced all our university courses to move online very rapidly), the fact that I had already started using the blog enabled me and my students to transition to the exclusive online format of the course quickly and easily. The blog provided an online meeting place to engage in collaborative writing and interaction. Students had already been familiar with online collaborative writing, so we easily resumed the group work tasks online during lockdown. I added more listening activities by sharing videos related to students' field of study. I also added more discussion questions in order to encourage students to express their opinions and share their views on particular topics. Since classroom time is always restricted, I felt that I offered students more opportunities to practice their language skills outside the classroom, and constantly kept them in touch with the language throughout the semester. I took great care for my posts to be friendly, encouraging and motivating for students, so that I could engage them in completing the tasks. From a teacher's perspective, using technologies in my teaching was also helpful because I could access more examples of student work than is usual in an ESP class. For example, when it comes to evaluating a student's speaking skills or improvement in speaking, it can be challenging for the instructor to assess the student based on an oral presentation given within a few minutes during class and listening to it only once. I found blogging helpful for students' oral assessments: students could record their speech, share it with each other and with me as the instructor and I could evaluate their language learning more effectively. Students also received a larger amount of feedback to

support their learning than the feedback they receive in the face-to-face classroom. I found it helpful to watch and listen to the presentations as many times as needed and this process meant I could give more targeted and detailed feedback to support learning.

The value of integrating technologies like blogs in the English for Specific Purposes classroom lies in the fact that learners now have multiple ways to use and practice the language outside the classroom, which may not have been the case in the past. By incorporating technology in a language course, learners can gain access to different tools and platforms where they can access more content, engage with more language use, and have more opportunities to interact with their peers or native speakers of the language. This can add a significant value in the overall process of learning. The integration of blogging in my English language classroom has helped me understand the value of blogging as a means for students to engage in collaboration, reflection, and critical thinking, which are highly significant transferable skills that can help students in any type of learning they engage. The fact that blogging consists of an asynchronous mode of communication allows learners to prepare and publish their tasks at their own time and pace. I hope that this will support self-regulation, a learning strategy “in which people organize and manage their learning, including control of their time, thoughts, emotions, behaviours, and environment” (Zhou and Wei 2018, p. 482). By allowing learners the possibility to decide for themselves when and where to complete a task, I am trying to encourage them to become more responsible and autonomous in their own learning.

Technologies like podcasting, wikis, speech processing software, along with newer technologies such as augmented reality and virtual reality can be integrated into language learning since they enable learners to further practice their skills outside the classroom. It is also important to note that most of these tools are free and easy to use, so this can further assist students in accessing these technologies. Due to the fact that there are many students in the English for Specific Purposes classroom, each has limited opportunities to practice the language sufficiently. My study has shown me that having access to technologies outside the classroom can be beneficial for improving and/or acquiring a

language and for affording more opportunities for all students to sufficiently practice different language skills.

The instructor's role during this process is instrumental in ensuring the learners' engagement in such online activities. During the course of this study, my role was mostly restricted to monitoring the blogging process and the students' interaction and less about intervening during discussions, as I wanted the students to be more autonomous during posting and exchanging peer feedback. However, I intervened to provide further feedback when I judged that some comments were not entirely accurate, or some mistakes were not picked up by students. As the study progressed, I noticed declining activity over the course of the semester, and after analyzing my initial findings where students indicated that they valued my feedback and considered it important in their learning, I tried to be more involved to enhance my teacher presence. I tried to do this, however, without guiding the discussions. I posted more 'thank you' comments after posting, congratulated students for accurate comments, and encouraged others to participate more. The fact that students felt that I was present during the commenting and feedback process seemed to make them feel more confident and encouraged them to keep posting and exchanging feedback. This view is supported by the students' interview responses, where they stated that initially they were hesitant posting and exchanging comments but gradually became more comfortable. They realized that the feedback they provided helped their classmates improve and also improved their own language performance, so they did not feel as inhibited.

My study contributes to the limited literature on the role of ESP teachers' presence in online or blended learning. Hosler and Arend (2012) note that teacher presence is a significant factor "contributing to student satisfaction" (p. 232). Their study indicates that students "want to be pushed to more challenging critical thinking by instructors who direct, encourage, and support deeper levels of critical thinking" (Hosler and Arend 2012, p. 225). A more recent study by Avsheniuk, Seminikhyna, Svyrydiuk and Lutsenko (2021) that I have read since completing my research, explores the role of teacher presence in online ESP courses during the COVID-19 pandemic. Their survey of online students placed

teacher presence as the most highly-rated element of teacher performance and indicates the instructor's importance as a facilitator in virtual learning (Avsheniuk, Seminikhyna, Svyrydiuk and Lutsenko 2021, p. 229). The study found that the teachers' presence plays an essential role in supporting students' knowledge acquisition during online learning: the authors state that "ESP teachers respond to learners' questions, design projects, and evaluate their learning because student expectations and attitudes are vital to motivation and learning" (Avsheniuk, Seminikhyna, Svyrydiuk and Lutsenko 2021, p.231).

My study therefore contributes to the existing research on teacher presence in online or blended courses by suggesting that students seem to show increased confidence when engaging in online social interactions with each other when they feel that the instructor is present throughout the process supporting them. In particular, I was actively involved in the blog but avoided intervening in the social interactions between the students, keeping my presence to an educational role. Providing encouragement and support for learning appeared to offer students the confidence to keep posting and exchanging feedback.

8.2. Recommendations for Practice

I am planning to further explore the use of blogs in different ESP courses, as well as investigate different types of collaborative activities that I could incorporate into the blogs. I have begun to share findings with other ESP practitioners in the field through presenting at conferences and publishing in the conference proceedings. I would like to end my thesis by sharing some recommendations for practice drawn from the literature used in this thesis and from my own research. These recommendations could be helpful for practitioners to bear in mind in their own ESP practices if they are thinking about using an asynchronous blog to support learning in their courses.

The recommendations are as follows:

- Instructors should design collaborative activities carefully so that the activities are interesting and motivating for students, and so that they support engagement in collaborative activities. ESP instructors should consider creating a shared class blog to encourage collaboration (rather

than tutor or student blog), so that all students can access peer and instructor posts.

- Instructors should include a variety of blog tasks that address core ESP language learning skills (reading, writing, listening, and speaking) by including authentic materials and multimedia relevant to the students' interests and fields of study.
- Teacher presence is important during asynchronous learning to ensure students stay motivated throughout the semester and feel that the instructor is engaging with their posts and participating in their learning.
- ESP instructors should consider using evaluation criteria to support students to engage in peer feedback. Criteria can assist students to offer more constructive feedback for their peers rather than more passively posting a comment because the instructor asked them to do so. It is helpful to discuss with students how to exchange peer feedback using evaluation criteria prior to undertaking online feedback.
- Students in the class should be encouraged to participate in peer feedback as a whole class group rather than being divided into smaller groups so that each student has access to a larger variety of peer feedback and support. ESP teachers should consider how to encourage all students to engage in peer feedback on the blog, particularly if the students are concerned about giving feedback to their peers.

8.3. Final Thoughts

This study has helped me understand the importance of research in the field of language learning. By reading different studies and findings in the literature, and by undertaking practitioner research, I have been able to learn more about different methodologies of teaching and learning that I can use in my own classrooms. I have gained an insight into the different ways technology can be used both inside and outside the classroom, as well as considering the challenges and limitations that I may encounter, so that I can deal with these in advance.

Overall, this study has greatly contributed to my professional development, as well as in my efforts to keep abreast of, and inform my practice with, the latest developments in my field.

I would like to mention one final thought on the research process here. The choice of focus groups as a data collection instrument to elicit student responses proved to be challenging, as it did not yield the amount or quality of data I expected. The students knew each other well and knew me as their instructor, so I expected that dynamic discussions would take place. However, this was not the case, and I had to frequently prompt participants to respond. The participants found it difficult to engage in a discussion, giving brief responses to which I had to prompt for clarifications and examples to illustrate the points they were making. The focus groups did not add significantly to the data produced during the individual interviews, as students did not seem to engage in dynamic discussions as expected. Parker and Tritter (2006, p.26) posit that group dynamics are important in facilitating in-depth discussions in focus groups, even though it often does not happen right away. More specifically, they state that “despite their collective interests, participants may not always be keen to engage with each other, or alternatively, may know each other so well that interaction is based on patterns of social relations that have little to do with the research intent of the focus group” (Parker and Tritter, 2006, p. 27). Therefore, researchers or practitioners who wish to employ focus groups as a data collection instrument, may want to consider whether these will indeed add to their data collection. If they decide to do so, then they should consider ways to engage participants in the discussion.

Overall, I have found that blogs can assist students to develop core language skills in reading, listening, writing, and speaking in English for Specific Purposes. Through sharing their posts, students were able to develop their language skills by creating blog posts and by reading and listening to each other’s posts in order to provide feedback. Nonetheless, blogging is not recommended as a replacement for face-to-face teaching, but as a tool that can be blended with traditional teaching. Face to face interaction and collaboration is still valuable and significant in ESP language learning. My findings suggest that the use of technologies in English for Specific Purposes classrooms can be beneficial for both teachers and learners when used in parallel with face to face teaching.

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Appendix A
Literature on blogging and language learning & blogging and ESP

Blogging and Language Learning	Blogging and Speaking	Blogging and ESP
<p>Akcay, A., & Akif, A. (2010). The Using of Blogs in Turkish Education. <i>Procedia Social and Behavioral Science</i>, (2), 1195-1199.</p>	<p>Hsu, H.Y., Wang, S.K., & Comac, L. (2008). Using audioblogs to assist English-language learning: an investigation into student perception. <i>Computer Assisted Language Learning</i>, 21, (2), 181-198.</p>	<p>Arnold, N. & Ducate L. (2006). Future foreign language teachers' social and cognitive collaboration in an online environment. <i>Language Learning & Technology</i>, 10A 1, 42-66.</p>
<p>Amir, Z., Ismail, K., & Hussin, S. (2011). Blogs in language learning: Maximizing students' collaborative writing. <i>Procedia Social and Behavioral Sciences</i>, 18, 537-543.</p>	<p>Hung, S.T & Huang, H.T. (2015). Video blogging and English presentation performance: A pilot study. <i>Psychological Reports</i>, 117, (2), 614-630. doi: 10.2466/11.PR0.117c20z6</p>	<p>Cretiu, A. E. (2016). The use of online tools in teaching and practicing English for Art. <i>Acta Technica Napocensis- Language for Specific Purposes</i>, 3, 25-28.</p>
<p>Ariffin, Z., & Yaacob, A. (2014). BALL (Blogs Assisted Language Learning): Are Malaysian Secondary School Students Prepared to Use Blogs in Language Learning? <i>Advances in Language and Literary Studies</i>, 5 (5), 123-13.</p>	<p>Kim, D. (2011). Incorporating podcasting and blogging into a core task for ESOL teacher candidates. <i>Computers & Education</i>, 56, 632-641.</p>	<p>Esteban, S.G., & Martinez, C. T. (2014). Critical reflections in teaching ESP through constructivist, communicative and collaborative technological integrated procedures. <i>Social and Behavioral Sciences</i>, 141, 342-346.</p>
<p>Asoodar, M., Atai, M.R., & Vaezi, S. (2016). Blog-integrated writing with blog-buddies: EAP learners' writing performance. <i>Journal of Educational Computing Research</i>,</p>	<p>Song, J. W. (2009). An investigation into the effects of an oral English diary and using voice bulletin board on English language performance. <i>Multimedia Assisted Language Learning</i>, 12,</p>	<p>Hung, S.T. (2011). Pedagogical applications of vlogs: An investigation into ESP learners' perceptions. <i>British Journal of Educational Technology</i>, 42 (5), pp. 736-746.</p>

54, (2), 225-252.	(1), 125-150.	
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<p>Dippold, D. (2009). Peer feedback through blogs: Student and teacher perceptions in an advanced German class. <i>ReCALL</i>, 21, (1), 18-36.</p>		<p>Pop, A. (2016). Medical students' perception of technology-enhanced ESP writing- a basis for quality language learning. <i>Synergy</i>, 12, (1), 176-185.</p>
<p>Ducate, L.C. & Lomicka, L.L. (2008). Adventures in the blogosphere: from blog readers to blog writers. <i>Computer Assisted Language Learning</i>, 21 (1), 9-28.</p>		<p>Zandi, P., Thang, S. M, Krish, P. (2014). Teacher professional development through blogging: Some preliminary findings. <i>Procedia-Social and Behavioral Sciences</i>, 118, 530-556.</p>
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<p>cohort university teaching: A case study. <i>Australasia Journal of Educational Technology</i>, 24 (2), 123-136.</p>		<p>(1), pp. 1-17.</p>
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<p>Kelly, D., Baxter, J.S., & Anderson, A. (2010). Engaging first-year students through online collaborative assessments. <i>Journal of Computer Assisted Learning</i>, 26, 535-548.</p>		
<p>Lin, M. H., Groom, N., & Lin, C.Y. (2013). Blog-assisted learning in the ESL writing classroom: A phenomenological analysis, <i>International Forum of Educational Technology & Society</i>, 16 (3), 130-139.</p>		
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APPENDIX B

LAN 201 & LAN 111 Course Descriptions

LAN 201: Business Communication for Management Course Description

By helping you become a more efficient speaker and writer, Business Communication for Management aims to prepare you for the challenges that you will face both at university and in the workplace. Throughout the course, emphasis will be placed on written and oral language as a way of improving your communication. The instructor thus will facilitate your understanding of the theory behind good communication and will be looking for evidence of the student first, having understood the theory, and second, of the student being able to implement that theory by developing their note-taking and paraphrasing skills, which will lead into producing clear and accurate summaries of business readings.

Summary of Learning Objectives: This course aims to create clear, precise documents in order to:

- a. Eliminate wordiness
- b. Place key words in power positions
- c. Use active and passive voice appropriately
- d. Avoid jargon and pompous wording
- e. Understand the need to achieve simplicity
- f. Write with the audience in mind
- g. Acquire vocabulary pertaining to business contexts
- h. Develop note-taking skills
- i. Paraphrase from written and audio/visual material
- j. Produce concise and accurate summaries of business-related texts

Learning Outcomes of the Course Unit (overall skills and knowledge you are expected to cumulatively attain by the end of the course):

By the end of this course, you should be able to:

1. Identify the most important ideas in a business-related text
2. Locate important information and business vocabulary from listening tasks
3. Restate information from a text in the students' own writing
4. List the most important information of a business text in a note format
5. Apply effective writing techniques to produce summaries of business-related readings
6. Produce coherent and accurate summaries of business readings
7. Demonstrate ability to communicate information effectively in written tasks
8. Formulate clear, precise and coherent sentences both in written documents and in oral tasks
9. Criticize opinions and give own judgments on various subjects derived from business texts
10. Assess peer-to-peer and personal performance in summary writing based on clearly-defined objectives
11. Evaluate and summarize the speech of professionals and judge the most effective ones.

LAN 111: English for Computer Science Majors Course Description

English for Computer Science is designed to meet the needs of students studying Computer Science for an undergraduate degree at the University of Cyprus. It is a three hour per week, 5 credit course that students from this department must successfully complete in order to fulfil their foreign language requirement.

The course will integrate the four skills (reading, writing, listening and speaking) with a concentration on comprehension and writing. The course intends to improve students' understanding of texts by reading articles related to their field of study. Writing will focus on using concise and coherent wording. Also, students will learn how to paraphrase so as to avoid plagiarism. This will in turn equip them with the necessary tools to prepare the oral presentation for the course.

A further aim of the course is to offer students a sufficient range of language related to the field so that they are able to express themselves with clarity, fluency and spontaneity; traits that they will use in the academic context which will serve as a catalyst for future use in their careers.

Summary of Learning Objectives: This course aims

- To enhance students' ability to communicate in the field of Computer Science
- To develop reading, writing, listening and speaking skills
- To enable students to effectively comprehend Computer Science related texts and paraphrase from the texts
- To enable students to write concisely and coherently
- To broaden Computer Science related vocabulary
- To enable students to prepare and present power point presentations on topics related to their major field of study

Learning Outcomes of the Course Unit:

By the end of this course, you should be able to:

- Read a variety of contemporary computer science related articles and identify relevant information and writing styles. Locate main ideas and paraphrase them.
- Differentiate main ideas from supporting details and express the ideas succinctly in students' own words.
- Demonstrate increasing competency in reading, writing, speaking and listening skills.
- Practice and employ relevant computer science vocabulary as well as being able to explain it in layman's terms.
- Identify specific format and language components employed in writing that is concise.
- Compose coherent and succinct writing by appraising sources for suitability and relevance.
- Examine examples of writing styles and formats to differentiate between effective and non-effective writing. Produce effective writing.
- Arrange and synthesize information in order to plan/prepare/produce oral tasks.

APPENDIX C

Criteria for evaluation of technical documents

Effective Memo Checklist

1. Does the memo have the correct memo format, including date, to, from, and subject lines?
2. Is the subject line correct?
 - Is it typed in all caps?
 - Does it contain a topic and a focus?
3. Does the introduction tell why you are writing and what you are writing about?
4. Does the body explain what you want to say?
5. Does the conclusion tell what's next, providing either a complimentary or a directive close?
6. Is the page layout reader-friendly?
 - Are highlighting techniques for accessibility, such as bullets, boldface, underlining, and white space used?
7. Is the writing style concise?
 - Do you limit the number of words per sentence, the number of syllables per word, and the number of lines per paragraph?
8. Is the writing clear?
 - Are the reporter's questions answered? (who/what/why/where/when)
 - Are vague words, such as *some*, *several*, *many* or *few*, avoided, specifying instead?
9. Is the writing style appropriate for the audience?
 - Have you defined high tech terms where necessary for low tech or lay readers?
 - Have you achieved the correct tone and personalized your memo, based on your audience and purpose?
10. Are errors eliminated? Remember, a memo with grammatical or mechanical errors will destroy your credibility. You must proofread to catch errors.

Summary Writing Checklist

1. Does the summary provide the works cited information for the article that is being summarized?
2. Is the works-cited information correct?
3. Does the summary begin with an introduction clearly stating the author's primary focus?
4. Does the summary discussion section explain the author's primary contentions and omit secondary side issues?
5. In the discussion section, are the author's contentions through pertinent facts and figures explained while avoiding lengthy technicalities?
6. Is the content accurate? That is, are the facts provided in the summary exactly the same as those the author provided to substantiate his or her point of view?
7. Has the discussions section been organized according to the author's method of organization?
8. Are transitional words and phrases used?
9. Have direct quotations in the summary been omitted depending instead on paraphrases?
10. Does the conclusion either reiterate the author's primary contentions reveal the author's value judgment or state the author's recommendation for future action?
11. Is the summary completely objective, avoiding any of your own attitudes?
12. Has an effective technical writing style been used, avoiding long sentences and long words?
13. Are the grammar and mechanics correct?
14. Is biased language avoided?

Checklist for Writing Instructions

1. Does the instructions' manual have an effective title?
2. Does it have an effective introduction?
3. Are the steps presented chronologically?
4. Does each step begin with a verb?
5. Are the steps well developed?
6. Do all the steps follow a parallel construction?
7. Does it have an effective conclusion?

APPENDIX D

Examples of student error/response to feedback: Data set, FALL 2015

LAN 201.3 Memo Writing Tasks

Student Code	Blog Comments	Memo Assignment	Midterm Exam
SB 5/1/12_15	<p>“I think you should use more positive language to explain with the candidate 3 is not suitable for any position!”</p> <p>“...the language you used for candidate 3 which is not positive.”</p>	<p>Used positive language throughout. (9/10)</p> <p>Requested a response in the conclusion</p>	<p>A good memo (29/30)</p> <p>Two spelling errors [recommendations-softwares]</p>
SB 9/12_15	<p>“Pay attention to your subject; it needs to become a bit more specific to the content of your memo.”</p>	<p>Accurate subject (6/10)</p> <p>-Request a response in conclusion</p> <p>-Awkward expressions in writing [for example ‘I believe in the advertisers must take place famous model’]</p> <p>Some errors in header format [the ‘to’ field is to general; ‘Company’s marketing’]</p>	<p>Accurate subject (19.5/30)</p> <p>Incomplete ‘to’ field</p> <p>Unclear expression</p> <p>Give contact information for conclusion</p>
SB 10/12_15	<p>“...but unfortunately incomplete. You had to explain the reason why candidate 3 is not suitable for any company.”</p>	<p>Memo was complete; included all information requested (8.5/10)</p> <p>Requested a response in the conclusion</p>	<p>The main body was complete; the conclusion needed more information (give deadline and ask for response) (21/30)</p> <p>Needed one more paragraph</p> <p>One unclear point [...because when your computer and printer do these you cannot show your excellent job to your customer’]</p>

LAN 201.3 Summary Writing Tasks

I= Instructor comment

Student Codes	Blog Comments	Summary Assignment	Final Exam
SB 11/12_15	"...the concluding sentence is not clear and does not reflect the conclusion of the text" (I)	Conclusion is clear but copied from original (5/10) More paraphrase needed	Somewhat clear conclusion (18/30)
SB 12/12_15	"...try to use more transition words and introduce the source more clearly by stating the title; proofread before publishing" (I)	Used more transition words and stated title in introduction (6.5/10) Try to paraphrase more	Didn't state title of the article. Uses transition words (21/30)
SB 10/12_15	"...you could paraphrase the phrase "sales driven"	Needs more paraphrasing (7.5/10) Author's conclusions not presented	Very little copying (23/30)
SB 13/12_15	"...I believe your conclusion is too general".	Good conclusion (7.5/10) General-vague introduction ['According to the article, Japanese people have to improve their English language skills.']	Good conclusion (27/30) One unnecessary detail included
SB 14/12_15	"The only thing I think you could change is the phrases "sales-driven", "customer-driven" and "market-driven".	There was more paraphrasing, but info was not entirely accurate (7.5/10) Unclear conclusion [an additional point was presented; it did not effectively close the summary.] Some inaccuracies in content	There was paraphrasing (28/30)

LAN 201.5 Memo Writing Task

Name	Blog Comments	Memo Assignment	Midterm Exam
SB 15/12_15	"...make sure you divide the message into paragraphs so that the information is more efficiently presented" (I)	No paragraphs (7/10) No subject line; incorrect header Give deadline for response in conclusion	No paragraphing (21/30)
SB 1/1/12_15	"...dividing the message into paragraphs would help you present the information more clearly" (I)	There was an effort to divide memo into paragraphs (6.5/10) No request for response	Memo divided into paragraphs mostly (19.5/30) Unclear request in the introduction
SB 16/12_15	"However, the last paragraph of the body needs to become less threatening".	Non- threatening language (9/10) Give deadline for responding in conclusion	No threatening language (27/30) No paragraphing in one point
SB 2/1/12_15	"...you need to revise the structure of the header" (I).	Correct structure of header (9/10) Request for response in conclusion	Correct structure of header (24/30) Give deadline for response in conclusion
SB 3/2/12_15	"The only suggestion I have is that you could give more information for company B so we could understand easier why the candidate 2 is the most suitable".	The content is complete (8.5/10) Unclear purpose in introduction	Complete in terms of content (27/30)
SB 17/12_15	"The only suggestion I have for you is that you could put more details about companies' needs".	Enough details- complete memo (8/10) Unclear purpose in introduction Request for response in conclusion	Enough details (19.5/30) Incorrect order of information in header. Unclear expression of

			one point [“unfortunately, if do not do this purchase there is a possibility to be far away from our competitor’s results”]
SB 7/1/12_15	“However, I think you should make more clear the reason candidate 3 is not chosen.”	Clear content (7.5/10) Unclear introduction- no purpose	Complete content (26/30)
SB 18/12_15	“The only suggestion I have is to avoid grammar mistakes!”	Grammar mistakes (8/10)	Grammar mistakes (25/30)

Summary Writing

LAN 201.5

Student Codes	Blog Comments	Summary Assignment	Final Exam
SB 1/12_15	“However, you could be more brief.”	Content is sufficiently presented (7.5/10)	Presents main ideas (22/30)
SB 19/12_15	“However, make sure you properly introduce the source and paraphrase some of the phrases used so that they are not entirely copied from the original” (I)	The source is properly introduced; some paraphrasing (7.5/10) Conclusion copied from original source	The source is properly introduced; some paraphrasing (20/30)
SB 3/2/12_15	“However, I think that your introduction sentence is very long and it doesn’t state clearly the author’s primary focus”	The introduction sentence is short, but not completely clear (7.5/10)	Clear introduction and accurate citation (29/30)
SB 20/2/12_15	“However, I think it will be better if your summary begins with an introduction clearly stating the author’s primary focus.”	The main idea of the article was mentioned in the introduction (8.5/10)	Good introduction (25/30)

SB 21/12_15	“However, the introduction is inaccurate; the author states how companies have changed their strategies over the years, not the existence of 3 types of companies” (I)	Still inaccuracies in the summary; introduction is appropriate (5/10)	Accurate introduction (18/30) More paraphrase needed
SB 17/12_15	“However, you could make it perfect by stating more clearly the author’s purpose.”	Good introduction (8/10) Unclear conclusion [To sum up, the author describes the way that Mr Mikitani from his new book ‘Marketplace 3.0’ wants to make his beliefs real.’]	Good introduction (22/30)
SB 7/1/12_15	“However, I believe that your introduction is very long.”	Good introduction (9/10)	More paraphrasing needed Proper introduction (22/30)
SB 22/12_15	“...however, the conclusion does not seem to be accurate, as the author states that the aim of the companies is to own the whole market, not only part of it.” (I)	Conclusion is accurate (7.5/10)	Better conclusion but long (24/30)

APPENDIX E

Examples of student error/response to feedback: SPRING 2016 Data Set

LAN 111.2 Memo Writing

I= Instructor comment

Student Codes	Blog Comments	Memo Assignment	Midterm Exam
[PK/ 2_16]	<p>“However, in my way of thinking, you wrote sentences with many words. In other words, you could use shorter sentences to express the idea of the memo”</p> <p>“I think you could skip some words and form shorter sentences”</p>	Attempt at shorter sentences (8/10)	More effort to write shorter sentences (19/20)
[MN/1M/2_16]	<p>“On the contrary, you didn’t use bullets or numbers for the steps that technicians have to follow”</p> <p>“If I were you, I would give the ability to all technicians to ask me questions if they needed anything”</p>	<p>No steps included (not necessary)</p> <p>Gave option to ask for questions (8/10)</p>	<p>Added steps</p> <p>Showed availability for questions (16.5/20)</p>
[EK/ 2_16]	“My one and only concern is that you could change a bit of the second part”	Well-structured main body (8,5/10)	Well-structured main body (18,5/20)
[AS/ 2_16]	“You could have used the numbered list as a way to make your points more clear, however don’t worry about it, it’s a mistake I also made and I just realized how easier it is to express your points in this way, comparing to what I did ☺ “	Used point form but was not relevant (6/10)	Effort to divide into paragraphs (16/20)
[IY/ 2_16]	“Try to divide the message in different paragraphs, distinguishing between introduction, body and conclusion” (I)	Clear distinction between introduction, body and conclusion (8.5/10)	Clear distinction between introduction, body and conclusion (17.5/20)

LAN 111.2

Manual Instructions' Task

I= Instructor comment

Student Codes	Blog Comments	Final Exam
[GA// 3_16]	"In the troubleshooting guide, try to add more than one problem long with its solution" (I)	Added two FAQs (18/20)
[CH/ 3_16]	"You should add more troubleshooting guide, or FAQs, or communication details"	Added troubleshooting guide (17/20)
[MN/ 3_16]	"My only concern is that you could add some more steps to make your points more specific. You could also add some more points to your troubleshooting guide or you could involve in your guide the communication details"	Added 4 problems in troubleshooting guide (14/20)

LAN 111.3

Memo Writing Tasks

Student Codes	Blog Comments	Memo Assignment	Midterm Exam
[NT/ 2_16]	"Try to be more direct in the introduction, by directly stating the purpose of your memo. Also, read the instructions in my post above carefully and revise your memo, as it needs to be addressed to all technicians" (I)	Improved header and introduction (8.5/10)	The memo was properly addressed to the recipients as per the instructions The introduction was direct and to the point. (17.5/20)
[TY/2_16]	"However, you could have written some details using bullet points." "The 'TO:' field needs revision; it should address all technicians" (I)	Points presented on a list The memo was properly addressed to the recipients as per the instructions (8.5/10)	Both header and introduction were accurate (18/20)

[PI/ 2_16]	<p>“On the other hand, I think that you should had attached the explanatory brochure with application form”</p> <p>“On the other hand you could have used bullet points in some parts but all in all excellent job.”</p>	Not included; not necessary (8.5/10)	Added enclosure; used bulled points (17/20)
[SK/ 2_16]	<p>“...however like many others and myself included, you didn’t provide any contact information!”</p> <p>“However, the memo should be addressed to all technicians instead”. (l)</p>	<p>Did not add contact information</p> <p>Correct “TO:” field (8/10)</p>	<p>Added contact info</p> <p>Correct header (18/20)</p>
[SK/2_16]	<p>“...your conclusion doesn’t tell what is next and what actions would be taken. You attached an application form but you didn’t refer to in your memo.”</p>	Improved conclusion; referred to enclosure in the memo (8.5/10)	Both areas are correct (16/20)
[NP/ 2_16]	<p>Maybe you should have written the actual contacting details, so it will be easier for the technicians to find you. Also, “enclosures” instead of “attachments” would be more appropriate, in my opinion”.</p>	Improved contact details; no need for enclosure (8/10)	Improved contact details (16.5/20)
[MK/ 2_16]	<p>“Although, I believe that at some points you should have used active instead of passive voice”.</p>	More active voice (9/10)	Improved (19/20)
[PL/ 2_16]	<p>“However, you have missed the explanatory brochure in enclosures and also in my opinion in contact information you should say who Jamie Levasseur is! ☺»</p> <p>“Although, I think that</p>	Added everything in the memo (7.5/10)	Both enclosures and position were added (17.5/20)

	<p>you have to enclose to your memo the explanatory brochure. Also, you don't mentioned who Jamie Levasseur is!"</p> <p>"However, you didn't refer to your memo that you attached an application form."</p>		
[LC/ 2_16]	<p>"...but I think if you had give the important things in points it would be easier for everyone to get the real message of the memo without any problem!"</p> <p>"Although I believe you had to enclose the explanatory brochure to your memo!"</p>	<p>Used bullet points (8/10)</p> <p>Not necessary; not added</p>	<p>Used bullet points (16.5/20)</p>
[AA/ 2_16]	<p>"so, I think you should tell them to reply if they took your memo! As well, you didn't refer to your enclosure in your memo. It would be good if you enclose an explanatory brochure..!!"</p>	<p>Requests for response.</p> <p>Mentioned a letter will follow with more information in a separate letter. (7.5/10)</p>	<p>Shows availability in conclusion. Enclosures not necessary (16/20)</p>
[AA/ 2_16]	<p>"...however, like many others and myself included, you didn't enclose the application form!"</p> <p>"Although I believe that you had to enclose the application form with your memo."</p>	<p>Not added (8.5/10)</p>	<p>Not necessary (18.5/20)</p>
[PR/ 2_16]	<p>"...you forgot to follow the correct memo format that requires all words in the subject line to begin with capital letters. Also, a list of enclosure files should be included in the end of your memo."</p>	<p>Improved header;</p> <p>No need for enclosure (6/10)</p>	<p>Improved header (13.5/20)</p>

LAN 111.3

Manual Instructions

Student Codes	Blog Comments	Final Exam
[EK/ 3_16]	“I believe FAQs would be a good way to conclude.”	No troubleshooting guide; there was conclusion though (14.5/20)
[SK/ 3_16]	<p>“But in my opinion, you could number your steps, which is easier for the reader, instead of using the alphabet. In addition to this, you could use highlighting techniques-different font sizes and styles, colour, italics to emphasize important information. Also, you didn’t include a troubleshooting guide.”</p> <p>“...but you could add either troubleshooting guide or FAQs section”.</p>	Numbered steps Included troubleshooting guide (16/20)
[EK/ 3_16]	...some of your steps don’t begin with a verb.”	All steps begin with a verb (18/20)
[AA/ 3_16]	“However, I believe they are more problems you could add. You also have a small grammatical error: devise-device! :)”	Added 2 FAQs (17/20)
[NP/ 3_16]	“try to add more than one problem and solution on the troubleshooting guide.” (I)	Had 3 problems in troubleshooting guide (16/20)

APPENDIX F

Examples of student error/response to feedback: Fall 2016 Data Set

LAN 201.4 Memo Writing

I= Instructor comment

Student Codes	Blog Comments	Memo Assignment	Midterm Exam
[PN/ 10_16]	<p>“However, there are a few spelling errors. For example, in the 4th paragraph “executes” should be written without an “s”, “managements strategies” should be written as “management’s strategies” and in the 5th paragraph “carrier” is correctly spelled as “career”.</p> <p>“However, your subject isn’t written in capital letters and you could use more linking words”.</p> <p>“However, there are just a few spelling errors. For instance, in the introduction, the phrase “For the three company’s A B and C” should be written as “For the three companies A B and C”.</p>	<p>Subject line improved Some use of linking words No spelling/grammar errors (9/10)</p>	<p>No similar spelling/grammar errors were repeated</p> <p>No capitalization in the subject line</p> <p>Use of linking words (28/30)</p>
[FF/ 10_16]	<p>“However, the subject line must be in all caps”</p> <p>“The only thing that bothers me is the duplication of the word “proper” in the subject line but generally you did a fantastic job!”</p>	<p>Improved subject line (9/10)</p>	<p>Improved (23/30)</p>
[AA/10_16]	<p>“However, your sentences in the main</p>	<p>Attempt at shorter sentences</p>	<p>Both improved (28/30)</p>

	body is too long” “However, although the subject line is specific, I think it could be shortened a bit”.	More concise subject line (8.5/10)	
[YC/ 10_16]	“Also, make sure the first letter of each word in the subject line are capitalized” (I)	Same capitalization error was repeated (7.5/10)	Improved (25/30)
[CI/10_16]	“However, the subject line should be written in all caps. You have a few errors, but generally it is a memo with clear writing” “However, the subject line isn’t written in capital letters.”	Improved (8.5/10)	Improved (25/30)
[AC/ 10_16]	“However, the subject line should be written in all caps.”	Improved (8/10)	Improved (24/30)
[SE/ 10_16]	“Although your subject is understandable, it isn’t written in capital letters”.	Improved (8/10)	Improved (23/30)
[MV/ 10_16]	“Try to revise your concluding sentence, so that you show availability for any questions/clarifications by the reader” (I)	Improved concluding line (8/10)	Improved concluding line (27/30)
[MC/ 10_16]	“However, the subject line is not written in all caps. In the body you omitted the word ‘the’ in front of company” “However, the subject line isn’t written in capital letters.”	Subject line improved (9/10)	Improved (22/30)
[NC/ 10_16]	“In terms of format, make sure you capitalize the first	Improved (9/10)	Improved (25/30)

	letter of every main word in the subject line” (I)		
[AA/ 10_16]	“Try to revise the header of your memo; also try to separate the body in different paragraphs so that the message is easier to read’ (I)	Some errors in header [for example ‘Date: October 4 th Thesday] -no capitalization in subject line Body is separated into paragraphs (7/10)	Improved header Body in single paragraph (24/30)
[NE/ 10_16]	“Just remember to write the first letter of every word in the subject line in capitals. Also please note that the noun referring to a person is ‘applicant’, not ‘applicator’. (I)	Both improved (8/10)	Improved subject line (23/30)
[DE/ 10_16]	“Although the subject line must be in all caps”	Improved subject line (8/10)	Improved subject line (22/30)

LAN 201.4 Summary Writing

Student Codes	Blog Comments	Summary Assignment	Final Exam
[CL/1/11_16]	“I think she could have analyzed the way that companies changed from sales-driven to customer-driven to market-driven a little bit more”	Mentioned all main ideas (8/10)	Complete summary (28/30)
[PN/I/11_16]	“The only thing I suggest is that she could have mentioned that the results of the two mistakes can lead to the dissolution of a company” “However, in the introduction you first need to state the main idea or purpose of the article overall and then	Complete content General introduction [‘The author...writes about Mr. Hiroshi Mikitani a	Complete content Improved introduction (25/30)

	begin with the first major point”	Japanese businessman.’](9/10)	
[AA/11_16]	“In my opinion though, there are some points that are missing in the text such as the third type of company or the mistakes the companies do”	Included main ideas (8.5/10)	Complete summary (28/30)
[AC/11_16]	“However, in the introduction, you need to state the main idea of the article overall rather than beginning directly with the first major point” (I)	Improved introduction that stated the article’s overall main idea (7.5/10)	Improved introduction (23/30)
[AA/I/11_16]	“...pay close attention to citing the article you are summarizing;...the connection between the major ideas presented needs some improvement” (I)	Added citation Some improvement in linking words (7/10)	Both improved (23/30)

APPENDIX G

OVERVIEW OF SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

In the interview students were asked to explore:

- Whether and how they used blogs in their everyday life
- What experiences of technology use they had in schools (such as web 2.0) and what these had been used for.
- Whether they had prior experience of learning English through blogging and if they had what they had learned.
- From their experiences of using blogs on the course whether this had affected their motivation to practice writing skills in English.
- Whether they thought online learning was more or less effective than traditional forms of writing for language learning.
- Their learning through blogs and compare this with classroom learning and which if either they preferred (and why).
- To what extent they thought that online tools such as blogs might benefit language skills or not. If yes, what and why; if no, why not.
- Whether or not collaboration was more or less beneficial for learning writing skills than working alone.
- The role of feedback in their learning - whether they had received peer feedback, and if so how had they used this, and how did it compare to instructor feedback?
- Whether or not blogging had helped them to be more active in learning during ESP.

