

STUDENT AND TEACHER PERCEPTIONS ON BENEFITS AND
CHALLENGES OF USING BLOGS IN ENGLISH IN FOREIGN LANGUAGE
READING CLASSES

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ABSTRACT

STUDENT AND TEACHER PERCEPTIONS ON BENEFITS AND CHALLENGES OF USING BLOGS IN ENGLISH IN FOREIGN LANGUAGE READING CLASSES

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This study investigated the benefits and challenges of using blogs in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) reading classes. The study also examined the possible solutions to the challenges of using blogs in reading classes. The study was conducted with 104 pre-intermediate students and five instructors of English at the English Preparatory School of a private university in Turkey in the spring semester of the 2012-2013 academic year.

The data for this study were collected through a questionnaire administered to students and interviews with teachers. The questionnaire was administered to the students after they had used blogs in their reading classes in the fall and spring semesters. Then five instructors were interviewed about the benefits and challenges of using blogs in reading classes and their suggestions to overcome these challenges were investigated.

The findings of the study indicated that blogs provided many advantages to the students, especially for improving various skills such as reading and writing and vocabulary and grammar knowledge. They also motivated students to attend reading classes more actively and to do more research on the topic. However, results also showed that there were important things to consider on the blogs. These include the choice of topics, access to the Internet, ineffectiveness of blogs for listening and speaking classes. Grading was also brought up as a challenge on the blog. As solutions to the challenges, adding more pictures, videos, and links and listening texts to the blog, giving clearer instructions on the blog and

supporting them with examples, providing the necessary infrastructure for internet connection at school, and sharing the grading rubric with students at the beginning of the semester were recommended.

Key words: Teacher perception, student perception, use of blogs in reading classes, technology in EFL, benefits and challenges of blogs

ÖZ

İNGİLİZCE OKUMA DERSLERİNDE BLOG KULLANMANIN FAYDALARI, ZORLUKLARI ve BU ZORLUKLARIN MUHTEMEL ÇÖZÜMLERİ HAKKINDA ÖĞRETMEN VE ÖĞRENCİ ALGILARI

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Bu çalışmada, okuma derslerinde blog kullanımının faydaları ve zorlukları incelenmiştir. Ayrıca okuma derslerinde blog kullanımıyla ilgili belirtilen zorlukların üstesinden gelebilmek için uygulanabilecek muhtemel çözümler araştırılmıştır. Bu çalışma Türkiye'deki bir özel üniversitede, 2012-2013 Akademik yılı Bahar döneminde, 104 orta düzeyde İngilizce öğrenen öğrenci ve 5 İngilizce okutmanı ile gerçekleştirilmiştir.

Bu çalışmada kullanılan veriler, öğrencilere uygulanan bir anket ve İngilizce okutmanlarıyla yapılan görüşmeler sonucunda toplanmıştır. Öğrencilerin, güz ve bahar döneminde okuma derslerinde blog kullanımından sonra, öğrencilere anket uygulanmıştır. Bu anket beş bölümden oluşmaktadır. Anketin ilk üç kısmı Likert ölçeği formatında olup sırasıyla öğrencilerin okuma derslerinde blog kullanımının faydaları, zorlukları ve okuma derslerinde blog kullanımıyla ilgili genel görüşlerini araştırmıştır. Anketin dördüncü kısmında açık uçlu sorular sorulmuş, anketin beşinci kısmında öğrenciler hakkında demografik bilgi toplanmıştır. Öğrencilerden bu veriler toplandıktan sonra, beş İngilizce okutmanı ile görüşmeler yapılmış ve okutmanların, okuma derslerinde blog kullanımının faydaları, zorlukları ve bu zorlukların muhtemel çözümleri ile ilgili fikirleri araştırılmıştır.

Çalışmada elde edilen bulgular blogların öğrencilerin özellikle okuma ve yazma becerilerini geliştirdiğini, dil ve kelime bilgilerini arttırdığını, öğrencileri konu

üzerinde daha fazla araştırma yapmaları ve okuma derslerine daha aktif olarak katılmaları için motive ettiğini göstermiştir. Bunun yanında, bloglardaki konu seçimi, internet erişimi, blogların dinleme ve konuşma becerileri üzerinde fazla etkili olmaması ve bloglar üzerinden öğrencilere not verilmesi gibi konular blogları kullanırken göz önünde bulundurulması gereken noktalardır. Araştırmanın sonuçlarına dayanarak, bu zorluklara çözüm olarak bloglara daha fazla resim, video ve dinleme becerilerini geliştirebilecek materyaller yüklenmesi, bloglar üzerinde net yönergeler verilmesi ve bu yönergelerin örneklerle desteklenmesi, okul içerisinde yeterli internet erişimi sağlayabilecek altyapı oluşturulması ve öğrenci performansı değerlendirme ölçütlerinin öğrencilerle dönem başında paylaşılması önerilmiştir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Öğretmen görüşleri, öğrenci görüşleri, okuma derslerinde blog kullanımı, İngilizce öğretiminde teknoloji, blog kullanımının faydaları ve zorlukları

To the greatest chance of my life, my beloved husband, Göksu AYDAN,

and

To the hero of my happy childhood, my dear grandfather, Hasan ÖZTÜRK

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

This chapter introduces the background to the study, the statement of the problem, research questions, the significance of the study and the key terms used in this study.

1.1 Background to the Study

A weblog, generally known as a blog, can be defined as an online diary which allows people to publish their experiences, thoughts, videos, pictures etc. on the internet for other people to read or see (Wang, Fix & Bock, 2005). It also enables people to write comments on other people's blogs which form the interactive side of the blogs. Blogs have been used for teaching purposes only in recent years, but it has been gaining in popularity. It also allows teachers and learners to communicate and share resources in and out of the classroom environment (Wang & Hsua, 2008). Blogs can be viewed as user-friendly as most blog sites are free to use, it is relatively easy to set up a blog, and a variety of sources can be included in the blogs. In addition, blogs have been noted as effective in enhancing learning by many studies (Bartlett-Bragg, 2003; Brescia & Miller, 2006; Martindale & Wiley, 2005) in terms of critical thinking, reflectivity and knowledge construction. In addition, while students write comments on other students' entries on the blog, they need to analyse the topic from different points of view and suggest their own ideas. Therefore, blogs can create an encouraging environment for students in order to achieve critical and analytical thinking. Moreover, blogs can also provide opportunities for communicating with other bloggers by using different learning sources like images, videos, and links. (Lucate & Lomicka, 2008; Oravec, 2002)

Blogs have attracted a great deal of attention as a tool for supporting students' learning processes, too. They have been especially useful for improving reading and writing skills. They are efficient tools to motivate students to improve their writing skills as they involve writing for a real audience, and to help them reflect on what they read in English (Dalir, Jafarigohar & Soleimani, 2013). What is more, as this is an era of modern technology, blogs give teachers an opportunity to integrate technology into traditional classes of teaching a language, such as reading and writing, which help teachers to make their classes more interesting for the students of the technology age (Özkan, Y., & Bada, E, 2012).

In line with the increasing popularity of blogs as instructional tools, the number of empirical studies and research papers focusing on them has increased. For example, Zawilinski (2009) suggests that blogs are beneficial because they promote collaboration, higher order thinking, problem solving skills, and the communication skills of students. Blogs have been exploited by teachers with so many different agendas that there has been a need to categorize blogs according to their function. Zawilinski (2009) has created 4 different categories of blogs namely, classroom news blog, mirror blogs, showcase blogs and literature response blogs.

According to the categorization suggested by Zawilinski (2009), the type used in this study is a literature response blog. This is used to encourage students to respond to a text that they read in class. The teacher posts an entry about the text and invites students to comment on the text. Thus, blogs are used as a tool to create a bridge between a school and out-of-school activity. The blogs used in the present study employed this strategy. For this reason, the study investigates whether the benefits of this kind of a blog mentioned in the research were valid in a private university context in Turkey as well.

In addition, more teachers have started using blogs with the idea of integrating technology into their teaching in mind. This is in response to the undoubted

increase in young people's use of technology in their daily lives. (Kashani, Mahmud & Kalajahi, 2013). However, there is only limited research within a Turkish context about the attitude of students towards the use of technology in class. For this reason, the study presented here also investigates if use of blogs as a technological tool in a Turkish context is favoured by students. It examines whether they prefer a pen and paper as they are used to, and whether technology is easily accessible for them or whether access to a computer and suitable internet connection poses a problem for them (Kashani, Mahmud, & Kalajahi, 2013). The study presents possible answers to these issues of concern as well because the results of the study are important in shaping the use of technology in the Turkish context.

In short, the present study investigates whether the benefits of the blogs mentioned in the literature are perceived in similar ways by English preparatory school students and instructors of English at a private university in Turkey. The study especially focuses on the benefits and challenges of using blogs in reading classes and aims to provide a perspective for using them effectively in class. This is done by determining their contribution but also any difficulties that teachers and students may face, together with possible solutions.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

In the literature, it is often stated that the use of blogs has been implemented in many schools around the world (Eastment, 2005). They are used particularly in reading and writing classes in the field of EFL (Oravec, 2002; Downes, 2004, Dawson K., Drexler W. & Ferdig R.E., 2007). Blogs are favoured by many teachers and used for different teaching purposes and have started to be used by some educational institutions in Turkey as well. However, the implementation of blogging for educational purposes at all levels of education in the Turkish context is limited. Therefore, this study aims to explore this issue in detail by presenting benefits and challenges and possible solutions to overcome these challenges. Blogs

may be used for language teaching and learning purposes more often in the future. For this reason, it is important to know the benefits of blogs and it is beneficial to understand the challenges and remedies in order to use them most effectively for educational purposes. Previous experiences of blogs should be taken into consideration while integrating their use into curricula or while using blogs for out-of-class activities so as to make the blogging experience fruitful for both teachers and students. Thus, this study aims to serve as a reflective source of the blogging experience. The study was conducted after students and teachers used blogs in their reading classes. It mainly focuses on three aspects of using blogs in reading classes. Firstly, it examines the benefits of blogs for language learning and teaching. Secondly, it indicates the challenges that students and teachers encountered while they were using blogs for language learning and teaching purposes. Lastly, it presents possible solutions to the problems mentioned by teachers and students. In addition, the study explores these three aspects from both the students' and teachers' perspectives. Therefore, the present study adds to the literature on the use of blogs in the EFL context in relation to both student and teacher perceptions.

1.3 Research Questions

In this study, answers to the following research questions were explored:

Based on the perceptions of instructors and alpha class (at elementary and pre-intermediate levels of English) students in the English preparatory school of the University:

- a. what are the benefits of using blogs in EFL reading classes?
- b. what are the challenges of using blogs in EFL reading classes?
- c. what are the possible solutions to overcome the challenges of using blogs in EFL reading classes?

1.4 Significance of the Study

Blogging may have significant potential to foster collaboration, critical thinking, reflection, synthesis and evaluation of students' especially in EFL reading and writing classes and so it is preferable to integrate blogs into English language teaching classes (Rahmany, Sadeghi & Faramarzi, 2013). On the other hand, blogs may bring some challenges with them as well (Reynard, 2008). For this reason, it is important to be aware of the potential difficulties of using blogs in language courses as well as advantages. A detailed research including the problems that blogging may bring is needed in order to obtain the whole picture. In addition, it is much more practical for a teacher to learn some logical solutions to these kinds of difficulties beforehand in order to be prepared for difficulties and to prevent problems before they occur.

Although there is a great deal of research into the advantages of using blogs for education, there are not many studies about the challenges of using blogs for English language teaching purposes (Faghihi, 2012). Therefore, this study may contribute by highlighting some challenges and presenting practical solutions for teachers for the problems that are likely to occur on their courses. Educational institutions that plan to use blogs with their students may benefit from this study as it gives a picture of blogs and they may use blogs more efficiently thanks to this study. As Allwright (1996) stated "without some understanding of why things happen in a certain way in the classroom, teachers have no sound basis for deciding to repeat the idea, to adapt it, or to abandon it" (p.2)

1.5 Key Terms

The following terms are frequently used in this thesis.

English as a Foreign Language (EFL): English as a foreign language is used to describe English instruction that occurs in a non-English speaking country such as in Turkey, where the official language of communication is Turkish.

Blogging: A blog is the construction of a web blog and it refers to a kind of online journal which shows the posts in a reverse order and it is usually used to publish ideas on various topics. Blogging refers to the act of using blogs on the World Wide Web.

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

This chapter reviews the literature on the use of blogs in English language teaching. The research in this field is categorized under specific topics namely

2.1 Use of Instructional Technology in English Language Teaching

Instructional technology refers to integrating technology into education enabling learners to access education at any time and from any place (Belderrain, 2006). It also refers to any kind of technological tool which is used to facilitate the learning process. Technology has been used in various ways to support the process of learning. For example, teachers and educational authorities have been making use of technology to create more useful sources, to improve the performance of teachers and learners, and to enable learners and teachers to use their creativity and enhance every stage of education (Ozkan & Bada, 2012). Integration is derived from the Latin word “to integrare” which means to make whole, so the integration of technology into education means making the education process “complete”, bringing together all essential elements (Earle, 2002). Thus, instructional technology does not simply mean using technology, but rather it means making it a part of the curriculum in order to complete the puzzle in terms of pedagogy.

As technology has brought us many new attractive tools to use in education, it has started to be used more and more often. On the one hand, it is very effective to use technology to facilitate stages of learning and to overcome challenges that teachers and learners have had to deal with so far. On the other hand, it may be too far-fetched to see instructional technology as a magic stick to solve each and every problem. As Earle (1992) stated, technology is a worthy source, but only when it is systematically used for developing human competence. Technology can only be

instructional when it is used by teachers and learners in a planned way to increase the impact of training. As Wager (1992) indicated, “the educational technology that can make the biggest difference to schools and a student is not the hardware, but the process of designing effective instruction.” (p.454) Instructional technology should be supported by educational pedagogy as well. It should be about easy access to information and it should foster critical thinking, motivation, student interaction with subject matter, and detailed processing of ideas (Earle, 2002). To elaborate, instructional technology is not only about using various technological tools. It is about incorporating the content of education and these tools to achieve the objectives of education. Therefore, instructional technology should be regarded as a continuing innovative process designed to address instructional/learning needs (Robey, 1992).

Although technology seems to have had considerable influence on education especially in the last two decades, the use of technology needs to be much more instructional. The effect of technology, and basically computers, is mostly about providing access to information and enabling learners and teachers to retrieve it easily (Hativa & Lesgold, 1996). On the other hand, there is a need for more research on how to make use of technology more effective so that it enables teachers and learners to go one step further and to achieve higher order skills, link different kinds of information in different ways and improve academic skills such as inferring, summarizing, reflecting, problem solving, interpreting and processing the information. Instructional technology is a big field for teachers and learners to experience and new research in this area means more practice and better ways to use technology for educational purposes (Korkmazgil, 2009).

Technology and language learning have always been close related as every kind of method and approach has its own tools to support it. To illustrate, for language teachers who followed the grammar translation method, the overhead projector was the ideal tool as this method was mainly based on one-way transmission of knowledge, that is, the transmission of grammatical input from the teacher to the

student and the students' performing it, using this input. Besides, early computer software which allowed repetitive drill practices was handy in implementing this method. Later, with the rise of the audio-lingual method, audio tapes gained importance and audio labs which enabled students to do repetitive audio practices, as suggested by the audio-lingual method, were established (Warschauer & Meskill, 2000). As these two methods were mostly based on repetition rather than interaction, it may be said that technology was used as an assisting tool rather than being integrated into the curriculum. On the other hand, in the 1980s and 1990s, communicative language teaching started to become popular and it put special emphasis on authenticity and meaningful interaction. For this reason, the implementation of the communicative approach required systematic integration of technology into language teaching. There were two main approaches to integrate technology into language teaching, namely: 1) cognitive approaches and 2) socio cognitive approaches (Warschauer & Meskill, 2000).

Cognitive approaches to communicative language teaching indicate that language learning is based on an individual psycholinguistic act. Thus, language learning is not a habit formation that should be supported by repetitive drills. Instead, people are hardwired to learn languages and their learning process can only be supported by meaningful and comprehensible input (Chomsky, 1986). Thus, learners create a cognitive model of language by processing, creating rules and making mistakes which occur naturally during the language learning period (Chaudron, 1987). However, although comprehensible input is essential for language learning, useful learning sources should have unfamiliar information as well to carry learners one step further (Krashen, 1985). Therefore, technological tools that can facilitate cognitive approaches to language learning should provide students with plenty of opportunities so that they can be exposed to language input as much as possible in a meaningful context and construct their own individual knowledge. Warschauer and Meskill (2000) identify three types of technology that can support this cognitive process:

- a. text-reconstruction software,
- b. concordance software,
- c. multimedia simulation software.

Text-reconstruction software enables teachers to present texts to students which have scrambled or missing words so that students can reconstruct these texts and practice mental construction of the linguistic system. Another type of software to support cognitive approach to language teaching is concordance software which allows learners to look for specific collocations and words in a text and exemplify their usage. Concordance programs can greatly contribute to the knowledge construction process as they can provide authentic input which help learners to see the language items in a meaningful context rather than in isolation as they see in a dictionary. Lastly, there is multimedia simulation software which provides learners with audio-visual micro worlds and enables them to experience the language in a meaningful context. With the help of this software, learners explore simulated places with the help of their linguistic ability and develop their construction process with the help of video, sound, graphics, and text. Although such software can be exploited for pair or group activities, they do not entail human to human interaction (Warschauer & Meskill, 2000).

The socio-cognitive approach, the other type of approach to integrate technology into language learning, puts special emphasis on human to human interaction and regards socialization as a key to language learning. Thus, for socio-cognitive approaches to language learning, practicing the language in meaningful contexts is essential as well as being exposed to the language. For this reason, the Internet can be an effective tool to facilitate this approach and caters for various kinds of interaction to improve language skills. The Internet can be effectively used for computer-mediated communication in a classroom, computer-mediated communication for long distance exchange, and accessing resources and

publishing on the World Wide Web. In addition, with Web 2.0 applications the amount of interaction among learners can be increased and personalized.

To sum up, technology and language learning are extremely compatible. Although tools to support language teaching vary according to the method, technology has contributed to English language teaching by facilitating its different approaches. Besides, if it is used systematically with the help of language learning pedagogy, it can provide greater potential for language teaching and learning.

2.2 Use of Blogs in English Language Teaching

2.2.1 Categorization of Blogs

As blogs are used for various teaching purposes, blogs are categorized in literature according to their functions. Campbell (2003) indicates three categories of blogs, according to their differing educational purposes:

- a. Tutor Blog
- b. Learner Blog
- c. Class Blog

The first category of blogs is the tutor blog and it is run by the teacher. This type of blog is used for various purposes by the teacher. Firstly, students and parents can be informed about the course syllabus, assignments, grades and due dates of assignments and projects and so on. Secondly, this type of a blog can be a platform where the teacher shares useful links for students, such as online dictionaries, online quizzes, ESL games, articles to be read and various sources for language learning purposes. According to Campbell (2003), this blog type is like a personal library where students can find useful information and fun activities that address their needs and interests and, in this way, it is an effective tool to encourage self-study for the students. Besides, this use of blogs may increase learner autonomy and motivate further research for students. The second category according to

Campbell (2003) is learner blogs which are updated by the learner with his/her own ideas and thoughts. Learner blogs serve for the improvement of reading and writing skills of the students as students update their blogs about what interests them. For this reason, they have a real audience and a real purpose to write. Besides, they can improve their reading and writing skills by reading and commenting on their friends' posts as well. As Stanley suggests (2005), students may have a better understanding about the value of their writing with this kind of a blog and their blogs can serve as an online portfolio giving them the chance to check their progress by evaluating their previous writing. In addition, this type of blogs gives students a freer space to express themselves in English as they are usually not restricted to any kind of topic and can write on their own specific interests. They can suggest the links they like in their blogs which gives them an opportunity for creating a hypertext document as they wish (Bartlett-Bragg, 2003).

Although the learner blog seems efficient as it fosters learner autonomy, it requires extra work for the teacher to check all the class blogs and it is hard to evaluate such blogs as there is a great variety among the blogs of each student. For this reason, the third category of blog mentioned by Campbell (2003) can be a better choice as it involves collaborative work between teacher and students. As this type of blog is the common product of the whole class and the teacher, they are especially useful for creating a sense of community in class and for fostering collaboration. As Stanley (2005) stated, this type of blog serves as an extra-curricular extension of the classroom, motivating students to do further research and to write more in depth about the topics mentioned in class. In addition, using this type of blog, gives the teacher an opportunity to facilitate project-based language learning. Students can create collaborative texts through blogs and they can get correction and feedback from their friends and also the teacher. This effectively contributes to their critical thinking skills. The blog type which has been investigated in this study belongs to the third category. As such, the teacher and students work collaboratively and comment on each other's writing on the

blog and write more in depth about the texts that they have read in class. Thus, whether these stated benefits are valid in one of the private universities of Turkish higher education context is now investigated.

Soares (2008) explores the third category of blogs stated by Campbell (2003) in his study by opening such a blog for his students. Although the class blog that he and his students created seemed promising at the beginning, as it was praised by teachers from other countries and, at first, students enjoyed being in touch with native speakers and updating with the blog, the attention of the students waned in a short time. Although students seemed enthusiastic to read and comment on the blog in class, they were not very willing to post things on the blog at home. Soares (2008) conducts further research on the students' understanding of the blogs and indicates that although he prepared activities on the blog that he expected to attract the attention of the students, the students who wrote posts and uploaded things on the blogs were only few. When he researched the reasons for this situation during class discussions, he found out that students actually saw the class blog as a learning tool via which they could express their ideas and practice their skills. However, some of them stated that they had technical problems on the blog and some others mentioned the lack of free time to visit the class blog. Soares (2008) also stated that students had a tendency to send materials to the teacher via e-mail so that teacher could do the posting and they were unwilling to work independently from the teacher.

This notion presented by Soares (2008) shows us two different perspectives. The first one is that students need more activities and support in order to be independent from the teacher and become autonomous learners. The second one is that blogs, in fact, encourage students to be autonomous and to take responsibility for their own learning. In addition, as solutions to the problems occurred during the use of blogs, Soares (2008) suggests some enlightening conclusions. Firstly, it is important to be aware of the advantages and disadvantages of blog sites before creating the class blog as some of the students' photos and posts disappeared

because of the technical problems. Secondly, the fact that students are technology literate does not mean that students can use blogs without any problems. They need support and guidance before using blogs for learning purposes. Thirdly, there is no strict relationship between the number of posts made and the value that the students give to the blog as although some students may have posted less than other students, it may be just because of the quality of the posts they tried to achieve. Zwalinski (2009) categorizes blogs according to their content and presents four common types of blogs:

- a. Classroom News Blogs,
- b. Mirror Blogs,
- c. Showcase Blogs,
- d. Literature Response Blogs

The classroom news blog is like a home-school connection and it includes information about the curriculum, changes in programs, news, school activities and any kind of updates that help home-school communication and it is generally administered by the teacher. Another type of blog is a mirror blog, which helps both students and teacher to reflect on the posts. Teachers or students can create a post about a book they read or an interesting activity they attended on the blog and other members of the blog share their comments about this post on the blog. Student comments of this type may contain thoughts about lessons or content learned as well.

Zwalinski (2009) also adds another type of blog: a showcase blog, which includes student art projects, podcasts (audio clips), and writing. Students and the teacher might use such blogs to write for a more authentic audience and such blogs may even include audio messages from students and podcasts. Lastly, there are literature response blogs, in which the teacher motivates students to write about a text they covered in class and think in more depth about it. This kind of a blog is like a bridge between a school activity and an out-of-school activity and encourages students to respond to the texts they read. The blogs which have been

investigated in this study belong to the last category; namely, literature response blogs, according to the categorization of Zwalinski (2009), and it is intended to help students achieve higher order thinking after reading a text.

Savas (2013) adds one more category of blogs, mentioning ‘thematic blogs’. In this type of blog, students collaboratively create and maintain blogs which include information on a particular subject related to course content. Each thematic blog contains plenty of course materials and various tools that could facilitate learning and reflection on the topic such as “articles on the studies or theory about the topic, links to websites that include useful information about the topic, audio-visual materials (videos, pictures, audios) about the topic and reflection questions about the articles or the topic for their classmates.”(p.198). In this type of blog, students work in groups and they are randomly assigned subjects from the course by the teacher. Then each student group creates a thematic blog which has information about a certain topic. Students upload articles, links and various media to give a better understanding of their topic to their friends. Besides, they write comments on each other’s blogs and they ask questions to each other. Thus, every group is specialized in a certain topic and provides scaffolding to their friends. Savas (2013) states that this kind of a blogging experience created a suitable platform for peer learning and made students more autonomous learners because:

- they relied less on the instructor’s input and explored additional resources on course topics by themselves:
- they were involved in the decision making more and had more control on what and how to present in their thematic blogs.
- they took on the role of an expert in one area and acted as an instructor to one another.
- they experienced teaching skills and strategies to present a topic to others in a meaningful way.
- the involvement of the instructor was minimal in thematic blog activity.

(Savas, 2013, p.206)

This study suggests that use of thematic blogs can promote interaction, collaboration and especially autonomy as students create the content on their own and rely on their peers to access course content. Based on this study, it is fair to say that thematic blogs can be effectively used to encourage students to take the responsibility for their own learning.

As mentioned above, blogs have been categorized in literature according to their functions and content.

Figure 2.1 gives a summary of the categorization of blogs:



Figure 2.1 Blog Types

2.2.2 Improvement of Skills on the Blogs

With the increasing use of Web 2.0 tools, teachers have gained more and more interactive programs to use in their classrooms. Blogs, one of the most widely used Web 2.0 applications for language teaching, have gained considerable interest, especially in the last decade as they are easy to use and do not require high computer skills (Savas, 2013). As a result of this user friendliness, blogs have become one of the most popular forms of online discourse and they have created a more personalized and dynamic platform for language learners. In addition, thanks to the unique structure of blogs, not only do students publish what they write immediately and reach a wider audience, but also they see themselves as authors (Amir, Ismail & Hussin, 2011).

Writing is one skill students find difficult to improve. In addition, it may be a challenging skill to develop for a teacher as well because it is often very time consuming and tiring to read all the students' writing and to give feedback. Thus, new methods that motivate learners to write more creatively and ease the workload for teachers are welcomed. Blogs have the potential to achieve this if they are used effectively. Blogs offer many new chances for students to practice and improve their writing skills and make this process more manageable for both teachers and students (Arslan, 2014). Furthermore, blogs allow collaborative writing which gives students the opportunity to cooperate and learn from each other while writing. As Amir, Ismail & Hussin (2011) stated:

Writing a project paper individually can be a very painful experience to some people who may not have adequate ideas and writing skills. However, when the writing project is carried out collaboratively, whereby a few people are assigned to write certain sections, and later put the sections together into a masterpiece, individuals in the group may find the exercise rewarding and exciting. (p.537)

In addition, as blogs allow students to give feedback to each other, it can decrease the workload of teachers and enable them to incorporate more writing tasks into their classes. The use of blogs can save time as teachers can give general feedback to classes on the blog as well as individual feedback and free them from the load of hard copy papers. Thus, blogs enhance student writing skills and allow for cooperation which enables further improvement in writing skills. This is preferable for teachers and students (Mah, & Liaw, 2008). Blogs can also function like an online portfolio in which students can see their previous work and check their progress (Johnson, 2004).

Furthermore, blogs also have potential for improving reading skills. Looi & Yusop (2011) stated that social constructivism regards reading as a social practice and the Web 2.0 tools such as blogs, wikis and social networking sites serve as platforms where learners interact in and out of the classroom and share a reading opportunity. While students were receptive learners of knowledge in the reading context of the past, now students are motivated to be autonomous learners and construct their own learning. Therefore, now reading is not an isolated skill, but a shared process. Blogs provide the necessary opportunity for this shared process as they serve as a platform to start discussions, initiate reading interactivity and facilitate reading activities. (Abbitt, 2007; Bosch, 2009; Du, Carroll, and Rosson, 2010)

Similarly, Noytim (2010) indicates that blogs have potential to improve various skills of the students, including writing, reading and vocabulary. He states that blogs can contribute to learning motivation and opportunities for authorship and readership. In addition, as blogs help to create online communities they can help teachers to advance literacy through storytelling and dialogues (Huffaker, 2004). Blogs have been associated with reading and exploited for this skill to the extent that now even some texts books have passages from online blogs as an authentic source (Anderson, 2010). Therefore, it can be said that blogs have been found useful for various reading activities in research. (Leu et al., 2007)

Similarly, while blogs have been noted by many studies for their contribution to reading and writing skills, they can be also useful for vocabulary and grammar knowledge. Rahmany, Sadeghi, & Faramarzi (2013) state that blogs can be helpful for students to learn and use more vocabulary and to use grammatical structures more correctly. In this study, they noted that after students started to use blogs, they recommended a lot of different vocabulary to each other and, thanks to peer feedback, their grammatical errors drastically decreased. Thus, there is evidence in research demonstrating that blogs are useful for improving numerous skills (Noytim, 2010).

2.2.3 Advantages and Disadvantages of Using Blogs in English Language Teaching

As with any new technological tool, blogs are stated to include both advantages and disadvantages that may vary according to the teaching context and technical infrastructure, student and teaching profile, and an institution's policies. However, now they are widely seen as a part of EFL context.

Blogs can be fascinating, or utterly tedious. They can be elegant or clunky, informed or bigoted. Often they are not checked for spelling or grammar. Some teachers loathe blogs for their poor or non-standard English; others love their authenticity and liveliness. But like them or loathe them, blogs are a fact of contemporary life. The 'blogosphere' is here to stay. (Eastment, 2005, p.358)

As stated above, blogs have become a part of education and, as a result, they are taking a greater part in research literature. The number of studies investigating the use of blogs in educational settings has increased considerably. While some studies have focused on the ways that they can be used for teaching and learning purposes, other research on this topic emphasizes the problems that can occur while using blogs in this process. Table 2.1 summarizes research on this topic along with its major findings:

Table 2.1 Summary of the Review of Literature related to Blogs

<i>Author</i>	<i>Research Questions</i>	<i>Method</i>	<i>Participants</i>	<i>Major Findings</i>
Churchill (2009)	In what ways does a blog environment supplement classroom teaching and lead to an improved learning experience?	Observations and analysis of blog activities and artefacts, continuous teacher-reflection, interviews with selected students and a questionnaire	The class of postgraduate students taking Master in Information Technology in an education course at Hong Kong University	Blogs can be a means of effective educational technology and useful blog-based activities for learning are: (1) reading blogs of others, (2) receiving comments and (3) previewing tasks of others and reading feedback received in relation to these.
Ding (2008)	What is the application of blogs as a new information technology in EFL in terms of its function, design, teaching effect, and disadvantages?	Empirical research through the analysis of class blogs and students' progress in various skills	100 students of English majors and non-English majors from Shandong University of Economics	Blogging builds up a new environment for EFL in terms of video-audio experience, learning psychology and communicative context, which ensures the interactive nature of EFL in the technological sense.

Table 2.1 Summary of the Review of Literature related to Blogs (continued)

<i>Author</i>	<i>Research Questions</i>	<i>Method</i>	<i>Participants</i>	<i>Major Findings</i>
Zang (2009)	What is the blogging phenomenon and the effectiveness of using blog exchanges for English writing?	General observation of features and its application in education	-	Blogs are now a teaching strategy that can be used in a variety of pedagogical methods. Blogging is an effective tool for delivery of instruction by the numerous benefits for its use which outweighed the drawbacks of the traditional communication tools such as email or bulletin boards.
Wang and Hsua (2008)	What are the differences between using blogs and using discussion boards, the advantages and limitations of using blogs to exchange ideas, lessons learned about using blogs to expand guided discussion?	Observations of learners' perceptions of using blogs	Pre-service teachers in a north-eastern institution's four-year teacher-preparation program	Blogging provides a convenient way to facilitate and disseminate information. However, blogging is time-consuming because it requires a great amount of reading, writing, responding, and thinking outside the required participation time in class.

Table 2.1 Summary of the Review of Literature related to Blogs (continued)

<i>Author</i>	<i>Research Questions</i>	<i>Method</i>	<i>Participants</i>	<i>Major Findings</i>
Wang and Woo (2009)	Can weblogs be used to promote students' critical thinking?	Weblogs from the students were collected and analysed using a known coding system for measuring critical thinking.	A group of secondary two students from a Singapore school	The topic for blogging is crucial in determining the types of critical thinking employed by the students. Students are seen to display critical thinking traits in the areas of information sourcing, linking information to arguments and viewpoints justification.

Accordingly, Churchill (2009) concentrates on the ways a blog environment can supplement classroom teaching and lead to an improved learning experience. In his experimental study, he states that blogs can be useful in creating an effective learning environment. He justifies his statement by pointing out that students who participated in his study stated that thanks to the blogs they felt an important part of the classroom community as their opinions were recognized and addressed. In his study, he uses questionnaires to collect data and asks various questions about using blogs in their courses. Although this study is promising as it presents the help of blogs for English language teaching purposes, it does not clearly state why almost half of the students do not plan to use them in their future studies. As a result, the problems of students and teachers using blogs are not referred to.

In another study on blogs Krause (2005) analyses the issue of using blogs in teaching from both teacher and student perspectives. He expresses that blogs can be used very well for scholarship, but when it comes to using it in teaching, it is a bit problematic, but not an outright failure. He emphasizes that giving students the opportunity to use a new and exciting technology doesn't mean they will want to use it. He adds that while he was trying to give students some freedom to use blogs, students thought that instructions were too vague. However, he also adds that there are advantages of blogs as they create an interactive atmosphere and save the teacher from having lots of papers. However, blogs can be analysed from different perspectives now as they have many more applications than before. At this point, it is important to state that blogs should not be used just for the sake of using technology. As Faghihi (2012) suggested, there are important questions to ask before using blogs as a part of our classes such as “How can we prepare the classroom space to become a space for learning, reflecting and for a portfolio of their learning process? What are the expectations that the teacher needs to make clear of what is acceptable and unacceptable in terms of content in that learning space?” (p.3). It is important to ask these questions and plan the use and the

function of blogs according to student profile, age, level and needs of learners in order to make blogging experience fruitful.

Furthermore, as another benefit of blogs, Ding (2008) points out that blogs provide students with the opportunity to show themselves as individuals. Keeping a blog with different teaching materials is suitable and not costly. Also, blogs offer an active social life, getting people to communicate in various groups in many situations. To examine the value of application of blogs in EFL, an empirical research study was conducted in the Shandong University of Economics in China. The participants of the research were 100 students of English major and non-majors from this university. 32 students in this group had experienced blogging before, 56 of them had had some knowledge about it and 12 hadn't known anything about the weblog. However, according to the results of the research, the use of the blog helped EFL courses. This research states that blogging is an effective tool because 25 students achieved remarkable development in their language skills, while 68 showed progress that can be easily seen in linguistic competence and only 7 of them moved forward a little. They seemed more active and interested in learning English. Only 2% of the students in the research didn't find the use of the blog very useful and effective in EFL, but the others admitted its positive impacts and derived benefit from it in their language skills.

Similarly, Zhang (2009) argues that using a blog is beneficial in education, especially on the basis of English writing. He states that it is possible to apply blogging technology in many different ways in education such as posting class materials (Johnson 2004), asking questions and answering or commenting on them, sharing useful videos, images, and audios related to the lesson topic, a communication tool between teachers and students and creating e-portfolios and so on. He states that this is because it is becoming more widespread and should be used in both teaching and learning processes. In this thesis, using weblogs in teaching writing as a branch of EFL is strongly suggested. It provides students with the web-based space to write and improve their writing skills. Zhang (2009)

cites many reasons for this. For example, a blog provides a real audience for the writing of the student because their friends, teachers and also bloggers outside the classroom see the posts (Pinkman, 2005). For this reason, Zhang (2009) asserts that students are more careful in terms of content and form because they are aware that someone will read their writing. Readers will give feedback or comment on the writing, writers will respond to them and so on. Both parties will be in a situation in which they write frequently and interact with each other. To put their own thoughts into words in a clear and correct way, sometimes learners resort to English dictionaries, the Internet or ask advice. They learn something from each other. They do this as they feel more responsible and motivated for writing. They will try to find the correct usage of English. In a way, blogs serve to increase the quality of students' writing in a positive way. They also give students the opportunity to use visual aids to make the meaning clearer for the readers. Besides, students can gain cultural knowledge as well as improving language because bloggers may be from outside the class (Guadagno, Okdie & Eno, 2008). Similarly, students can learn what is called "netiquettes" through the use of blog. As the Internet becomes a more important way of communication, knowing netiquettes, which is defined as the set of rules about behaviour that is acceptable on the Internet, gains importance for learners (Parry, 2010).

On the other hand, although interaction on the blogs is very helpful for students as suggested by Zhang's (2009) study, the process of interacting may create problems as blogs are online tools that are open to general public. Chuang (2008) underlines that blogs' being open to everyone may have negative effects. Student blogs may receive unwelcome comments from outsiders. Also, when student teachers share their experiences in the school where they practice teaching, they may encounter problems as they can share unpleasant experiences sometimes or they can talk about the problems at that school, for example. On the other hand, Stanley (2004) takes a different approach to blogs being open to everyone. He states that as students are aware of the fact that their posts can be read by other people, they take

more pride and they pay much more attention to what they write. As they know that their writing is open to other people, they are particularly careful and write with the comments that may come from their friends in mind. According to Stanley (2004), this may motivate learners to do better. In addition, he states that as students are commenting on each other's work on the blog, blogs help teachers to have a much more learner centred approach. Faghihi (2012) agrees with this notion and states that a sense of competition among students may motivate them to do better jobs and as they see each other's writing, they may try to create masterpieces to publish on the blog.

Some studies analyse how blogs can be used for specific purposes in EFL classrooms, as they are viewed as especially beneficial in some cases of learning and teaching. Wang and Hsua (2008) focus on blogs' usage as a collaboration tool in teacher education programs by observing learners' perceptions of using blogs to enhance discussion. They point out that blogs can be an ideal forum for social constructivist learning and they underline that blogs provide an opportunity for the participants to write for readers beyond the classroom, which is not possible in discussion boards. These features make blogs good tools in class discussions. On the other hand, there are some problems with using blogs from the learners' point of view. Some posts were not easy enough to understand when students preferred not to express their opinions very openly. Some students considered this blogging activity as an extra burden in addition to the class assignments and to classroom discussion. Blogging is time consuming as it requires a lot of reading, writing, responding, commenting, and thinking outside the required participation time in class (Wang & Hsua, 2008). Although such activities on blogs were reported to be time consuming and provide extra work for students, research supports that blogs contribute to the critical thinking skills of the students (Noytim, 2010). Accordingly, Wang and Woo (2009) underline the use of blogs to promote critical thinking in their exploratory study and state that the crucial point in determining

critical thinking on the blog is the topic. Thus, blogs are only useful for this purpose when the topic is appropriate.

Korkmazgil (2009) examined a different purpose for using blogs in teaching and learning; namely, how blogging enhances pre-service English language teachers' reflectivity in practice teaching. She states that blogging creates a flexible environment in which bloggers find and develop their own unique styles, improve their skills at their own pace, and take responsibility for their own participation and learning. Her study justifies that "blogs might offer new possibilities to researchers and educationalists that traditional reflective tools mostly fall short of while retaining many of the more positive aspects."(p155.) She conducted her study at the Foreign Language Education department of the Middle East Technical University and observed 12 pre-service teachers. The findings of the study suggest that using blogs in education as a flexible and reflective tool that create an encouraging, non-threatening and interactive environment for learning, can be supported to provide a more efficient learning place.

Eastment (2005) explores other advantages and disadvantages of using blogs in EFL classrooms. Her study reveals that there are many useful sides to writing on blogs for students. They write for an audience, for a purpose and there is no strict formatting and everything they write appears on the blog immediately. Besides, teachers can use blogs to get students to reflect on their own learning. However, she underlines that when it comes to reading other people's blogs, it is may be problematic for educational purposes. Blogs may be too personal or they are created to be followed regularly over a period of time. Therefore, when somebody reads it without any background data, they may not understand what is going on the blog.

Furthermore, evaluating students' performance on blogs is also a challenge regularly highlighted in literature. Hurlburt (2008) brings a new understanding of evaluating students' performance on blog activities. He states that the success of

blogging is not based on whether students write their blogs or not. Instead, it is based on whether the instructor fails to successfully connect blog activities with social elements and also the agenda for which the instructor created the blog. According to Hurlburt (2008), blogging has great potential for the classroom and this is closely linked to blogs being a social network. However, creating a blog and assigning tasks to students are not enough for blogs to become a successful tool for instruction. As blogs are mostly used for reading and writing classes, attention should be paid not only to documented but also invisible readers and the blog writers. As Hurlburt (2008) stated “in order to understand fully and implement successfully blogging assignments, the anxious writer must be reassured, the neglected reader must be revived and rewarded, and the comments, if desired, must be assigned.”(p.188) As Web 2.0 allows users to be as interactive as possible, by making changes on the websites and commenting on each other’s posts, blogs as a Web 2.0 tool should become parallel to their real-world counterparts. Personalization and assessment are two key elements for blogs to achieve their desired social or community effect. Personalization is an important factor to create a personal space for students to create a real class community. In addition, assessment is also crucial to track student performance on the blog and for an instructor to be an open facilitator.

Ding (2008) states that rather than creating problems for students, blogs were actually a solution to some problems created by the quick development of higher education learning in China. According to Ding (2008), there were several problems in Chinese higher education such as a shortage of English teachers due to an increase of enrolment year by year and a lack of direct exchanges between teachers and students, and among students. Further, some teaching materials remained old-fashioned without frequent updating and the dull and old-fashioned teaching methods that make activating the study interest of students very hard persisted. In addition, as the notions of EFL have transformed from teacher-centred to student-centred interaction, education policy makers and teachers have

started to seek more interactive, task-driven and reflective ways of teaching. On the other hand, although there is an attempt to improve teaching, the passive reception of students stayed as a disadvantage for large-class lecturing. At this point, it was clear that a tool was needed to implement class discussion and give every student a chance to express themselves in English. Thus, according to Ding (2008), blogs were the best solution to address the needs of the students at this point as they give a platform to discuss course subjects on the Internet and achieve a more learner centred education, which is very hard to achieve in crowded classrooms. Ding (2008) states that blogs are closely linked to EFL. As they are spaces specific to individuals' personality and areas of interest, they have a potential to create platforms to practice the language.

Besides, the maintenance and updating of materials on the blog are practical and economical and the blog as part of social life fosters communication between student groups in discussing many different topics. Ding (2008) puts special emphasis on individualistic learning as students can only learn in accordance with his or her self-concept and the learning process can best occur with the concepts of *self-involvement*, *self-initiation*, *individual pervasion*, and *self-evaluation*. In addition, he indicates that blogs are significant tools for self-reflective learning in which the learner explores his own learning by searching for learning materials, cultivating their interests through blogs and reflecting on their own learning. This is why he recommends that teachers should also have blogs and reflect on their teaching, share experiences and maintain contact with other teachers through hyperlinks. Besides, although blogs are individualistic, teachers' blogs should have the following features as well as detailed specific requirements for students:

- Electronic Bulletin Board: which is mainly for posting notification and latest news, praise of good performance, and exhibition of the best works.
- Module of Resource Management: EFL materials well classified in a chronological order.

- Student Electronic Records: recording the whole learning process of each learner so as to evaluate their performance in a proper way.
- Short Message Management Module: to communicate with some students in a timely way so as to have a better understanding of their learning.
- Suggestion Management Module: teachers summarize their reflection on the teaching ideas and methods in response to students' suggestions.
- Interlinkage: to list some useful websites and some individual and group blogs for further study and exchanges.

(Ding, 2008, p.33)

As blogs have been popularly integrated into teaching, they have started to be incorporated into the curriculum and teaching projects as well. Lee (2012) mentions a blog-assisted online extensive reading program which was applied to improve the reading skills of Taiwanese EFL university students whose reading practices mostly relied on reading online. They were also a part of traditional extensive reading programs that were mostly based on printed materials, and not particularly contemporary graded readers. This program was created to help students gain confidence and ability with authentic texts and to apply their real life reading skills to their second language. In this program, students were instructed to read a variety of texts on the blog and write a summary and reflection for them. They were also asked to raise one or two issues on the blog that they wanted to discuss with their friends. Students were also required to reply to their friends' comments on their blogs. After the effect of this program was investigated from various perspectives such as reading habits, attitudes, and ability, the major findings of the study suggested that this program increased students' confidence and interest in reading and writing online. It also fostered positive attitudes in students towards the texts written for native speakers of English. In addition, the variety of the texts on the blog helped students read not only the genres and topics they preferred, but also different genres and topics that they had not tried before. What is more, a number of the students stated that writing for not only the teacher

bur also for other friends and peers motivated them to spend more time on a blog and to try to do a better job. It is clear from this study that students' benefited from the experience of blogs and using blogs in reading classes gave satisfying results. On the other hand, Lee (2012) also states that although these results seem promising, it is hard to say that this program helped students gain a long-term habit in online reading and writing as some of them found the tasks time consuming. Besides, most of the learners did not want to go on with the tutor blog or their own blogs when the semester ended. On the other hand, although this result seems negative regarding the use of blogs, it is promising to see that students stated that they would use the websites, and sources they learned about during the blogging experience, in their future learning. For this reason, it is fair to regard the reading and blog integration program as successful as it actually helped students to be more independent learners.

Faghihi (2012) mentions the practical advantage of blogs of helping the teacher to keep in touch with absent students and inform them about class projects and upcoming assignments. She states that blogs can be used as a communication tool even when students stay out of the system for a while or when the semester is over. Regarding absent students who are an issue of concern for teachers, Faghihi (2012) presents a reasonable solution because blogs can help them continue their learning when they are not in class. Thus, the teacher can reach all the students in his/her class including sportsman who often have training and matches to go to or ill students who usually stay behind the course. As class blogs can be used as a platform to share articles and all class material, using it as a part of the class is an advantage for absent students. Faghihi (2012) also states that blogs can be used for improving all four skills of the students. Although this idea is stated in the theory in her article, there is no research conducted to support this idea in the study. It is promising to consider blogs as a tool for improving all four skills of the students. However, there is a need to support this idea with data from students and teachers.

For this reason, the present study investigates the contribution of the blogs to these four skills as well.

Overall, the use of blogs in language learning classes has both advantages and challenges as stated in the literature. Based on the review of literature,

blogs are advantageous in language classrooms because they facilitate:

- a. the improvement of the four skills and keeping in touch with absent students (Faghihi, 2012)
- b. reflectivity (Korkmazgil, 2009)
- c. interaction between teachers and learners and among learners (Ding, 2008)
- d. writing for an audience (Eastment, 2005)
- e. sharing class materials and checking students' progress (Johnson 2004)
- f. asking questions and answering or commenting on them, sharing useful videos, images, and audios related to the lesson topic, creating e-portfolios (Zang, 2009)
- g. classroom teaching (Churchill, 2009)
- h. collaboration and autonomy (Savas, 2013)
- i. improving the four skills and critical thinking (Noytim, 2010)
- j. increasing vocabulary and grammar knowledge (Rahmany, Sadeghi, & Faramarzi, 2013)

Blogs may create challenges in language classrooms because they can be:

- a. time consuming (Wang and Hsua, 2008)
- b. too personal or be created to be followed regularly over a period of time (Eastment, 2005)
- c. vague in terms of instructions (Krause, 2005)

The studies which have been conducted on using blogs in EFL courses focus on the opinions of either students or teachers and state very few problems related to blogging. However, analysing the topic from both teachers' and students'

perspectives and investigating the reasons for the problems in this topic are crucial. Considering that blogging is a growing technology, blogs have many more features than they had in the past. As these new features form the new concept of the blog, they are crucial in order to analyse the use of blogging in education. Therefore, the study presented here investigates opinions and problems about using blogs in EFL courses; it gives clues about how to use blogs effectively in language classes.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

In this chapter detailed information on the presented study in relation to the context, participants, data collection instruments, data collection procedures, and data analysis methods are given.

3.1 Design of the Study

The study presented here was carried out as a “case study” whose focus is described by Richards (2003) as “on a particular unit or set of units-institutions, programmes, events and so on...” (p.20). Case study was chosen as a framework for the study because its research goals, instruments, and data collection/analysis process were in line with the research questions that were investigated. In a case study a single unit is taken and investigated in detail and in relation to the research questions asked. In addition, a case study “allows the scholar to take a holistic approach to studying a phenomenon in its natural setting” (Willis, 2008, p.212). The research questions of the study required the researcher to investigate a particular instructional tool (Blogs) in a specific skills course (EFL Reading) in one institution. Thus, there was a match between the phenomenon at hand and the research framework case study provided. Case studies also require a detailed description of the case subjected to the study; therefore, the rest of the chapter provides a thorough presentation of the context, participants, and data collection/analysis processes.

3.1.1 Context

The study was conducted in a preparatory school at a private university in Turkey. The ultimate goal of the English preparatory program is to equip learners with

essential academic English language skills required for pursuing their departmental courses. The English language education aims to enable the students to communicate in written and oral contexts at international standards but also to contribute to their self-development by stimulating learner autonomy. The department of foreign languages also has an agenda of raising and preparing individuals for their future careers.

The students who are accepted after the university entrance exam, administered throughout Turkey in order to determine student success in various fields and place them into universities according to their scores, take the English proficiency exam of the university. They are then allocated to Alpha, Bravo or Charlie classes according to their level unless they become eligible to start in their departments by attaining a very high score. Alpha refers to elementary and pre-intermediate, Bravo refers to intermediate students and Charlie refers to upper level students. As students are accepted to this university with their Math, Natural and Social Sciences scores rather than their proficiency in English, only a small percentage of students become eligible to start their departments without studying in English preparatory school. Students who are at beginner or elementary levels are placed in Alpha classes. Intermediate students are placed into Bravo classes and upper and advanced students are placed into Charlie classes. As future careers of the students require high proficiency in English, students are exposed to an intense program of English in English preparatory school. They take 30 hours of English classes per week. This study was conducted with Alpha level students who used blogs in their reading classes.

Before describing the study in detail, it is important to give an overview of when, how, and by which means the study was conducted. Figure 3.1 below summarizes both the background to the study and the process of the study conducted and presented:

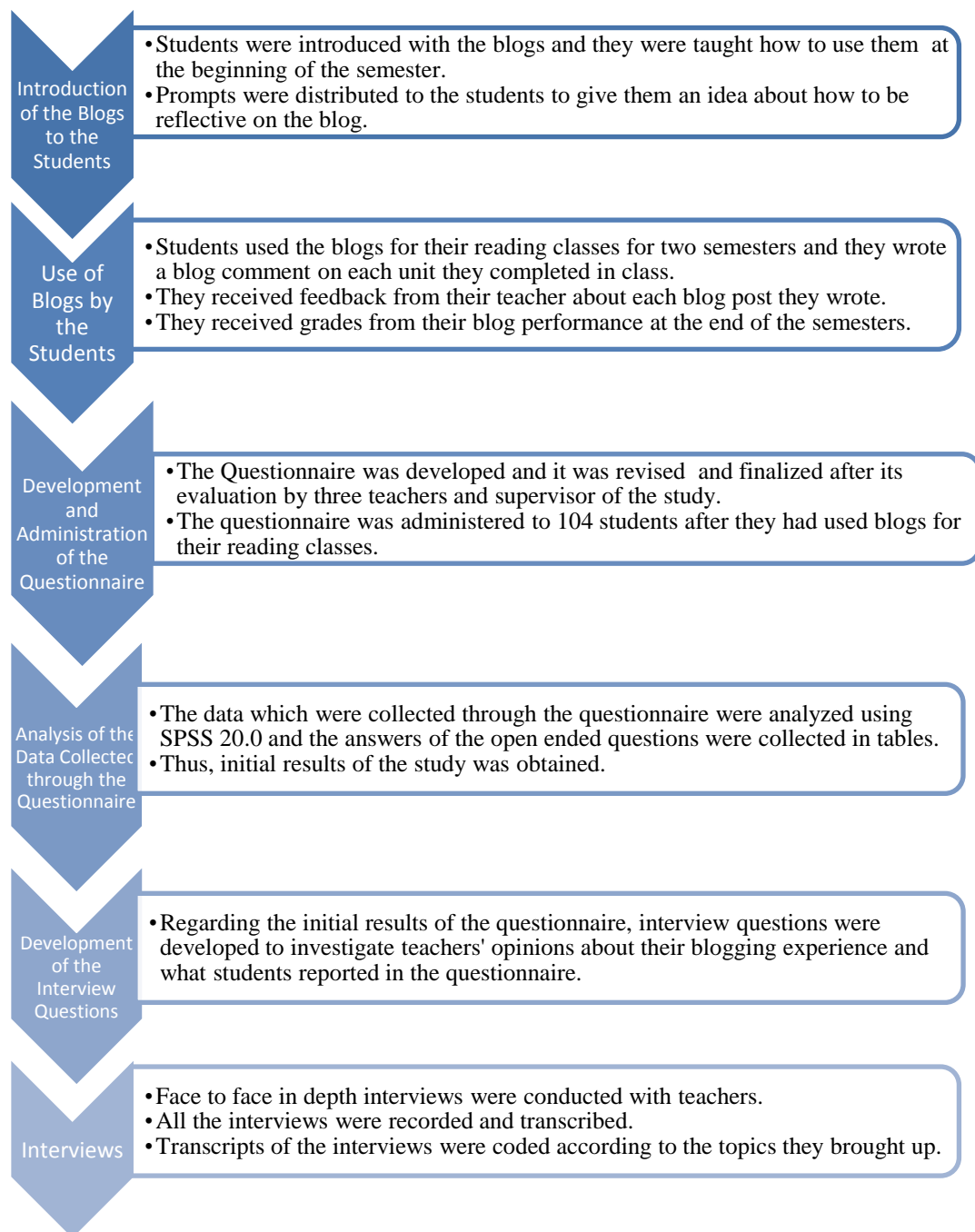


Figure 3.1 Overview of the Background Information and Procedure of the Study

The curriculum of the department in which the study took place was skills-based one, so students had separate reading, writing, listening, speaking, and grammar classes, all of which had their own books, materials and tasks. In reading classes, students used a reading course book which had chapters on different themes such as sociology, medicine, history, and culture. Each chapter had two or three reading texts and all of these texts were related to their chapters. Students finished each chapter in two or three weeks. After they completed each chapter, they were expected to write a post on their class blog which was a part of Cambridgelms Online Learning Program (You can see this website at <http://www.cambridgelms.org/touchstone/p/splash>). As students had already been using this program for other classes as well, all the participants of the study were the members of this program and they had mastered the necessary technical details before the study began. When students finished the chapter in class with their teachers, the reading instructor posted an entry on the blog and invited students to think about the subject in depth, reflect on what they have read or do further research on the topic. Students wrote comments on the teacher's post and shared their ideas about the subject. Figure 3.2 is a sample page of teacher's post for one of the chapters of the book.

Cambridge LMS

[Home](#)
[Support](#)
[Logout](#)

ALPHA09: Blog

READ THIS 3 UNIT 5 JOURNAL ENTRY

[All posts](#)
[Next](#)
[Back to class](#)


[View profile](#)

By [saydan](#) on 14 Apr, 2013 at 11:48:04 AM

Dear Alpha 9 students,

Please add your last blog entry of the term as a comment on this blog. You need to reflect on what you have learned from the Automotive Technology Unit. As far as I have seen, it is the most enjoyable unit for most of you, so I am sure that you will come up with great ideas. Here are the things you can do to write your journal entry:

- compare and contrast the texts with your ideas and experiences,
- talk about characters and what they have experienced,
- the things you have newly learned from the texts.

Please remember to

- add references to the text,
- comment on it (**add your own ideas and experiences on it**),
- be clear and understandable.

Have fun! :)

[Edit](#) | [Add comment](#) | [Delete](#)

Figure 3.2 An Example of Teacher Post on the Blog

After the reading, the instructor posted the entry similar to the one shown in Figure 3.2 to the class blog and students started to write comments on the entry. They had one week to post their comments to each teacher entry on the blog. They were expected to write between 200-250 words. In addition, as the English level of the students was beginner, participants were given worksheets to give them support with their possible English language needs and enable them to express themselves better in the blog environment. For example, participants were given worksheets with several reading prompts to help them understand the concept of “reflection”

in Figure 3.2. This worksheet is shown in Appendix E. Students mostly benefited from these prompts in making an introduction to their paragraphs.

Students could make use of the prompts shown in Appendix E, but they did not have to. They could create a comment without using the worksheet, so the worksheet was used just to give an idea to students about how to reflect. Therefore, students were provided with a format that they could follow and enough guidance to understand the nature of the task.

By the end of the semester, students had written a blog comment for each chapter and their comments were graded by their reading instructor considering reflection, coherence and grammar. In total, they wrote 12 blog comments. As students were supposed to collect points from their assignments, projects and exams in order to be eligible to take the proficiency exam at the end of the spring semester, the grade that they took from the blog assignment was also important for them. To illustrate, two examples of students' blog entries are shown in Figure 3.3 and Figure 3.4.

:

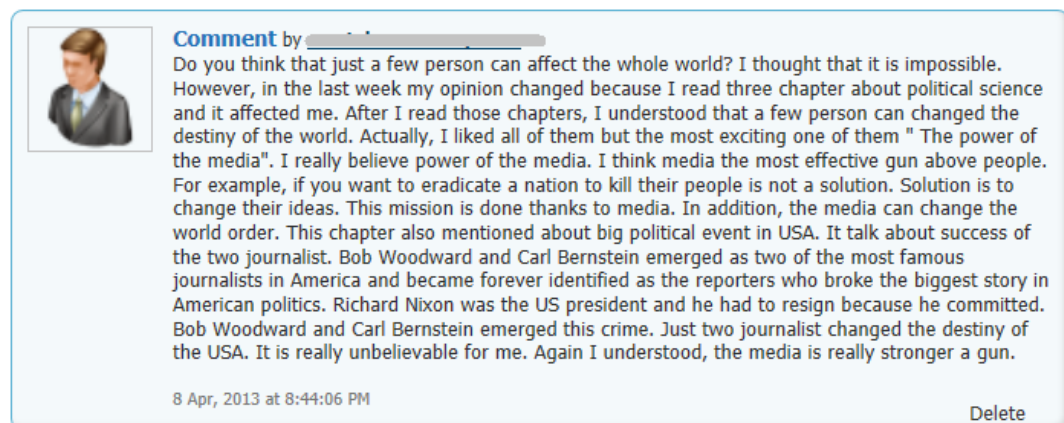


Figure 3.3 Example A from Students' Blog Comments

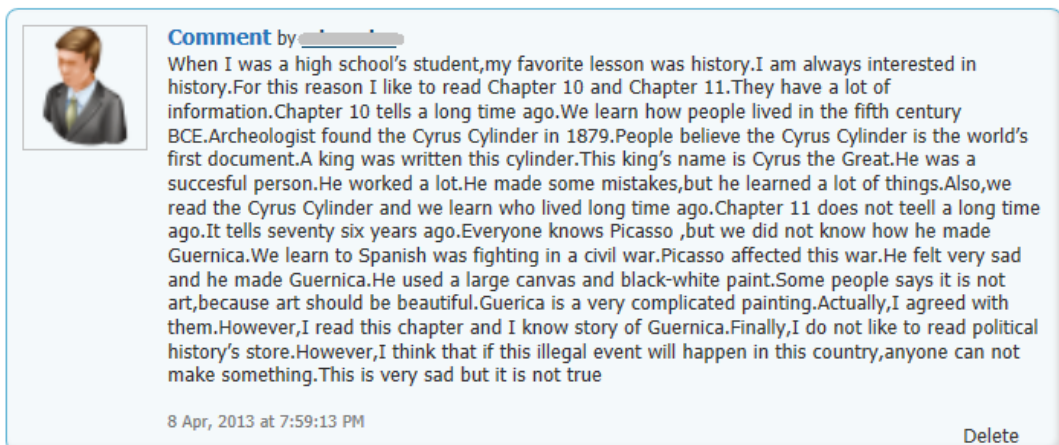


Figure 3.4 Example B from Students' Blog Comments

3.1.2 Participants

The data were collected from two main groups of participants: 104 EFL reading students and five EFL reading instructors. The students were all in alpha level (elementary and pre-intermediate) classes of the department of foreign languages of the university and their ages ranged between 17 and 22. More than half ($n=70$) of the students were male while ($n=34$) of the students were female. The majority of the participants ($n=92$) were Turkish citizens while 12 of the students were international. Besides, 55 of the students spoke a foreign language other than English. The students were selected randomly among all the Alpha level students studying at the department and their perceptions of blogs in English reading classes were investigated via a questionnaire. Table 3.1 summarizes the information about the participants:

Table 3.1 Summary of the Profiles of the Participants

Participant Groups				Data	
				Collection	
				Selection	
	Male	Female	Total	Criteria	
				Instrument	
				Used	
Students	70	34	104	Random	Questionnaire
Teachers	1	4	5	Random	In-depth Interviews

In addition to the data collected from students, five instructors of English who taught reading skills in the alpha level in the department of foreign languages, and used blogs in their classes, were interviewed in order to triangulate the data collected on the effectiveness of blogs in reading classes. In other words, both qualitative and quantitative data were collected and analysed to provide triangulation in this research.

Instructors' views on the topic allowed the researcher to make sense of the blog applications in classes better and understand the students' blog experiences in instruction. All the instructors that were interviewed for the study had been teaching English as a foreign language for more than two years. During the interviews, the instructors' opinions about using blogs for language teaching purposes and their experiences on this topic were ascertained. All interviewees were given a consent form before the interview in which they agreed that they participated in the study voluntarily and they could withdraw from the interview whenever they wanted. Their names were kept confidential and no information was used without their permission.

3.2 Data Collection

3.2.1 Data Collection Instruments

In order to collect the data to answer the research questions of the study, two main types of data collection instruments were used: a student questionnaire and instructor interviews. Students were provided with a questionnaire developed by the researcher and they were expected to share opinions and experiences about the various aspects of blogs via the questionnaire. The questionnaire contained 5 parts, which had various question types such as Likert scale statements, true-false, open ended questions, and demographic information formats. Thus, both qualitative and quantitative data were collected through the questionnaire. Then, when the data collected from students were analysed, interview questions were developed by the researcher in order to conduct in-depth interviews with the instructors. These interview questions were prepared by paying particular attention to what students had stated in the questionnaires in order to gauge the teachers' opinions the data received was triangulated and analysed via the student questionnaire.

3.2.2 Questionnaire

The questionnaire given to the students (see Appendix A for the full copy of the student questionnaire) was developed by the researcher after considering the issues surrounding the use of blogs and technology mentioned in previous research. In order to increase the validity and reliability of the questionnaire, it was firstly given to three teachers to get expert opinion. They were asked to give feedback to the questionnaire based on their opinions and experiences. Based on the feedback of the teachers, the questionnaire was revised and some of the items which had the potential to lead to ambiguity were clarified. After receiving the feedback of the teachers, the researcher of the present study conducted a pilot study and gave the questionnaire to ten students in order to increase the reliability. These students completed the questionnaire and gave feedback to the researcher. After the pilot study, the questionnaire was revised again and some minor changes were made

such as paraphrasing and simplifying some vocabulary. Then it was administered by the researcher to 104 students. The questionnaire given to the students had five parts. Table 3.2 below summarizes the different parts of the questionnaire together with each part's question type and rationale:

Table 3.2 Parts of the Questionnaire

<i>Parts</i>	<i>Aim</i>	<i>Question Type</i>
Part I	To investigate the benefits of the blogs	4 Point Likert Scale
Part II	To investigate the challenges of the blogs	4 Point Likert Scale
Part III	To investigate perceptions about blogs and use of technology	True / False Questions
Part IV	To investigate students' own experiences on the use of blogs	Open Ended Questions
Part V	To investigate the demographic information of the students	Open Ended Questions Yes/No questions

The first part of the questionnaire was in a Likert scale format and it included statements designed to investigate whether the students believed that the blogs were useful. Students put a tick if they strongly agreed, agreed, or strongly or totally disagreed with the statements given in this part. This part was particularly important to determine the useful sides of the blogs. On the other hand, the second part of the blog contained statements about why blogs are not useful. This part stated some potential disadvantages of the blogs and asked students if they strongly agreed, agreed, disagreed, or strongly disagreed in the format of a Likert scale. This part was designed to investigate if the disadvantages of the blogs stated in literature were applicable in an English preparatory school context in Turkey as

well. The third part of the questionnaire followed a different format and asked students to report if statements given in this part were true or false based on their opinions and experiences. Participants' responses to both negative and positive statements about blogs and using technology in education were investigated in this part and it included statements to explore students' opinions about using blogs and technology in education versus using traditional methods for language teaching purposes.

The fourth part of the questionnaire consisted of open ended questions. It directly asked students the research questions; namely, benefits and challenges of using blogs in their classes and possible solutions to overcome these challenges. Students were expected to give their opinions about these issues answering these open-ended questions. The last part of the questionnaire, the fifth part, aimed to investigate the demographic information of the students. This part involved questions to explore students' habits, experiences and lifestyles which were possible to influence their performance on the blog such as their access to the internet, their previous experiences about blogs, their knowledge of technology and their facilities to use the computer easily. As this information could affect students' attitude towards using blogs for language learning, it was essential to investigate this information. In summary, the 1st, 2nd, 3rd parts of the questionnaire provided quantitative data and the 4th part provided qualitative data. The 5th part provided both qualitative and quantitative data. To conclude, via this questionnaire, students' opinions about the benefits and challenges of using blogs for language learning purposes, their suggestions to overcome the challenges and several aspects that could affect their opinions were explored.

3.2.3 Interview Questions

Semi-structured interviews with students' English reading instructors were conducted in order to make in-depth exploration of the use of blogs in reading classes. The interview questions that were asked were prepared in two steps. In the

first stage, a framework of questions was prepared and themes that are parallel to the ones in the questionnaire were created. The questions that were firstly prepared were closely related to the issues concerning the blogs mentioned in research. However, in order to make the questions more in-depth for the research of the present topic, the second stage of preparing questions was only realized after the data were collected from students via the student questionnaire, and the results analysed. Then the final version of the interview questions was formed including the issues raised by the students in the questionnaire. Thus, interview questions of this study were prepared based on the research about the relevant topic and the analysis of the data collected from students (see Appendix C for interview questions).

3.3 Data Collection Procedures

The questionnaire was administered to the students after they used blogs in reading classes for two semesters. The foreign languages department of the university in which the study was conducted consisted of three semesters. In the first two semesters, a skill-based program was applied in which blogs were used in reading classes. The last semester was based on a TOEFL preparation program in which only an integrated TOEFL course was given. The data was collected after students used blogs for two semesters and when they were studying English at the end of the third semester. The data were collected from randomly selected five classes. There were 19 alpha classes in total in the foreign languages department and three of them were high achievers, while 16 of them consisted of randomly selected students. High achiever classes were determined according to the test results and assignment grades of the students in the fall semester. The students with top scores were placed into the first three classes. However, there was not a big gap between the scores of the high achiever class students and other students. The data were collected from one high achiever and four other classes. There were about 20 students in each class and the data were collected from 104 students in total. Data were collected both from a high achiever class and other classes in order to present

a whole picture and true representation of the English preparatory class. Once the data were collected from students, the data analysis process started in order to make the in-depth interviews more effective.

The interviews were conducted in a semi-structured way with English language instructors in the foreign languages department. These instructors were the reading course instructors of the selected classes. All the interviews were conducted face to face and questions related to teachers' experiences with blogs and the issues raised by the students were investigated.

Table 3.3 Overview of the Interview Process

<i>Participant</i>	<i>Date</i>
Teacher 1	1 November 2013
Teacher 2	17 October 2013
Teacher 3	18 October 2013
Teacher 4	9 November 2013
Teacher 5	15 November 2013

As the interviews were semi-structured, various topics about the blogs were raised and teachers were asked to elaborate and exemplify the issues which contributed to the data of the present research. All the teachers were given consent forms which were in Turkish (App. B). However, the interviews were conducted in English as the teachers stated before the interviews that they preferred to speak English because the terms they intended to use were in English and they did not want to speak a language that was a mixture of Turkish and English. For this reason, the interviews were conducted in English after the teachers had used blogs in reading classes for two semesters and completed all the grading process related to blogs. A total of 25 questions (Appendix C) were asked to each instructor in the interviews. The questions were related to blogs' contributions to reading classes and reflective skills of students, their benefits, and challenges for the teacher and students, its

comparison with traditional methods and ideal blog environment for them. All the interviews were tape-recorded and transcribed for data analysis.

3.4 Data Analysis

In this study both qualitative and quantitative data were gathered and analysed. Qualitative data were collected through the open-ended questions of the questionnaire that is the 4th part and in-depth interviews. The quantitative data were collected through the 1st, 2nd, 3rd and the 5th parts of the questionnaire.

In order to analyse the open-ended questions and the semi structured interviews, the constant comparative method for analysing qualitative data was implemented. The constant comparative method was described by Maykut and Morehouse (1994) in the following way:

A method of analysing qualitative data which combines inductive category coding with a simultaneous comparison of all units of meaning obtained. As each unit of meaning is selected for analysis, it is compared to all other units of meaning and subsequently grouped (categorizing and coded) with similar units of meaning. If there are no similar units of meaning, a new category is formed. In this process, there is room for continuous refinement; initial categories are changed, merged, or omitted; new categories are generated; and new relationships can be discovered (p. 134).

The answers to the open-ended questions of the questionnaire were coded and listed in a table after they were categorized under different categories. The number of answers that were collected under the same category was noted in order to analyse the qualitative data. The number of answers that were given to each category was noted in the same table. In order to analyse the qualitative data of the interviews, all the answers from the teachers were transcribed and they were coded according to their content (see Appendix D for a sample of the coding process

performed on the interview transcripts). Every answer was taken as an item and they were coded according to their theme. A coding table was created with their frequencies and numbers that occur in the transcripts. In addition, in order to have a better analysis of the data, colour coding for the transcripts were made. The answers related to the benefits of the blogs were coded green, while the answers related to the challenges of blogs were coded yellow and suggestions to overcome the challenges of the blogs were coded turquoise. Colour coding helped the researcher to see a general picture of the answers in terms of the content and contributed to an improved analysis of data.

The constant comparative method was used in order to see all the things which were brought up by students and teachers in detail. This method gave the researcher the opportunity to analyse all the data as categories. Thus, all the benefits and challenges of the use of blogs in EFL classes which were mentioned by students and teachers were presented with their frequencies. Also possible solutions to overcome these challenges were given under certain headings thanks to this method.

The quantitative data were collected from the questionnaire and they were analysed using the Statistical Packages for Social Science (SPSS 20.0). There were 17 items in the first part of the questionnaire which state the benefits of the use of blogs for language purposes. The first part of the questionnaire was in the form of a Likert scale and this was assessed with values ranging from 1 to 4. The scoring for the statements was as follows: Strongly agree=4, Agree=3, Disagree=2, Strongly Disagree=1. The second part of the questionnaire was also in the form of a Likert scale and it included statements about the challenges of using blogs for language purposes. The Likert scale was assigned values ranging from 1 to 4. The scoring for the statements were as follows: Strongly Agree=1, Agree=2, Disagree=3, Strongly Disagree=4. The rationale behind using a reverse scoring system for the first and second parts of the questionnaire is that the scores were calculated accordingly in Likert scales and the opinions of the students were

evaluated based on these scores. The third part of the questionnaire was in the format of true and false. There were 12 statements and while six of these statements were negative statements about blogs, six of them were positive statements about blogs. During the analysis of this part, in addition to the analysis of each item individually, the percentage of positive statements was compared to the percentage of negative statements to evaluate the rate of positive and negative opinions about use of blogs or technology for language learning purposes. As stated before the Statistical Packages for Social Science (SPSS 20.0) was used in order to analyse the quantitative data. Use of this method gave the researcher the chance to have all the percentages of each item in the questionnaire and compare these percentages which revealed the perceptions of students.

This chapter presented descriptive information related to the context of the research, participants, the data collection instruments, the procedures of collecting the data, and the data analysis of the study. In Chapter four the results and discussion of the data analysis and the suggestions of the study for language learning and teaching are presented.

CHAPTER 4

RESULTS

This chapter presents the results of the data analyses obtained from the questionnaire implemented with 104 students studying at English preparatory school at a private university in Turkey and in-depth semi-structured interviews which were conducted with 5 instructors of English. The analyses were demonstrated in terms of both quantitative and qualitative data and were used to answer the research questions shown below:

Based on the perceptions of instructors and alpha (beginner/elementary) level students in the English preparatory school of the University:

1. What are the benefits of using blogs in EFL reading classes?
2. What are the challenges of using blogs in EFL reading classes?
3. What are the possible solutions to overcome the challenges of using blogs in EFL reading classes?

4.1 The Results of the Questionnaire

As mentioned earlier, the questionnaire used in the study included 5 parts. The first and the second part of the questionnaire were in the form of a Likert scale and the first part included positive sides of blogs while the second part included negative parts of blogs and students were expected to give responses stating if they agree, totally agree, disagree or totally disagree. The third part of the questionnaire included both positive and negative statements about blogs and technology in general and students were expected to report if the statements were true or false according to their opinions and experiences. The fourth part of the questionnaire

had open-ended questions that were composed of the research questions of the study. Finally, the fifth part of the questionnaire aimed to collect demographic information about the students. While discussing the results of this study, it is appropriate to start with the demographic information from students as it is useful to describe the technological and educational background of the students to make the results more clear and meaningful.

4.1.1 Demographic Information of Students

104 students filled in the questionnaire in this study and their ages ranged between 17 and 22 and their average age was 19. While 67.33% of the participants were male, 32.67% of the participants were female. 88.24% of the participants were Turkish Republic citizens while 11.76% of the participants were international students. In addition, 53% of the students can speak a foreign language other than English.

In order to learn about their access to the internet, details of the students' accommodation conditions were also investigated. When students were asked about the place where they stayed, 65.69% of the students said they stayed at home while 33.33% of the students stated they stayed at a dormitory. 1% of the students marked the "other" option. In addition, when their internet connection was asked, 83.33% of the students stated that they had the internet access in the place where they lived. Figure 4.1 below was created based on students' answers:

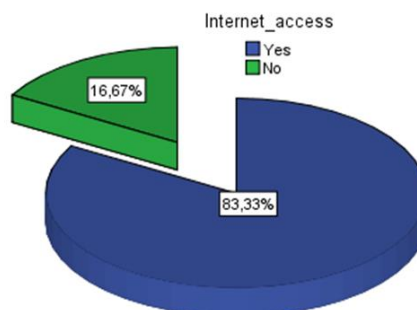


Figure 4.1 Internet Access of the Students

Although the majority of students had internet access in the place where they stay, there were still 16.67% of students who did not and this will have affected their study with blogs. In addition, 87.88% of students had their own personal computers, but there were 12.12% who did not and they had to use computers at another place to complete their blog assignments. When students were asked where they used computers, they gave the answers collated and presented in Table 4.1.

Table 4.1 Places that Students Access to the Internet

<i>The place that students used computers if they did not have their own personal computers</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
At the computer laboratory of my school	38%
Internet café	29%
From someone else's computer	25%
Other	8%

When students were asked if they had any difficulty accessing the class blog, 20% of all the students stated that they experienced difficulty. In addition, 50% of the students who did not have their own computers stated that they had difficulty accessing the class blog. In other words, students were more likely to have difficulty if they did not have their own computer or an internet connection where they lived. Also, students who stated that they had difficulty were asked to specify the difficulties they experienced. The responses of the students are reported in Table 4.2:

Table 4.2 Difficulties Faced by Students in Accessing the Blog

<i>Students' statements describing the difficulties they experienced while using computers for blogging</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
I spend a lot of time going to the internet café.	18,2%
Internet cafés are expensive.	27,3%
The internet connection in the dormitory is very bad.	18,2%
I have to go home early to do my homework because it is more difficult to use computers at school laboratory or at the internet café.	9,1%
I don't feel comfortable when there are people around me while I'm doing my homework.	9,1%
I would be more relaxed if I could use my own computer.	9,1%
I have to stay at school after classes finish.	9,1%

Although there were 21 students who stated that they had difficulty in accessing the Internet or computers, this did not prevent them from using computers or the Internet almost every day. The frequency of use of computers is shown below in Figure 4.2:

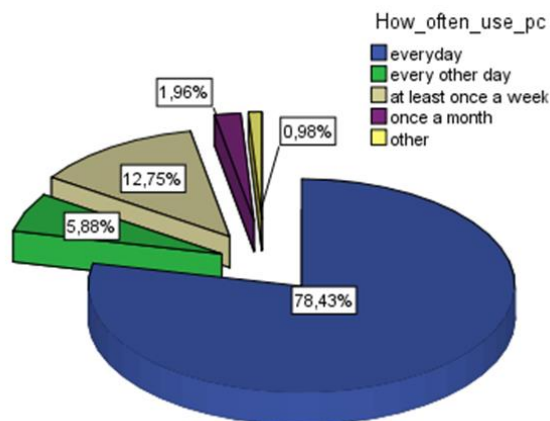


Figure 4.2 The Frequency of Students' Use of Computers

As shown in Figure 4.2, an excessive number of students (78.43%) used computers every day and the others used them very often. Therefore, it is appropriate to say that although some students stated that they had difficulty in accessing the class

blog, it might also be possible that students had difficulty in considering computers or the Internet as a platform to do homework or to learn English on their own by doing research with the help of the computers. In addition, when students' self-perceived computer skills are collated, it can be concluded that in general students believed that they were good at using most programs. This might have helped them use the blogs more effectively. Table 4.3 shows the level of students' self-perceived computer skills:

Table 4.3 Level of Students' Computer Skills

<i>Level of Students' Computer skills</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
Very Good	24,49%
Good	62,24%
Poor	11,22%
Very Poor	2,04%

On the other hand, although students are familiar with computers, the percentage of students who used blogs before they started to use them in their reading classes was relatively low. Namely, only 27.84% of the students had used blogs before their reading classes at the university. A majority (72.16%) of the students were introduced to blogs for the first time at the university for their reading classes. In addition, 61.22% of students who used blogs before they started university used them for educational purposes whereas 36.73% of the students used blogs for other purposes and 2.04% of the students use them for both.

This part of the thesis gave information about the students, their technology background and their habits of using technology. In the next part of the study, the benefits of the blogs that students agreed on the first part of the questionnaire will be shared.

4.1.2 Benefits of the Blogs Based on the Questionnaire Part I

As stated before, in the first part of the questionnaire, students reported if they agreed or disagreed with the benefits of the blogs stated through use of a Likert scale. In this part of the study, at first the percentages of the items are shared in Figure 4.2. Each percentage is provided under its category for every item in Figure 4.2. After that, the items are ordered according to the score each gets in Figure 4.3. This provides the opportunity to see which items are agreed or disagreed most by the students and, hence, which items stand out among the other statements. As the first step to introduce the benefits of the blogs reported by students, Table 4.4 shows the percentages of these benefits:

Table 4.4 Benefits of the Blogs According to the Results of the Questionnaire

<i>I think, blogs are <u>useful</u> for reading classes because ...</i>		<i>Strongly agree</i>	<i>Agree</i>	<i>Disagree</i>	<i>Strongly Disagree</i>
1.	they help me to reflect(thinking something carefully) on what I have read in class	35.6%	52,9%	4,8%	6,7%
2.	they motivate me to read the texts more carefully	27,9%	47,1%	18,3%	6,7%
3.	they give me the chance to use computers for my learning process.	24.3%	41,7%	23,3%	10,7%
4.	they promote collaboration (i.e. they are beneficial to share many ideas by using them.)	22,1%	60,6%	10,6%	6,7%
5.	they create a suitable environment for class discussion.	17.6%	45.1%	29.4%	7.9%
6.	interacting with my friends and teachers outside the class helps me fill in the gaps of my knowledge of the course topics.	22,1%	48,1%	23,1%	6,7%
7.	blogs motivate me to do research on the topics of the texts in reading class.	32,7%	46,2%	15,4%	5,8%
8.	I can get quick feedback from the teacher with the help of them.	29.9%	45.7%	19.1%	5.3%

**Table 4.4 Benefits of the Blogs According to the Results of the Questionnaire
(continued)**

<i>I think, blogs are <u>useful</u> for reading classes because ...</i>		<i>Stron gly agree</i>	<i>Agree</i>	<i>Disag ree</i>	<i>Stron gly Disagree</i>
9.	they help us to keep up with the developing technology in our learning experiences.	21.2%	52.5%	21.2%	5.1%
10.	they are more interesting than traditional methods like writing reflection papers and getting feedback in the lesson.	22,1%	52,9%	15,4%	9,6%
11.	doing activities on blogs is enjoyable.	18.6%	44.1%	25.5%	11.8%
12.	they help me improve my vocabulary knowledge in English	30,8%	54,8%	11,5%	2,9%
13.	they help me improve my grammar knowledge in English	23.3%	59.2%	13.6%	3.9%
14.	they help me improve my speaking skills in English	9,6%	24.1%	47,1%	19,2%
15.	they help me improve my listening skills in English	10,8%	25,5%	44,1%	19,6%
16.	they help me improve my reading skills in English	21,2%	65,4%	9,6%	3,8%
17.	they help me improve my writing skills in English	39,4%	51%	5,8%	3,8%

In Table 4.4, the percentages of student answers are given for each category: “agree, strongly agree, disagree and strongly disagree” to give the results in detail. However, during the discussion of the results, the statements are given only as “agree or disagree” by combining “agree and strongly agree” results and “disagree and strongly disagree” results to provide a discussion which would present a more well-organized response to the research questions of the study.

As seen in Table 4.4, students agreed on a lot of benefits of the blogs. To illustrate, students reported that they improved a lot of skills thanks to blogs such as

“reflection, research, vocabulary, grammar” and “reading skills”. Based on Figure 4.2, we can say that students became more motivated to read the reading texts in class or outside the class more carefully. This is because they knew they were going to reflect on it on the class blog. This was stated by three teachers during the interviews. Therefore, it is reasonable to say that blogs contributed to both in-class and out-class study skills of students as students did not read the text for the sake of doing the reading activity; rather they read it to actually comprehend and reflect on the text. To illustrate, 75% of the students mentioned that blogs inspired them to read the texts more carefully. On the blog, students were expected to combine the reading texts with their own lives and to give examples from their own experiences or ideas related to the reading texts. As students stated in the questionnaire, this blog activity can be said to have achieved its goals as 85.5% of the students stated that they improved their reading skills with the help of blogs.

In addition, a high number of the students (88.5%) stated that blogs helped them to reflect on what they read in class and also a considerable number of students (78.9%) stated that blogs motivated them to do research on the topics of the texts in the reading class. This indicates that blogs helped students continue their learning process outside the class as well and were motivated to build on what they learned in class. Similarly, the results of the study show that students learned more and more vocabulary with the help of blogs. 85.6% of the students agreed that blogs helped them to improve their vocabulary knowledge. There were two ways that students could learn more vocabulary through the blog activity. At the first stage, as students were expected to comprehend the texts well in order to reflect on them, they tried to define almost all the important vocabulary in the text to have a better idea on it. Therefore, they were motivated to learn these words while reading the text and they did various vocabulary activities in class with their teachers to practice this vocabulary. Then they recycled these words and exemplified them while they were writing their blog comments simply because they needed this vocabulary to reflect on the relevant topic. For this reason, it is

possible to say that blogs served as an extension of the vocabulary learning process after school. At the second stage, this improved students' vocabulary knowledge. As shown in Figure 4.2, blogs motivated students to do more research on the topic and while they were doing research on the text, they accessed more information on the relevant topic and looked words up the dictionary more often to better understand and share this information with their friends on the blogs. The more research they did, the more they felt the need to communicate different points of views to their friends and so they defined and practiced a lot more vocabulary. In the same way, students (82.5%) stated that they improved their grammar thanks to blogs. Although there was no grammar topic which was taught on the blog or in the reading classes, most students found blogs useful for grammar as well. This can be explained by blogs being a platform to practice grammar structures that students learned and also by students' need to express their ideas on the blog. This caused them to learn new structures by asking their friends and teachers and by searching for these structures on the Internet.

These results show us that blogs can be a really efficient platform to inspire students to produce the target language and actively use the language to communicate and express themselves. This leads to the improvement of integrated language skills. What is more, one of the most important skills that can be obviously improved with the help of blogs is writing. 90.4% of the students agreed that they improved their writing skills thanks to blogs. Writing is a skill that can only be improved by practice and students found many chances to practice their writing skills on the blog. As both their peers and teachers read their comments on the blog, students paid special attention to vocabulary usage, correct grammar structures, and the organization of their paragraphs. In addition, students got grades from their blog comments, which also provided motivation for them to do their best on the blog. Besides, they wrote a paragraph once in two weeks, which provided them with continual practice and gradual improvement of their writing skills. As productive skills; namely, writing and speaking, are relatively more

difficult to improve, blogs can be a great help in practicing and developing these skills.

On the other hand, students stated that blogs were not as effective on other skills such as listening and speaking. 66.3% of the students disagreed that blogs improved their speaking skills, while 63.7% of the students disagreed that blogs improved their listening skills. These results can be explained by the format of the class blog. As the class blog was based on teachers sending a post and students commenting on this post, there was a lack of any video or voice recording that could help students to improve their speaking and listening skills. The class blog was mostly focused on reading and writing skills and it did not directly address speaking and listening skills. For this reason, these results can be regarded as expected. In order to compare the most agreed benefits with the least agreed benefits of the blogs, Table 4.5 shows an overall comparison of the benefits stated in the questionnaire:

Table 4.5 Comparison of the Benefits Reported in the Questionnaire

<i>I think, blogs are <u>useful</u> for reading classes because ...</i>		<i>Agree</i>	<i>Disagree</i>
1.	they help me improve my writing skills in English	90,4%	9,6%
2.	they help me to reflect(thinking something carefully) on what I have read in class	88,5%	11,5%
3.	they help me improve my reading skills in English	86,6%	13,4%
4.	they help me improve my vocabulary knowledge in English	85,6%	14,4%
5.	they promote collaboration (i.e. they are beneficial to share many ideas by using them.)	82,7%	17,3%
6.	they help me improve my grammar knowledge in English	82,5%	17,5%
7.	blogs motivate me to do research on the topics of the texts in reading class.	78,9%	21,2%
8.	I can get quick feedback from the teacher with the help of them.	75,6%	24,4%

**Table 4.5 Comparison of the Benefits Reported in the Questionnaire
(continued)**

<i>I think, blogs are <u>useful</u> for reading classes because</i> ...		<i>Agree</i>	<i>Disagree</i>
9.	they are more interesting than traditional methods like writing reflection papers and getting feedback in the lesson.	75%	25%
10.	they motivate me to read the texts more carefully	75%	25%
11.	they help us to keep up with the developing technology in our learning experiences.	73,7%	26,3%
12.	interacting with my friends and teachers outside the class helps me fill the gaps in my knowledge of the course topics.	70,2%	29,8%
13.	they give me the chance to use computers for my learning process.	66%	34%
14.	they create a suitable environment for class discussion.	62,7%	37,3%
15.	doing activities on blogs is enjoyable	62,7%	37,3%
16.	they help me improve my listening skills in English	36,3%	63,7%
17.	they help me improve my speaking skills in English	33,7%	66,3%

On the other hand, there were still 33.7% of students who found blogs useful for their speaking skills and 36.3% of the students who reported that blogs were useful for their listening skills. These results can be explained by skills being integrated with each other. To elaborate, as students improved their vocabulary and grammar knowledge, they automatically improved their listening and speaking skills as well. They gained more vocabulary and grammar structures to explain themselves and to understand what they listen to. As all skills depend on each other, it is appropriate to think that when a skill is improved, it helps the student to be better in another skill as well.

In addition to improving skills, blogs were also useful for promoting class discussion, interaction and collaboration. To elaborate, 62.7% of the students stated that blogs created a suitable environment for class discussion. This result is especially important as teachers usually have difficult times trying to spare some time for class discussion as they had many topics to cover and they could allocate limited time for class discussion. Besides, while having a class discussion, it is highly possible that only certain active students participate while many other stay silent and prefer not to be a part of class discussion. However, on the blog every student had the opportunity to be a part of the class discussion as they were supposed to write comments and introvert students were also more likely to participate. Thus, blogs provided an efficient platform to have class discussions which had no time limits and were more likely to involve each and every member of the class. Moreover, 70.2% of the students agreed that interacting with their friends and teachers outside the class helped them fill the gaps in their knowledge of course topics. This result could be of importance as it can show that using blogs helped students to continue their learning experience when the classes finished and they obtained the chance to ask and answer questions about the course content. On the blog, both the teacher and their friends were accessible and they could reach the information they needed about the class easily. Even if they missed the class, they had a way to catch up with the topics they missed and they could keep track of what was going on in class while they were absent. Sometimes, there were ill students who could not come to class because of serious medical reasons or students who were members of school teams or clubs who are excused by the administration. These students have difficult times compensating for what they missed. Thus, blogs can be a solution to this problem and those students can access the class content and keep up with the other students as well. Even if they are in class, they may miss some points and they can easily catch up via the class blog as it can serve as an online version of the classroom.

Based on the results in Table 4.4 and Table 4.5 it is possible to say that blogs were also a way of integrating technology into the learning and teaching process which had positive effects on students. To illustrate, 66% of the students agreed that blogs gave them the chance to use computers for their learning process. 73.7% of them also reported that blogs helped them to keep up with the developing technology in their learning experiences. This shows us that students also regarded blogs as an integration of the latest technology to their learning experiences. In addition, it is appropriate to say that this integration was considered as a positive thing by the students as 75% of them agreed that blogs were more interesting than traditional methods like writing reflection papers and getting feedback in the lesson. Besides, 62.7% of the students reported that doing activities on the blog was enjoyable. Therefore, it is reasonable to say that students developed a positive attitude towards blogs. Moreover, students also reported the convenience of the blogs for their learning process. To illustrate, 75.6% of the students agreed that they could get quick feedback from the teacher with the help of blogs. As blogs enabled teachers to read their students' writing at any time or any place, they were more likely to give quick feedback to the students. Therefore, it is reasonable to conclude that blogs are convenient tools to provide quick and effective feedback as well.

In this part of the study, the benefits of the blogs which were indicated by the students at the first part of the questionnaire are shared. In this next part, challenges faced by the students while using blogs in reading classes are shared based on the answers to the second part of the questionnaire.

4.1.3 Challenges of the Blogs Based on the Questionnaire Part II

As demonstrated before, blogs have many advantages such as improving various skills, promoting collaboration/ class discussion, and the integration of technology to the learning process. On the other hand, there are also challenges that students and teachers face while using blogs for EFL. These challenges are important to

consider in order to use blogs effectively. Just like Table 4.4, in Table 4.6 the percentages of students answers are demonstrated for each category such as “strongly agree ,agree, disagree and strongly disagree” to give the details of the results. On the other hand, during the discussion of the results, the statements are given only as “agree or disagree” by combining “agree and strongly agree” results and “disagree and strongly disagree” results to provide a discussion which is easier to handle and read. Table 4.6 shows the challenges that students have based on what students reported in the 2nd part of the questionnaire:

Table 4.6 Challenges of the Blogs According to the Results of the Questionnaire

<i>I think, blogs are <u>not useful</u> for reading classes because ...</i>		<i>Strongly agree</i>	<i>Agree</i>	<i>Disagree</i>	<i>Strongly Disagree</i>
1.	it takes a lot of time to write a comment on the blog.	4,1%	16,3%	55,1%	24,5%
2.	they create extra work in terms of time and energy on me.	1,9%	32%	44,7%	18,4%
3.	I have a hard time checking the course blog frequently.	4,9%	43,7%	37,9%	13,5%
4.	I am bored with commenting on something all the time.	8,7%	45,2%	37,5%	8,7%
5.	It means one more assignment for me.	3,9%	34%	52,4%	9,7%
6.	sometimes, instructions on the blog seem unclear to understand.	11,5%	52,9%	30,8%	4,8%
7.	I sometimes have difficulty in figuring out what my teachers expect from me and I can't complete the tasks accordingly.	10,6%	46,2%	32,7%	10,6%
8.	when I do not have internet connection, I lose my access to the blog and I can't meet the course requirements.	8,7%	26,9%	37,5%	26,9%
9.	I feel uncomfortable with the idea that everyone can read my posts.	19,6%	45,1%	29,4%	5,9%

Table 4.6 Challenges of the Blogs According to the Results of the Questionnaire (continued)

<i>I think, blogs are <u>not useful</u> for reading classes because ...</i>		<i>Strongly agree</i>	<i>Agree</i>	<i>Disagree</i>	<i>Strongly Disagree</i>
10.	the degree/closeness of the relationship between me and my friends affects our commenting behaviour on blogs.	15,5%	43,7%	35%	5,8%
11.	when my class is crowded, it becomes difficult to keep up with all the things on the blog.	10,6%	35,6%	45,2%	8,6%

The first two items in Table 4.6 are closely related to blogs being time consuming. 20.4% of the students believed that writing a comment on the blog took a lot of time. As writing a blog comment was a new task for students and as their level of English was not very high, students were likely to spend much time on blog writing. Thus, some students (33.9%) also stated that blogs required extra time and energy and some students (48.6%) reported that writing a blog comment meant one more assignment for them. At this point, it is important to consider all the assignments that students are supposed to do and allocate them sensibly so that they do not have a lot of work that addresses the same topic. It is important to make assignments as balanced as possible so that students do not consider blog writing, which has lot of benefits for them as stated in Figure 4.2, as yet another assignment. Besides, it is also crucial to explain the rationale behind using blogs in our classes to shape their point of view of blogs in a positive way. Another issue that came up in this part was that 48.6% of the students stated that they had difficulty in checking the class blog all the time. A good solution to this problem can be assigning clear deadlines to students so that they know all the dates that they should write a comment and the dates that their teachers publish a post. In addition, 53.9% of the students agreed that they got bored with commenting on something all the time. An effective solution to this problem can be making the

class blog as interesting and attractive by choosing topics that can address students' interests and equipping the class blog with pictures, links and videos that might be of interest to students. Another important issue that should be taken into consideration while using blogs is instructions. 64.4% of the students reported that sometimes the instructions on the blog were not clear enough to understand for them. In addition, 56.8% of students stated that they sometimes had difficulty in figuring out what their teachers expected from them and they couldn't complete the tasks accordingly. These results show the importance of giving clear and detailed instructions on the blog. As blogs are mainly online tools which do not provide face to face communication, clear instructions are much more important. That is why instructions on the blog should be supported with vivid details and even examples. In addition, as blogs are a part of blended education rather than an online one, some classroom time can be spared to talk about teachers' expectation on the blog. This serves to make everything clear as this problem might arise because of the lack of sufficient proficiency in English. They may not understand because the language of the instructions is too advanced for them

Results in Table 4.6 also indicate that blogs could be seen as an extension of the classroom dynamics. 59.2% of the students stated that the closeness of the relationship between them and their friends affected their commenting behaviour on blogs. This implies that the relationships between students stayed the same on the class blog as well. Although this situation did not necessarily create any negative behaviour in this specific study, if this poses any threat to the class unity in other educational settings, it can be best to set rules on the blog. Setting such rules can solve the other two other problems that students mentioned as well. As these rules can create a positive and safe atmosphere in the blog, students can feel less uncomfortable with the idea that other students see and read their writings on the blog as 59.2% of the students stated that they felt uncomfortable with the idea that other students can see and read their comments. Besides, creating such an atmosphere can solve the problem that students (46.2%) stated about the difficulty

of keeping up with the class blog when the class is very crowded. Students may have to follow different some different students every week rather than all students, and so they do not have any difficulty when the class is crowded.

Finally, 35.6% of the students agreed that when they did not have access to an internet connection, they lost their access to the blog and they couldn't meet the course requirements, which emphasises the importance of technical facilities at schools.

4.1.4 Comparison of the Results of the Questionnaire Part I and Part II

In this part of the study, a comparison of the first and second sections of the results of the questionnaire is given in order to describe the students' attitude towards blogs. As mentioned earlier, in the first and the second sections of the questionnaire, students reported if they agreed or disagreed with the benefits of the blogs stated in the items as they were in the form of a Likert scale. These parts of the questionnaire were assessed using values ranging from 1 to 4. However, the first and the second parts of the questionnaire were assessed in reverse order in order to provide a correct comparison of the results. To elaborate, the scoring for the statements for the first part was as following: *Strongly agree*=4, *Agree*=3, *Disagree*=2, *Strongly Disagree*=1. Therefore, it means that the higher score an item gets, the more it is agreed on that benefit. On the other hand, the scoring for the statements for the second part was as follows: *Strongly agree*=1, *Agree*=2, *Disagree*=3, *Strongly Disagree*=4. It means that the lower score an item gets, the more it is agreed that it is a challenge and the higher an item gets, the more the challenge is disagreed with. That is, students did not agree that it was really a problem for them while they were using blogs in their classes. In other words, if the scores are higher, the attitudes of the students are more positive whereas if the scores are lower, the attitudes of the students are more negative. Besides, if students gave no answers to the item, answers were calculated from students who gave answers to that item as was done in other parts of the thesis, too.

If we explain the rationale behind the reverse-ordered calculation system with a chart, Figure 4.3 is considered:

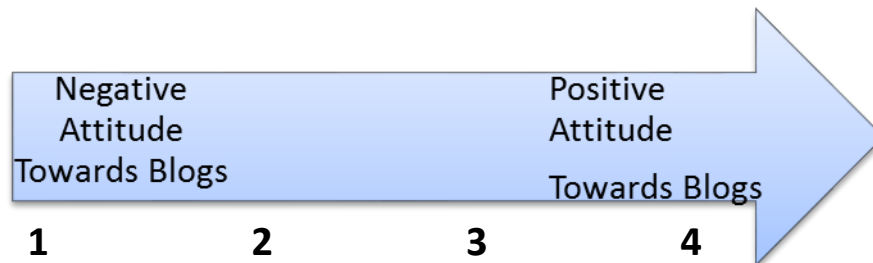


Figure 4.3 Explanation of the Calculation of Values

As seen in Figure 4.3, when positive statements in Questionnaire part I were compared with negative statements in Questionnaire part II, a calculation based on the scores assigned to the options of the Likert scale was made. According to this calculation, the means of the items signify negative attitudes if they were closer to 1, and they signify positive attitudes if they were closer to 4. Table 4.7 shows the results of this calculation:

Table 4.7 Descriptive Statistics of the Questionnaire Part I and II

Descriptive Statistics (N=104)			
Items of the Questionnaire	Mean	Std. Deviation	Variance
they help me improve my writing skills in English	3,2596	0,73729	0,544
they help me to reflect(thinking about something carefully) on what I have read in class	3,1731	0,80583	0,649
they help me improve my vocabulary knowledge in English	3,1346	0,72484	0,525
blogs motivate me to do research on the topics of the texts in reading class.	3,0577	0,84563	0,715
they help me improve my reading skills in English	3,0385	0,68156	0,465
they help me improve my grammar knowledge in English	2,9904	0,78202	0,612

**Table 4.7 Descriptive Statistics of the Questionnaire Part I and II
(continued)**

they promote collaboration (i.e. they are beneficial to share many ideas by using them.)	2,9808	0,77561	0,602
they motivate me to read the texts more carefully	2,9615	0,85812	0,736
they are more interesting than traditional methods like writing reflection papers and getting feedback in the lesson.	2,8750	0,86673	0,751
interacting with my friends and teachers outside the class helps me fill in the gaps in my knowledge of the course topics.	2,8558	0,84092	0,707
they give me the chance to use computers for my learning process.	2,7692	0,96774	0,937
they help us to keep up with developing technology in our learning experiences.	2,7596	0,99020	0,980
I feel uncomfortable with the idea that everyone can read my posts.	2,7308	0,90555	0,820
sometimes, instructions on the blog are not clear enough to understand.	2,7115	0,73304	0,537
doing activities on blogs is enjoyable.	2,7019	0,99396	0,988
they create a suitable environment for class discussion.	2,6731	0,91844	0,844
the degree/closeness of the relationship between me and my friends affects our commenting behaviour on blogs.	2,6635	0,84314	0,711
I sometimes have difficulty in figuring out what my teachers expect from me and I can't complete the tasks accordingly.	2,5673	0,82161	0,675
I am bored with commenting on something all the time.	2,5385	0,77489	0,600
when my class is crowded, it becomes difficult to keep up with all the things on the blog.	2,4808	0,80025	0,640
I have a hard time checking the course blog frequently.	2,3750	0,81476	0,664
It means one more assignment for me.	2,2981	0,73577	0,541
they help me improve my listening skills in English	2,2500	0,94252	0,888
they help me improve my speaking skills in English	2,2404	0,87573	0,767

**Table 4.7 Descriptive Statistics of the Questionnaire Part I and II
(continued)**

when I do not have internet connection, I lose my access to the blog and I can't do the course requirements.	2,1731	0,92896	0,863
they create extra work in terms of time and energy for me.	2,1538	0,77296	0,597
I can get quick feedback from the teacher with the help of them.	1,6442	1,62456	2,639
it takes a lot of time to write a comment on the blog	0,9423	1,13057	1,278
Valid N (list wise)	2,6071		

In Table 4.7, when we analyse the results, we can see that the item which has the highest score is Section 1, Question 17 with the score of 3, 2596. This item indicates that blogs help students improve their writing skills in English. Therefore, it is clear that a high number of the students believe they got better in writing thanks to blogs. This result is the most striking item of the questionnaire. In addition, the second highest score belongs to the benefit of the blogs for improving the reflectivity skills of the students. This shows us that students took the advantage of blogs while they were reflecting on what they read in class. Moreover, the third highest score refers to blogs improving the vocabulary knowledge of students and it is certain that students increased their level of vocabulary with the help of blogs.

When we also look at the lowest scores, we see that Question 1 in Section 2 has the lowest score. It states that it takes a lot of time to write a blog entry. This score denotes that students mostly disagreed with the idea of blogs' being time consuming which can be seen as an implication of a positive attitude towards blogs.

The mean of all scores could be used in order to see if the attitude of the students is closer to positive or negative in the present study. The mean of the descriptive statistics above is 2,6071, so we can say that the attitudes of the students were

closer to positive according to the results of the questionnaire part 1 and part 2. Students have found more benefits in using blogs in their reading classes than challenges.

4.1.5 Advantages and Disadvantages of Blogs Based on Questionnaire Part III

The third part of the questionnaire used in the present study had items which were marked as True or False by the participants. This part had 12 items and six of these items were positive statements about blogs while six of them are negative. The participants were expected to give their ideas about blogs on various issues such as their effect on motivation, the grading of blogs, their friendliness, and their appropriacy for reading classes. The results of this part are shown in Table 4.8:

Table 4.8 Results of the Third Part of the Questionnaire

<i>No</i>	<i>Statements</i>	<i>TRUE</i>	<i>FALSE</i>
		<i>%</i>	<i>%</i>
1.	The use of blogs is suitable for the purpose of the reading classes.	89.3%	10.7%
2.	Traditional methods like writing a reflection paper and getting feedback in the lesson are easier to use in reading classes.	29.8%	70.2%
3.	When I use blogs in reading classes, I become more motivated for the lessons.	57.2%	42.8%
4.	Using blogs in reading classes does not have a positive effect on me.	31,7%	68,3%
5.	Instructions of the teacher on blogs are not as understandable as the ones in a face-to-face lesson.	48.5%	51.5%
6.	Blogs shouldn't be graded because this causes negative feelings towards them.	55.3%	44.7%
7.	The blog application in Cambridgelms Online learning website is user friendly enough for me.	68.9%	31.1%

Table 4.8 Results of the Third Part of the Questionnaire (continued)

8.	I don't understand what I am doing while using blogs in reading classes, so I feel lost.	25.2%	74.8%
9.	I see using blogs in reading classes as a useless task.	32%	68%
10.	If I were a teacher of English, I would use blogs in my courses	68.9%	31.1%
11.	The use of blogs is suitable for the nature of the reading classes.	89.1%	10.9%
12.	Doing homework on the blog is easier than writing it by hand.	78%	22%

The results of this part indicate that blogs were considered suitable for both the nature and the purpose of reading classes. Based on this result, it is possible to say that blogs can be effectively integrated to reading classes and they can be made an important part of such classes. What is more, 68.9% of the participants reported that if they were teaching the class, they would use blogs in their classes. Similarly, 68% of the participants disagreed that the use of blogs in reading classes is a useless task. Thus, it is clear that students found using blogs useful and they supported the idea of using blogs as a part of their classes.

Another topic that arose in this part was motivation. 57.2% of the participants reported that they became more motivated for their classes when they used blogs. Besides, 68.3% of the participants disagreed with the statement that “using blogs in reading classes did not have a positive effect on them”. These results denote that blogs can positively contribute to students’ motivation. As stated before, many participants stated that blogs were helpful for improving various skills and blogs could be expected to be motivating for students as it helps them to get better in their learning process. To elaborate, blogs are likely to provide both internal and external motivation to students. It may be possible to make use of blogs to provide internal motivation as they help learning and provide a sense of creativity,

achievement and joy of learning for students. They also have the potential to provide external motivation as students gain teacher appreciation and feedback on the blogs and they also receive grades. Thus, as motivation is the key element to success, it is reasonable to say that blogs are promising for student success as well.

Part III (T/F) of the questionnaire also has implications for the comparison of blogs and technology in general with traditional methods. To illustrate, 70.2% of the students disagreed with the statement that traditional methods like writing reflection papers and getting feedback in the lesson were easier to use in reading classes. This shows that a large number of students considered blogs more advantageous and easy to use compared to traditional methods. Similarly, 78% of the students reported that doing homework on the blog was easier than writing it by hand. These results imply that blogs made life easier for students and facilitated their assignment completion process. In the same way, 68.9% of the participants agreed that the blog application in Cambridgelms Online Learning Website was user friendly for them. This shows that most of the students did not have difficulty while using blogs. On the other hand, there were 31.1% of students who did not think that the blog application in Cambridgelms Online Learning Website was user friendly enough, which may indicate that there were students who needed more guidance in using the technology. It is important to be aware of these student needs and to provide more support. In addition, technology is promising, but as mentioned earlier, special attention should be paid to instructions on the blogs. 48.5% of the students stated that teacher instructions on blogs were not as clear as in a face-to-face lesson. Similarly, 25.2% of them reported that they didn't understand what they were doing while using blogs in reading classes, so they felt lost. This result points out the importance of making the task as comprehensible as possible on the blog. The teacher's expectation on the blog should be openly communicated to the students. Besides, as the use of blogs is an example of blended learning, instruction can be reinforced during face to face sessions as well.

Finally, grading is an issue reported in this section of the questionnaire that created disagreement among students. 55.3% of the students agreed that blogs shouldn't be graded because this caused negative feelings towards them. On the other hand, 44.7% disagreed with this statement. Therefore, grading is a controversial issue among students and this issue is going to be discussed in the study later in detail as students raised this issue in open-ended questions part as well.

4.1.6 Results and Discussion of Open-Ended Questions in Questionnaire Part IV

In the 4th part of the questionnaire, four open-ended questions were asked of students in order to collect qualitative data, triangulate the quantitative data in the questionnaire, and to have a better idea about their opinions about their blogging experience. These four questions were parallel to the research questions of the study. These questions are:

- What were the benefits of blogs in reading classes? Please, give specific examples.
- What were the challenges of blogs in reading classes? Please, give specific examples.
- What are your suggestions to improve the use of blogs in reading classes? Please, give specific examples?
- If there are other things you like to add or comment on, please specify.

This part of the questionnaire was very helpful to collect data from students which were not explored before. Thanks to this part, students had a chance to openly express what they found useful or what challenges they faced while using blogs in their classes. The answers that students gave to these questions were collected under certain categories and the answers to the first question on the benefits of the blogs are shown below in Table 4.9:

Table 4.9 Benefits of the Blogs Mentioned in Open Ended Questions

<i>Benefits of the Blogs</i>	<i>f</i>
Blogs improve writing.	28
Blogs improve vocabulary.	25
Blogs improve reading.	20
Blogs improve my knowledge.	16
Blogs improve grammar.	13
Blogs improve my research skills.	12
Blogs improve critical thinking skills.	10
Blogs are not useful.	7
Commenting on the blog is useful.	3
Receiving feedback from the teacher is faster on the blog than traditional methods.	3
TOTAL	137

As seen in Table 4.9, students found blogs helpful to improve their writing, vocabulary and reading skills. Students also found blogs useful to improve their knowledge and as they translated this word from Turkish, it can be said that they believed that their knowledge of English was facilitated by blogs. In addition, critical thinking skills and research skills were some of the skills that were stated to be improved by blogs. It is also interesting to see that a blog's contribution to the concentration of the students was also mentioned in the study. These results reveal how technology positively affected and was appreciated by students. In addition, there is also evidence that students found blogs enjoyable and time saving compared to traditional methods as they stated blogs were fun and they took less time than writing by hand. As these are students' own sentences, it is appropriate to say that blogs have positive implications for teachers and students to use them in teaching and learning processes in order to make them more effective, fun and convenient.

On the other hand, in addition to the benefits of the blogs mentioned in Table 4.9, students also stated some challenges of the blogs. It is interesting to see in the

results that although students agreed on a lot of the benefits of the blogs, the challenges were varied and students stated many different challenges in their answers. It is important to consider the challenges shown in Table 4.10 to address each and every student and their different learning styles while using blogs:

Table 4.10 Challenges of the Blogs Mentioned in Open Ended Questions

<i>Challenges of the Blogs</i>	<i>f</i>
Blogs are a problem when the internet connection is slow.	9
It takes time to organize my ideas and find a topic to write on the blog.	9
I cannot find enough time to write on the blog.	8
There is no challenge.	6
It is a waste of time.	6
It is hard to write more than one comment.	4
Sometimes, it is hard to understand what the teacher means on the blog.	3
I have to try hard to be better than the other students on the blog.	3
It is hard to read the passages again and again to write a comment on the blog.	3
I have to write a comment on the blog even though I do not like the topic.	2
I cannot find ideas to write in a short time.	2
I am not interested in blogs.	2
I write a comment on the blog for my grades even though I do not want to.	2
There are too many tasks to complete.	2
Topics are sometimes boring.	2
TOTAL	63

As seen in Table 4.10, some of the answers were related to proficiency level while some of them were about timing and the choice of topic. Some items could be connected to the level of proficiency as students stated that they had difficulty in understanding and commenting on the topic when it was hard for them and also they reported that they had hard times finding the correct grammar structure or vocabulary or experienced difficulty because of unknown vocabulary on the blogs. This shows us that the tasks that students were supposed to complete on the blogs

were challenging for their level of proficiency rather than using the blogs. However, according to Krashen's (1994) $i+1$ theory students need tasks that present some challenge for them in order to build one more step in their knowledge and to add a new level of understanding. Besides, blogs provided comprehensible input to students that was relevant to their context. Computers and the use of the Internet are parts of students' daily life context and the topics that students commented on were related to what they had covered with their teachers in class. Therefore, the input on the blogs was relevant and comprehensible for them, which can facilitate their second language acquisition process.

In addition, based on students' answers it is appropriate to say that they found blogs challenging partly because they wanted to do better as they stated that it took time for them to organize their ideas, find correct words and the grammar structure on the blog and, most importantly, they stated that they had to try hard to be better than the other students on the blog. Therefore, although several challenges such as the number of the blog entries, the topics, the grading system of the blogs, and the workload of the students should be taken into consideration, it is interesting to see that some challenges faced by the students arose because of perceived competition with other students on the blog.

Moreover, it is also important to state that although access to the Internet is taken for granted by many people, students were still facing some problems concerning the internet access they were doing their homework on the blog.

On the other hand, when students were asked to write their suggestions to improve blogs, they suggested many different solutions that could be applicable while using blogs in English language teaching classes. When we look at students' suggestions about the blogs, we see that there are a great number of suggestions about the grading of the blogs. While some students ($n=7$) believed that blogs should not be graded, some students ($n=2$) stated that the percentage of blogs on their grades should be increased. In addition, the other common topic among students' answers

was the topics they should write on the blogs. Some of the students (n=2) stated that topics could be more interesting and some of the students (n=3) suggested doing more research on the Internet and writing about the news they read. Writing about the news on the blogs could be a good idea in English language classes as this is already what students generally do on Facebook or Twitter and this suggestion can make blogs more interesting and attractive for students. Table 4.11 shows many more examples of students' suggestions to improve blogs:

Table 4.11 Possible Solutions Mentioned in Open Ended Questions

<i>Suggestions to Improve Blogs</i>	<i>f</i>
Blogs should not be graded.	8
We can have more reading and more blog comments.	5
Students should not write this much on the internet.	4
Teachers can write an example for each topic.	3
Blogs should not be used.	3
We should write blog comments on every passage we read.	3
Students can be encouraged to do more research and to write about some news on the internet on the blog.	3
They are good enough for us now.	2
Teachers should be more careful while giving grades on the blogs.	2
Writing only one paragraph can be better on the blog.	2
I want to learn the level of my blogging skills.	2
Blogging is perfect.	2
Topics can be more interesting.	2
The percentage of blogs on our grades should be increased.	2
We should use pictures and videos as well.	2
I believe our teachers do their best to improve blogs.	2
TOTAL	47

When we compare Table 4.9, Table 4.10 and Table 4.11 we can clearly see that the number of the benefits ($f=145$) that students stated was far more than the number of the challenges they mentioned and the suggestions they brought ($f=56$). Students stated that blogs improved a lot of skills such as writing, critical thinking, research, vocabulary, grammar and they were useful for getting quick feedback from the teacher. The excessive number of the items that were related to the

advantages of the blogs shows that they were useful tools to support students' learning experiences and they can be effectively used in reading classes to help students reflect on what they had read on the class and to give feedback to students about their comments and how reflective they were on the blogs. Besides, blogs could be efficient tools to integrate reading and writing skills and to create a platform for students to practice both. On the other hand, there are still improvements that can be made to the blogs. Two important issues to pay attention to are grading and the choice of topics. As grading is a crucial issue for students' performance, it is important to grade blogs in a way which satisfies both teacher and students. The expectation of the teacher on the blog should be clearly articulated to students because the result of the present study shows that there are students stating that they get a low grade even though they do all the requirements on the blog. They further suggest that the teacher should be more careful while grading the blogs. Therefore, grading is an important issue to handle on the blogs. In addition, the choice of topics is important as when students do not find the topic interesting, they have difficulty writing something on it. A good strategy to solve this problem can be suggesting more than one topic to write on the blog and as students stated, they can also write about the news they read on the Internet. To summarize, blogs have several benefits that make them effective instructional tools for English language teaching, and they also have some challenges that can vary from one class to another. As every class has its own needs and skills, every class blog should be shaped according to these needs and skills and its rules should be designed to address the learning skill of each student to make the class blog an effective learning environment for every member of the class.

4.2 The Results of the Interviews with Teachers

As mentioned before, students' ideas were investigated via a questionnaire and the results were reported above. On the other hand, in order to have a complete picture of the blogging experience, in-depth interviews were conducted with teachers and their opinions on this matter were investigated. A lot of views were brought up

during these five interviews which were transcribed and coded under certain categories. In order to present a detailed report of the in-depth interviews, first of all, all the codes that appeared during the interviews are given in Table 4.12, from the most frequent codes to the least frequent ones:

Table 4.12 Coding Table of Interviews with Teachers

<i>Codes</i>	<i>Frequency of the Codes</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
Effective feedback on the blog	17	8,2%
Increase of vocabulary knowledge on blogs	12	5,8%
Improvement of writing skills on the blogs	11	5,3%
Advantage of blogs over traditional methods	11	5,3%
Contribution of blogs to reflective skills	10	4,8%
More research on the topic	9	4,3%
Contribution of blogs to reading classes	9	4,3%
Positive experience with blogs	8	3,9%
Easy training for blogs	8	3,9%
Importance of blogging tools	7	3,4%
Detailed input on the blog	7	3,4%
Effectiveness of grading blogs	7	3,4%
Ideal blog environment	7	3,4%
Technical problems related to blogs	6	2,9%
Teacher workload as a challenge	6	2,9%
Sample blogs for students	6	2,9%
Teaching experience	5	2,4%
Positive effect of blogs on student motivation	5	2,4%
Compensation for missing information	5	2,4%
Improvement of grammar on blogs	4	1,9%

Table 4.12 Coding Table of Interviews with Teachers (continued)

Difficulty of accessing the i-Internet by students	4	1,9%
Blogs being time consuming	4	1,9%
Low motivation of students	4	1,9%
Handy error correction on blogs	3	1,4%

It is seen in Table 4.12 that the top three topics raised by the instructors during the interviews were about feedback, the increase in vocabulary, and the improvement of writing skills on the blog. To begin with, teachers reported that although giving feedback on the blog was time consuming and difficult to handle, overall it was helpful for students and it was fun at the same time. To illustrate:

Teacher workload can be a challenge, too, because teachers give feedback to the students' journals on the blogs, so it is kind of time consuming. I know it is really helpful but it is a kind of work load.
(Teacher 1, female, Interview A, October 1, 2013)

As teachers spent much time reflecting on and considering what each student wrote on the blog, they viewed giving feedback as a time consuming activity but a useful thing for students at the same time. In addition, they reported that they enjoyed the process of giving feedback as it was like discovering the students' world via blogs and then being able to reflect on it. Besides, checking students' progress and compensating for what might not have been understood in class were among the things that teachers mentioned as helpful while giving feedback.

I think blogs can also help teachers to compensate for what students might not understand in class because teachers give feedback to students on the blogs and it helps them to improve their skills and it helps students to see their mistakes and they had a chance to correct their mistakes. (Teacher 1, female, Interview A, October 1, 2013)

We gave comprehensive feedback to the students on the blogs and we were happy about it as the feedback was detailed. Also, we checked if students really comprehended the text or whether they stole the information from somewhere or copied the ideas of other people. Even our feedback was longer than students' entries, so I believe our feedback was really informative for them. The blogs were also useful for teachers as we could observe their progress on the blogs and we could see the difference between their entries in the beginning and at the end. We could see the improvement between the first blog entry and the last blog entries. We could also see their vocabulary and grammar improvement and improvement in every aspect of language on the blogs. (Teacher 2, female, Interview B, October 17, 2013)

Thus, it can be said that blogs served as an extension of the learning that started in class and teachers were able to correct them. They served as a platform on which students had a chance to produce language using the new vocabulary, skills, and structures they learned in class. Moreover, both students and teachers had a chance to see students' progress in learning thanks to blog comments and feedback.

In addition, teachers also reported that blogs made giving feedback easier for them as they did not have to take care of paper work and they could access the blogs whenever and wherever they wanted. Thus, there is evidence that blogs provided them with opportunities which were better than traditional methods. Also, it was mentioned that blogs contributed to the communication between the teacher and the student as they had the opportunity to communicate and share things outside the class as well. As they barely found time to cover the course material during class hours, the use of blogs was an advantage for communication as well. To illustrate:

I commented on students' grammar vocabulary and sometimes made jokes on the blog, and we mentioned what they wrote on the blog in class as well. I think I gave enough input and very detailed feedback. I think the handiest benefit of the blog is that you do not have to carry all those papers home and try to carry them back to the class and then distribute to the students. This process is kind of boring and tiresome for me, but blogs are more accessible. I can give feedback to my students even using my cell phone; I think most important benefit for teachers is its convenience. (Teacher 4, male, Interview D, November 9, 2013)

The second most popular topic was the increase in the vocabulary of students on the blogs. As students were expected to reflect on the reading texts they covered in class, they were encouraged to exemplify the vocabulary they newly learned and to do research on these topics. Thus, students were motivated to learn and use new vocabulary to explain their opinions, which was appreciated by their teachers, too. During the interviews, teachers reported that students greatly improved their vocabulary related to the topics of the reading texts and they googled the things mentioned in these texts and got a better idea about the topics. They then looked up the new vocabulary in the dictionary and actively used them in their blog entries.

They could exemplify the vocabulary in the texts and they had to learn new vocabulary to express themselves, their ideas were better on the blogs, especially about the specific topics. If we read an article about medicine or sports, they learned new vocabulary and they searched for new vocabulary to express what was in their minds, so it was beneficial for them. (Teacher 2, female, Interview B, October 17, 2013)

Therefore, based on what both teachers and students reported, it is possible to say that use of blogs positively affected the vocabulary knowledge of the students and inspired them to learn more and more vocabulary.

Another very popular topic in the interviews was the improvement of writing skills on the blogs. As students practiced their writing skills a lot on the blogs, they were expected to improve this skill a lot and based on the data collected by both students and teachers, it is reasonable to say that blogs had a positive influence on students' writing skills. To elaborate, it was reported during the interviews that one of the most difficult skills for students was writing as students usually started university without having practiced this skill much. They had some habits from high school which were barely applicable to the English paragraph writing rules or criteria and some of them developed almost no writing skills at all. For this reason, expressing their ideas in an organized way was a challenge for students. This was mentioned by students in the questionnaires (See Table 4.10). Thus, students needed support and guidance from their teachers on a regular basis to improve their organization and to adapt an organized way of thinking and writing. Teachers reported that blogs were really helpful in providing this support and they were more advantageous than traditional methods at this point as well.

Writing is one of the hardest skills for our students. They have some habits that they acquired from high school and they usually persisted with those habits. Some of them have not improved their writing skills at all. They often have problems organizing their ideas and expressing themselves clearly, so they need guidance from their instructor. Based on my experience, I can say that students can only improve their writing skills with continual feedback and guidance. Blogs provide a good environment for this guidance and feedback. It is much more efficient than collecting papers, carrying them to home, writing feedback on them one by one and distributing them to the students and trying to reach

absent students. (Teacher 4, male, Interview D, November 9, 2013)

In this part of the study, all the codes that were used during the interviews were analysed to present the key issues mentioned by the teachers, and to introduce a general outline of the themes. On the other hand, the results of the selective coding done on the interview data revealed four main headings under which the initial codes could be grouped. These headings are as follows:

- Benefits of blogs on student learning
- Instructional challenges of blogs
- Technical challenges of blogs
- Suggestions to improve the use of blogs in EFL reading classes

4.3 Benefits of Blogs on Student Learning

As seen in Table 4.13, there are many codes stating the benefits of blogs on students' learning that indicate teachers' positive opinions on this topic. Table 4.13 shows these benefits:

Table 4.13 Benefits of Blogs According to Teachers

<i>Benefits of Blogs on Student Learning</i>	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
Feedback on the blog	17	8,2%
Increase of vocabulary knowledge on blogs	12	5,8%
Improvement of writing skills on the blogs	11	5,3%
Advantage of blogs over traditional methods	11	5,3%
Contribution of blogs to reflective skills	10	4,8%
Contribution of blogs to reading classes	9	4,3%
More research on the topic	9	4,3%
Blogging tools	7	3,4%

Table 4.13 Benefits of Blogs According to Teachers (continued)

Effectiveness of grading blogs	7	3,4%
Blogging tools	7	3,4%
Input on the blog	7	3,4%
Positive effect of blogs on student motivation	5	2,4%
Compensation of missing information	5	2,4%
Improvement of grammar on blogs	4	1,9%
Error correction on blogs	3	1,4%

As seen in Table 4.13, in addition to the advantages of the blogs mentioned by students in the questionnaire, there were many other benefits of the blogs which were reported by the teachers. As well as the improvement of skills, the increase of vocabulary and grammar knowledge, enhancing reflectivity and the advantage of blogs over pen and paper methods, teachers mentioned that blogs encouraged students to do more research on the topic and learn a lot more details about it. This helped them to comprehend the topic better, to acquire more vocabulary about it and to be exposed to the language more and to reflect on the topic with more depth. Teacher 4 gives an example on this matter:

As I said before, students may do more research due to the blogs as in some of the tasks we guided them to do more research on the topic, and also some of the topics were very interesting for students and they did further research. Sometimes, I felt that students knew more about the topic than the textbook mentioned as they googled it. Particularly, there was a topic about a cat and the cat knowing when people die. Students find this story really interesting and they watched some documentaries about it and they mentioned them on the blog. Seeing them being interested in something other than their cell phones was rewarding. (Teacher 4, male, Interview D, November 9, 2013)

This quotation implies two things about the blogging experience. First of all, the teacher is satisfied with students' doing research on the topic as they obtained more information. Therefore, it is appropriate to state that blogs helped students to carry on the learning process on the blogs when the school finished and the exposure to the language continued. Secondly, it is interesting to see that blogging means coping with the side effect of technology which is students' unwillingness to be interested in anything but their smart phones, by using technology again. Thus, they have something related to learning English to surf on the Internet, or access by using their smart phones. This obviously illustrates that blogs facilitate teachers' keeping up with the technology.

Giving comprehensible input and compensating missing information on the blog were two important topics that were mentioned by teachers. All the teachers reported that they were satisfied with the input they gave on the blog. They also stated that they gave very detailed feedback and provided plenty of input for students. Besides, they stated that blogs were helpful in compensating for missing information as well because students could always learn the class topics on the blog even if they did not attend the classes for a while. Therefore, they were able to catch up with their peers and the teacher had an opportunity to reach them as well.

I think blogs can of course compensate for what might not have been understood in class. Sometimes, even teachers are not motivated or we are tired, or depressed. We are not always ready to learn. That is why when students go home and read the text again, they have time and opportunity to understand the text better. (Teacher 3, female, Interview C, October 18, 2013)

On the other hand, it was also reported that blogs could be much more useful to present missing information to the students if they were used for grammar lessons. As students usually had difficulty catching up with the grammar topics when they

missed their classes, blogs could have been an effective platform to inform students about the grammar topics which were covered in class and to provide them with some examples. These examples could be also useful for other students to recycle and to practice more. Therefore, it can be said that blogs were useful for teachers to inform students about the class content and to provide them with continual input, but they can be even more useful if they are used in classes which require more input and instruction from teacher.

Another benefit that teachers put emphasis on is the positive effect on students' motivation of blogs. During in-depth interviews, teachers highlighted that writing a blog entry encouraged students to pay more attention in reading classes. As they were aware of the fact that they had to learn the class content in order to be a part of the blog activity, they listened more carefully and they read the texts more carefully. Having an activity outside the class that was connected to the reading class increased the importance of both reading texts and reading classes. Students read the texts in order to comprehend it as they were required to reflect on them.

Students usually get bored while reading things in class and it is hard to motivate them to read texts, especially when the texts get harder. However, when they write things on the blog, they have an aim in mind to read and comprehend the texts better. Giving correct answers to comprehension questions in the reading book is not a very big motivation for students, but if it is made a part of blogs, students have one more stage to complete so this is the most important benefit for me. (Teacher 4, male, Interview D, November 9, 2013)

As seen here, blogs served as an extra aim for reading the texts and teachers reported that due to them, students took the reading classes more seriously. This could have helped facilitate the learning process. In the same way, teachers also reported that blogs helped students to enhance their imagination and they managed

to express what they imagined in a well-organized way on the blogs. This helped them to try to think in English and so to put their imagination into words in English rather than trying to directly translate from Turkish. In the same way, interviews with teachers revealed that blogs acted as a bridge between class and real life and students voiced their opinions freely due to this bridge. To elaborate, blogs built a bridge between real life and class because students expressed their own ideas and shared their experiences on the blog related to the topic they dealt with in class. This encouraged them to integrate their life with the class content and combine them on the blogs freely without any interference. Teachers reported that this freedom on the blogs and integrating their life and class content were also a source of motivation for them.

Students were motivated for the blog but not just for the scores or the grades they need to take the exam to pass the preparatory school. It was also good for them to express their ideas because they had the freedom; they had the freedom to even say if they did not like the texts. It was fun for them to comment on the texts.
(Teacher 2, female, Interview B, October 17, 2013)

There were additional issues reported by teachers as important. The first topic was about peer feedback. Teachers stated that in this type of blog assignment, students usually wrote for their teachers and they did not comment on each other's writings very often as they were not required to. Teachers regarded this as a disadvantage and stated that they would like to add a peer feedback component to the next blogging activity to make class blogs livelier. In addition, teachers mentioned that grading was an important component of the blogging activity. However, the ideas of the teachers varied on the grading issue. To elaborate, four of the teachers believed that grading blogs was helpful as it motivated students to be more active on the blog. On the other hand, one of them suggested that blogs should not be graded as they were university students and they should be aware of what was good for their learning without any grading pressure. Similarly, 55,3% of the

students stated in the questionnaire of this study that blogs shouldn't be graded because it causes this causes negative feelings towards them although still 44,7% of them did not share this view. Besides, there were reactions from students on the grading issue that was mentioned by teachers, which is discussed in the next chapter in detail. However, to summarize, grading was an issue that divided teacher's opinion. To illustrate two different opinions from teachers:

I was not happy with the grading system because I think it should not have been graded in our case. It should have been based on reading our own reading study. Of course some students will say 'OK I am not going to use it', but they are free to say this because they are at university level. For motivated students, they are going to use it anyway because they are motivated because they are going to get teacher feedback. If you do not grade something if you just think that the activity itself would provide the motivation, I think it works better. I think it is like external motivation and internal motivation. I think blogs should work on internal motivation. It is like giving chocolate to the students. Do this and I am going to give you chocolate. Use the blogs; I am going to grade you. It should not be a must. (Teacher 5, female, Interview E, November 15, 2013)

We had criteria to assess the blogs evaluating grammar, vocabulary, fluency and so on, and also we checked if the ideas are related to the passage or not because they may just write whatever comes to their minds, so we needed to check if the ideas were related and also organized. Therefore, the grading was relevant. (Teacher 2, female, Interview B, October 17, 2013)

4.4 Instructional Challenges of Blogs

In addition to the blogs' various benefits, some challenges were mentioned by teachers. These challenges are about the workload of teachers and students, time and the grading of the blogs. Table 4.14 shows these challenges:

Table 4.14 Instructional Challenges of Blogs According to Teachers

<i>Instructional Challenges of Blogs</i>	<i>Frequency of the Codes</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
Teacher workload as a challenge	6	2,9%
Blogs being time consuming	4	1,9%
Low motivation of students	4	1,9%
Checking the originality of students' blog entries	2	0,9%
Students' reaction to the grading of the blogs	2	0,9%

As seen in Table 4.14, teacher workload was stated as a challenge by teachers. They stated that they had lots of other instructional activities to carry out as well as blog assignments. That is why blogs were time consuming for them.

Teacher workload can be a challenge, too because teachers give feedback to the students' journals on the blogs, so it is kind of time consuming. I know it is really helpful but it is an increase in our work load. (Teacher 1, female, Interview A, October 1, 2013)

Teachers mentioned that they were aware of the fact that blogs were useful for students' learning processes, but as there were lots of things to do and they had a lot of classes to teach every day, keeping a blog meant extra work for them. In addition, they had to give feedback to every student for their each of their blog entries. Also, they were supposed to check the originality of each student's work. This was necessary as students were getting grades for their blogging performance and accepting a blog comment that was not original would be unfair to other

students who put a lot of effort in on their blog. For this reason, teachers also checked the originality of each blog comment by making a Microsoft word document of them and uploading this document to a website that checks the originality of such documents called www.turnitin.com. All of the teachers did the same thing to make sure that students did not steal comments from each other's class blog and also they did not copy and paste from a source on the Internet. Teachers stated that this was necessary in our technology age as students are able to access any kind of information without putting in much effort. Besides, this was also useful for making students actually practice the language rather than copying and pasting it. They also indicated that although this process required time and effort, it was worthwhile as students learned a lot of things and made considerable progress thanks to blogs. On the other hand, one teacher also reported that students had plenty of homework already and that this added an extra challenge for students. As the school had a skill-based program which included separate classes for reading, listening-speaking, writing, and grammar, students had a lot of assignments to complete from each class and their program was very intense. Therefore, writing a blog comment for each chapter in the reading book was a challenge for students as well. Teachers stated that this might have been one of the reasons for students' low motivation. Besides, teachers highlighted the ineffectiveness of blogs for speaking and listening classes as a feature of the blogs that should be improved. As stated also by students earlier, blogs were very effective for writing and reading skills but they were not very helpful for speaking and listening skills. This issue, brought up by teachers during the interviews, indicated that their class blog was all about writing and did not include videos or podcasts for listening to the class blog. That is why listening and speaking skills were not addressed in blogs. Therefore, teachers also suggested adding more videos or listening texts to the blogs in their next experience in order to address these skills and to motivate students better.

I can also suggest adding things to the blogs in addition to writing. They can add some videos or voice mails because students love such things and it is motivating for them. (Teacher 1, female, Interview A, October 1, 2013)

Finally, teachers mentioned students' reaction to the grading system of the blogs. As mentioned earlier, grading was a controversial issue among both teachers and students. Similarly, teachers who were in favour of grading the blogs stated that although they were happy with the grading system and the rubric they used, students were not satisfied with this system and so reacted adversely. To illustrate,

I was happy with the grading as we had a rubric and we followed the rubric but students were not because they thought that if they write something on the blog, they should have the full point just because they completed the assignment on time. They did not believe that we should grade their assignments according to content and organization. But, I believe we should. (Teacher 4, male, Interview D, November 9, 2013)

Thus, it is fair to say that teachers' expectations and students' expectations did not match on the blog and so the grading system did not satisfy the students. A possible solution to solve this problem could be to explain teachers' expectations for the blog assignment to the students in a detailed and clear way with examples. Also, the rubric can be shared with students before they start to use blogs so they can have a better idea about how they are going to be graded.

4.5 Technical Challenges of Blogs

Although the use of technology seems promising for English language teaching and learning, it may bring its own technical problems, just like every technology does. During the interviews, teachers reported that they encountered some technical problems with the website where they created the class blogs, but that such problems occurred rarely. In addition, they stated that sometimes the lack of

internet access or the slowness of the internet caused some trouble for both students and teachers. These problems are shown in Table 4.15:

Table 4.15 Technical Challenges of Blogs According to Teachers

<i>Technical Challenges of Blogs</i>	<i>Frequency of the Codes</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
Technical problems related to blogs	6	2,9%
Difficulty of accessing the internet by students	4	1,9%
Difficulty of accessing the internet by teachers	1	1,9%
Advantage of pen and paper over blogs	1	0,4%

As seen in Table 4.15, technical problems occurred during the use of blogs and difficulty of accessing the Internet by both teachers and students were mentioned by the teacher. However, these problems seem manageable as teachers stated that they were easy to use and the school was making its infrastructure for wireless internet connection better.

While we were using blogs on Cambrdigelms.com, students came to us with some problems, especially technical ones. We talked to the people who were dealing with the problem and they helped our students via online ways or by sending e-mails. Therefore, there was not anything very serious and they dealt with the problems. (Teacher 1, female, Interview A, October 1, 2013)

In addition, only one teacher stated that she preferred pen and paper rather than use of technology as she was used to pen and paper and she personally liked traditional methods. However, she also reported that she believed use the of technology was more inspiring for students.

4.6 Suggestions to Improve Blogs in EFL Classes

In order to overcome the challenges mentioned before and to make blogs a more effective place for both teachers and students, teachers presented some suggestions to improve blogs.

Table 4.16 Suggestions to Overcome the Challenges Based on Teachers' Opinions

<i>Suggestions to Improve Blogs in EFL Classes</i>	<i>Frequency of the Codes</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
Ideal blog environment	7	3,4%
Importance of useful links	2	0,9%
Importance of good computer skills	1	0,4%
Reducing the number of the blog entries	1	0,4%
Blogs as an in-class activity	1	0,4%
Importance of clear instructions on the blog	1	0,4%
Providing necessary infrastructure to use blogs	1	0,4%

As Table 4.16 suggests, teachers described their ideal blog environment. To start with, teachers reported the importance of blogs being simple and user friendly so that students could use them without encountering any problems and so prevent any negative attitude towards them from developing. They also suggested incorporating example blogs and introducing them with the blogs of popular people in order to help them to develop a positive attitude towards them. Secondly, they stated the importance of making blogs interesting for students by adding more images and visuals so that students became more motivated to use them.

My ideal blog is a simple one. There must be clear instruction on the blog about how to use it. We should have a video to show how to use the blog system. Good computer skills can help students.

*Maybe in blogs, we can suggest some useful links for students.
(Teacher 1, female, Interview A, October 1, 2013)*

We can make blogs more interesting and more motivating by putting some videos, photos or visual things or games on the internet and make them think about the blogs more and have more fun and then write because if you say students just write what you think it may be dull or students may get bored, so we can make blogs more colourful. (Teacher 2, female, Interview B, October 17, 2013)

In addition, the importance of helping students to gain the necessary computer skills that are required to handle the blogging activities was stressed during the interviews. Introducing the blogs to the students in a computer lab or implementing them as a class activity was also suggested to make blogs more manageable for students. Furthermore, paying special attention to giving clear instructions on the blog and elaborating on these instructions in face to face classes were recommended. Finally, because the student and the teacher workload were brought up as a challenge in both questionnaire and in the interviews, reducing the number of blog entries that students were expected to write was presented as a solution. Also, teachers stressed the importance of revising the number of the assignments for each class so that the workload could be more manageable for students and teachers.

I would open up a very good computer lab first of all and I would include the blog usage into the teaching hours, for example every day, on the last hour or perhaps two times a week, we could go to the computer lab with the students. I would give 45 or 50 minutes for them to read the text and write their blog entries. Then we could send feedback to each other. I would not ask them to do it outside the class. Maybe I would make them do some extra work

on the blogs, for example, we could write some responses in the computer lab and I would say to them 'please find the related video on YouTube and send it to the blog and please write responses to each other'. Whenever they want they could publish something, so they would not use the blogs in the same way. If you just asked them to create a blog entry without any sample outside the class, they would not do it and they did not do it. Even if we grade them, we should motivate them to use blogs in a different way. (Teacher 5, female, Interview E, November 15, 2013)

My suggestion to improve blogs is that the number of the blog entries that students are expected to write should be reduced. They may write not in every unit but every two units. The frequency was too much. In my ideal blog environment, I would add more links, photos or videos etc. It is more interesting. Also, before writing a blog entry, we can show students the blogs of other people and make them follow these people, especially famous people's blogs maybe to take their attention to the blogs. Thus, they may understand the value of writing and reflecting their ideas. If they see someone they know, they can learn about their lives, they can be more motivated. (Teacher 3, female, Interview C, October 18, 2013)

I think our blog activity was fine but we should just reduce the number of the assignments that students are expected to complete from each class. Students share and enjoy. Teachers should be there too in order to keep students' interests alive. Students should share things about themselves, they should tell stories about the theme of the each unit and teacher should motivate them to keep writing on the blog by giving continual feedback. Students can comment on each other as well so that they actually enjoy the

process of writing, sharing and reflecting in a different language.

(Teacher 4, male, Interview D, November 9, 2013)

In this chapter, the results of the questionnaire that was administered to the students in order to investigate their opinions and experiences about the blogging activities, and the results of the in-depth interviews which were conducted with teachers to learn their points of view about the issue were reported. The results of the study were presented both quantitatively and qualitatively. Through both qualitative and quantitative data, the benefits and challenges of using blogs for language learning and teaching and also possible solutions to overcome the challenges were presented by including the teachers' and students' ideas.

In the next chapter, findings and implications of the study are presented as a follow-up to the results of the data analysis which were reported in this chapter.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION AND DISCUSSION

This study was carried out in order to investigate the benefits and challenges of using blogs in English as a Foreign Language reading classes and to suggest possible solutions to overcome these challenges based on teachers' and students' opinions. The study was conducted by collecting data through a questionnaire from 104 English preparatory class students and through in-depth interviews with five English language instructors after they had used blogs in reading classes for two semesters.

After students used blogs to write reflective comments about each chapter they read in class on the class blog, and were graded out of their performance on the blogs, they were administered a questionnaire to investigate their ideas and experiences about the blogging process. The questionnaire required students to give information about useful parts of the blogs, challenges that they encountered while using blogs, general ideas about blogging and the use of technology in their classes. In addition, demographic data, information about their habits of use of technology, and the facilities they had in order to access the Internet, were collected. Also, the questionnaire had an open-ended question part in which students expressed their opinions about the benefits and challenges of blogs and where they were able to present solutions to overcome these challenges. After the results of the questionnaire was analysed by using the Statistical Packages for Social Science (SPSS 20.0), and the results of the open ended part were coded by using a constant comparative method, interview questions were prepared for teachers in order to have an in-depth analysis of the blogging experience. Five teachers were interviewed and their interviews were transcribed. Then, their

interviews were also coded and analysed through the constant comparative method in which the themes were identified and categorized under certain headings.

In this chapter, the findings derived from the questionnaire and in-depth interviews, discussion, the pedagogical implications, the limitations of the study and suggestions for further research are presented.

5.1 Findings and Discussion

The major findings of the present study are presented in three different sections: the benefits of using blogs in English as a Foreign Language reading classes, the challenges and the possible solutions to overcome these challenges.

5.1.1 Benefits of Using Blogs in English as a Foreign Language Reading Classes

As mentioned before, the first part of the questionnaire was specifically focused on the benefits of the use of blogs for students. Furthermore, students expressed other benefits of blogs with their own sentences in the open-ended part of the questionnaire. Thus, different benefits of the blogs were reported by students. In addition, many other benefits were highlighted by teachers during the interviews. All of these data collection instruments helped the researcher answer the *Research Question 1*. Table 5.1 shows the overall summary of the benefits identified by teachers and students as the answer to the *Research Question 1*:

Table 5.1 Overall Benefits of Blogs

Benefits of Use of Blogs in English as a Foreign Language Reading Classes Based on Students' and Teachers' Opinions

- Improving writing and reading skills, vocabulary and grammar knowledge
 - Motivating students to do more research on the topic and to read the texts more carefully.
-

Table 5.1 Overall Benefits of Blogs (continued)

- More interesting than traditional methods.
 - Improving reflection and critical thinking skills.
 - Facilitating the feedback and error correction process
 - Serving as an extension of classes and compensating for missing information.
 - Helping students and teachers to keep up with the latest technology
 - Providing a platform for practice and more exposure to the language.
 - Being compatible with the nature of the reading classes.
-

The results of the questionnaire and interviews showed that blogs made many positive contributions to reading classes and also the learning and teaching process. They helped students to improve sub-skills in reading, writing, and research. They facilitated vocabulary and grammar learning and feedback and error correction processes. In addition, they positively affected the motivation of students as they were encouraged to read texts more carefully so as to participate in the reading classes more actively. Also, they had a chance to think critically about the blogs and actively reflect on them. What is more, blogs made life easier for both students and teachers as they served as an extension of the class, promoting collaboration and communication between class members and teacher, and provided a platform to increase the exposure to the language and to practice it more often. Therefore, it can be said that blogs were found suitable for the nature and the purpose of the reading classes and also for language learning and teaching by students and teachers. The findings surrounding the benefits of blogs for language learning are consistent with those of Bartlett-Bragg, (2003), Brescia & Miller (2006), Martindale & Wiley (2005).

In addition, the results of the study were also compatible with Churchill (2009) in that he stated that blogs provided an effective environment for language learning

as they helped students to actively use the language and improve their skills. Besides, as Korkmazgil (2009) stated previously, they enhanced the reflectivity of the students as they provided a flexible environment in which students could express themselves in their unique styles and had a chance to improve their knowledge according to their own pace.

Furthermore, as is seen in the data shown before, the number of the benefits mentioned by teachers and students were far in excess of the reported challenges. Therefore, it is appropriate to say that the various advantages of blogs outweighed their disadvantages and also blogs were reported as more convenient than traditional tools, as also stated by Zang (2009).

5.1.2 Challenges of Using Blogs in English as a Foreign Language Reading Classes

Some challenges of blogs were agreed upon by students in the second and third parts of the questionnaire and also in the open-ended questions. Moreover, teachers brought up a number of challenges during the interviews which were consistent with the students' answers. Both the questionnaire and the interviews enabled the researcher to answer the *Research Question 2*. Table 5.2 shows the overall summary of the challenges stated by teachers and students as the answer of the *Research Question 2*:

Table 5.2 Overall Challenges of Blogs

Challenges of <i>Use of Blogs in English as a Foreign Language Reading Classes</i> Based on Students' and Teachers' Opinions
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Difficulty of accessing the Internet • Grading of blogs • Vague instructions • Extra workload for teachers and students • Time consuming

The results of the interviews and the questionnaire showed that whenever there was a problem concerning internet connection or computers, the access to the blog became more difficult. In addition, some of the students did not have their own computers or an internet connection in the place where they stayed and this caused difficulties for them. Therefore, the difficulty of accessing the blog was the first challenge reported by students and teachers.

Secondly, as stated before, grading was a controversial issue among teachers and students. While four of the teachers were satisfied with the grading of the blogs, one of them stated that blogs should be a voluntary activity, so they should not be graded. Besides, students' reactions towards blogging varied. Therefore, it is appropriate to say that the grading system should be carefully planned and grading of blogs should have clear rubrics so that students do not become confused as to how their work is being evaluated, as Reynard (2008) stated.

Another challenge reported during the study was the instructions for the blogs. A number of students claimed that they did not understand the instructions on the blog and they felt lost. This implies the importance of smooth communication on the blogs. As online communication is relatively more difficult than face to face communication, giving clear instructions on the blog so that each student can understand the task is very important. These instructions can also be supported with examples to reach every student.

Finally, because blogs required a lot of reading, writing, researching, organizing, reflecting and commenting, they were reported as an additional workload which took up both students' and teachers' time. These results were in line with what Wang and Hsua (2008) stated. However, when the results are analysed in detail, it can be seen that these issues do not seem too serious. Teachers stated that blogs took their time but they were also very useful. Similarly, both students and teachers stated that blogs took their time not because it was a burden for them but because the English preparatory program was too intense and they had lots of other

tasks to complete. Therefore, it is appropriate to say that this challenge can certainly be overcome by revising the number of the assignments for each class or reducing the number of the blog entries.

5.1.3 Possible Solutions to Overcome the Challenges

As an important part of the study, possible solutions to overcome the challenges on the blogs were investigated through the open-ended part of the questionnaire and the in-depth interviews. Numerous suggestions to solve the problems and to improve blogs were reported by students and teachers which enabled the researcher to answer *Research Question 3*. Table 5.3 shows a summary of these solutions:

Table 5.3 Summary of the Suggestions to Improve Blogging

<i>Possible Solutions to Overcome the Challenges</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Adding more pictures, videos, links and listening texts to the blog • Giving clearer instructions on the blog and supporting them with examples • Providing the necessary infrastructure for internet connection at school • Sharing a grading rubric with students at the beginning of the semester • Reducing the number of blog entries and revising the number of the assignments for each class • Encouraging students to provide peer feedback • Showing blogs of famous people to students and encouraging them to follow them • Suggesting more than one topic for students to reflect on

The results of the present study showed that although some problems occurred during the use of blogs in reading classes, these problems can be solved using the strategies shown in Table 5.3. In addition, blogs can address the listening and speaking skills of the students if more videos and listening texts are added. Thus,

blogs can be a more effective platform to improve the skills of the students. Besides, students can be better motivated to use blogs if they are introduced to the blogs of famous people and encouraged to follow these blogs. Last but not least, the results of the study showed that topic selection is very important for the blogs as students did not want to comment on the topics that they found dull. This result matched what Wang and Woo (2009) stated in their study as they stated that topic selection is vital for enhancing critical thinking of students on the blogs. As a solution to this challenge, students suggested in the questionnaire that teachers should provide more options for the topic on the blog. Thus, they could select the most suitable one for them.

To conclude, the answers of the teachers and students showed that blogs had numerous benefits for them. Even though they encountered some challenges, they were manageable and easy to solve by implementing the possible solutions identified by them.

5.2 The Pedagogical Implications

Considering the results of the study and the related research on use of blogs for language learning and teaching purposes, the following implications were drawn up for incorporating into English language teaching and learning.

Blogs are effective instructional tools to integrate technology into English language classes as they are useful to improve the various skills and to keep up with the latest technology. Blogs can efficiently be made a part of English language teaching classes. As they are easy to create and use, they have many advantages over traditional methods. Besides, they are easy to access as long as there is a stable internet connection. Therefore, if blogs are used with particular attention to topic choice coinciding with the interests of students and by giving comprehensible instructions, they can help students become more motivated for the class and to develop more positive attitudes for the reading class.

In addition, as the results of the study imply, blogs can be very helpful in improving skills, especially reading and writing. Blogs can be used efficiently as a part of reading and writing classes. However, if blogs are equipped with more videos, listening texts and other kinds of materials, they can address other skills such as listening and speaking. Thus, a well-equipped blog, which is supported with images, links, podcasts etc., can also be used as part of an integrated class or any class that teachers and students wish. As Oravec (2002) maintains, blogs encourage students to be more analytical, critical and reflective in their writing. Because of the fact that blogs are a product of the whole class and they provide a platform to write for a real audience, they empower students to more to be collaborative and productive in their writing which they then produce with more care. All in all, based on the results of the study and the relevant literature, it is entirely reasonable to conclude that blogs are an efficient tool to integrate with English as a Second Language learning classes.

5.3 Limitations to the Study and Suggestions for Further Research

The current study was conducted after students and teachers used blogs in their reading classes. The data was collected after blogs had been implemented. Therefore, a preliminary study was not implemented which otherwise might have been helpful in giving a more detailed picture of the case. It could have revealed how students develop attitudes towards the blogs over time. For this reason, the study could be conducted again to include a preliminary study as well. Also in this study, experienced by students who used internet at internet cafés and at home, or perceptions of students in high achiever classes and in other classes were not separately mentioned. In another study, challenges experienced by different student profiles can be investigated. Longitudinal studies are also recommended to investigate how blogging can benefit teachers and students when the necessary improvements are done to overcome the challenges mentioned in this study. Further, undertaking interviews with students about the reasons for their attitude towards blogs may be useful for examining this issue in increased depth.

In addition, blogs can be integrated to courses other than reading to see how effective they are in improving other skills. Besides, an experimental study in which a group of students use blogs as a part of their classes while another group does not, might give an effective analysis of blogs and their contribution to the improvement of skills. Analysing the issue from both students' and teachers' perspectives is recommended for all future studies on this topic.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A: THE QUESTIONNAIRE

QUESTIONNAIRE on USING BLOGS in READING CLASSES

This questionnaire is prepared for investigating student opinions about using blogs in reading classes in the English Preparatory School. In the first section of the questionnaire, useful sides of using blogs for reading classes are going to be examined and you are expected to state if you agree with these positive aspects or not. In the second section, negative sides of the blogs are going to be investigated. You are required to point out whether you think such negative effects can come out. In the third section, your attitudes related to using blogs are going to be asked. According to the given statements, you are asked to show your attitudes by circling true or false options. In section four, you are expected to complete the sentences with your opinions about using blogs. In the last part, you are expected to provide basic information about yourself. Your personal information is not going to be revealed. It is important for this study that you respond truthfully. The questionnaire will take 15 minutes. Please read all items carefully. Thank you for your participation.

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SECTION I.

Please state to what extent you agree or disagree with the statements below.

I think, blogs are <u>useful</u> for reading classes because ...		Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
1.	they help me to reflect(thinking something carefully) on what I have read in class	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
2.	they motivate me for reading the texts more carefully	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
3.	they give me the chance to use computers for my learning process.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
4.	they promote collaboration (i.e. they are beneficial to share many ideas by using them.)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
5.	they create a suitable environment for class discussion.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
6.	interacting with my friends and teachers outside the class helps me fill the gaps in my knowledge of the course topics.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
7.	blogs motivate me to make research on the topics of the texts in reading class.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
8.	I can get quick feedback from the teacher with the help of them.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
9.	they help us to keep up with the developing technology in our learning experiences.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
10.	they are more interesting than traditional methods like writing reflection paper and getting feedback in the lesson.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
11.	doing activities on blogs is enjoyable.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
12.	they help me improve my vocabulary knowledge in English	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
13.	they help me improve my grammar knowledge in English	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
14.	they help me improve my speaking skills in English	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
15.	they help me improve my listening skills in English	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

16.	they help me improve my reading skills in English	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
17.	they help me improve my writing skills in English	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

SECTION II.

Please state to what extent you agree or disagree with the statements below.

I think, blogs are <u>not useful</u> for reading classes because ...		Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
1.	it takes a lot of time to write a comment on the blog	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
2.	they make extra work in terms of time and energy on me.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
3.	I have a hard time with checking the course blog frequently.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
4.	I am bored with commenting on something all the time.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
5.	It means one more assignment for me.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
6.	sometimes, instructions on the blog seem to me too unclear to understand.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
7.	I sometimes have difficulty in figuring out what my teachers expect from me and I can't complete the tasks accordingly.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
8.	when I do not have internet connection, I lose my access to the blog and I can't do the course requirements.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
9.	I feel uncomfortable with the idea that everyone can read my posts.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
10.	the degree/closeness of the relationship between me and my friends affects our commenting behaviour on blogs.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
11.	when my class is crowded, it becomes difficult to keep up with all the things on the blog.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

SECTION III.

Please define whether statements below are true or false.

1.	The use of blogs is suitable for the purpose of the reading classes.	T	F
2.	Traditional methods like writing reflection paper and getting feedback in the lesson are easier to use in reading classes.	T	F
3.	When I use blogs in reading classes, I become more motivated for the lessons.	T	F
4.	Using blogs in reading classes does not have a positive effect on me.	T	F
5.	Instructions of the teacher on blogs are not as understandable as the ones in a face-to-face lesson.	T	F
6.	Blogs shouldn't be graded because this causes negative feelings towards them.	T	F
7.	The blog application in Cambridgelms Online Learning Website is user friendly enough for me.	T	F
8.	I don't understand what I am doing while using blogs in reading classes, so I feel lost.	T	F
9.	I see using blogs in reading classes as a useless task.	T	F
10.	If I were a teacher of English, I would use blogs in my courses.	T	F
11.	The use of blogs is suitable for the nature of the reading classes.	T	F
12.	Doing homework on the blog is easier than writing it by hand.	T	F

SECTION IV.

Answer the questions below. Please write in detail. Share as many examples as you can from your own or your peers' experiences.

- **What were the benefits of blogs in reading classes? Please, give specific examples.**

- **What were the challenges of blogs in reading classes? Please, give specific examples**

- **What are your suggestions to improve the use of blogs in reading classes? Please, give specific examples?**

- **If there are other things you like to add or comment on, please specify.**

SECTION V.

Please give information about yourself.

1.	Age:	
2.	Gender:	Female <input type="checkbox"/> Male <input type="checkbox"/>
3.	Nationality:	TC <input type="checkbox"/> Other <input type="checkbox"/>
4.	Do you know any other languages other than English? If yes, please specify.	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>
5.	Where do you stay?	Home <input type="checkbox"/> Dormitory <input type="checkbox"/> Other <input type="checkbox"/>
6.	Do you have internet access at your place?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>
7.	Do you have your own computer?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>
8.	If you don't have your own computer, where do you use computers?	At computer lab. of your school <input type="checkbox"/> Internet café <input type="checkbox"/> From someone else's computer <input type="checkbox"/> Other (please specify) <input type="checkbox"/>
9.	If you use computers in such places, does that make any difficulty for you? If yes, please specify.	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>
10.	How often do you use computer?	Everyday <input type="checkbox"/> Every other day <input type="checkbox"/> At least once a week <input type="checkbox"/> Once a month <input type="checkbox"/> Other (please specify) <input type="checkbox"/>

APPENDIX B: CONSENT FORM FOR INTERVIEWS

İNGİLİZCE OKUMA DERSLERİNDE BLOG KULLANMANIN FAYDALARI, ZORLUKLARI ve BU ZORLUKLARIN MUHTEMEL ÇÖZÜMLERİ

Bu çalışma okuma derslerinde blog kullanımının faydalarını ve zorluklarını incelemektedir. Çalışma ayrıca okuma derslerinde blog kullanımıyla ilgili belirtilen zorlukların üstesinden gelebilmek için uygulanabilecek muhtemel çözümleri araştırmaktadır. Bu nedenle katılımcı öğretmenlerden okuma derslerinde blog kullanımı hakkındaki fikirlerini ve tecrübelerini paylaşmaları istenecektir. Bu çalışmaya katılmak tamamen gönüllülük esasına dayanmaktadır. Bu çalışma katılımcıya hiçbir zarar vermeyeceği gibi katılımcıların kimlikleri araştırmacıdan başka kimseyle paylaşılmayacaktır. Katılımcının kimliği her durumda gizli tutulacak ve kimlik bilgileri çalışmanın sonuç kısmında yer almayacaktır. Her öğretmen için rakamlar kullanılarak bir kodlama yapılacak ve öğretmenlerin verdiği cevaplar sadece bu kodlar aracılığıyla gösterilecektir. Katılımcı istediği zaman sorulara cevap vermeyi bırakabilir ya da çalışmaya katılmaktan vazgeçebilir.

Bu röportajdaki sorulara cevap vermek yaklaşık 15 dakika süre alacaktır. Katılımınız için şimdiden teşekkür ederiz.

Çalışma ile ilgili sorularınız için lsedaozturk@gmail.com adresine e-posta gönderebilirsiniz.

Yukarıdaki bilgileri okudum ve çalışmaya katılmayı kabul ediyorum.

Adı Soyadı: _____

Tarih:

İmza:

APPENDIX C: INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS FOR THE USE OF BLOGS IN READING CLASSES

1. What is your EFL teaching experience?
2. How long have you been using blogs in your English classes and for what purposes?
3. Had you seen any other samples of blogs to teach English before you started using the Blogs in your classes? If yes, approximately how many and under which settings?
4. Had you received any kind of formal training on using Blogs for teaching English before you used it in your classes?
5. Do you think you need more guidance, training or support in using blogs in English classes? If yes, how would you like to receive this support?
6. What were the benefits of blogs for students in English reading classes? Please, give specific examples.
7. What kind of tools or components did you include in your English reading Blogs?
8. How much guidance and directions did you give to the students?
9. Were you satisfied with the amount of input and/or feedback you provided to your students? Why/Why not?
10. What were the benefits of blogs for teachers in reading classes? Please, give specific examples. In your opinion, what are some contributions of blogs to English reading classes?

APPENDIX C: INTERVIEW QUESTIONS (continued)

11. Do you think blogs have a contribution to reflective skills of students? If yes, how? Please, give specific examples.
12. Do you think blogs are helpful for students to learn new vocabulary in English? ? If yes, how? Please, give specific examples.
13. Do you think blogs are helpful for the writing skills of students in English? ? If yes, how? Please, give specific examples.
14. Do you think blogs can help to teach what might not have been understood in an EFL class? If yes, how? Please, give specific examples.
15. Do you think blogs are motivating to have students think about the reading texts more carefully? If yes, how? Please, give specific examples.
16. Do you think blogs are motivating to have students do more research on the reading texts that they have read in class? If yes, how? Please, give specific examples.
17. In your opinion, which of the following skills and language components can be improved most by using blogs: reading, listening, speaking, writing, grammar, and vocabulary? Why? Please give specific examples.
18. Which one do you think is the easier one for students: traditional methods such as pen and paper or using technology and blogs? Why? Please give specific examples.

APPENDIX C: INTERVIEW QUESTIONS (continued)

19. Which one do you think is more useful one for students: traditional methods such as pen and paper or using technology and blogs or a combination of both? Why? Please give specific examples.
20. Which one do you think is the easier one for teachers: traditional methods such as pen and paper or using technology and blogs? Why? Please give specific examples.
21. What were the challenges of using blogs in reading classes? Please, give specific examples.
 - a. From the students' perspectives.
 - b. From the teachers' perspectives.
22. How did you grade students' progress and performance in blogs?
23. Were you happy with the grading system/criteria in blogs? What would you change if you had the chance? Why?
24. What are your suggestions to improve the use of blogs in reading in English classes? Please, give specific examples.
25. If you had enough resources and support from the administration or colleagues, what kind of a blog environment would you create for your learners? What would be its features, components, or tools? In other words, what would be an ideal learning and teaching Blog for English as a Foreign Language classes? Please, give specific examples.

26. Do you have any other comments in relation to the use of Blogs in English classes?

**APPENDIX D: AN EXAMPLE OF COLOR CODING FROM TEACHER
INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPTS**

Teacher 4, male, Interview D, November 9, 2013

Benefits	Both I and my students enjoyed blogging I learned many things about my students thanks to blogs and I enjoyed writing comments on them, sometimes we made jokes and had fun on the blog and sometimes I laughed at what they wrote on the blog. For me the only challenge is time. Our program is very loaded here. We are trying to make help students pass TOEFL which is very difficult to achieve in one year. Students have grammar, reading, writing,
Challenges	listening & speaking and touchstone classes and each has its own assignments. Teachers give various courses, so it is really difficult to catch up with all the assignments and so we spend most of our time working while students spend a lot of time doing homework. So, I think blogs are nice but it is challenging to do all the assignments and checking them.
Suggestions	I think our blog activity was fine but we should just reduce the number of the assignments that students are expected to complete from each class. Students share and enjoy. Teacher should be there too in order to keep students' interests alive. Students should share things about themselves, they should tell stories about the theme of the each unit and teacher should motivate them to keep writing on the blog by giving continual feedback. Students can comment on each other as well so that they actually enjoy the process of writing, sharing and reflecting in a different language.

APPENDIX E: READING PROMPTS

Write down any thoughts, questions, or ideas you had while reading.

Write down the way you felt while reading the text.

This reading text made me realize _____

This reading text reminded me of _____

I would like to ask the author _____

My opinion of this reading text is _____

My favourite part was _____

This reading text made me wonder about _____

Make a prediction about what will happen next.

If you were the author, what would you change?

How is this reading text like another one you have read?

Does a character remind you of someone you know?

How is the main character alike or different from you?

Would you want to be the character's friend? Why or why not?

What did the author do to keep you interested in the reading text?

Illustrate the setting and use five words to describe it.

I like / dislike this reading text because _____

Would you like to be one of the characters in the reading text? Who and Why?

Does the reading text leave you with questions you would like to ask? What are they?

What are your favourite lines/quotes? Copy them into your reading journal and explain why these passages caught your attention.

How have you changed after reading the text? What did you learn that you never knew before?

Who else should read this text? Should anyone not be encouraged to read this text? Why? Would you recommend this text to a friend or fellow classmate?

Write about the characters? Which one is your favourite? Is there a character you hate/detest/despise? Why?

I think the author is really trying to say _____

I think the part _____ should be changed because firstly, _____

Secondly, _____.

_____ must be important because it repeats over and over. I think

_____.

I really like this sentence / phrase / or this word used in the reading text because

_____.

This part is very important because _____. Another thing is that

_____.

I noticed that the first thing the author underlines _____. After reading the text, I wonder _____.

The characters in the reading passage seem realistic / unrealistic

because _____. Also, _____.

I love the way _____.

I wish that _____ It seems like _____.

I'm puzzled over or wonder about _____.

I learned something about _____ The setting of the story is _____.

The author's words made a picture in my mind _____.

Reading about _____ makes me think about _____.

I was very touched / angry when I _____.

The thing(s) I read about was/were shocking / exciting because _____. The other reason why I think so is that _____.

The title of the reading passage is a perfect match because _____. The other reason why I think so is that _____.

_____ is a problem / conflict because first of all, _____. The other reason why I think this way is that _____.

This passage made me realize _____.

This reading text reminded me of _____.

If I had the chance to talk to the author of this text, I would ask

him/her_____.

My favourite part in the text_____ .

The author managed to keep me interested in the text because_____.

The author couldn't manage to keep me interested in the text because_____.

The _____ which the author mentioned seems unclear because_____.

The overall message of the text is_____ .

I can relate to the _____ because first of all, _____ and another thing is that_____.

I was surprised when I _____.

This situation reminds me of something that happened in my own life_____.

This book was an effective writing because_____.

_____ was either believable / unbelievable about the texts / characters / events_____ .

APPENDIX F: TURKISH SUMMARY OF THE STUDY

Bu çalışma Ankara, Türkiye’de özel bir üniversitenin İngilizce hazırlık bölümünde öğrencilerin ve öğretim görevlilerinin okuma derslerinde blog kullanımı ile ilgili görüşlerini araştırmak amacıyla yürütülmüştür. Çalışmanın verileri öğrenciler okuma derslerinde iki akademik yıl boyunca blog kullandıktan sonra toplanmıştır. Öğrencilerin bloglar hakkındaki görüşleri araştırmacı tarafından geliştirilen bir anket aracılığıyla, öğretmenlerin görüşleri ise yapılan röportajlar sonucunda öğrenilmiştir. Uygulanan anket ve röportajlar aracılığıyla öğrencilerin ve öğretmenlerin okuma derslerinde blog kullanmanın faydaları, zorlukları ve bu zorluklara getirilebilecek muhtemel çözümler araştırılmıştır.

Bloglar bir çok ülkede dil öğretimi amacıyla kullanılmaktadır. Yapılan araştırmalarda blogların özellikle okuma, yazma, eleştirel düşünme, kelimeleri doğru ve etkili kullanma ve dil bilgisi gibi bir çok beceriye katkıda bulunduğu gözlenmiştir. Bunun yanı sıra bu alanda yapılan blogları kullanırken yaşanan zorluklara ve bu zorlukların muhtemel çözümlerine değinen sınırlı sayıda çalışma vardır. Ayrıca, bu konuda Türkiye’de ki okullarda yapılan araştırmalarında sayısı sınırlıdır. Bu nedenle hem blog kullanımının Türkiye’deki eğitim kurumlarına etkilerini hem de blogların faydalarını, zorluklarını ve bu zorlukların muhtemel çözümlerini sunan araştırmalara ihtiyaç vardır. Bu çalışma için araştırmacı bu ihtiyaçtan esinlenmiştir. Bu nedenle bu çalışma Ankara, Türkiye’deki bir özel üniversitede yürütülmüş ve İngilizce öğretim elemanlarının ve hazırlık sınıfı öğrencilerinin yukarıda belirtilen konularda ilgili görüşleri araştırılmıştır.

Araştırmanın yapıldığı üniversitede öğrenciler okuma derslerinde her hafta farklı bir konuda okuma parçaları okumuşlardır. Daha sonra bu okuma parçaları hakkında öğretmenlerinin blog üzerindeki gönderilerine konu hakkında kendi fikirlerini araştırmalarını ve parça üzerindeki görüşlerini yansıtan yorumlar yazmışlardır. Öğrenciler bu yorumları yazdıktan sonra öğretmenleri öğrencilere

yazdıkları yorumlar üzerinden geri dönüt vermişlerdir. Bu geri dönütler çoğunlukla öğrencilerin yazdıkları yorumların içeriği ve dili doğru kullanım üzerinedir. Dönem sonunda ise öğrenciler blog üzerindeki performanslarından not almışlardır ve bu notlar onların hazırlık bölümündeki genel not ortalamasında yerini almıştır. Bu çalışma ise öğrenciler blogları yukarıda bahsedilen şekilde iki dönem boyunca kullandıktan sonra yapılmıştır.

Bu çalışma için veri toplamak amacıyla hazırlık bölümünden seçilen 104 öğrenciye araştırmacı tarafından geliştirilen bir anket uygulanmıştır. Bu anket beş bölümden oluşmaktadır. Anketin ilk bölümü blogların faydaları, ikinci bölümü blog kullanırken karşılaşılan zorluklar, üçüncü bölümü bloglar ve genel anlamda eğitimde teknolojinin kullanımı hakkında öğrencilerin görüşlerini araştırmaktadır. Anketin ilk iki bölümü likert ölçeği formatında, üçüncü bölümü ise doğru-yanlış formatındadır. Anketin dördüncü bölümünde ise öğrencilere açık uçlu sorular sorulmuş ve bu sorular direk olarak araştırma sorularının cevaplarını hedeflemiştir. Bu nedenle öğrencilere blogların faydaları, blog kullanırken karşılaşılan zorluklar ve bu zorlukların muhtemel çözümleri sorulmuştur. Beşinci ve son bölümde ise öğrencilerin kendileri hakkında bilgi vermesi istenmiştir. Sorulan sorular genelde öğrencilerin internete ve bloglara erişimi ve bilgisayar kullanma alışkanlıkları ile ilgilidir.

Bu araştırmada konu ile ilgili öğretim elemanlarının görüşlerini öğrenmek için İngilizce hazırlık bölümünde görev yapan beş İngilizce okutmanı ile röportajlar yapılmış ve blogların faydaları, blogları kullanırken karşılaştıkları zorluklar ve bu zorluklara getirebilecekleri muhtemel çözümler hakkında okutmanların görüşleri de alınmıştır.

Anket aracılığıyla toplanan veriler SPSS programı kullanılarak analiz edilmiş ve anketin her bir maddesi için istatistikler elde edilmiştir. Bu istatistikler kıyaslanarak öğrencilerin tutumları değerlendirilmiştir. Anketin açık uçlu soruları ise başlıklar altında toplanmış ve bu başlıkların cevaplar arasında görülme sıklıkları

hesaplanmıştır. Öğretim elemanları ile yapılan röportajlar ise öncelikle yazıya dökülmüş daha sonra ise bu yazılarda bahsedilen ana başlıklar belirlenmiştir. Sonrasında ise bu başlıkların röportajlarda bahsedilme sıklıkları belirlenmiştir. Araştırmada elde edilen bulgular blogların öğrencilerin bir çok dil becerisinin gelişimi için faydalı olduğunu göstermiştir. Bulgular blogların özellikle öğrencilerin yazma, okuma, eleştirel düşünme, kelime bilgisi, dili doğru kullanma gibi bir çok beceriye olumlu katkı sağladığını göstermiştir. Ayrıca hem öğretim elemanları hem de öğrenciler derslerde bloglardan yararlanmanın hem de motive edici hem de daha kullanışlı olduğunu belirtmişlerdir. Bunun yanı sıra araştırmanın sonuçları öğretim elemanlarının ve öğrencilerin blog kullanırken bazı zorluklarla karşılaştıklarını da göstermiştir. İnternet erişimi, bloglar üzerindeki yönergelerin net anlaşılmaması ve bloglar üzerinden not verilmesi belirtilen zorluklardan öne çıkanlardır. Bu zorluklara çözüm olarak okulda internet erişimi için kolaylık sağlanacak gerekli alt yapının hazırlanması, bloglar üzerinden verilen yönergelerin daha çok örnek ve açıklamayla desteklenmesi, bloglara daha çok resim, görüntü ve ses kaydı yüklenmesi ve öğrenci performans değerlendirmesinde kullanılan kriterlerin öğrencilerle dönem başında paylaşılması gibi öneriler sunulmuştur. Araştırmada elde edilen bulgulara bakarak yukarıda bahsedilen noktaların dikkate alınarak blogların dil öğretiminde etkili bir şekilde kullanabileceği sonucuna varılmıştır. Bunun yanında bu araştırmanın verileri öğrenciler blog kullandıktan sonra toplanmıştır. Bu nedenle öğrencilerin ve öğretim elemanlarının zaman içerisinde bloglara karşı nasıl tutum geliştirdiğini göstermesi açısından bu çalışma bir de öğrenciler ve öğretim elemanları blog kullanmadan önce yapılarak tekrarlanabilir. Ayrıca, bloglar okuma derslerinden başka derslerde de kullanılarak bu derslerdeki etkilerini de araştırmak blogların dil öğretiminde kullanımı hakkında daha detalı bilgi sağlayabilir. Bu alanda yapılacak araştırmalarda her zaman hem öğrencilerden hem de öğretmenlerden veri toplanması önerilmektedir.

APPENDIX G: TEZ FOTOKOPİSİ İZİN FORMU

ENSTİTÜ

Fen Bilimleri Enstitüsü

☐

Sosyal Bilimler Enstitüsü

☒

Uygulamalı Matematik Enstitüsü

☐

Enformatik Enstitüsü

☐

Deniz Bilimleri Enstitüsü

☐

YAZARIN

Soyadı : Aydan

Adı : Lütfiye Seda

Bölümü : İngiliz Dili Eğitimi

TEZİN ADI (İngilizce): STUDENT AND TEACHER PERCEPTIONS ON BENEFITS AND CHALLENGES OF USING BLOGS IN ENGLISH IN FOREIGN LANGUAGE READING CLASSES

TEZİN TÜRÜ : Yüksek Lisans

☒

Doktora

☐

1. Tezimin tamamından kaynak gösterilmek şartıyla fotokopi alınabilir.
2. Tezimin içindekiler sayfası, özet, indeks sayfalarından ve/veya bir bölümünden kaynak gösterilmek şartıyla fotokopi alınabilir.
3. Tezimden bir bir (1) yıl süreyle fotokopi alınamaz.

☒☒☐

TEZİN KÜTÜPHANEYE TESLİM TARİHİ: