Using audioblogs to assist English-language learning: an investigation into student perception

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This pilot study investigates how the use of audioblogs can help to meet an instructor’s need to improve instruction in English as a second language (ESL). In this study, the instructor uses audioblogs to manage oral assignments, to interact with learners, and to evaluate performance outcomes. Learners record oral assignments through cellular phones, and maintain an individual audioblog in which they submit and archive the oral assignments. The instructor interacts with each learner through the individual audioblog to enhance his or her learning according to individual needs. Using mixed methodology (survey, open-ended questions, interview, and analysis of blogs), this study explores how the instructor’s interaction with learners through audioblogs improves learners’ oral English performance. The results indicate that the use of audioblogs meets the instructor’s instructional needs, providing an efficient and effective way to evaluate students’ oral performance and permitting individualized oral feedback. In addition, learners enjoy the ease of using audioblogs and believe that audioblogs assist their language-learning experience. This study also discusses the challenges that users of audioblogs face in the process of English-language instruction, and the implications of audioblog in language learning.

Keywords: audioblogs; e-portfolio; mobile learning

Introduction

This study was implemented in an English-language institute (henceforth, the ELI) at a university located in the northeast United States. Participants were international students enrolled in the Advanced English Conversation course according to their results on the ACT Compass Placement test; graduate students’ placement rested on the results of tests written and administered by the ELI. The instructor expressed a need to improve teaching and learning through technology, specifically directed to students’ communication skills in speaking and listening. This study detailed the instructional problems, how technology (audioblogs) met the instructional needs, the learners’ perception of using audioblogs, and the results of the implementation, as well as the challenges and difficulties encountered.

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Instructional needs

Two researchers met with the instructor six months before the research implementation. The instructor described the learning goal of the Advanced English Conversation course and explained the teaching methods that she employed. The goal was to improve students’ English speaking and listening abilities. The instructor employed communicative language teaching approach (Richards & Rodgers, 2001, p.156) in which communicative competence is the desired outcome but with focus on comprehensive pronunciation. The evaluation focused on language and thoughts (flow and fluency), understanding, vocabulary, and pronunciation. Students engaged in meaningful learning contexts and applied their personal social-cultural linguistic experience into the communication activities. Students’ formal learning usually took place in the classroom where the instructor reinforced their oral practices with assigned materials (pronunciation exercises, formal speeches, and group conversation) and with CD audio clips. Six hours a week in the classroom were simply not enough to make a noticeable difference in communicative skills. Therefore, students were required to engage in contextualized extended learning practice.

In order to continue extended learning outside the classroom, students were required to listen to the assignments and to record their oral responses on cassette tapes for evaluation. However, major instructional problems emerged. First, the instructor had to spend a great amount of time playing the cassettes back and forth to evaluate the students’ oral assignments and provide oral feedback. Second, owing to the development of new technologies, people rarely possessed cassette players, such devices having been superseded by the MP3 digital music player. The instructor therefore expressed her desire to employ new technologies: these would integrate more multimedia elements into the teaching environment and provide an easier way for individualized feedback on oral performance, especially with pronunciation corrections.

These instructional needs created an opportunity for the language instructor to collaborate with researchers from reading programs and from instructional technology programs. After initial class observations and discussion with the language instructor, the researchers decided to accommodate the instructional needs by:

1. providing a channel to give assignments in multimedia formats for instructors;
2. providing an easy way to record oral assignments for students;
3. allowing instructors to give individualized oral feedback; and
4. creating a better assessment tool and format for evaluation.

On the basis of a literature review on and research on the current technologies, the researchers decided to integrate audioblogs into the curriculum to improve the language-learning process.

Literature review

Research on using blogs as a computer-assisted language learning (CALL) tool

Computer-mediated communication (CMC) technologies have a long history that extends to CALL tools. CMC tools can be divided into two categories: asynchronous (delayed time) tools and synchronous (real-time) tools (Romiszowskį & Mason, 2004). Synchronous communication tools include chat rooms (instant messages) and audio/
video conferencing (Kung, 2004; Lai & Zhao, 2006). Asynchronous communication tools include online discussion boards, e-mail, listservs, and blogs, and they have long promoted language learning (Fitze, 2006; Ware, 2005; Van Handle & Corl, 1998; Warschauer, 1996). One of the most interesting developments in the CMC environment is the blog, which presents a powerful medium for literacy (Huffaker, 2005) and which meets many needs in this particular type of learning environment.

Blogs are personal journals. The features of blogs include fast and easy publishing, chronologically archived posts, compatibility with multimedia elements (audio, video, graphic), and a reciprocal-communication mechanism enabling other users to interact with the author through comments. Educators are in favor of integrating blogs into language learning because they are easy to establish, they give students opportunities to write to a real audience, and they enable two-way communication between authors and readers (Lowe & Williams, 2004). There is, however, little research and little discussion focus on the use of blogs as a way to promote language learning. Pinkman (2005) required students enrolled in a pre-advanced English course in Japan to write articles and to comment on other students’ articles on the individual blog (N = 15). The findings revealed that the blog motivated students to use English to interact – on the blog – with their instructor and their classmates. Bloch (2007) described how a Somali immigrant student used a blog to develop academic writing in English. Huffaker (2005), Godwin-Jones (2003), and Campbell (2003) also summarized and discussed blogs’ promotion of literacy in the classroom. In summary, blog is being used as an e-portfolio to collect students’ writing samples chronically because it provides instructor ongoing assessment and provides students with an ongoing process to monitor their learning.

**Using blogs to provide individualized feedback**

Instructor’s feedback regarding learners’ performance plays a crucial role in the language-learning process (Lynch & Maclean, 2003; Yang, Badger & Yu, 2007). Tsutsui (2004) proposed three types of feedback in teacher-student language-learning environments: interactive, intrusive, and delayed feedback (p. 374). He stated that interactive feedback cannot benefit all students owing to the many variables that affect the classroom and that include time limit, number of students, and students’ personalities. The problem with intrusive feedback is that instructors have to interrupt students’ performance in the middle of conversation. The stated problems are similar to the learning environment in our target class. In our learning environment, the instructor provided immediate feedback to students in a face-to-face classroom. There were three meetings per week, and each meeting lasted three hours. However, it was unrealistic to provide immediate feedback to all 20 students in the face-to-face classroom, especially to introverted students, who were inclined to remain silent. The instructor needed an assessment tool that could help her both evaluate all students and provide them with individualized instruction.

Tsutsui further pointed out that it is difficult to provide students with delayed feedback after their performance because the instructor has to record students’ performance; the students may not be able to connect the instructor’s comment to their performance because of the time lag. In this study, we needed a tool that would enable the instructor to easily record oral feedback: this ease, in turn, would enable students to track their learning progress. Because this course focused on the improvement of students’ speaking and listening skills, the compatibility and the ease of integrating an audio function into blogs was crucial. After researching the available and affordable technologies, we decided to
choose audioblogs that would assist students’ language learning. Blogs can incorporate multimedia formats of works. In addition to writing assignments, students can record an audio or video file and can archive the artifact on their blogs. The instructor can evaluate students’ reading, writing, listening, and speaking skills if the multimedia format tasks are given. The instructor can then provide oral or written feedback to individual students according to their needs. The process is described in the ‘Procedure for the implementation of the audioblog’ section.

To date, little research has focused on the area of audioblogs in language-learning studies. According to our findings, the research that came closest to our focus was conducted by Volle (2005). In this study, 19 Spanish-language learners at the university level took an online course and completed two types of voice e-mail assignments: one type was read-aloud passages, and the other type was grammar drills. Volle measured students’ pronunciation, stress and intonation, and proficiency at the beginning of the semester and at the end of the semester. He reported that no significant difference was found.

In this study, we chose to adopt audioblogs among other technologies owing to the former technology’s beneficial features:

(1) Ease of use: this feature helps reduce students’ cognitive load in learning. A friendly technology enables learners to focus more on learning tasks and less on the technology. Ngu and Rethinasamy (2006) implemented CALL software and compared the learning performance of a group using CALL with the learning performance of a group using the conventional (face-to-face) teaching method (N = 30). The results indicated that the conventional group learned more efficiently than the CALL group. The two researchers attributed the less efficient CALL-software learning to the software’s requirement of heavier cognitive load. Barr, Leakey and Ranchoux (2005) reported a similar phenomenon. They divided students into four conversation classes (class size between 5 and 11): two were taught in a multimedia laboratory and two were taught in a traditional face-to-face manner. The results indicated that the students who did not use technology outperformed those who did. One of the contributing factors that the researchers identified was the greater amount of time that students had to spend learning the technology. In comparison with other technologies, the ease of audioblog is that users can setup the blog (e-portfolio) and connect the audio clips with the blog which can be done by one-click-button publishing. If we use analogy to describe the process of linking audio clips to blog, it is similar to submit the cassette tapes (audio clips) to students’ homework boxes (blog) for instructor evaluation. In addition, a friendly and affordable technology is easier to adapt to an educational setting then is user unfriendly or expensive learning tools.

(2) Affordance: compared to the podcasting approach, which requires a media player as a delivery device, a server to host audio files, and particular software to create RSS feeds; this project adopts a relatively affordable approach. The equipment needed for both instructor and students include a computer and a cell phone (or VoIP account), readily available for teaching and learning. Instructor and students can still choose to download audio clips to their media player if they have one.

(3) Easy archiving of assignments for evaluation: this feature enables the instructor to measure student-performance outcomes and to track students’ learning progress. Students can also reflect on their learning and take up the responsibility and ownership of learning.
Compatibility with multimedia format files: the instructor can assign homework in multimedia formats. For example, the instructor can insert conversation audio clips or conversation video clips into blogs or can insert external links into blogs so that students can access other web sites containing news articles or broadcast audios. The process of posting audio clips on blogs is easy.

Easy to facilitate interaction: this feature enables an effective, convenient two-way interaction through the hypertext function. It is essential that the instructor can correct students’ performance in both the oral format and the written format and that the students can access the feedback.

The purpose of this study is twofold: first, we shall explore whether or not audioblog technology can feasibly meet the instructor’s instructional needs (namely, the instructor’s need to evaluate learners’ speaking and listening skills in the Advanced English Conversation course); second, we shall investigate ESL students’ perception of audioblogs’ contribution to improved oral English performance.

Learning environment
We conducted the study at the aforementioned ELI, which is located in the northeast United States. The ELI offers reading, writing, and speaking/listening courses at the beginner, intermediate, and advanced levels. The course (advanced-level speaking/listening) was designed to improve students’ listening comprehension, fluency, and pronunciation. In general, computer software would augment listening comprehension and pronunciation activities in the classroom. And in general, class size was restricted to 15, so only 15 stations were available in the room. In-class materials included one textbook for listening comprehension and another textbook for conversation and pronunciation and various supplementary materials designed by the teacher. At one time when audio cassette recorders and players were commonplace, students had been required to practice various speaking assignments at home and then to record the assignments. The instructor would give the students a written critique of their pronunciation skills.

As the researchers, we undertook this study and worked closely with the instructor on the blog’s technical functions and on the blog’s publishing features. In addition, we offered the instructors some insights and some assistance in regards to the curriculum design, class materials, class activities, homework, assignments, and the like.

A sample instructor’s teaching blog (http://languageaudioblog.blogspot.com/) was presented to the instructor before the implementation to demonstrate the possibilities of using blog in language learning. Multimedia elements are incorporated on the sample instructor blog, such as a news video clip shared on Youtube, an external CNN news video resource for listening, reading and writing practices, a story recorded by the instructor for students to listen to the story and then respond to the questions in oral and written form. The instructor could easily setup a class roster with link to each student’s blog (e-portfolio) to access students’ work for evaluation.

Procedure for the implementation of the audioblog

Step 1: setup of the blog
At the beginning of the semester, the instructor introduced the class to the new method for oral assignments. The researchers then helped students set up their own blogs with Google’s free blogging service (blogger.com) in the first two sessions of the
language-learning lab. Only a few of the students had blogging experience. Most students encountered difficulties during the process of setting up blogs, but most of these difficulties concerned email-account validation. Students were advised not to reveal their real name or any information that might reveal their identities online. They could also choose to ‘hide’ their blogs so that no one could find their blog through a search engine on the Internet. After setting up their blogs, the students were then instructed to write their first entry: a self-introduction. The URLs of all students’ blogs were collected and posted on the instructor’s blog so the instructor could easily connect to their blogs. The next step for the instructor was to link the students’ blogs to the audio recording system.

Step 2: online audio recording system

In this study, we adopted Evoca (http://www.evoca.com), the online audio recording-playing system. Students set up an Evoca account and then connected their blog with the Evoca account. There are three ways to record audio clips that can be uploaded to Evoca: use of a microphone connected to the computer, use of a cellular phone, and use of Skype (VoIP). All students chose to use a cellular phone to record their oral assignments because the device is highly portable, individual, unobtrusive, available anywhere, useful (suited to everyday needs for communication) and intuitive (Sharples, 2000). Evoca automatically archives audio clips. The user can then post the audio clips to his or her blog by clicking Evoca’s ‘post to blog’ button (Figure 1, B). The user also has to embed a virtual voice recorder on the blog to allow other readers to leave oral comments (Figure 1, A). The instructor can use this virtual voice recorder to leave students both oral feedback on the blog and text comments on the blog (Figure 1, C). At the first session, 15 students successfully created their blogs and, using a cellular phone and Evoca, recorded the first audio clip. Several students were struggling with some technical issues (e.g., having neither

Figure 1. Sample student’s language learning blog. A: virtual voice recorder; B: oral assignments post by student; C: interact with the user through comment feature.
a cellular phone nor a compatible home phone; no valid email address to activate a Blogger account or an Evoca account) or were absent on the day of the instructional session. We provided students with a screenshot manual that showed them the step-by-step procedure for completion of oral assignments and for the posting of assignments on the blogs.

**Step 3: procedure for the distribution and the completion of assignments**

The instructor usually recorded her assignments with Evoca and posted them on the instructor’s blog (Figure 2). Students had to link to the instructor’s blog to read the assignment, and then responded to the assignments in oral format with Evoca or in written forms on their blogs. The students were to complete their assignments at home or in the language-learning lab. The instructor connected to each student’s blog to evaluate the assignment, and then posted on the individual blog either audio feedback with the virtual voice recorder or written feedback through commenting function. Students were to listen to the instructor’s feedback via their own Evoca accounts. They could retrieve their submitted assignments that now featured the instructor’s feedback. In short, the instructor used the blog as a teaching vehicle to post assignments and to interact with individual students on their blogs through feedback, whether audio or text.

The blog archived all students’ work so that the instructor could examine their language learning individually and could identify short-term or long-term performance outcomes.

**Step 4: assessment of audioblog assignment**

For the listening comprehension, students listened to a short recording and answered questions about it using audioblogs. The instructor reviewed the answers in class. On the
blog, the instructor posted pronunciation assignments from textbooks, and then she suggested that students practice the assignment before recording it on the audioblogs. The instructor responded to the students’ recordings by making corrections and comments. In some cases, when there were many serious errors, students were asked to repeat the recording. The instructor’s evaluations were based on the fluency criteria and the comprehension criteria that would be used to evaluate a student’s readiness to exit the course. In general, students who meet the exit criteria receive a ‘P’ (pass) in the course while those who do not meet the criteria receive a ‘PR’ (progress repeat). Students who receive a PR must take the course again.

In general, the instructor considers fluency holistically, taking into account grammar, usage, vocabulary, and pronunciation. Overall, grammatical correctness may be accorded less weight than the ability to speak without fumbling or searching for words. Pronunciation is vitally important insofar as it affects a student’s ability to be understood.

The instructor considers the following specific themes regarding skills that the student has or does not have: comprehends and can discuss an audio clip; speaks with relative ease; neither fumbles nor searches for words; uses a relatively high level of vocabulary as well as some variety in sentence structure (simple, compound, and complex); understands questions without the need for repetition or rephrasing; makes few errors in usage and syntax; may speak with an accent that does not interfere with the ability to be understood.

**Research design**

**Participants**

In the spring of 2007, 22 international students enrolled in the Advanced English Conversation course in the aforementioned ELI. They had been assigned to the course on the basis of their results in English-proficiency exams. We selected the students for participation in the study on the basis of a purposive sampling method. Five of the students were in undergraduate programs, 13 were in graduate programs, and five were non-degree ELI students. Their majors ranged from business, education, electronic engineering, and computer science to medical science. Students were from Thailand (4), South Korea (2), Turkey (2), Colombia (1), Taiwan (5), Pakistan (1), Israel (2), and India (4).

**Research method**

We used the mixed methodology (Tashakkori & Teddlie, 1998) that consists of qualitative (student open-ended questionnaire, instructor interviews, student blog analyses) and quantitative (survey) data. Our objective therein was to examine two topics: the degree to meet the instructional needs, and the perceptions that students had of blog use as a facilitator of language learning.

**Data collection and analysis**

We collected data from the following sources to investigate the perceptions that learners had of blog use as a language-learning tool:

- Student-attitude survey (Appendix 1): The 11-item Likert-scale survey measured the perceptions that learners had of blog use’s contribution to English-speaking proficiency. The survey was administrated at the end of the semester.
Student open-ended questions (Appendix 2): These questions probed into students’ additional concerns about this project. Students completed the attitude survey and the open-ended questions anonymously.

Interview with the instructor: We conducted an interview with the instructor to identify the perceptions that she had regarding not only blog use’s contribution to language teaching and language learning but also differences between these perceptions and perceptions from previous teaching experience.

Analysis of students’ audioblogs: At the end of the semester, we analyzed students’ audioblogs and examined especially the assignment-completion rate.

We developed both the surveys and the interview protocols on the basis of both our literature review and previous studies (Pinkman, 2005; Shoffner, 2006; Son, 2007). We used several strategies to triangulate data; that is, we used multiple methods to collect data, and we used peer examination to examine themes from the open-ended questions and the interview (Mathison, 1988). Guiding both our analysis of the open-ended-question responses and our analysis of the interview responses was the analysis model of Miles and Huberman (1994, p. 50), which discusses transcription, theme identification, and results revision based on peer examination. Description analysis displayed the frequencies of survey responses to demonstrate students’ attitudes toward audioblog use in this course.

Discussion of findings

Survey findings

Seventeen students returned the survey. Table 1 shows the survey results of the students’ attitude toward audioblog use.

Questions 1, 2, 3, 4, and 7 investigated the ease of audioblog use. Students indicated that doing homework with blogs was not difficult (76% of the students either agreed or strongly agreed). About half the students faced no problems when creating audio clips on the blogs (53% of the students either agreed or strongly agreed), while 12% of the students reported that they encountered related problems. Approximately 75% of the students believed that, as a tool, the blog greatly facilitated the archiving of their work (76.4% of the students either agreed or strongly agreed). Regarding the submittal of oral assignments, the same percentage of students (76.4% of the students either agreed or strongly agreed) preferred audioblogs to audiotapes, while 17.7% of the students preferred to use audiotapes. And 76.5% of the students pointed out that their sense of control over their blog (ownership of learning) was stronger than their sense of control over traditional pencil-and-paper work.

Questions 5 and 6 concerned students’ satisfaction regarding their interaction with the instructor. Most students enjoyed their blog-based interaction with the instructor (88.2% of the students either agreed or strongly agreed) and pointed out that the instructor’s individualized feedback helped their language learning (94.1% of the students either agreed or strongly agreed).

Questions 8 and 9 examined students’ experiences regarding blog use as a facilitator of language learning. The majority of students believed that the audioblog is a good language-learning tool (82.41% of the students either agreed or strongly agreed). After a semester’s worth of experiences regarding audioblog learning, 64.7% of the students reported that they had stronger confidence in using English than before, while 5.9% of the students disagreed with the statement.
Questions 10 and 11 concerned the frequency of audioblog use. Half of the students (58.8%) accessed the instructor’s blog once or twice a week, 23.5% of the students at least three times a week, and 17.7% of the students every day. Most students created entries on their blogs once or twice a week (82.4%), 11.76% of the students reported that they did so at least three times a week, and 5.9% of the students rarely or never completed assignments. The instructor posted assignments on her blog once a week.

Students’ attitude-survey results show that the students enjoyed using audioblog technology in the process of learning the English language, considered audioblog use to be easy, enjoyed the instructor’s individualized feedback, and had stronger confidence in their use of English. The positive attitude toward use of CALL was consistent with some

Table 1. Student attitude toward using blog survey responses (N = 17).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ease of use audioblog</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Neutral</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Std. Deviation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I have easy access to a computer. Doing my homework with blog is not difficult for me.</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>23.5%</td>
<td>41.2%</td>
<td>35.3%</td>
<td>4.12</td>
<td>.781</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I faced a lot of problems when creating audio recording entries on my blog.</td>
<td>17.6%</td>
<td>35.3%</td>
<td>35.3%</td>
<td>11.8%</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2.41</td>
<td>.939</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I think the blog is a great tool to archive my works.</td>
<td>5.9%</td>
<td>17.6%</td>
<td>52.9%</td>
<td>23.5%</td>
<td></td>
<td>3.94</td>
<td>.826</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I prefer using audio tape to record my assignment rather than using audio blog.</td>
<td>17.6%</td>
<td>58.8%</td>
<td>5.9%</td>
<td>5.9%</td>
<td>11.8%</td>
<td>2.35</td>
<td>.122</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I have a greater sense of control over my blog portfolio compared to traditional paper works.</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>5.9%</td>
<td>17.6%</td>
<td>64.7%</td>
<td>11.8%</td>
<td>3.82</td>
<td>.728</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Satisfaction with the interaction with the instructor</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Neutral</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Std. Deviation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I find that my teacher’s reviews and critiques on my blog is more interesting and interactive than using a Word document.</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>11.8%</td>
<td>52.9%</td>
<td>35.3%</td>
<td>4.24</td>
<td>.664</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I find that interacting with my instructor on my blog is helpful because the feedback is individualized.</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>5.9%</td>
<td>52.9%</td>
<td>41.2%</td>
<td>4.35</td>
<td>.606</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Satisfaction with learning experience using audioblog</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Neutral</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Std. Deviation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I think blog is a good language learning tool.</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>17.6%</td>
<td>41.2%</td>
<td>41.2%</td>
<td>4.24</td>
<td>.752</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I have stronger confidence in using English now.</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>5.9%</td>
<td>29.4%</td>
<td>41.2%</td>
<td>23.5%</td>
<td>3.82</td>
<td>.882</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. The items were based on a 5-point Likert Scale. From 1 (Strongly disagree) to 5 (Strongly agree).
previous studies in the area (Almekhlafi, 2006; Barr, Leakey, & Ranchoux, 2005; Klassen & Milton, 1999).

**Open-ended questions**

The open-ended questions investigated students’ opinions on four topics: the advantages and the disadvantages that use of audioblogs posed for language learning, how the audioblog facilitated their oral performance, additional concerns regarding use of audioblogs, and suggestions regarding the implementation of audioblogs. Categories in Table 2 list students’ opinions on these topics according to the frequency of the reports. The following comments concern the perceived advantages of audioblog use: it is easy to interact with the instructor and receive the instructor’s individualized feedback in a

Table 2. Student responses to the open-ended questions (N = 17).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Responses</th>
<th>Number of times reported</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Student-perceived advantages of audioblog use</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Easy way to interact with the instructor beyond the classroom</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fast way to do homework</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Useful way to receive instructor’s individualized feedback</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Easy to listen to and turn in the assignment</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Useful way to practice speaking and listening before assignment completion</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fun</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Student-perceived disadvantages of audioblog use</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Technical issue (e.g., no Internet connection, computer crash)</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Need to have basic computer skills</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>How audioblog facilitates language learning</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Improves pronunciation and speaking skills</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Helps instructor provide individualized feedback</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relates instructor’s feedback to the mistakes made in assignments</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Improves listening skills</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Improves grammar</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Helps students listen to other students’ oral practice</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Encourages conversation with native speakers</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Allows for regular practice sessions</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Suggestions for improved future implementation</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Use more multimedia materials, e.g., video clips, audio broadcasting</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Let students leave comments on the instructor’s blog and</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>on other students’ blogs to enhance interaction</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Offer small class size</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Have students record a greater variety of topics</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Allow for visual self-recordings that enable the instructor to see students’ lip movements</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Other comments</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Show their blogs to family or friends</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recommend for the next class</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enjoy learning new blog technology</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Can use audioblogs in a pure online learning environment</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
timely manner; it provides an efficient process for completion of oral assignments; it allows for practice and for repeated listening to assignments; and it is fun to use. Students noted, as well, that use of the cellular phones to record audio clips eased the assignment-completion process. The technical issues that students reported did not pertain to the audioblog technology. Some students reported that, sometimes, either loss of a network connection or a computer crash would hinder the assignment-completion process.

Students stated that the audioblog facilitated their language learning because they listened to the assigned materials and to the feedback from the instructor and recorded natural oral speaking on a regular basis. This process helped them improve their speaking and listening skills. Audioblogs enabled them to relate the instructor’s feedback to the mistakes that they had made in a particular assignment. Some students stated that after participating in this project, they felt more confident in carrying out conversations with native speakers.

Students also provided suggestions by which the instructor might improve the audioblog activity: use multimedia-format materials, for instance, video clips and audio broadcasts; allow students to leave comments on the instructor’s blog to increase peer interaction; have students record audio clips on a variety of topics, and let them upload self-recorded video to demonstrate their lip movements to the instructor. In addition, the students claimed that providing individual feedback to a group of 20 students was a great burden on the instructor and that, therefore, a smaller class size would strengthen audioblog activity.

Surprisingly, eight students out of 20 showed their audioblogs to their families or friends without any prompt or encouragement from the instructor or the researchers. Some students recommended that the instructor integrate the audioblog technology into the following semester’s version of the course because the audioblog had helped improve their speaking and listening abilities. One student even commented, ‘I could use audioblog technology to learn English even if I weren’t in the US.’

**Instructor interview**

Even though the student-attitude survey and the open-ended questions showed that participants were positive about audioblog use as a way to strengthen speaking and listening skills, both our interview with the instructor and our analysis of the blogs disclosed problems with the students’ learning outcomes and with motivation. These problems were not mentioned in the students’ reports.

Regarding the advantages that audioblog use had for language learning, the instructor’s perceptions were similar to the students’ perceptions: it facilitated fast two-way communication and provided an easy method to evaluate oral assignments and to provide individualized feedback. This technology helped her manage instruction efficiently and concentrate more on monitoring students’ learning progress over a period of time. The blogs archived all students’ oral assignments so that the instructor could compare the students’ early oral skills with the students’ later oral skills. From the instructor’s observation, students in general were motivated to use audioblog technology because it is a modern technology that younger generations are familiar with.

An important challenge that the instructor faced while implementing this technology was the class size. It was difficult to monitor and to respond to the oral performances of more than 20 students. The class size should be no larger than 10 students, in her opinion.
The instructor expressed another concern about this activity: student participation. Throughout the entire semester, about half of the students did the audioblog. One third of this group worked on the oral assignments on a regular basis. A few students did the assignments on their audioblogs only rarely. This is not pedagogically sound because students need to hear the corrections before proceeding to the next assignment. The audioblog activity was part of formative assessment; however, the final grade was based on the summative assessment (final exam). Thus, this policy might be a factor on student participation.

As for the learning outcomes, students who completed assignments regularly and constantly improved their speaking abilities. However language improvement was not manifesting itself over the short term. Even students who were improving their skills encountered significant pronunciation problems.

The instructor came up with several suggestions that she is planning to integrate into the next blog implementation. She will more frequently assign tasks that enable students to more frequently practice their oral skills. We will work with the instructor to create a holistic rubric and will implement it in the blog so that she can systematically evaluate the students’ language performance. The instructor will create materials that are more creative and will integrate them into the blog so that students’ learning motivation will increase.

**Analysis of students’ audioblogs**

We calculated the number of assignments that each student posted on his or her audioblog. Twenty-one students used the audioblog at least once. Table 3 lists the number of audio clips that students posted on their blogs, and Table 3 lists, also, the number of

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 3. Number of audio clips posted on students’ blogs.</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Number of audio clips posted on blogs</td>
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<td>----------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student A 14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student B 18</td>
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<tr>
<td>Student C 6</td>
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<tr>
<td>Student D 23</td>
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<tr>
<td>Student E 33</td>
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<td>Student F 15</td>
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<td>Student G 25</td>
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<td>Student H 25</td>
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<tr>
<td>Student I 14</td>
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<tr>
<td>Student J 43</td>
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<td>Student K 22</td>
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<td>Student L 32</td>
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<td>Student M 28</td>
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<td>Student N 22</td>
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<td>Student O 9</td>
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<td>Student S 7</td>
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<tr>
<td>Student T 26</td>
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<tr>
<td>Student U 23</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: * = did not turn in final exam.
students who submitted their final exams on their blogs. Three students who each posted fewer than 10 audio clips did not submit their final exams. Some students turned in late assignments and took make-up final exams in order to receive a passing grade. This course’s evaluation system, which is pass or fail and which offers no grades, might affect student motivation relative to completion of the blog assignments.

Conclusion

The main purpose of this study was to investigate a technology that resolves instructional problems in a language-learning environment: in particular, the technology should help both the instructor and the learners evaluate learners’ oral assignments and should provide learners with individualized oral feedback. The findings suggest that it is feasible to integrate audioblogs into an ESL course because they are easy to use and affordable. Students enjoyed using the audioblogs, and the instructor confirmed that the technology met her instructional needs. And because of audioblogs’ ease of use, students can concentrate more on the assignment itself and less on cognitive load. In summary, audioblog serves as a great tool for instructor to conduct formative and summative assessment, to incorporate multimedia formats of content, to provide individualized feedback, to facilitate two-way interaction, and to build an online learning community. For students, they can develop their own e-portfolios through the use of audioblogs, which encourage their reflective practices and establish the ownership of learning.

However, the key to successful integration of audioblogs into such a course is the interaction between the instructor and the students. The instructor should use the audioblog to give assignments regularly and, what is more important, should provide students with constructive and accurate feedback that helps the students correct their own problems. Technology serves as a vehicle in this study. Adopting the right technologies to adapt to different learning needs in different learning contexts, providing constant professional feedback, running a class of a reasonable size, and motivating students with diverse pedagogies are four important conditions that, if met, will increase the likelihood of successful implementation. The first two conditions were met in this study, a fact that, at least, resolved the instructor’s needs. To generate a greater effect on the learning-performance outcomes, there is a need both to adopt more strategies that motivate students to learn and to limit class size to about 10 students. In this study, the instructor spent a great amount of time providing feedback to each student; consequently, she had less time to research a variety of materials for integration into the curriculum.

Implications and our next step

In this study, audioblog serves as an e-portfolio tool to chronically collect students’ oral performance and allows the instructor to observe the growth of students’ communication competence. Students can also monitor their own learning progress and take up the responsibility of their own learning. The implication on the use of audioblog can be more versatile. The instructor can collect students’ oral and written assignments for formative and summative evaluation and observe their learning progress. The instructor can adopt multimedia resources (image, audio, video) on the Internet as learning resources on the instructor blog. Students can use the commenting function and voice recorder features to interact with other students. (For example, students can record famous stories from their countries and share with other students.)
Having implemented the audioblog technology for one semester, we have learned several lessons that, if needed, can improve the audioblog-based learning process. We will continue to repeat the use of audioblogs and will add the following changes to the next implementation. We also provided training materials for instructors who are planning to adopt audioblog in language or literacy learning on the instructor’s sample blog (http://languageaudioblog.blogspot.com).

1. Adopt more strategies for audioblog use. Examples include asking students to listen to a radio show or a video clip and to comment on the topics, having students tell a story, or having students listen to a story and then articulate their reflections.

2. Explore the multimedia resources on the Internet to stimulate learning motivation and learning autonomy.

3. Provide classrooms more blog-based opportunities to increase the interaction between the instructor and the students and between the students and their peers. For instance, ask students to comment on other students’ assignments.

4. Develop a holistic rubric for the systematic evaluation of students’ pronunciation, stress and intonation, and proficiency. We are currently working on such a rubric, which will also guide students’ practicing and learning and provide students with extra feedback about their learning performance.

5. Seek smaller class sizes.

6. Enable an RSS (Really Simple Syndication) function or a comments-notification function to alert users to any new updated entry on their blogs. This technology can help users receive feedback immediately.

**Future research**

The advancement of network and communication technology enables ubiquitous learning to support language learning (Ogata & Yano, 2003). When audioblog technology combines with wireless hand-held devices (PDA and cellular phone), it is more feasible that students could gain access to the instructor’s blog, could record audio clips, could post audio clips on their own blogs, and could interact with others on their own – or the others’ – blogs. The effects that ubiquitous learning devices have on ESL language learning, particularly in relation to audioblogs, constitute an interesting topic worthy of further research.

**Notes on contributors**

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tools. Her articles have been published in *Educational Technology Research & Development*, *Journal of Interactive Online Learning*, and *Tech Trend*. She can be reached at skwang@nyit.edu or skw0218@gmail.com. Her web site address is http://iris.nyit.edu/~skwang.

Linda Comac (MA CUNY) is coordinator of the English Language Institute at the New York Institute of Technology. Linda has been teaching courses in listening/speaking and in writing at the Institute for almost 15 years.

**References**


**Appendix 1**

**Survey of attitudes on use of blogs**

This questionnaire is designed to assess your perceptions and attitude toward using blog in an advanced speaking and listening class. It should require about 10 minutes of your time to complete the survey. Usually it is best to respond with your first impression, without giving any single question much thought. Your answers will remain confidential and only researchers will have access to your responses. Your participation is entirely voluntary. You can withdraw at any time without penalty.

Age:____ Major:_______________ Nationality:___________________

(1) I have easy access to a computer. Doing my homework with blog is not difficult for me.

- [ ] Strongly agree  [ ] Neutral  [ ] Disagree  [ ] Strongly disagree

- [ ] Agree

(2) I faced a lot of problems when creating audio recording entries on my blog.

- [ ] Strongly agree  [ ] Neutral  [ ] Disagree  [ ] Strongly disagree

- [ ] Agree

(3) I think the blog is a great tool to archive my works.

- [ ] Strongly agree  [ ] Neutral  [ ] Disagree  [ ] Strongly disagree

- [ ] Agree

(4) I prefer using audio tape to record my assignment rather than using audio blog.

- [ ] Strongly agree  [ ] Neutral  [ ] Disagree  [ ] Strongly disagree

- [ ] Agree

(5) I find that my teacher’s reviews and critiques on my blog are more interesting and interactive than using a Word document.

- [ ] Strongly agree  [ ] Neutral  [ ] Disagree  [ ] Strongly disagree

- [ ] Agree
(6) I find that interacting with my instructor on my blog is helpful because the feedback is individualized.
   □ Strongly agree □ □ Neutral □ □ Disagree □ □ Strongly disagree
   □ □ Agree

(7) I have a greater sense of control over my blog portfolio compared to traditional paper works.
   □ Strongly agree □ □ Neutral □ □ Disagree □ □ Strongly disagree
   □ □ Agree

(8) I think blog is a good language learning tool.
   □ Strongly agree □ □ Neutral □ □ Disagree □ □ Strongly disagree
   □ □ Agree

(9) I have stronger confidence in using English now.
   □ Strongly agree □ □ Neutral □ □ Disagree □ □ Strongly disagree
   □ □ Agree

(10) How often did you check the instructor’s blog?
    □ Every day □ □ At least three times a week □ □ Once or twice a week
    □ Rarely (when the instructor notified me that the assignment was posted on his/her blog)

(11) How often did you create entries on your own blog?
    □ Every day □ □ At least three times a week □ □ Once or twice a week
    □ Rarely (when the instructor notified me that my assignment was missing)

Appendix 2
Student open-ended questions

(1) What are the advantages and disadvantages of using blog as a language learning portfolio?
(2) How did the use of blog facilitate your language learning?
(3) Does this blog improve your learning? If yes, how did the use of blog improve your language learning? If not, please explain why.
(4) What are the issues and concerns do you have about this blog activity?
(5) How can this project be improved?
(6) Can you share with us any other ideas about this blog portfolio project?
(7) Will you show your blog portfolio to your friends or family? Why or why not?
(8) What other ideas can you share with your instructor in terms of using blog to assist your language learning?