

Sequential Mixed Methods Study to Examine the Potentiality of Blackboard-Based Collaborative Writing as a Solution Tool for Saudi Undergraduate EFL Students' Writing Difficulties

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Abstract : English is considered the most important foreign language in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA) because of the usefulness of English as a global language compared to Arabic. As students' desire to improve their English language skills has grown, English writing has been identified as the most difficult problem for Saudi students in their language learning. Although the English language in Saudi Arabia is taught beginning in the seventh grade, many students have problems at the university level, especially in writing, due to a gap between what is taught in secondary and high schools and university expectations-pupils generally study English at school, based on one book with few exercises in vocabulary and grammar exercises, and there are no specific writing lessons. Moreover, from personal teaching experience at King Saud bin Abdulaziz University, students face real problems with their writing. This paper revolves around the blackboard-based collaborative writing to help the undergraduate Saudi EFL students, in their first year enrolled in two sections of ENGL 101 in the first semester of 2021 at King Saud bin Abdulaziz University, practice the most difficult skill they found in their writing through a small group. Therefore, a sequential mixed methods design will be suited. The first phase of the study aims to highlight the most difficult skill experienced by students from an official writing exam that is evaluated by their teachers through an official rubric used in King Saud bin Abdulaziz University. In the second phase, this study will intend to investigate the benefits of social interaction on the process of learning writing. Students will be provided with five collaborative writing tasks via discussion feature on Blackboard to practice a skill that they found difficult in writing. the tasks will be formed based on social constructivist theory and pedagogic frameworks. The interaction will take place between peers and their teachers. The frequencies of students' participation and the quality of their interaction will be observed through manual counting, screenshotting. This will help the researcher understand how students actively work on the task through the amount of their participation and will also distinguish the type of interaction (on task, about task, or off-task). Semi-structured interviews will be conducted with students to understand their perceptions about the blackboard-based collaborative writing tasks, and questionnaires will be distributed to identify students' attitudes with the tasks.

Keywords : writing difficulties, blackboard-based collaborative writing, process of learning writing, interaction, participations

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