

THE ROLE OF GOOGLE CLASSROOM IN ENHANCING WRITING CAPACITIES THROUGH ELECTRONIC FEEDBACK

دور تطبيق قوقل كلاسروم في تحسين قدرات الكتابة عن طريق التغذية
الراجعة الالكترونية

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Abstract: Teaching the writing skill is still one of the most challenging tasks for language teachers as it entails considerable time and effort from them to help students develop their capacities in the long term. One of these challenges in the Algerian context, as revealed by this study through the use of qualitative data interviewing six teachers of writing, is the time allotted to teaching writing and the over-crowded classes which make the task even harder for the teacher to evaluate the writing performances and to provide appropriate feedback to learners. The aim of this paper is to come up with some solutions that teachers can benefit from in order to save time and help students excel in writing. In that respect, teachers can deliver electronic feedback by using the Learning Management System (LMS) known as Google Classroom. In so doing, an attempt will be made in order to show the benefits of electronic feedback delivery using this software focusing on how it could be effectively used with regard to writing instruction.

key words: Electronic Feedback, Learning Management System, Writing Capacities.

ملخص: لا يزال تدريس مهارة الكتابة من أكثر المهام صعوبة بالنسبة لمعلمي اللغة حيث يتطلب الكثير من الوقت والجهد لمساعدة الطلاب على تطوير قدراتهم على المدى الطويل. أحد هذه التحديات في السياق الجزائري ، كما كشفت هذه الدراسة ، هو الوقت المخصص لتدريس

الكتابة والصفوف المكتظة للغاية مما يجعل المهمة أكثر صعوبة بالنسبة للمعلم لتقييم أداء الكتابة وتقديم ملاحظات مناسبة للمتعلمين. الهدف من هذه الورقة التوصل إلى حلول معينة يمكن للمدرسين استخدامها لتوفير الوقت ومساعدة الطلاب على التفوق في الكتابة من ناحية أخرى . في هذا الصدد، يمكن للمدرسين تقديم تعليقات إلكترونية من خلال استخدام نظام إدارة التعلم المعروف باسم Google Classroom. عند القيام بذلك، سيتم إجراء محاولة لإظهار كيف تعمل وكيف يمكن استخدامها بفعالية فيما يتعلق بتعليم الكتابة.

الكلمات المفتاحية: التغذية الراجعة الالكترونية ، نظام ادارة التعلم ، قدرات الكتابة

1. Introduction

Effective teaching of English as a Foreign Language goes necessarily through the four language skills (listening, speaking, reading and writing). It is commonly agreed among language teachers and practitioners that writing is the most essential one and the most difficult to learn and teach. The present study takes place at the University of Hamma Lakhdar of El-Oued taking third-year teachers of English as a case study in dealing with their teaching writing difficulties and how to overcome them. The investigation has revealed, through the conduction of semi-structured interviews that teachers encounter many multi-dimensional problems stemming basically from lack of writing practice and motivation on the learners' part as well as inadequate instruction, which is, in turn, a result of time constraints and disorderly over-crowded classroom management. Given the aforementioned problems, the research proposes some practical solutions at the disposal of writing teachers limiting the scope of the study to issues of time and large classes. As the learners' profiles have been radically changed because of the digital age and the information overload era, it is fundamentally imperative for the teachers to identify their needs and preferences. Taking that parameter into consideration, the use of technology in the language classroom has become an inevitable option as Kessler (2018: 205) asserts: "language teachers today are faced with so many fascinating options for using technology to enhance language learning that it can be overwhelming". Moreover, researchers and language practitioners in EFL and ESL have insisted that the introduction of Internet Communication Technologies (ICTs) offer a suitable option so as to overcome writing problems and save teachers' and learners' time (Ward 2004, Wu, 2006, Zinstejer, 2008).

1. Research Questions

This paper aims to explore the state of the writing of third-year students of English at El-Oued University putting forward the two following questions:

- What are the main challenges that teachers encounter in teaching writing?
- How can these challenges be overcome?

2. Research Hypothesis

It has been hypothesized that teachers of English are facing many problems in teaching writing that stem basically due to limited time for teaching writing and over-crowded classes which may result in insufficient practice and writing instruction. In addition, the use of Google Classroom as a complementary teaching tool can save teachers' time and effort through the provision of electronic feedback.

3. Literature Review

The following section is devoted to reporting some of the previous studies that have dealt with the effectiveness of the electronic feedback on developing students' writing capacities. At the outset, it is worth mentioning that this kind of feedback could be delivered through the integration of the internet and technology into the language class such as the use of LMS known as Google Classroom.

Electronic feedback can be provided through the use of the computer or smartphones. According to Ellis (2009), it is extensive corpora of written English (either carefully built or simple available through search engines such as Google) that can be used to provide students with help in their writing. This help can be accessed by means of software programs while students write or it can be used as a form of feedback. Furthermore, it has become so common nowadays in writing classes that students submit their assignments electronically through the use of software programs and teachers provide feedback on these writings.

Research studies on electronic feedback are "scarce" and a lot of composition teachers consider that teachers' written feedback is more impactful than e-feedback (Ene and Upton, 2014). Generally speaking, feedback is effective and helpful providing that students make use of it in their revision and hence improve in future work.

A study of electronic feedback has been carried out by Tuzi (2004) found that e-feedback was helpful for L2 writers to focus on certain linguistic areas on writing after revising it resulting in considerable improvement in writing. Another research conducted by Hyland and Hyland (2006) in which they suggested an integration of software into the writing process and providing students access to corpus information while writing. This study has revealed that these corpora are of great help for learners as they give

them further learning opportunities allowing them to know how to self-edit their errors.

Milton (as cited in Ellis, 2009) has developed software programs of e-feedback known as *Mark my Words*. It offers teachers with electronic data of approximately 100 recurrent lexico-grammatical and style errors that he found frequently committed in the writing of Chinese students. Moreover, the store gives a brief comment on each error along with links to online resources so as to show correct forms. The program enables teachers to use the electronic store to insert brief meta-linguistic commentaries into the student's writing. After that, the text is handed back to the student who then consults the electronic resources which help him to develop self-correcting capacity.

E-feedback has many advantages in developing writing as many studies have indicated its significance. One of these advantages is that it allows students to take a more active role in the writing process and to have a more interactive learning environment. However, some educators have expressed their concern about e-feedback which could replace the traditional forms of feedback that they are familiar with arguing that the change of writing form the paper to electronic means is not preferable.

More recently in 2019, a British teacher has developed highly sophisticated software called *Mark Mate* that can be downloaded from this website (<https://www.markmate.co.uk/>). This marking software is designed for teachers allowing them to assess their learners' writings along with the provision of E-feedback.

4. Research method

4.1. Participants

The participants of this research are teachers from English language department in Hamma Lakhdar university of El-Oued who are currently teaching third-year students of English.

Teachers who have participated in the study are permanent in the department, six of them have been interviewed to answer questions related to writing problems.

4.2. Data collection procedure

4.2.1. Semi-structured interviews

Semi-structured interviews are conducted with a number of teachers from the University of El-Oued. As described by Wallace (1998), most of the semi-structured interviews' questions will be open and the agenda will include comments, examples and/or follow up questions in order to encourage the interviewee to give fuller and more detailed responses. Other aspects to be considered include time factor, friendly and relaxed atmosphere, and suitable recording tools. Participants were notified about

the nature of the questions to be asked prior to the interview. Wallace (1998) assumes that this helps participants give fuller, more informative answers. Other procedures were obtaining participants' consent especially with regard to recording the interview.

Unlike quantitative data (as in the questionnaire), qualitative research data is non-numerical and will be dealt with in linguistic units in oral or written form. The comments of Cohen et al (2000) of how to design interviews were taken into account. The interviews were conducted in the target language and recorded in the form of MP3 and burned in a CD ROM. Then, their scripts were written and analysed quantitatively.

4.2.2. Description of the interview

The teachers' interview consists of twelve questions that aim to identify the writing problems of the students and the written feedback that teachers provide in order to overcome those difficulties. It begins by asking teachers about their writing teaching experience (Q1). Then, teachers are asked if they consider that writing is a challenging skill for students to master (Q2) and what kind of problems that students have with writing (Q3). Next, we question the reason(s) behind students' poor writing (Q4). After that, we wanted to know which approach that teachers use in their teaching (Q5) and whether or not the product approach in writing is failing our teaching objectives (Q6). Moreover, interviewees are asked about the kind of written corrective feedback that they provide while correcting students' assignments (Q7) and how and when do teachers provide that feedback (Q8). Then, teachers are asked if they have prior knowledge relevant to differences between students' mother tongue and English (Q9), what type (s) of written feedback do teachers provide? (Q10). Finally, question ten (Q11) aims at knowing, from the teachers' point of view, suggested solutions to minimise students' writing problems. The last question (Q12) is an open one that gives teachers the chance to add, if possible, anything relevant to the already discussed issues in the interview.

5. Results and Discussion

The following section is devoted to the analysis of the teachers' interviews and discussing their findings. Those outcomes will serve to bring answers to the research questions and thus confirm or disconfirm the advanced hypotheses. This implies that only the responses that are related to the objectives of the study are taken into consideration in the analysis.

The first question of this study was about the identification of the main challenges that teachers of writing face. The six interviewed teachers have reported that the main challenges are related to students' low level and their linguistic deficiency and a lack of vocabulary. Furthermore, all the interviewees have asserted that over-crowded classes and the insufficient

time devoted to the teaching of written expression module are the main difficulties they struggle to cope with in order to attain their teaching objectives. In that regard, teachers have said that they teach only one hour and a half per week for a module that needs practice and continuous assessment and guidance. These responses confirm the first hypothesis which states that time limits and large classes are the main problems teachers of writing face.

In an attempt to overcome these challenges (addressing the second question of the study), the six interviewed teachers agreed that teaching time allotted to writing has to be extended and the number of the students per groups has to be minimised. In fact, these solutions are not available in the context of the study as the department does not have a sufficient number of teachers and even the part-time ones are not that competent especially in teaching a module like writing.

To conclude, it is safe to say that the responses of the teachers have enriched the research's findings as they addressed the main issues tackled in the research questions and hypotheses such as teaching writing problems and their reasons, and providing solutions to handle the situation.

6. Pedagogical Implications

The analysis of the findings has clearly shown that teachers of English are facing serious problems in teaching writing. Among these challenges are the time of instruction and large classes which make it hard for teachers to intervene in assisting students in writing. This section proposes an alternative solution to these problems through the integration of the internet and technology in the language classroom so as to make teaching more effective and learning more beneficial and enjoyable. In that regard, a Learning Management System (LMS) is suggested which is known as Google Classroom; a virtual class in which the pedagogic couple (teachers and learners) can interact easily.

It is necessary to explain how Google Classroom works in teaching writing along with its benefits and how it could be effectively used by teachers in delivering electronic feedback to writing. According to the website of Google Classroom, this LMS is a new application developed for educational purposes was launched in August 2014 so as to help teachers save time to maintain the organization of the classes and improve and facilitate communication with students through a simple connection to a Gmail account and Google Drive. This system is a free online learning platform that offers a space for teachers and learners to conduct and manage to learn. Students need to have a Gmail account and then they can sign in. Teachers are supposed to post assignments in a due time. Later these writing can be evaluated and electronic feedback can be provided as well.

Lynch (2018) has provided ten reasons why teachers should use Google Classroom in their classes. These reasons can be summed up in the following points:

- ✓ Easy to install, students can be added directly by teachers or share a code with them to join the virtual classroom hub.
- ✓ It enables teachers to create paperless assignments, review them and provide e-feedback on the stream, all in just one place and with just a click. Teachers can easily check the progress of assignments.
- ✓ It ameliorates the organization of the learning process in that all study materials are automatically filed into folders in Google Drive. Students have access to their assignments on an assignments page.
- ✓ It enhances communication through instant class discussions. Students can share resources with their peers and provide answers to questions on the stream and receive e-feedback from their teachers.
- ✓ Affordable and secure as it contains no ads and does not use students' data for advertising purposes.

From the above-mentioned benefits, it can be said that teachers of writing have to be encouraged and invited to use Google Classroom in their writing classes in order to overcome the challenges of teaching writing that they have addressed in the interview.

7. Conclusion

The present paper discussed the issue of teaching writing problems in the Algerian university context that have been expressed by the participants of this investigation and it has focused mainly on two aspects; time insufficiency and large classes. These problems hamper teachers to provide necessary written feedback that would help students improve their writings. Therefore, the research suggests an appropriate solution to these issues which obviously falls in the Interest of the current students and their familiarity with the internet and technology on a daily basis. It worth mentioning that Google Classroom cannot solve all the writing problems, but it can only be used as a facilitator the teaching task since writing improvement necessitates further teaching practices.

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Appendices

Appendix I

Guided Interview Questions with Teachers

- ❖ An explanation of the research questions and objectives is necessary before conducting the interview so that the interviewees can have a clearer picture of the topic under study.
- ❖ The interviews are carried out after the writing experimental and study and as complementary to the questionnaires' findings.
- ❖ Interviewees are given the questions of the interview in advance in order to offer them the opportunity and time for thinking and reflection.

Q1: What can you say about your writing teaching experience?

Q2: Do you think that writing is still a challenging skill for the students to master?

Q3: What kind of problems do you encounter in teaching writing module?

Q4: What is the reason (s) behind the students' poor writing?

Q5: Which approach do you follow in teaching writing?

Q6: Do you think that adopting the product approach in writing is failing our teaching objectives?

Q7: While correcting the students' writing, what kind (s) of written corrective feedback do you usually provide?

Q8: How and when you provide that written corrective feedback?

Q9: Do you have certain prior knowledge to differences between the students' mother tongue and English?

Q10: What types of feedback do you provide?

Q11: What solutions could suggest in order to overcome the writing problems for the students?

Q12: Do you have anything you would like to add in relevance to the already discussed issues in this interview?