

How do language learners interact with each other in collaborative writing when they use online resources as a support?

What this research was about and why it is important

This study investigated language learners' problem-solving processes and interaction patterns in collaborative writing when they use online resources as a support. In order to understand the impact of the access to online resources, learners' interaction patterns in two different collaborative writing settings were analyzed and compared – *without* and *with* the use of online resources.

Having the knowledge helps instructors to integrate students' digital literacies (the ability to navigate online resources) and the use of online resources into the teaching of writing more efficiently. Collaborative writing is a common practice in a language-learning classroom. When learners need help in the writing process, some learners turn to online resources for assistance apart from consulting instructors. However, how online resources help learners in collaborative writing process and support their interactions has not been sufficiently investigated in the area of computer-supported collaborative learning.

The interaction patterns of 56 second language learning undergraduate students were examined. It was found that for most learners, online resources greatly supported their problem-solving in the writing process and facilitated their interactions. However, for non-collaborative learners, online resources had a limited role in helping foster active interactions.

What the researcher did

- The author recruited 56 undergraduate students enrolled in a freshmen English course and tasked them to write an essay in pairs in two settings: *without* the use of online resources and *with* the use of online resources.
- The author video recorded students' interaction patterns during collaborative writing in the two settings.
- The author then analyzed and compared students' interaction patterns across the two settings.
- The author also interviewed each pair of students to understand how they perceived the writing process across the two settings.

What the researcher found

- Most students became more collaborative when using online resources. They were more actively engaged in discussions and meaning negotiations to solve problems than when they did not use online resources.
- Particularly, some of the less proficient students became more actively engaged in discussions.
- For the few non-collaborative students, the access to online resources did not seem to help foster active interactions. Some even became even more non-collaborative.
- In the interview, most students reported that online resources greatly facilitated their thinking process, helped them solve problems in collaborative writing, and maintained their active interactions.
- Non-collaborative students reported that using online resources facilitated their writing process only individually. It did not help to engage them in interactive discussion.

Things to consider

- For most collaborating learners, the diverse language-related resources online potentially help their thinking process, brainstorming, and in turn support their interactions.
- Less proficient language-learning students may benefit from online resources in collaborative activities as they can find information online to help them contribute to discussions.
- The extent to which online resources help students' problem-solving processes may sometimes depend on how well they collaborate with each other. The study showed that the more collaborative students are, the more online resources can help them in their problem-solving processes and maintained their interactions, and vice versa.