

Emotional state, social relationships, and attention to language during collaborative writing

What this research was about and why it is important

Collaborative writing is a common classroom activity when learning and teaching a second language. It involves two or more students writing a single text together. When students write together, they can focus on a range of language issues, such as vocabulary, grammar, and syntax. This process helps improve students' knowledge of the target language. However, discussing language problems is complex, and little is known about the variables and their interactions with regard to language use. This study selected three pairs of Russian language learners at a university in China. It examined the moments of their discussions about language use during a collaborative writing activity. The study found that the learners' attention to language use was closely related to their emotional state and the social relationships formed during collaborative writing. The findings will help teachers to improve learning outcomes by fully engaging students in instructional activities.

What the researcher did

- The six participants were students majoring in Russian language at a university in China. During a Russian class, they worked in three groups of two to jointly write a short text about keeping healthy.
- The collaborative writing processes of each pair was audio-recorded using their smartphones.
- After completing the writing activity, the participants completed a five-point Likert scale questionnaire (1 = Strongly disagree, 5 = Strongly agree). The questionnaire had 12 items about how the students perceived their collaborative writing activity.

What the researcher found

- The number of language problems to which the pairs paid attention during collaborative writing varied. However, all pairs correctly resolved more than half of the problems encountered.
- The social relationships, emotions and perceptions differed among the pairs when they wrote together.
- When pairs were supportive and viewed the activity as enjoyable and useful, they noticed elaborated on many language issues.
- When pairs expressed reluctance to communicate and perceived disadvantages in collaborative writing, they were less likely to have productive discussions about language issues.

Things to consider

- This study shows that positive social relationships (e.g., supportive) help students to focus on language use during collaborative writing. Therefore, second language teachers should outline some ground rules to help their students create a friendly and harmonious relationship. These rules may include seeking agreement before making decisions, asking each other for opinions, elaborating on their views, and respecting or appreciating each other's ideas.
- A negative emotional state (e.g., anger or perceived disadvantages) was particularly harmful for collaborative writing. Teachers might adjust tasks to appropriately intervene in the process, particularly when students experience emotional struggles.
- This study showed that emotional state, social relationships, and attention to language are interrelated during collaborative writing. More research is needed to establish a cause-and-effect relationship among these three dimensions of task engagement.

Material, data, open access article: N/A

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