

Chapter 52

Assessing the Effectiveness of Interactive and Collaborative Resources to Improve Reading and Writing in English

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ABSTRACT

This paper presents a mixed research developed at the Pontifical University of Salamanca with students of intermediate level of English. It examines the effectiveness of the application of interactive and collaborative resources to improve reading and writing in English. Based on the overall evaluation of the blended course, most students believe that online glossary, online questionnaire, wiki and forum are good tools to improve their written skills. They are strongly aware of the necessity of improving these skills, and consider that the activities designed through these technological tools have allowed them to foster effective written communication in a variety of situations. Students also emphasize the potential of collaborative tools to communicate and develop collaborative learning. However, some students consider that there is a lack of privacy and fluency in communication, and believe that interactions are impersonal and disorganized, so they have had problems to do the activities and communicate suitably.

INTRODUCTION

The aim of this study is to analyse the effectiveness of interactive (online glossary and online questionnaire) and collaborative (forum and wiki) resources to improve reading and writing in English. Before introducing the model and the activities designed with these tools, we will review studies in which Moodle and its tools have been used to create a teaching-learning environment in English. As García-Peñalvo,

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Colomo-Palacios & Lytras (2012), and García-Peñalvo & Colomo Palacios (2015) point out all these Social Web tools are changing the way in which users take part in the communicative and learning process. They state that Web 2.0 philosophy facilitates the access to knowledge, the communication between individuals and the possibility of being a content author. Students learn, practice, and communicate with all the protagonists of the teaching-learning process (Pinto-Illoriente, Sánchez-Gómez & García-Peñalvo, 2015). This enhances a collective construction of knowledge in which students have an active role, against individualism of traditional methods (Pinto-Illoriente, Sánchez-Gómez & García-Peñalvo, 2014).

LITERATURE REVIEW

The experience developed by Savignon & Roithmeier (2004) is focused on using forum as a tool to promote cultural exchange and to learn a second language (L2). This exchange takes place between students who were learning German in the USA, and students learning English in Germany. Students of both countries participate in different discussion topics during several weeks through forums. This study points out that there are evidences of collaborative dialogue, and cooperative construction of texts, as well as the use of asynchronous communication strategies to promote the exchange of knowledge and create a community of learning.

The study of Fitze (2006) also expresses the positive aspects of using forum to teach a foreign language. In this occasion it combines traditional and online instruction through an e-learning platform. The study concludes that there is a broader range in the vocabulary used, as well as a greater interaction and participation of students in written expression.

The study of Farabaugh (2007) is conducted at Cornell University in different literature courses. The Farabaugh study uses two versions of the wiki software: QwikiWiki and MediaWiki. The author concludes that this technology is a good tool to carry out reading and writing assignments that encouraged language awareness in the literary domain. The results also emphasize that this asynchronous tool is appropriate to improve writing skills, to extend group work outside the class, to promote collaborative writing, and to help students to create their own knowledge rather than just receiving it from teachers.

The study conducted by Kol & Scholnik (2008) also focused on the use of forum in the teaching-learning process of English. Although the purpose of this research is to establish valid criteria to assess the contributions on the part of students, the research focuses on the use of forum for academic purposes. It emphasizes students' positive perceptions towards the use of this tool to improve written skills.

We also highlight the study of Lund (2008) in Norway about the use of wiki as a collaboration tool in teaching English. The results of the study show that wiki is an appropriate tool to promote collaborative and cooperative abilities in learning foreign languages.

In the research carried out by Franco (2008) the use of wiki is also emphasized. The study is developed in Brazil with students of intermediate level in English. The use of wiki is analysed to promote peer correction in a virtual group environment. The results confirm once again the positive attitudes of students towards the use of this resource in their progress in learning English.

The study of Mak & Coniam (2008) is conducted in Hong Kong with high school students whose level in English was intermediate. According to the results, the use of wiki helps students develop their writing skills, and it promotes collaborative writing between students with minimal input and support from teachers. Students are able to write authentic texts and to work together.

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