Investigating the Role of Classroom Interactional Activities in Developing University Students' Writing Skills at Arab Countries

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ARTICLE INFO	ABSTRACT

This paper aims to investigate the extent to which teachers can play an effective role to develop students' writing skills through classroom interaction at the Arab Countries Universities. The researcher has adopted the qualitative method as well as the test as a tool for collecting data relevant to the study. It is an attempt to highlight the importance of classroom interactional activities in developing students' writing skills. The sample of this study comprises of non-specialized students who study English as requirement at the Arab Countries Universities as a representative sample. The marks obtained from the test were compared. Accordingly, the results have revealed that classroom interactional activities play a great role in developing students' writing skill. The result has also shown that the test significance indicates that there is equivalence among students after being exposed to classroom interactional activities. Therefore, this indicates that students are in need of interaction activities to develop their writing skills.

1- INTRODUCTION

Interaction has long been considered as a very important strategy. It requires, in the process of foreign language learning, the presence of two parts or more which are students and teacher who collaborate in achieving communication. Interaction is a way of learning in general and developing the language skills in particular. This section deals with the notion of interaction as a strategy that takes place in classroom, starting with a brief view about classroom as students' discourse communities and discourse approach to language teaching, since interaction is a key element in the students' discourse community framework. Then, we will explain the main aspects, types and principles of interaction, and finally we briefly explain the role of teachers in the classroom interaction.

2- AIM AND SCOPE OF THE STUDY

This study aims to investigate the importance of classroom interactional activities in developing students' writing skills. The scope of the study is limited to 30 non-specialized students who study English as a requirement at the Arab Countries Universities in the academic year 2018-2019 as a representative sample.

3- LITERATIRE REVIEW

Discourse Community (DC)

According to educator and researcher John Swales, a discourse community (DC) is a group of people involved in and communicating about a particular topic, issue, or in a particular field which is characterized by six defining features: "a discourse community has a broadly agreed set of common public goals"; "it has mechanisms of intercommunication among their members", "it uses its participatory mechanisms primarily to provide information and feedback", "a discourse community utilizes and possesses one or more

genres in the communicative furtherance of its aims", "In addition to owning genres, a discourse community has acquired some specific lexis and " A discourse community has a threshold level of members with a suitable degree of relevant content and discoursal expertise" (Swales 1990). The classroom is a perfect example of a discourse community and especially a language classroom. The goal of language classrooms is for the development of students language skills, students and the teacher have mechanisms to communicate with each other, information and feedback are also key concepts in the language classroom, special genres and lexis are found in the classroom and there are members with a suitable degree of relevance and expertise. (Cazden 2001)

The description of discourse community perfectly matches a language classroom, and that is why we can surly say that an English language classroom is considered to be a discourse community of its own.

Discourse Analysis (DA)

Discourse Analysis (DA) is the study of language in use. In other words, it is the examination of language use by members of a speech community. It involves looking at both language form and language functions and includes the study of both spoken interaction and written texts. It identifies linguistic features that characterize different genres as well as social and cultural factors that aid us in our interpretation and understanding of different texts and types of talk (Nunan 1991).

Discourse analysis is concerned with the study of the relationship between language and the contexts in which it is used. It grew out of work in different disciplines in the 1960s and early 1970s. Discourse analysts study language in use in both written texts and spoken data. McCarthy (1991) stated that:

A discourse approach highlights the role of the context in other words language is use, so teachers must seek to involve more authentic materials as they are the easiest way to bring context into class. Skill integration is also a key notion within the DA, It is very beneficial to connect skills together (e.g. Speaking/listening or reading/writing).

Discourse analysis came as a reaction to other approaches to language teaching, it did not eliminate them it rather elected all their advantages and tried to complete them.

Interaction as a Type of Language Teaching Discourse Approach

Several approaches to classroom discourse are used to measure, analyze and describe the behavior of contributors in classrooms each of which has its own view. One such approach is Discourse Analysis (DA) (Young 2003).

Many researchers have investigated about classroom discourse that involves interaction; they showed the importance of interactions in building knowledge and improving skills. For Allwright (1984) it is important to keep students active in the classroom, which means reducing the amount of teachers talk in classroom and increasing the students' participation time. Naturally, they will talk to each other through pairs or groups wher51e each learner gets his time to interact. Teachers usually seek to move on from getting students talking to each other to the more complex problems of getting them communicating, and that is the result of what is called the discourse approach. DA relies mainly on the value of interaction; person to person encounters.

Teachers and students then should distinguish between interaction and communication; they should not consider them as synonyms, In spite of the fact that many of them consider that communication refers only to people interacting with each other. (Brown 2007)

Classroom Interactional Competence (CIC)

Classroom Interactional Competence (CIC) is simply defined as, teachers' and students' ability to use interaction as a tool for mediating and assisting learning.' (Walsh 2011) It places interaction firmly at the centre of teaching-learning processes and argues that by improving their CIC, both teachers and students will directly develop learning and opportunities for learning.

The notion of interactional competence was first coined by Kramsch "I propose (…) a push for interactional competence to give our students a truly emancipating, rather than compensating foreign language education."Kramsch (1986) Kramsch argues that a focus on interactional competence allows us to concentrate more on the ability of students to communicate intended meaning and to establish mutual understanding rather than native like performances. In the other hand, Young offers this definition of interactional competence: Interactional competence is a relationship between participants' employment of linguistic and interactional resources and the

contexts in which they are employed… (Young 2008)

There are many ways in which CIC manifests itself. Firstly, and from a teacher's perspective, a teacher who demonstrates CIC uses language which is both convergent to the pedagogic goal of the moment and which is appropriate to the students. This position assumes that pedagogic goals and the language used to achieve them are inextricably intertwined and constantly being re-adjusted (Walsh 2006). A second feature of CIC is that it facilitates interactional space: students need space for learning to participate in the discourse, to contribute to class conversations and to receive feedback on their contributions. Classroom interactional activities is very context-specific as it is shown in a number of contexts.

By context', I mean the physical and temporal setting of the interaction in addition to the specific micro-context, or mode, of the moment. For teachers, it is extremely important to develop a close understanding of CIC in order to improve their practice and the learning opportunities for their students.

Classroom Interactional Activities (CIA)

Classroom interactional activities (CI), simply, is a kind of action that occurs as two or more objects have an effect upon one another. In the classroom context, interaction describes the form and content of behavior or social interaction in the classroom (Gordon 1998).

The communicative process involves interaction between at least two people who share a list of signs and semiotic rules. The concept of interaction is defined as ―reciprocal events that require at least two objects and two actions. Interaction occurs when these objects and events naturally influence one another (Wagner, 1994:8).

Therefore, interactions do not occur only from one side, there must be joint influence through giving and receiving messages in order to achieve communication.

The concept of interaction has a significant importance in the classroom too; it is a necessary element in the process of learning and teaching. Allwright and Baily (1991) state that interaction is something people can do together i.e. collectively. Obviously, in the classroom it is considered as important for the teacher to manage who should talk, to whom, on what topic, in what language so on. However, none of this can change the fact that

classroom interactional activities focuses on the students' cooperation. (Cohen 2004)

In order to understand the relationship between classroom interactional activities and EFL, there are two main assumptions. First, the classroom provides an environment that leads to EFL, The second is that what happens in classrooms involve communication, and this can be seen as some form of interaction, i.e. there are reception and production based theories of classroom interaction and EFL. Reception-based theories agree that interaction contributes to EFL through students' reception and understanding of the foreign language; however, production-based theories contend that interaction helps students to produce the SL (Ellis, 1990 cited in Johnson 1995).

Reception-based theory, according to Johnson (1995), is related to the input hypothesis, which holds that the input should be comprehensible to students for a better acquisition since the latter happens when students understand input that contains well-formed structures and which can meet their current level. Productive-based theory relates to the output hypothesis that holds that students should get opportunities to produce the language if they want to achieve an advance language level (Thurmond 2004).

Classroom Interactional Activities Aspects (CIA)

Classroom interactional activities Aspects(CIA) involves two main aspects, which are negotiation of meaning and feedback, if these two elements are not available in the classroom, and then we cannot speak of a successful learning through interaction. Ellis and Foto (1999:09) say, ―Interaction contributes to learning through the provision of negative evidence and through opportunities for modified output.‖ Interaction then is rich of meaning negotiation where the students can receive feedback from their interlocutors.

Negotiation of Meaning

Studies on interaction between students focus on the interactive discourse between students engaged in foreign language learning tasks where negotiation of meaning is the focal point. Ellis and Barkhuizen (2005) define negotiation of meaning as the verbal exchanges that occur when the speakers seek to prevent the breakdown of the communication. They add that negotiation of meaning is the central discourse structure.

The students in the classroom then should make the linguistic output more comprehensible for the other students in the class, so that they can engage

with them in the interaction. However, if there is a lack of comprehension different processes can be focused on to repair the interaction. Mackey Alison (2007: 12-3) asserts that Through processes of repetition, segmentation and rewording, interaction can serve to draw students' attention to form-meaning relationship and provide them with additional time to focus on encoding meaning.

Repetition involves repeating the students' exact speech as it is when the others do not understand. Segmentation is another process for repairing a negotiation; the students repeat the utterance by dividing it into linguistic segments with a rising or falling intonation, Rewording means rephrasing the original utterance, (i.e. using other simple words). Therefore, instead of all these terms, clarification can be considered as an umbrella term to cover these processes; the students in interactions often ask the one who articulates to well explain if they do not understand, and the latter attempts to modify his output to meet the level of understanding of the whole class (McCarthy 2003).

According to Edwards (1987), the opportunities of meaning negotiation help the language students in three main ways. First, as suggested by Long and others, it helps students to get comprehensible input that is to say it facilitates comprehension. One way in which this takes place is when the negotiation breaks down and students seek to segment the input into units so that they can understand them. Second, negotiation of meaning provides students with feedback on how to use the second language. For example, teachers very often correct students' mistakes when they negotiate so that they use the FL accurately. Finally, negotiation of meaning encourages students to adjust, manipulate and modify their personal output, because a successful negotiation takes place when students produce outputs that are comprehensible and therefore target-like (Pica 1992-1994 cited in Ellis 2003).

To sum up, in negotiation of meaning the students will focus on the form as well, because negotiation involves feedback and modification to input and output when the students attempt to send again their misunderstanding, which is sometimes due to problems with language use.

The Role of Feedback

Researchers have suggested that oral feedback is one of the key beneficial aspects of interaction which can promote learning in general. According to Mackey (2007: 30) through interaction that involves feedback, the attention of the students are paid to the form of errors and are pushed to create modification.‖ In order for interaction to develop the writing skill, students must notice the errors and recognize them for correction.

Thus, for some researchers attention is very crucial for learning. Feedback may occur from students, i.e. students are able to correct and call each other's attention to the errors. In doing so, they very rarely replace their interlocutors' correct form with incorrect form. However, feedback from teachers can be different from the students' one, because teachers employ many types of correction strategies (Larsen-Freeman 2010).

Mackey (2007) suggests two forms of feedback, an explicit and implicit feedback.

Explicit feedback is defined as any feedback that states overtly that students do not use the second language correctly in their speech; it is called also metalinguistic feedback because teachers provide the students with the linguistic form of their errors. Whereas implicit feedback refers to the corrective feedback that includes requests for clarification or recasts, in other words, teachers rephrase the students' utterance by changing one or more sentence component, Recently, many studies have shown that the explicit feedback is more effective than the implicit feedback, this means that in explicit feedback, the teacher draws the students' attention directly to the errors so that the students do not use them again. However, in implicit feedback, the teacher asks students to reformulate their output to be understood and this is an indirect corrective feedback since the teacher does not point the errors directly. In brief, the feedback role of interaction is of central Importance to Students (Celce-Murcia 2001).

3- METHODOLOGY

Introduction

This part is concerned with the methodology of the study. A detailed description of the subjects and setting has been provided, the design of the instrument, procedure of data collection and the method of the data analysis, validity and reliability of the questionnaire and the test were presented.

Subjects: The Students

The subject of this study were (30) of non-specialized students who study English as a requirement at the Arab Countries Universities in the academic year 2018-2019 as a representative sample. These students were randomly selected as a represented sample.

They have already had background about writing descriptive composition in English language. Those students their ages range between (17 to 19). They have the same educational background. Arabic language is the mothers' tongue of most of those students. Those students included males only.

Instrument of Data Collection: Writing Skill Test

The material of this research is originally written as answers to writing skill test designed by the researcher to test subject's ability to express their ideas in two different sessions, the students were provided with a descriptive writing skill topic and were given one hour to finish the descriptive topic.

Procedures

30 of non-specialized students who study English as requirement at the Arab Countries Universities as a representative sample (2018-2019) - were asked to describe each other during the class-; the students were given one hour to finish the task. The topic was a descriptive composition about "My City Abha"; those students were provided by guided vocabulary related to the topic. After that the papers were collected, numbered and marked by the researcher and three different teachers.

Validity and Reliability

Validity of the Test

The test guided questions were subjected to an expert's judgment who related their relevance.

Reliability of the Test

To estimate reliability, the researcher designed the test which matches students' level. The students were asked to write a guided descriptive composition. They were not allowed to ask each other.

Piloting Study: Introduction

Nunan (1992, p. 145) points out that all research instruments should have piloting phase. Bell (1993, p. 48) also believes that, "all data gathering instrument should be piloted to test how long it takes recipient to complete them to check that all questions and instructions are clear and enable you remove any items which do not yield usable data".

The writing skill test items were piloted priors to the main study. Non-specialized students who study English as requirement at the Arab Countries Universities (2018-2019) participated in the piloting study.

The piloting study was conducted for the following aims:

1. Give the researcher a clear idea about the time needed for the test.

2. Determine whether the texts questions and instructions were clearly written.

3. Identify any problems.

4. Identify any adjustment that may be needed.

After conducting the piloting study, the researcher notes that some students did not understand all the instructions; therefore, the researcher further explained these instructions.

The following part presents the analysis of the piloting study which is the student's writing skill test. "KashAvarz's (1994) model was used to analyze student's writing skill products.

4- RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The researcher has used a test as a tool in the collection of data relevant to this study. The researcher has designed the test to develop, non-specialized students who study English as requirement at the Arab Countries Universities (2018-2019) as a representative sample, writing skills through being interacted in the classroom to develop their writing skills.

The tables below are going to illustrates what has been stated earlier.

Analysis of Students' Test

Type of Errors	Syntactic Constructions		Vocabulary Selection		Punctuation Selection		Space and Order of Importance		Topic Coherence	
30	Negative	Positive	Negative	Positive	Negative	Positive	Negative	Positive	Negative	Positive
Frequencies	13	17	12	18	14	16	13	17	7	23
Percentages	43.3%	56.7%	40%	60%	46.7%	53.3%	43.3%	56.7%	23.3%	76.7%

A. Syntactic Constructions
The table above illustrates s the percentage and frequency of the answers of the study sample that concern with the Syntactic Constructions and shows that most of the sample answers were positive which

are represented by the percentage (56.7%). This justifies that students have shown that they are in need to be trained and developed by using classroom interactional activities in how they can construct sentences in their correct forms.

B. Vocabulary Selection
The table above illustrates s the percentage and frequency of the answers of the study sample that concern with the vocabulary selection and shows that most of the sample answers were positive which are represented by the percentage (60%). This justifies that students need to be trained and developed through classroom interactional activities according to the result above in how they can choose the correct contextual meaning of words.

C. Punctuation Selection
The table above illustrates the percentage and frequency of the answers of the study sample that concern with the Punctuation Selection and shows that most of the sample answers were positive which are represented by the percentage (53.3%). This justifies that students need to be trained and developed in how they can select the right Punctuation if they have given interactional activities.

D. Order of Importance
The table above illustrates the percentage and frequency of the answers of the study sample that concern with the Space and Order of Importance and shows that most of the sample answers were positive which are represented by the percentage (56.7%). This justifies that students are in need to be trained and developed in how they can make develop their topic according to the Order of Importance if they are exposed to interactional activities.

E. Topic Coherence
The table above illustrates the percentage and frequency of the answers of the study sample that concern with the Topic Coherence and shows that most of the sample answers were positive which are represented by the percentage (76.7%). This justifies that students are in no need to be trained and developed in how they can develop their topic without deviating from their Topic Coherence according to the result above if they exposed to interactional activities.

Executive Summary
After comparing and analyzing the results with the main hypothesis. The test significance indicates that there is equivalence among students' English language writing skills. Therefore, this indicates that non-specialized students, who study English as requirement at the Arab Countries Universities as a representative sample (2018-2019) , are in need of interactional activities to develop their writing skills.

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