

The impact of EFL teachers' mediation in wiki-mediated collaborative writing activities on student-student collaboration

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Abstract. This paper focuses on how teachers mediate wiki collaborative writing activities, and the impact of their mediations on students' collaboration. It is based on a study conducted with three English as a Foreign Language (EFL) teachers and their students (aged 17-18 years) at two government-funded girls' high schools in Kuwait. The selected groups of students, supported by their class teachers, carried out wiki collaborative writing activities over a period of eight weeks. The writing activities were tracked from conception to completion, by closely analysing the wiki discussion and edits, in order to explore the process of interaction. This was triangulated with interview data with teachers and students to gain deeper insights. The results show that, despite the fact that all groups of learners and teachers received a similar type of training and worked on the same activity, there were some variations in the level of their collaboration. Teachers played an essential role in shaping the way that learners collaborated; i.e. some teachers' behaviours promoted collaboration, while others hindered it. Although it can be acknowledged that the wiki is a powerful tool for student-centred collaborative writing, it can also be argued that the role of the teacher is indispensable, and the right kind of teacher intervention is critical to the success of collaborative writing, especially in educational contexts that are similar to Kuwaiti schools. Therefore, professional training is required in order to raise teachers' awareness of effective pedagogy in supporting wiki-mediated collaborative writing activities.

Keywords: wiki, collaborative writing, teacher mediation, student collaboration.

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How to cite this article: Alghasab, M. (2016). The impact of EFL teachers' mediation in wiki-mediated collaborative writing activities on student-student collaboration. In S. Papadima-Sophocleous, L. Bradley & S. Thouësny (Eds), *CALL communities and culture – short papers from EUROCALL 2016* (pp. 1-6). Research-publishing.net. <https://doi.org/10.14705/rpnet.2016.eurocall2016.529>

1. Introduction

The use of wiki has captured the attention of researchers because of their potential for promoting collaborative writing, which is the process whereby two or more writers compose a text (Storch, 2005). Wikis have been proposed as tools to promote collaborative interaction, i.e. interaction that is rich in reciprocal feedback, consideration of another's proposal, using a first person plural pronoun (we) throughout the activity (Li, 2013) and co-constructing the wiki text together by adding, expanding and correcting each other's text (Bradley, Lindstrom, & Rystedt, 2010). To date, studies conducted on student-student (S-S) interaction have reported mixed findings: some document a high level of collaboration (Li, 2013) whereas others observe instances of writing individually in a cooperative manner (Bradley et al., 2010), a reluctance to edit each other's texts (Lund, 2008), and unequal participation (Li & Zhu, 2011). Therefore, computer-assisted language learning researchers have called for more teacher intervention in the wiki context (e.g. Lund & Smørdal, 2006). However, previous wiki studies have not investigated this topic in depth. Given the prominent role that teachers play in promoting collaboration, as reported in other Face-To-Face (FTF) studies (e.g. Yoon & Kim, 2012), this study aims to qualitatively analyse the nature of teachers' interventions and how this influences the students' collaboration in the wiki context. The following research questions are proposed:

- How do EFL teachers mediate students' interaction in wiki-based collaborative writing activities?
- What is the impact of their mediations on the level of students' collaboration?

2. Method

2.1. Approach, context and participants

A qualitative multiple case study design was adopted. One embedded case, a group of four learners working together, was selected for in-depth exploration from each teacher's class. Based on students' self-reported data of the behaviours in FTF collaborative activities, representative groups – in which there was a mix of students reporting both collaborative and non-collaborative orientations – were selected for in-depth exploration. The cases refer to the interactions of three small groups of learners with their teachers, with each interaction as a bounded system.

The study was conducted in two government-funded girls' high schools in Kuwait, where English is taught as an obligatory subject five times a week. Using a convenient sampling method, three twelfth grade EFL teachers and their classes were recruited to participate in this study. All participants were non-native English speakers, their first language being Arabic. The students were all female, Kuwaiti learners of EFL, and their ages ranged from 17 to 18 years old. In the three groups, learners were asked to design a poster about Kuwait. Three PBwiki platforms were created for the purpose of the study. Each group was assigned a sub-topic, however, within each group there was no division of labour. The study was conducted in the second academic term, in February 2014, and lasted for 13 weeks. Table 1 presents the data collection timeline.

Table 1. Data collection timeline

Weeks 1 & 2	Week 3	Weeks 4 - 11	Week 12	Week 13
Orientation/ background questionnaire and interviews. Teachers' wiki training.	Students' training.	Out of class wiki activity (designing a poster). Week 7 & 11 teachers' stimulated recall interview.	Teachers' post activity interview.	Students' post activity interview (individual interview).

2.2. Data collection methods and analysis

Data was collected through a systematic observation of the wiki discussion and the page history, teachers' stimulated recall interviews, and semi-structured interviews with teachers and students. To characterise teachers' interventional behaviour and students' levels of collaboration, a framework was developed combining a priori (i.e. pre-established; used in previous research) and a posteriori (i.e. emerging from the data) categories. Teachers' interventional behaviours were classified into three levels: organisational, socio-cognitive, and socio-affective (Mangenot & Nissen, 2006). The three levels of interaction were also used to refer broadly to how students interacted. Within each level, in the manner of Li (2013) and Arnold, Ducate, Lomicka, and Lord (2009), contributions to the discussion were further classified according to their functions (e.g. organising the work, seeking peer feedback, expressing emotions). Previous framework categories were considered in order to analyse editing behaviours (e.g. Mak & Coniam, 2008), including adding new ideas, expanding ideas, reorganising ideas, correcting, deleting, and synthesis of information. The unit of analysis was defined as either a post to the discussion forum or an edit action. Interview data was also coded thematically according to

their focus (organisational, socio-cognitive, and socio-affective levels). In order to enhance the reliability, the framework and its categories were explained to another researcher, and then the process of coding 15% randomly selected extracts was done independently by both researchers. Instances of agreement and disagreement were counted, and following [Miles and Huberman's \(1994\)](#) inter-coder reliability formula, the inter-rater agreement reached 86.9%. The discrepancies were resolved by discussion.

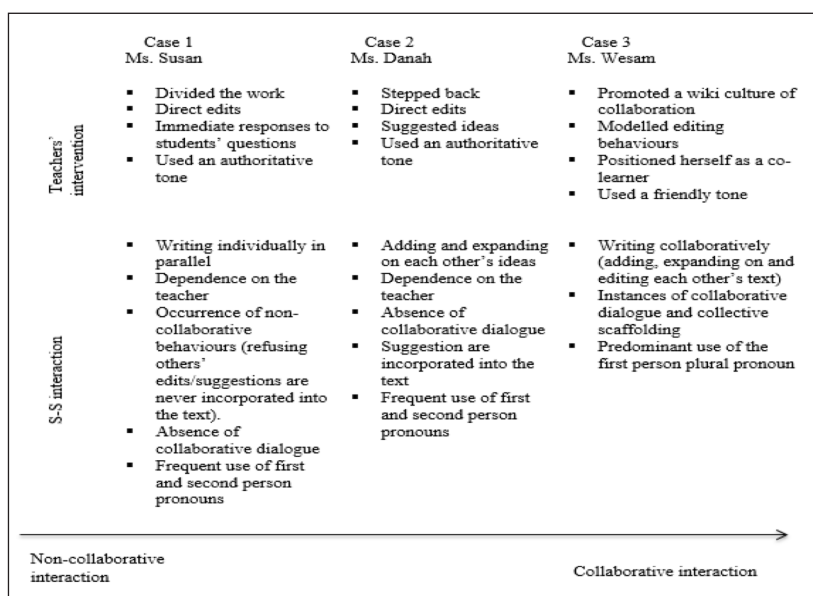
3. Findings and discussion

Analysis of the teachers' and students' interactions in the wiki suggests that, despite the fact that all teachers and students received similar types of training and worked on a similar type of activity, there were variations in the level of collaboration across the three cases (see Figure 1), which upholds the findings of previous studies (e.g. [Arnold et al., 2009](#); [Li & Zhu, 2011](#)). The results also show that the way in which teachers intervened in the activity had an impact on the level of collaboration among students at organisational, socio-cognitive, and socio-affective levels. For example, Case 1 teacher employed a very structured approach: she divided the work among the students, gave direct task instructions, used an authoritative tone, immediately answered students' language-related questions, and edited their wiki text. In direct contrast, Case 2 teacher only intervened in order to encourage students to participate, by suggesting ideas for the text, although she edited the students' text. She appeared to assume that the students would autonomously engage in collaborative dialogue and the co-construction of the wiki text. On the other hand, Case 3 teacher intervened in order to encourage collaboration, by establishing a wiki culture of collaboration and positioning herself as a co-learner, in an effort to promote collaborative dialogue; she asked questions about students' language use, modelled editing behaviours, and explicitly encouraged students towards such behaviour.

An examination of student-student interaction indicates that the teachers' interventional behaviours influenced how students interacted. [Figure 1](#) shows the less collaborative group (Case 1), where the teacher structured the activity, students wrote individually, as instructed, ignored others' suggestions, rejected others' edits and depended on the teacher, with instances of seeking feedback occurring most frequently between the teacher and a student, rather than between students. In Case 2, where the teacher stepped back and intervened rarely, students failed to engage in a high level of collaboration, which supports the findings of previous research (e.g. [Lund & Smørdal, 2006](#)). Although the students' writing behaviours

involved adding to and expanding on each other's ideas, they rarely engaged with each other in a collaborative dialogue by seeking and providing feedback on the text. In Case 3, the teacher's mediation of the students' interaction caused them to gradually engage in collaboration. High levels of collaborative behaviours emerged, including writing collaboratively by adding to, expanding on and correcting each other's existing texts, and engaging in a collaborative dialogue by questioning, elaborating on and suggesting alternatives to each other's language use. These collaborative behaviours have also been reported in other studies (Li, 2013), in which learners were novices individually and experts collectively.

Figure 1. Teachers' intervention and learners' interaction



4. Conclusion

Although wiki is a powerful tool for student-centred collaborative writing, the role of the teacher is indispensable, and the appropriate kind of teacher intervention is critical to the success of collaborative writing. This study has showcased how certain teachers' behaviours directly impact how students collaborate. Thus, professional training is required in order to raise teachers' awareness of effective pedagogy in supporting wiki-mediated, student collaborative writing.

5. Acknowledgements

I would like to thank my supervisors, Dr Zöe Handely and Dr Jan Hardman, for their feedback and contributions. I would also like to thank all teachers and students who participated in the study.

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Published by Research-publishing.net, not-for-profit association
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CALL communities and culture – short papers from EUROCALL 2016
Edited by Salomi Papadima-Sophocleous, Linda Bradley, and Sylvie Thouéšny

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Legal deposit, United Kingdom: The British Library.
British Library Cataloguing-in-Publication Data.
A cataloguing record for this book is available from the British Library.

Legal deposit, France: Bibliothèque Nationale de France - Dépôt légal: décembre 2016.