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The role of voice recorders in promoting autonomy and language development in beginner ESOL learners

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Research Questions

The aim of this study is to investigate the impact of technology supported (digital recorders) peer collaboration on language development and to answer the following questions:

- To what extent does the use of a simple device (digital recorder) enhance learners' learning experience
- To what extent does it lead to improved language performance
- To what extent are beginner learners of English (E1/E2) capable of scaffolding each other and is this effective

Methods

This study investigates certain aspects of autonomous behaviour; namely the ability to self reflect on one's performance and to give/receive feedback on one's performance and their effectiveness at two different proficiency levels - E1 and E2 (beginners and post-beginners). Storch (2008) argues that 'Another, deeper level of attention occurs when learners talk about the language they have produced. This metatalk may deepen the learners' knowledge about language use, about the relationship between meaning, form and function.' This kind of attention is thus thought to be at the level of understanding. Swain (1998) argues that by encouraging metatalk among learners, we may be stimulating their language learning processes.

Digital voice recorders were used to allow learners to record their performance on various tasks. They were then asked to listen to their performance reflect on it and give peer feedback where appropriate. Learners were then asked to record themselves performing the same task again. The recordings were subsequently compared qualitatively to see if there was an improvement between recording one and recording two and whether or not learners took on board comments and suggestions made at the reflection/feedback stage.

Research findings

The data are still being analysed but early analysis of the data shows that this method is less effective at the lower level, i.e. E1. E2 learners, however, responded very well to this intervention. Learner attitudes to using voice recorders in this way were also tested which suggest that they found the exercise useful and worthwhile. Teacher reflections have also been included to show the effectiveness of the method from a practitioner's point of view.

References

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