An EFL classroom as a Community of Practice: The marriage between theory and practice

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This qualitative "classroom as a community-of-practices"-based research aims to explore how novice English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners become experienced learners through their meta-cognitive experiences.

The Communities of Practices’ (CoP) model by Lave and Wenger (1991) is the theoretical framework for this study. Its active patterns and participants’ transformations inside of the CoP can be a challenge to visualize (Ribeiro, 2010). We used Feez’s (1998) "the teaching-learning cycle” and ”Australian and ESP genre approach” as a teaching framework. Learners experienced a collaborative and active learning through these lessons.

The first-year university students, who were EFL learners from two different universities (n = 52), were segregated into three classes to participate in the same genre approach of language learning communities for one semester. Learners’ self-reflection written texts on their classroom participations and peer essay analysis were collected between 2014 and 2016. Data analyses included categories analysis and text mining on their self-reflection logs while quantifying learners’ cognitive and meta-cognitive abilities on their essays.

The results showed that, at the beginning of the research period, the learners’ interests tended to be focused on language features in their essays, which displayed top-down meta cognitive ability, while their interests shifted towards their readers and genre structures, which might imply bottom-up meta cognitive ability at the end of the semester.

We discuss the possible roles of transformation in their cognitive and meta-cognitive abilities from novices to experienced learners in the pedagogical CoPs, as well as that of practical active learning in the classroom.

Keywords: Communities of Practice, Text mining, Classroom-based Research.