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Abstract:

This paper aimed to explore Saudi student's attitudes towards SCMC and its influence on language use using six telephone interviews with CMC instructors, supplemented with an analysis of the available literature and research on the topic. Generally speaking, the findings indicated that distance learners faced more challenges in their attempt to interact with fellow distant learners, instructors, and the university than regular students; that student characteristics such as age, educational background, and milieu (environment) influenced students ability to pass SCMC-based English classes, particularly for older students; and that CMC lacked the ability to expose students to typical conversational situations downplaying students ability to hold real conversations. However, on the positive side this technology not only provided an opportunity for individuals to use both oral and written communication in learning English but also improved the learning context by enhancing students' learning and interaction experience. A significant flaw in the research is that the interview questions were presented to the instructors rather than the students themselves which may make it difficult to gain a true perspective of the attitudes of students towards CMC. It would make sense therefore, for future research to explore the attitudes of students themselves using a face-to-face qualitative interviewing technique which is more personable than telephone interviews, enables rapport-building and facilitates a deeper level of understanding. It also allows for the opportunity for new insights that may have previously been unconsidered. Among the factors that demand immediate attention is that SCMC influences language structure. Moreover, there are more specific areas that may require more detailed attention. For example, an exclusive utilisation of SCMC supports the over-utilisation of short sentences, abbreviations, omission of subject nouns, and deletion of subject pronouns. It therefore, should be emphasised that although SCMC provides a unique platform for distant students to interact with their instructors, students' ability to SCMC English courses is easily interrupted by environmental and demographic factors. Consequently, the research recommends additional research to evaluate how best to improve students' interaction in SCMC classes. Moreover, KAU should facilitate a project to find out how to ensure that all distance students attend SCMC classes.

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