

Towards More Teacher Autonomy within a Top-Down Curriculum

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Abstract

This self-study aimed at empowering EFL preservice teachers with collaborative action research to improve their teaching practice. The participants of the study were four Saudi EFL preservice teachers enrolled in the eighth level, at Riyadh Teachers' College in the second semester of the academic year (2005-2006) and doing their teaching practice in three intermediate stage schools. The study attempted to find out about: (1) how collaborative action research affected their professional knowledge, teaching autonomy and textbook adaptations, (2) collaborative action research options that were most workable in the EFL settings in the Saudi context, (3) ways of overcoming the obstacles of using collaborative action research in the Saudi context, (4) ways in which collaborative action research changed participants' beliefs about their EFL teaching career, their roles as classroom researchers and their students. The study lasted for fourteen weeks. The participants used collaborative action research to examine their classrooms, identify their students' needs and find out how far the assigned courses met them and what to do if they did not. As the study sought to achieve multiple goals, multiple research methods were used. Findings of the study indicated that collaborative action research increased the participants' professional knowledge and enabled them to practice more teaching autonomy. Findings also showed a positive change in their beliefs. The study provided the optimal options of collaborative action research in the Saudi context. The study finally presented some recommendations and topics for further research.