

Two Heads Writing Together, Is Collaborative Writing Better?: Exploring Students' Perceptions

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Abstract

Collaborative writing is considered an important skill in 21st-century learning, covering communication, creativity, and critical thinking. It has been proven to enhance students' writing skills. Therefore, this study aimed at investigating students' perceptions of collaborative writing. The perception was investigated through survey research by distributing a printed questionnaire to 31 students in grade ten at State Vocational School 1 of Portibi, North Sumatra. The questionnaire was a closed-ended version consisting of 11 questions, divided into meaningfulness and competence aspects. The questionnaire results were classified based on the Means scales, the Median, the Modes, and the Standard Deviation. The results showed the students' positive views (67.74%) regarding the usefulness of collaborative writing. The usefulness refers to the ease of constructing ideas, executing the writing process, understanding the concept of writing, and enhancing students' confidence. Additionally, students perceived the benefits of collaborative writing through discussion and peer review processes. They considered it as a meaningful process where they learned from their own and peers' mistakes. However, some students perceived it negatively since collaborative writing took more time than individual writing. Finding students' perceptions will be a reference for English teachers to improve the teaching writing through collaborative writing and find the strengths and weaknesses of collaboration. To acquire the usefulness and meaningfulness of collaborative writing, it was suggested that collaborative writing must be well acknowledged and designed based on students' conditions, level, and background.

Keywords: *collaborative writing, students' perceptions, writing skill*

1. INTRODUCTION

In the 21st century, collaboration is considered a crucial skill requiring communication, critical thinking, and creativity (Partnership for 21st Century learning, 2015). Teachers and practitioners have frequently demonstrated collaboration in English Language Teaching (ELT) since it has enhanced learning outcomes. Several studies have shown the beneficial impacts of collaboration in language learning, such as improving target language skills and solving the languages' issues (Hanifah et al., 2019; Rejeki Murtiningsih, 2016; Swain & Lapkin, 2013; Winarti & Cahyono, 2020; Yeh, 2014). Collaborative learning is highlighted by the Indonesian Education and Culture Ministry which encourages it to be implemented in elementary to higher education students (Salinan Permendikbud, Nomor 22 Tahun 2020).

To begin, some theories of Vygotsky (1978) and Brown (2001) emphasized that collaboration assists students in learning a language. Vygotsky (1978) believes that language is the integration component of social interaction, guided participation, and collaborative learning. Thus, collaboration helps students build good communication and gradually improves their language skills. In addition, Brown (2001) affirms that collaboration encourages students to improve oral language, writing skills, reading, and listening skills. These theories are believed to be appropriately used in a broad teaching context.

Previous studies have proven collaboration in various academic disciplines such as English as a Foreign Language (EFL) students and non-EFL at the high school and university (Mutwarasibo, 2014; Winarti & Cahyono, 2020). Mutwarasibo (2014) assumed that collaboration promoted university students' engagement and active learning. It was claimed that collaboration raised students' enthusiasm, courage, and learning success. Winarti & Cahyono (2020) asserted that collaboration genuinely encouraged social interaction and cognitive development. Even they affirmed that collaboration acquired positive behaviours, referring to individual and group responsiveness and participation.

Referring to the advantages, collaboration has been promoted to be employed in the EFL context. Several studies emphasized excellent collaborative learning in the four languages skills (Bhowmik et al., 2018; Storch, 2011; Winarti & Cahyono, 2020). Bhowmik et al., (2018) confirmed that collaboration is an effective instructional strategy in the writing classroom. It provided students with a critical pedagogy of their writing and peers' writing. Standing from this point, the students' pedagogy led them to comprehend the process of writing. Therefore, it was confirmed by Canadian postsecondary students that the collaborative writing process was fun.

A study conducted by Winarti & Cahyono (2020) investigated the effect of collaborative writing and process writing approach. The study proved that collaboration allowed students to discover coherent ideas through discussing and exchanging ideas with their peers. Collaborative writing did not merely ease students producing texts; moreover, it encouraged students to learn grammar and vocabulary from their peers. Thus, the students perceived that collaborative writing was an appropriate strategy because it helped improve their writing abilities. Likewise, Villarreal & Gil-Sarratea (2020) depicted that students tended to produce good quality of writing in collaborative activities. Good quality refers to accurate content, structure, the flow of ideas, relevant sentences, appropriate wording.

Supported by López-Pellisa et al. (2021), some processes of collaborative writing consisting of synthesizing, clarifying, and structuring ideas were considered practical and useful.

Notwithstanding some advantages of collaborative writing, it also leads to some disadvantages. It was revealed that collaborative writing raised students' conflicts due to different views (Winarti & Cahyono, 2020). The study affirmed that the students did not have the freedom to express their ideas in writing, and it was hard for them to accept their partner's ideas. Moreover, time efficiency became the students' issue in which they had to spend more time developing their ideas properly due to waiting for peer's approval. Another issue was an unequal tasks distribution that some of the group members did not contribute enough to develop ideas (Chang & Brickman, 2018; Wilson et al., 2018). In the bottom line, the lack of collaborative writing meant less freedom in expressing ideas, less time-efficiency, and less task distribution among their peers.

Despite the disadvantages of collaborative writing, several studies have been conducted to find the students' perspectives towards collaborative writing (Ismail & Lustyantie, 2020; Suwaed et al., 2019). The perspectives were obtained from EFL students taking an academic writing course. Ismail & Lustyantie (2020) proved that students felt satisfied with integrating collaborative writing in writing class. The collaboration promoted students' deeper understanding of the theories and practices of writing. Interestingly, the students gained critical thinking by experiencing the writing process. Apart from this, it was supported that students highlighted the favours of collaborative writing activities (Suwaed et al., 2019). The students' favours refer to avoiding the teacher's instructions misunderstanding.

The other study investigated undergraduate students taking academic writing courses (Zulfikar & Aulia, 2020). It was revealed that students perceived collaborative writing positively and negatively. It was a positive perception since it helped students organize their writing content and share feedback with their peers. Beyond that, they had self-awareness of reflecting on their writing abilities. At the same time, collaborative writing was also meant to be negative for the students. The students had a terrible experience in working collaboratively in which the students were unwilling to participate fully and to convey their opinions within the collaboration. The negative perceptions were affected by possible factors, such as passive contribution, irresponsible task distribution, and psychological factors referring to students' bonding.

Students' perceptions towards collaborative writing, particularly in Indonesia, are less well studied, especially in high school and vocational school levels. The researchers believe that investigating vocational school students' perceptions towards collaborative writing is crucial as the students also learn English writing since EFL in Indonesia includes a broad teaching setting. Therefore, the vocational students' perceptions must be investigated.

Pertinent to the students at State Vocational School 1 of Portibi, they have experienced a collaboration that refers to group work. The collaboration was implemented in English learning writing skills. The implementation of collaborative writing was usually done with brainstorming ideas, discussing vocabularies and their meanings, and writing a full paragraph. Therefore, by the experiences, the researchers assume that it can be a background to investigate the students' perceptions of collaborative writing. Regarding the mentioned points, the result of the perceptions of collaborative writing will be beneficial for

practitioners to improve and reflect on their teaching writing. Standing from the points, we were intrigued to discover the students' perspectives to provide the learning teaching insight for students and teachers.

Considering the study gap, the main research question is formulated "what are the students' perceptions towards the implementation of collaborative writing?." Therefore, in this current study, the research problem was limited to three points; the first problem concerned rural areas, the second problem was going to the vocational students, and the third problem was students' majors.

2. RESEARCH METHODS

This study was carried out through Survey research. Latief (2019) mentions that survey is typically research to explore opinions, perceptions, and behaviour related to the researcher's interest. Along with the definition, survey research is explained as collecting individual perceptions and responses through questions (Check & Schutt, 2012). The perception is obtained through an individual or group about preferences and behaviours toward a particular issue.

The subject of this study involved 31 students majoring in Motorcycle Technique at State Vocational School 1 of Portibi, located in North Padang Lawas Regency, North Sumatra Province. The respondents were students from two classes in grade 10. The classes were chosen as they experienced the implementation of collaborative writing in English learning. Meanwhile, the students participating in this study were chosen randomly to avoid biased answers.

The instrument of this study was a closed-ended questionnaire consisting of 11 questions adapted from Winarti & Cahyono (2020). The researchers considered adapting because this current study has different objectives and subjects. The adaptations modified the questions to suit the students' conditions in experiencing collaborative writing. Thus, the questions aimed at seeking meaningfulness and competence of collaborative writing. This questionnaire was designed into a four-point Likert scale (strongly agree to strongly disagree). This scale is employed to avoid neutral answers and ease students' understanding of answering students' questions. Table 1 shows the blueprint of the questionnaire.

Table 1. Blueprint of the Questionnaire		
Aspects	Variables	Questions
Students' profile	Name Class	-
Meaningfulness	Students' activities on collaborative writing	Five questions
Competence	Students' writing skills and understanding	Six questions

*Adapted from Winarti & Cahyono (Winarti & Cahyono, 2020)

Table 1 depicts the questionnaires' description adapted from (Winarti & Cahyono, 2020). It consisted of three aspects: students' profile, meaningful, and competence. The meaningfulness reflected the students' activities involving collaborative writing. Meanwhile, the competence aspect showed the students' ability in writing due to the implementation of collaborative writing. Further, the questionnaire was completed with a blueprint used as an indicator. Blueprint is illustrated as a guidance to provide visual representation (Grant, 2014). In other words, a blueprint is a guide to structure and design a framework.

The data collection was obtained through direct distributing to the students at State Vocational School 1 of Portibi. It was believed that distributing questionnaires offline would ease students' understanding in filling the questions clearly. In this study, there were two techniques in analysing the data. The first step was classifying the answers based on the scales using Excel format. Afterward, the data was analysed using statistical methods. This step aimed at finding the Means, the Median, the Modes, and the Standard Deviation. Afterward, it was continued to find the final percentage of the group in the population. The last step was making inferences from the result of each data.

3. FINDINGS

Regarding the objective of the study, it was presented that the students had positive views concerning collaborative writing. The respondents' identification can be seen in Table 2.

Table 2. The Distribution of Students' Characteristics by Classes

Class	Major	Frequency	Percentages (%)
Grade 10	Motorcycle Technic Class X 1	16	62%
Grade 10	Motorcycle Technic Class X 2	15	68%

The respondents of the study were from two classes in grade 10, consisting of class X1 (62%) and X2 (68%). The total of the respondents from both classes was 31 students. Then, the results from the questionnaire can be seen in Table 3.

Table 3. The Results from the Questionnaire

Questions	Mean	Median	Modus	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
1. Collaborative writing's activities are useful	2.967741935	3	3	19.35%	67.74%	3.22%	9.67%
2. Collaborative writing's activities take a longer time to write because it needs agreement from partners	2.193548387	2	3	6.45%	22.5%	54.83%	16.12%
3. Collaborative writing's activities help me to understand the concept of writing better	3.387096774	3	3	45.16%	48.38%	6.45%	0%
4. The introduction of the text helped me to prepare in writing the text	3	3	3	22.58%	58.06%	16.12%	3.22%

5. In collaborative writing, I do not find any useful learning activities conducted by the teacher	2.258064516	2	2	9.67%	19.35%	58.06%	12.90%
6. I can perform all the collaborative writing's steps very well	3.258064516	3	3	35.48%	54.83%	9.67%	0%
7. I am convinced to write descriptive text in the final test	2.838709677	3	3	16.12%	58.06%	19.35%	6.45%
8. Peer review or peer edit helps me to reflect on my own mistakes	2.967741935	3	3	16.12%	64.51%	19.35%	0%
9. Discussing with peers improves my writing skill	3.258064516	3	3	35.48%	54.83%	9.67%	0%
10. My peer's mistakes can be a reflection for me to write better	3.129032258	3	3	29.03%	54.83%	16.12%	0%
11. I am sure I can write any topic assigned by the teacher	3.129032258	3	3	35.48%	45.16%	16.12%	3.22%

The result of the survey is presented in table 3. Overall, the students with 67.74% had affirmative views towards collaborative writing, and only a few (3.22%) affirmed less positive views. Besides, they (49.38%) admitted that collaborative writing's activities help them understand the concept of writing compared to those who (6.45%) responded to negative opinions about their understanding in writing. Pertinent to the text introduction, the students found it helpful to prepare writing with the percentage of agreement (58.06%). They (54.84%) could also execute all the collaborative writing steps well, whereas the others (9.67%) believed the opposite behaviours. Moreover, the students claimed they were confident to write descriptive text in the final test with the rate of 16.12%, and a few of them had unconvinced feelings in writing (6.45%).

It was found that 64.51% of students realized the positive impact of peer review in which they could reflect on their writing mistakes. In addition, they also (54.83%) mentioned that peer discussions improved their writing skill. However, some realized that peer review and peer discussion did not help them find mistakes in writing with a percentage of disagreement (19.35%) and (9.67%) respectively. Although fewer students (16.12%) admitted that collaborative writing could not reflect students' mistakes in writing, many students (54.83%) recognized the useful peer review. They learned from their peers' mistakes as well. Regarding the positive behaviours admitted by students, they were sure they could try to write any topic writing assigned by the teacher (45.16%) and found it meaningful in terms of the teaching-learning in collaboration (58.06%).

4. DISCUSSION

Based on the results of the study, collaborative writing was intended to be meaningful by the students in grade 10 at State Vocational School 1 of Portibi. The students revealed the meaningfulness of collaborative writing in the learning steps, the peer review, and the peer discussion. This current study affirmed that the students could carry out all the steps in collaborative writing. These activities were useful for them to improve their writing abilities. The results were in line with Pham (2021) that students could figure out the writing steps better individually or collaboratively. The collaboration led students to determine the topic for writing, construct ideas, make an outline, discuss ideas, develop paragraphs, and peer review.

Most students agreed that collaborative writing activities were useful for them. It was not also helping them understand the concept of writing but also structuring the ideas. Still, it did not affect their writing aspects such as grammar, vocabulary, and mechanism. In contrast with Winarti & Cahyono (2020), the betterment of grammar and mechanism aspects were not affected whether the students worked individually or collaboratively. It occurred due to the different levels and backgrounds of the students. It was assumed that higher-level students achieved more benefits of collaborative writing rather than vocational students.

Students' benefits also outweighed peer review and peer discussion in collaborative writing. The students of State Vocational School 1 of Portibi perceived that peer review helped them acquire new ideas from their peers. They could learn to organize better ideas by reflecting on their peers' writing. Connected with previous studies, students confirmed that peer review significantly increased their writing performance because the concept of writing was well understood during the discussion (Kurihara, 2017). Considering the students' discussion, collaborative writing allowed them to brainstorm ideas, understand their tasks, explore ideas and implement their knowledge while writing (Bhowmik et al., 2018). Thus, collaborative writing activities provided students with the opportunity to transfer ideas among their peers.

The peer review activity is concerned with checking the writing aspects, such as content, grammar accuracy, sentence structure, vocabulary usage, spelling and punctuation, organization, and coherence. Nonetheless, peer review was somehow useful only for particular students since few students comprehend how to do a peer review in collaborative writing well. As a result, not all students in previous studies agreed to consider peer review positively (Ahmed, 2020). The peer-review issues were revealed by Ahmed (2020) that claimed poor impacts for their writing improvement. They affirmed that the peer review process made them feel unconfident to comment on their peers' writing. Besides, they also had a lack of concepts' peer review.

On the other hand, the students at State Vocational School 1 of Portibi acknowledged that collaborative writing takes much time. It was shown that they had to pass some stages in writing, such as brainstorming ideas to drafting a paragraph. This was aligned with a previous study that showed collaborative writing required some activities that may differ from individual tasks (Alawaji, 2020). In detail, the students had to pass through discussion, ideas development, and effective language usage with their peers. These processes became the students' reasons to consider negatively towards collaborative writing. Besides, Ahmed (2020) affirmed that students spent much time demonstrating a recheck of the usage of

writing aspects in the peer-review process. Through this, many students believed that collaboration takes time that they could have used for writing a draft.

Zulfikar & Aulia (2020) confronted the betterment of writing ability after the students' experienced collaborative writing. Pertinent to the collaborative writing process, it was wrapped up that students need to be introduced to the concept and procedures of collaborative writing to achieve the effectiveness of collaborative writing. With this in mind, students will be able to track their progress and identify their weaknesses in each process of collaborative writing. Respectively, the teacher considers the collaborative writing process to track the students' difficulties and weaknesses to design a better learning teaching. Through better teaching implementation, students' writing ability will gradually increase (Zulfikar & Aulia, 2020).

During peer review and discussion, students need to be acknowledged with peer reviewing to achieve the benefits. The urgency of peer review does not merely identify peer's mistakes but also actualizes the students' wiring concepts. Unfortunately, most students failed in implementing the concept of peer review in that they only assessed whether the writing product was good without paying attention to the writing aspects in detail. The roles of the teacher, therefore, are necessary during the process. The teacher might facilitate the peer review process, ensure the students' responsibilities, assess students' work, and create writing assignments. Even though students are capable of doing peer review, they still rely much on the teacher's feedback. According to Ahmed (2020), it occurred because of some circumstances such as lack of competence, commitment, and interest.

Time efficiency was also considered as a crucial aspect in doing collaborative writing. Each student certainly has different timing to undergo the process of collaborative writing; some might take longer time than others. The processes which take much time stated by Suwaed et al. (2019) were deciding and organizing ideas. The different opinions between peers affected students' less practice in writing. Regards to time efficiency, there are some considerations for teachers. First, teachers need to set up the exact time allocation for each process so that students have an equal opportunity to undergo each process. Second, teachers may provide some topics to be developed at the beginning of the class. By doing so, students can press the time to be used in other collaborative writing processes.

5. CONCLUSION

This current study confirmed the positive students' perceptions towards collaborative writing. Overall, collaborative writing left decisive perceptions for the students. They agreed that the activities in collaborative writing were meaningful in which the process encouraged them to produce better writing products. Most students affirmed that collaborative writing was useful to improve their writing skills, understand the concept of writing, perform the collaborative writing activities well, write the descriptive text in the final test, and learn mistakes from themselves and peers. Despite the positive perceptions, the opposite perceptions were also investigated. According to the students, collaborative writing brings a new issue for the students during the writing process. The issue was related to the time efficiency that the activities took longer time to write than individuals working. Regarding the findings, the researchers suggested that collaborative writing activities must be well

acknowledged and designed by the teacher based on students' conditions, level, and background. It can be also used as a reference for English teachers to improve the teaching writing through collaborative writing and find the strengths and weaknesses of collaboration.

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