| **RESEARCH ARTICLE**

A Critical Review of Collaborative Learning in Academic Writing Classes

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| **ABSTRACT**

Writing has long been regarded as one of the most challenging skill in language education, as it requires only lexical resources and grammatical knowledge, but it demands social sensitivity. The emergence of the collaborative writing models has proved its significance in the ability to enhance academic writing performance. Collaborative writing allows learners to exchange ideas and expand the personal language repertoire. Learners are also able to enhance self reflection. However, the success of employing collaborative writing is still limited to certain factors. This paper is a critical review of the merits and reality of using collaborative writing in tertiary education. Certain recommendations are also made in this paper to optimise the effectiveness of collaborative writing in academic writing classes.

1. Introduction
The appropriateness of learning styles in language classrooms has spurred a notable interest among researchers in general and teachers in particular. The concept of suitable teaching and learning approaches is always controversial due to the differences in preferred learning and teaching styles. In traditional English classrooms in the Vietnamese context, teachers play the role of "authority" in their classroom, where all the attention has to be paid to the teachers in a rigid and severe manner (Minh, 2011). In other words, a good classroom used to be defined as a classroom of silence and regulations, and teachers are dominant in the teaching and learning processes. However, this mode of teaching results in certain limitations owing to the discouragement in learners' engagement, interaction, and autonomy.

The application of collaborative writing has attracted much attention from scholars to argue the appropriateness of the methods against the traditional assumption of the spotlight of the teachers in the classroom. The use of collaborative writing is obviously significant to foster learners' academic competency. Although the recognition of learners' role in classroom activities has been seen over the years, the actual participation is limited for certain reasons. This paper attempts to discuss the challenges and opportunities of applying collaborative writing in tertiary educational contexts. Recommendations to optimise the effectiveness of collaborative writing will be proposed in this paper.

2. Literature Review
2.1 The merits of collaborative writing
Collaborative writing is regarded as the process of teamworking in which members of a group have to interact with each other to propose ideas and generate the piece of writing together. It can consist of various stages to identify the appropriate ideas to arrange them in a logical order. An outline of what should be written or included in the essay will be the obvious guidance for the whole team to observe the flow or the development of the ideas in the essay (Storch, 2019). Then, they have to present to defend

the suitability of their personal ideas. After that, members are supposed to create the first draft to shape the raw version of the papers. Class members will be invited to give constructive feedback on the quality of the paper based on the given criteria from the teachers. This use of the new interaction can allow learners to exchange ideas and foster self-reflection on strengths and weaknesses, and they can modify learning strategies.

Cooperative learning allows learners to participate in various tasks and activities in an EFL classroom (Richards & Rogers, 2014) with certain benefits. First, learners are given opportunities to maximize their learning efficiency. Traditional teaching methods frequently provide learners with the same material and opportunities as "equality" in the absence of regard to learners' particular levels and interests. Therefore, they cannot fully perform in EFL classrooms. However, cooperative learning in groups requires learners to be aware of their roles in the assignments, and they are allowed to negotiate with their peers to opt for pieces of workload that remarkably fit their competence (Artz & Newman, 1990). Subsequently, despite the difference in categories of tasks for each learner, the amount of workload is approximately identical, and learners' personal strengths can be encouraged and utilized in their contribution to the accomplishment of the tasks.

Second, interdependence among learners is developed in the cooperative learning model. The dominance of teachers in EFL classrooms is reduced to a certain extent. In my opinion, the gap between teachers and learners is moderately big in age, cognition, and personality, which causes some difficulties in understanding each other in EFL classrooms (Campbell, 2008). Thus, cooperative learning is more beneficial to strengthen the proximity among teenage learners. I am at ease to propose questions for my partners rather than for teachers, as I am also worried about making foolish mistakes. The degree of comfort in learning is highly associated with productivity in academic performance. Moreover, peer corrections are enhanced to signify individual mistakes. The limited amount of time in forty-five-minute classrooms of big sizes at high school is not sufficient for personalization in learning strategies. I could not have opportunities to discuss and receive feedback from teachers. As a result, cooperative learning is crucial to lengthen individual learning periods via peer corrections. In group activities, learners are able to express ideas, negotiate matters, and receive feedback and corrections from their team to eliminate personal weaknesses (Slavin, 1995). As a result, learners' social competence is developed via the ideas of other learners from a variety of social and cultural backgrounds.

In addition, functional language is empowered during group interactions. Traditional classrooms regularly concentrate on delivering language rules instead of considering the purposes of learning language. Learners are in an attempt to achieve certain levels of language proficiency to perform acts in daily and academic contexts in a dynamic manner. However, conventional classrooms are stuck at "giving" with little assessment of learners' application in practice. During group discussions, the functional language to perform an act is entirely utilized. It is compulsory for learners to apply discourse markers and functional expressions to achieve communicative goals in discussing and debating in their groups. Therefore, they will be more aware of the roles of language learning and the strategies to apply language with particular purposes in specific contexts. Unfortunately, EFL learners frequently make wrong assumptions in their conversations with others in English (Hancock, 2004). It is impossible to ensure that the hearers or partners are able to understand what the speakers mean to express for the first time. They may misinterpret the message inside the language due to the inadequacy in linguistic competence, discourse competence, and intercultural communication competence. Hence, cooperative learning is meaningful in reducing the possibility of misunderstanding and encouraging the chances of clarification and modification in expressions.

Another important point for assertion is that cooperative learning is significant in encouraging motivation and positive attitudes among learners. In this model, learners play a role of control in their learning process, which then stimulates their curiosity and active participation (Nunan, 1991). Learners are considerably interested in this model as learners are more confident to discuss and decide the content of our group assignment, and the level of engagement of team members is also higher. Learners no longer keep silent in class or avoid the questions. Learners are generally scared of teachers' criticism or negative feedback, which is considered a face-threatening act in the classroom and prevent learners from expressing their individualism in an explicit way (Wang, 2019; Zhang, 2019). Additionally, the competitiveness among learners is minimized to create a supportive and optimistic learning environment in which teachers become facilitators to assist learners in language acquisition, and learners act as the key elements to determine the success of their learning. In brief, cooperative learning is deemed the most appropriate and adaptive strategy for learners in various learning environments.

Especially in collaborative writing, computer-mediated communication (CMC) has been used as a practical tool in language instruction. The purpose of Abe's study (2020) is to investigate how students engage with one another while engaging in collaborative writing. The study used a qualitative methodology and conversational analysis (CA) to understand how 54 first-year Japanese students interacted with one another when writing collaboratively online using the Quip website. The study concentrated on one focal participant and tracked the gradual shifts in the participants' interpersonal behaviors over the course of 15 weeks. The study's findings suggested that learners needed to use a variety of resources, including semiotics, metalinguistic replies, and temporal discussion. By supporting the multimodality of expressions in collaborative tasks to achieve the goal, this study

complements the prior work. The principles of the observation of interactional practices are what are considered to be this study's most important contribution.

Zhang's study from 2021 aims to investigate the effects of collaborative writing on the quantity, caliber, results, and participation of intermediate-level EFL students in LREs. This study continues to close the gap left by Zhang's earlier study, which did not examine the cyclical nature of collaboration in academic writing (Zhai, 2021). To identify the pattern of LREs, the data were gathered through the analysis of pair chat transcription of 35 pairs of intermediate learners in a Chinese institution. The results show a proportional correlation between the use of collaborative writing and learners' interactions.

2.2 Challenges of applying collaborative writing in academic writing classes
The challenges of implementing collaborative writing in a tertiary context can be seen in the reluctance of learners to share and participate in collaborative writing activities. First, learners hesitate to propose their personal ideas in group activities as they are scared of making mistakes (Zhai, 2021). The act of falseness or incorrect interactions may lead to loss when they are judged with certain limitations in the ability of the team members. Fear is deemed an obvious factor in language education that prevents learners from merging or integrating with other people for the lack of competency. Some learners are not sure of the accuracy of their suggestions; hence, they refuse to propose ideas to keep their faces secure (Kim & Kim, 2021). Criticism or disagreement among members is regarded as a face-threatening act. This reality proves the over-criticism of language education over the content subject as language learning is more of the personal expression for face security. The participation of learners is not just "doing together"; it is more of interaction in a small social community or the community of speech in which members attempt to share agreement in ideas and interactions.

Second, the efficacy of the assessment in collaborative writing classes is also a tremendous concern. Assessment is the process of giving feedback, compliments or recommendations for the performance of learners after the period of learning acquisition (Rodriguez & Seedhouse, 2021). Most learners are unwilling to give feedback to their friends for various reasons. The inability to propose the correct feedback is one of the most significant elements of this reality. Learners are not teachers, so they are incapable of giving the appropriate feedback, and they are scared of making wrong suggestions or comments about their mates' papers (Pham & Nguyen, 2020). Moreover, the criteria are not profoundly understood for learners to base on when they give feedback to peers. Hence, when they are asked to give feedback, it is confusing for them to realise the type or the standards of giving feedback.

3. Recommendations
The application of collaborative writing is promising to a great extent to foster learners' writing performance and enhance social interactions to develop competency-based learning progress rather than test-based courses. To handle the limitation, certain measures should be taken into consideration. First, learners should be introduced to the benefits and procedures of collaborative writing. When learners are aware of the nature of collaborative writing, meta-cognitive knowledge can help learners obtain a positive mindset towards the new applications. A profound understanding of the new method is fundamental to shaping their positive reactions to the transformation (Abe, 2020). Second, randomisation should be adopted for group tasks. When learners are assigned a certain group activity, the role of each member should also be chosen randomly. Accordingly, the members will be more responsible for the group rather than depending on good learners. Moreover, the names of the presenters can also be random in order that any member can become the presenter and they are to get ready to be on stage. Third, the assessment activity should be enhanced with peer assessment (Luquin & García Mayo, 2021). The learners should be guided with the criteria of the assessment activities for how to propose appropriate comments or feedback so it will not hurt their friends. In this case, it does not mean that teachers should put the responsibility for ensuring the quality of the paper on the shoulders of the learners; it will be a manner for reflection among learners.

4. Conclusion
The application of collaborative writing is promising to foster learners' academic performance as it allows learners to attend the speech commuity in the actual communication contexts. Learners are able to exchange ideas and propose peer feedback for each other. However, the effectiveness of the new model is restricted due to the low participation among learners, the lack of quality peer feedback and the negative attitudes towards the applications. Therefore, certain solutions should be implemented to optimise the efficacy of collaborative writing. The study also sheds light on other studies to explore the impact of personal perception on the willingness to employ the new methods among learners.

Conflicts of Interest: The authors declare no conflict of interest.
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