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Collaborative Writing

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(وَأَنْزَلْنَا مِنَ السَّمَاءِ مَاءً بِقَدَرٍ فَأَسْكَنَّا فِي الْأَرْضِ وَإِنَّا عَلَى ذَهَابٍ بِهِ لِقَادِرُونَ)

صدق الله العظيم

[المؤمنون: ١٨].

Didication

To our first teacher prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him).

To our friends

To Those who has provided us with support and encouragement

When writing this paper , we received a great help from many people who contributed and shared with us their experiences, time and advice. In particular, we should like to thank our teacher and supervisor **Dr. Ali Abdul Hussein** who has given much time and care guiding and commenting on the early drafts of this paper. He will recognize that his pieces of advice and guides were taken into consideration.

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Abstract

Writing is no longer an individual activity but an interactive process through which social abilities of the learners are reinforced. To promote interaction in the writing class, collaboration has been suggested to be advantageous. The present study aimed to examine the impact of practicing in pairs on the writing fluency of learners.

1.1 Definition of Writing

The ability to write effectively and fluently in English is becoming increasingly important in today's modern world, since communication through language has become more and more essential. Writing is known as an important skill for multifarious reasons in education and business. In fact, it plays a significant role in personal and professional life. Consequently, it has become one of the major requirements in English for General Purposes (EGP) as well as English for Academic Purposes (EAP) syllabi. Evidently, the pedagogical purposes of writing range from improving, training, and practicing language in the early stages of learning to communicating fluently and accurately at intermediate and more advanced levels (Raimes, 1987).

Writing skills can be major criteria towards better academic position and greater educational success. However, this good advice will be lost if students do not believe the importance of writing skills in helping them achieve academic mastery. The present study results can convince and help them to find a way to improve their writing ability. There may be students with a high degree of knowledge and they may know the answer of a question of an essay test, but conversely obtain a low mark from that test because they cannot express their knowledge as the result of writing weakness. Thus it is very important for English or any other language students to have a strong writing ability to show his/her inner information (Hosseini, 2013:7).

Suleiman (2000:155) asserts that “writing is a central element of language, any reading and language arts program must consider the multidimensional nature of writing in instructional practices, assessment procedures, and language development.”

1.2 Collaborative Writing

The term collaborative writing refers to projects where written works are created by multiple people together (*collaboratively*) rather than individually. Some projects are overseen by an editor or editorial team, but many grow without any oversight. Collaborative writing can lead to projects that are richer and more complex than those produced by individuals. Many learning communities include one or more collaborative assignments. However, writing with others also makes the writing task more complex (DiCamilla and M.,1997:610).

Successful collaboration occurs when each participant is able to make a unique contribution toward achieving a common vision or goal statement. Supporting this common goal are objectives that have been generated by each of the participants. It is important for each participant to "feel" as though he or she has a significant contribution to make to the achievement of goals. It is also important that each participant be held accountable for contributing to the writing project. Collaboration is difficult face-to-face, but online it can be truly difficult. Groups have to deal with language and cultural barriers, time zone issues and overall communication issues. These challenges are inherent in teamwork. Teamwork suffers when the right people work on the wrong things at the wrong time, or when roles, expectations or responsibilities shift quickly and unexpectedly.

Expectation of content and User controls - Often, issues will come up when access to documents becomes a necessity and multiple people are contributing. It is imperative to have appropriate user access controls in place to ensure smooth transitions. Proper controls must exist that allow people to work on files either as a simultaneously shared or checked out document. User accounts need not be hierarchical but changes from all accounts should not run the risk of being overridden. Controls should be in place that allows user checkout capability or a 'sandbox' area where changes can then be merged. While providing an environment is important, establishing guidelines and the expectation of the type of content that will be submitted is equally important. Having a content editor to proof-read to maintain quality and ensure one coordinated voice should also be considered (Dillenbourg,1999:54).

Cultural barriers that lead to communication issues – as the work force becomes more diverse, language and cultural differences must be taken into consideration to ensure a seamless assimilation into the group while still being respectful of others traditions. An organization must be proactive or risk misunderstandings that will hinder communication and create work-place issues.

Time-zone - It is always a challenge coordinating meetings with a disparate group of people who are all busy with other projects, it becomes more of an issue when trying to coordinate with those in different time-zones. When orchestrating meetings with those from different time zones, it is good to accommodate parties by compromising on schedules or using collaborative software that allow sessions to be recorded for later use (Ibid:67).

There are various of degrees of collaboration in authoring. At one end of the

range is a single author who through discussion with and review by colleagues produces a document. The other end of the spectrum is a group of writers who jointly author a document. For this appendix, term collaborative authoring is used for two or more individuals who work together to produce a single document (Macaro,1997:3).

A significant portion of technical writing is done not by individuals but by various types of groups. Collaborative writing, like most group activities, has both benefits and pitfalls. A group can possess a wide range of skills impossible to find in a single individual. In addition, a group can become greater than the sum of its parts; interaction among members of a writing group often stimulates creativity and scientific insight (Storch,2005:153).

To write effectively, collaborative writers may need to incorporate the following steps into the process of writing their document (Ibid.).

1. List all research and writing tasks necessary for completing the project.
2. Determine which tasks depend on the completion of other tasks.
3. Establish a realistic schedule for completing the document.
4. Assign tasks to individual members of the group.
5. Develop a style guide for distribution to ensure a consistent format and style.
6. Determine procedures and responsibilities for the document's production and final electronic form.
7. Assign someone to manage the document's production.
8. Establish procedures for reviewing each other's sections as they are written.

9. Assign someone to be responsible for consistency and accuracy in style.
10. Assign someone to be responsible for technical accuracy.
11. Develop procedures for resolving possible conflicts.

1.3 Importance of Collaborative Writing

Writing as the visual channel and the productive mode of language is a vital skill for the L2 learners to develop their language knowledge and the teaching of this skill has become central in second language classrooms (Hyland, 2003).

Writing, like listening, is often slighted in language classes. Especially because of the powerful influence of audio-lingual method in ELT, the oral skills have received major attention and writing has been considered less important (Matsuda, 2003). This view toward writing makes speaking the focus of language teaching in the classroom.

However, White (1981, as cited in Nunan, 1989) suggests that writing should be taught separately from speaking in L2 learning. Thus writing, as a way of expressing ideas, thinking, and learning content (J. Foster, 2008), must be regarded as an essential tool for language learning as well as communication.

According to Hinkel and Fotos (2002), the role of language output in L2 learning is not less than language input because one has to be understood, as well as to be able to understand while communicating. Along with the shift from the

teacher-centered classroom to the student-centered acquisition of communicative competence, communicative approaches encourage the language students to learn the second language through contextualized and meaningful communication.

Collaborative learning, as a system of concrete teaching and learning techniques underlying the communicative language teaching, emphasizes active interaction between students with different skills and background knowledge (Tsai, 1998). Collaborative learning is a situation in which two or more people interact with each other to trigger learning mechanisms (Dillenbourg, 1999:24).

Collaborative learning focusing the active role of students in the class has owed much credit to constructivism. The main focus of constructivism has been student-centered learning (Cheek, 1992; Yager, 1991).

Constructivism embraces Vygotsky's perspective regarding social interaction as well as Piaget's approach to learning in which students play an active role to learn on their own. It is evident that L2 learners take accountability for their own learning, especially when they contribute to collaborative language output activities. Tsui (1995) defines SLA as: Input refers to the language used by the teacher, output refers to language produced by learners and interaction refers to the interrelationship between input and output with no assumption of a linear cause and effect relationship between the two. (p. 121)

Swain (2005:67) states that learners' speaking or writing facilitates language learning when engaging in collaborative learning activities. Participants make use of problem-solving dialogue to solve their linguistic problems regarding the task.

Furthermore, collaborative dialogue forms an important part of peer interaction.

A great number of studies in L2 have established that interaction enhances the collaborative learning experience of learners. It is evident that learning occurs when students participate actively in collaborative activities. Along with the shift from the teacher-centered to learner-centered classrooms in CLT, group work has applied to learning contexts with the aim of intensifying communication and interaction (Sullivan, 2000). With the emerging of TBLT, group work emphasis on peer interaction has resulted in more negotiation for meaning (Pica, Holliday, Lewis, and Morgenthaler, 1989).

Ohta (2001:54) reported that peer interaction in a classroom corpus of adults learning Japanese increased their accuracy due to peer feedback and peer correction.

Morris (2008:18) points out that based on ZPD, peer feedback can help the learner to move from an actual level to a potential level. Peer feedback provides opportunities for the learners to negotiate meaning, to give comments and suggestions, and to make corrections. Peer feedback requires collaborative dialogue in which two parties negotiate meaning to foster language learning (Rollinson, 2005:49). Peer learning is a two-way reciprocal activity in which peers of the same level learn from and with each other. Since learners in peer collaboration follow a single goal, they share their cognitive resources, modifying solutions, and make joint decisions.

Applying pair work to classroom context is more practical than group work since two students can learn to work effectively on activities and they can more

easily come to an agreement with each other. It is obvious that pair work offers language learners with more chances to use the language. In a study on pair work activities, Macaro (1997) notified that pair interaction promoted L2 use in a two-way information exchange in contrast to a large group exchange. Storch and Wigglesworth (2007) also reported that learners working in pairs outperformed those working individually.

Cooper (1986:12) expresses that writing is not only a cognitive activity but a social activity which requires L2 students to interact and discuss ideas in pairs or small groups. Since L2 writing is an invaluable process and product, requiring social exchange of meaning, there is a need to find out the importance of collaboration in L2 learning.

Peer feedback had positive impact on students' writing. Although Hong (2006:11) found that students' attitude toward peer feedback activity in L2 was negative, Jacobs, Curtis, Braine, and Huang (1998:163) believed that students usually accept peer feedback in writing because feedback which is given by peers makes them feel more comfortable and confident in the writing learning environment. Rollinson (2005:58) mentions that peer feedback in ESL writing is recently used in learning context because of its social, cognitive, affective and methodological advantages. In contrast to teacher feedback which is product-oriented occurring at the end of the task (Lee, 2009:23), peer feedback is given during the task as a process, so it is more conductive and practical.

Kamimura (2006:67) states that using collaborative writing tools can provide substantial advantages to projects ranging from increased user commitment to easier, more effective and efficient work processes. It is often the

case that when users can directly contribute to an effort and feel that they've made a difference, they become more involved with and attached to the outcome of the project. The users then feel more comfortable contributing time, effort, and personal pride into the final product, resulting in a better final outcome.

In addition, collaborative writing tools have made it easier to design better work processes. These tools provide ways to monitor what users are contributing and when they contribute so managers can quickly verify that assigned work is being completed. Since these tools typically provide revision tracking, it has also made data sharing simpler. Users won't have to keep track of what version is the current working revision since the software has automated that. Furthermore, because this software typically provides ways for users to chat in real time, projects can be completed faster because users don't have to wait for other users to respond by asynchronous means like email. One more advantage is that since this software makes it easy for users to contribute from anywhere in the world, projects can benefit from the inclusion of perspectives from people all around the world (Ibid.).

1.4 Advantages and Disadvantages of Collaborative Writing

The advantages and disadvantages of collaborative writing depend on what the purpose of the writing project is. People write for different reasons and to

produce different kinds of products. Sometimes the purpose of writing is to produce knowledge, such as the kind of writing one finds in the online encyclopedia Wikipedia . In such cases, collaborative writing can be very useful because the combined knowledge of many people can be aggregated, and the smarter people in(Ricci, R. and Wiese,2011:32).

The group can correct the errors of members who are less smart. Sometimes the purpose of writing is to produce 'art' or some other kind of 'beautiful','expressive', or 'persuasive' text. In these cases, collaboration can also be useful, but it is much more difficult to manage because the focus is not just on the information contained in the text but on the way the text is put together. Finally, sometimes the purpose of writing is to produce relationships (Ibid.).

According to Blanchard (2015:21) this kind of writing is naturally collaborative because you are collaborating with the person you are writing to, and they often respond with another text, which you later have to respond to. The desire to build relationships can also be part of larger collaborations such as when people post on blogs or forums. For some reason, collaborative writing in school does not seem to work as well as it does on blogs and other online venues. There is a good reason to try to get students to do group projects since most of the writing they will do in the workplace will probably be in groups. Most students, however, don't like to work in groups. Some of the difficulties of collaborative writing projects are:

1. creates a Free Rider problem
2. highly depends on intrinsic motivation from all participants
3. Demands responsibility for the process .

Here are some ways teachers can improve their group assignments to make them as fun as collaborative writing online is:

1. Educate about leadership in flat hierarchy groups. Perhaps integrate this into the task .
2. Let the students actually use some of these internet tools .When there are different views or ideas in the group, people have to discuss and compromise to reach the common direction. This helps eliminate some errors (Ibid.).

However, some potential sparkling view points may also be eliminated, for profounding theories might look silly or unacceptable at the first place .So collaborative writing might not encourage creativity to some degree (Horowitz,2012:56).

Using collaborative writing tools can provide substantial advantages to projects ranging from increased user commitment to easier, more effective and efficient work processes. It is often the case that when users can directly contribute to an effort and feel that they've made a difference, they become more involved with and attached to the outcome of the project. The users then feel more comfortable contributing time, effort, and personal pride into the final product, resulting in a better final outcome (Ibid.).

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Planning a piece of writing collaboratively helps generate more innovative ideas. It also forces writers to think more clearly about the concept. After all, you can't get away with confused logic when you have to explain it to someone else. We find that a team generates more ideas and comes up with clearer concepts when they work collaboratively (Velasquez,2011:9).

When a team collaborates, their writing improves. Immediate feedback allows for immediate improvement. Bad writing can't survive long. It is often difficult for solitary writers to spot mistakes, which makes collaboration particularly important during editing and proof-reading. It's probably the single easiest way of avoiding the kind of hilariously bad writing that makes newspaper headlines (Ibid:10).

Collaborative writing, group writing, team writing, distributed writing all terms used interchangeably to describe what it generally means to perform collective writing in a professional atmosphere. For our purposes, however, we won't use all of those terms. Why? Because there is a vast difference between collaboration and working in groups or teams; thus, the terms collaborative writing differs greatly from team, group or distributed writing. We will refer to the act of writing together as collaborative writing (Ibid).

Collaboration involves a mindset that sees the whole as more important than its parts. In other words, when people decide to collaborate, they are deciding to set aside their individual goals for the good of the group or company they represent. Collaboration seeks to combine multiple skill sets, knowledge bases, ideas and engagement from a number of people for the sole purpose of accomplishing a goal that benefits all regardless of position or title. A collaborative mindset is focused on company success more than it is individual success (Blanchard ,2015:25).

Conversely, team and group writing tends to focus on gathering together for a period of time to accomplish a set goal for a certain project during a specific time or event. It does not necessarily entail a long-term, ingrained mindset that seeks constant success for the good of the company or group. So, collaboration differs from teams and groups because it requires every member of the group or team to take responsibility for the final outcome. It's what happens, for example, when the parents of a child see the success of that child as the responsibility of both parents, not just one (Ibid).

1.5 Practical Approaches

In a true collaborative environment, each contributor has an almost equal ability to add, edit, and remove text. The writing process becomes a recursive task, where each change prompts others to make more changes. It is easier to do if the group has a specific end goal in mind, and harder if a goal is absent or vague. A very good method of discussion and communication is essential, especially if disagreements arise. Successful collaboration occurs when each participant is able

to make a unique contribution toward achieving a common vision or goal statement. Supporting this common goal are objectives that have been generated by each of the participants. It is important for each participant to "feel" as though he or she has a significant contribution to make to the achievement of goals. It is also important that each participant be held accountable for contributing to the writing project (Currier, 2008:188).

Collaborative writing can lead to projects that are richer and more complex than those produced by individuals. Many learning communities include one or more collaborative assignments. However, writing with others also makes the writing task more complex (Ibid).

Conclusion

Collaborative learning refers to a small group of learners working together as a team to solve problems, complete a task, or achieve a common goal. Collaborative or cooperative learning differs from traditional learning because it provides concrete opportunities for individuals, who are given specific roles within their groups, to work together to reach common goals.

It is usually contrasted with traditional or competitive classroom environments. When students learn separately, their individual performances do not necessarily affect one another either positively or negatively. Competitive learning, on the other hand, means putting them in direct competition with each other, with the idea that this will have an effect on individual performances. This research is one of the first studies to have investigated the impact of using collaborative learning as a strategy to improve the English writing skills of students.

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