

**Using Collaborative Writing for
Developing Students' Writing Skill and
Engagement: The Case of Business
College Students at Delta University**

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Abstract

The purpose of this study is to examine the impact of collaborative writing (CW) on the achievement and fluency in writing skill among students' of Business College at Delta University. A quantitative method was applied by using pre- and post- test to measure the improvement of students. The participants were 60 students of freshmen students, who studied "English for Business" course in the fall semester of the academic year 2018\2019. The participants were divided into two groups with twenty students for the Control Group (CG) and forty students for the Experimental Group (EG), to find out the achievement of students and the differences between whom producing a written texts individually and the other working in pairs. A semi-structured questionnaire was also administered to measure students' attitude towards using (CW) in practicing writing English texts. The findings reveal that the experimental group members' achievement in writing has been found to be better than that of the control group students on the writing composition posttest. Students' engagement while writing process was estimated by a qualitative study based on observation during data collection. The findings of collaborative writing questionnaire showed that the experimental group students had positive attitudes towards (CW) approach. The study concluded that collaborative partner writing has several positive implications for writing in the ESP contexts,

particularly, in terms of accuracy, fluency, organization, and student's engagement when written texts.

Key words: *collaborative writing, writing engagement, attitude, English for Business*

مستخلص الدراسة باللغة العربية

تهدف الدراسة الحالية إلي استكشاف أثر استخدام إستراتيجية الكتابة الجماعية (الطريقة الزوجية) علي تنمية الأداء الكتابي لدي طلاب كلية إدارة الأعمال في مادة اللغة الإنجليزية، كما تهدف إلي بيان مدي أثر العمل الجماعي في عملية الكتابة علي مهارات التصحيح وتقديم التغذية الراجعة بالمقارنة بالأداء الفردي التقليدي.

استخدمت الدراسة المنهج التجريبي باختيار مجموعة تجريبية وأخري ضابطة من عينة الدراسة وعددها ستون طالب، كما استخدمت اختبار كتابة قبل التجربة وبعدها لبيان مدي الأثر الذي يتم تحقيقه لدي طلاب المجموعة التجريبية.

واستخدمت الدراسة أيضا استبيان لقياس الاتجاه نحو الكتابة لدي طلاب المجموعة التجريبية.

وتوصلت نتائج الدراسة إلي وجود تباين في درجات الاختبار الكتابة البعدي لصالح المجموعة التجريبية التي درست بالأسلوب الجماعي، مما يدل علي وجود أثر إيجابي للإستراتيجية المتبعة.

كما أظهرت نتائج الاستبيان وجود اتجاه إيجابي نحو الكتابة الجماعية لدي طلاب المجموعة التجريبية. وطبقا لنتائج الدراسة، تم تقديم بعض التضمينات التربوية لاستخدام هذه الإستراتيجية خصوصا مع طلاب التخصصات الأكاديمية الخاصة التي تدرس اللغة الإنجليزية ومهاراتها.

Introduction:

The ability to write efficiently and effectively in English is becoming a significant issue in recent world, since communication through language has become more crucial. Writing is considered as a basic skill for several aspects in education, life affairs and business as well. Therefore, it has considered one of the main requirements for educational and academic features in English as a foreign language (EFL), as well as English for Specific Purposes (ESP) syllabi.

Recently, using group work or pair activities has been encouraged in language classroom pedagogy (Shehadeh, 2011). In addition, various research that have been conducted collaborative working in teaching different language skills, revealed several advantages that group working or pair participation support for assessment and learning. Moreover, connected to the implementations that adapted collaborative activities in English learning classrooms, group and pair performance give opportunities for the students to be responsible, which may assist them to enhance their independence and learning autonomy. (McDonough, 2004).

Focusing on collaborative writing, which has become a basic topic that was treated by several studies recently, it has had a crucial effect in pedagogy (Manchón, 2011). Although writing is commonly considered as a personal activity through which knowledge is exchanged between a sender (the writer) and a receiver (the reader), writing in a collaborative environment has been drawing a remarkable consideration in language assessment and teaching (Storch, 2005). Collaborative writing, which is enlarging students' contribution in language learning activities, has turned into a determined, and a communicative goal. This collaboration gives students better chances to correlate and share their

language acquaintance in a more practical learning atmosphere (Biria & Jafari, 2013). Since group working makes the writing task more complicated rather than individual writing, the current study has utilized pair writing approach in which two members of students work together to submit their texts. This approach may reduce such complexity, and provide the sense of collaborative working in the same way. Topping (2001) defined paired writing as a constructed process for efficient learning in writing, which presented a practical alternative approach for the writing performance more efficient than other traditional approaches.

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) 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.

1. Context of the Problem:

Compared with the other language skills, writing is considered the most complicated to teach and learn. That is why more focus should be given to the methods and

approaches of practicing and teaching writing in the classrooms (Zeng, 2005). Students require sufficient recognition and knowledge to generate and construct ideas to produce texts. In Business faculty educational system (as ESP students), insufficient practices in English writing are provided for the students. That is due to time limitation, students' poor motivation and limited proficiency, which make the writing task as a profound and great obstacle. Regarding the students' hesitation of committing grammatical mistakes or giving accurate sentences, Al-Jarf (2007) found that peer feedback and support could assist students to decrease such anxiety and stress as well developing their language acquaintance. Consequently, the current study examine the impact of collaborative writing (CW) on the achievement and fluency in the writing skill of Business college students.

2. Research Questions:

The main objective of the current study is to examine the efficacy of collaborative writing, pair writing in particular, and its impact on the writing performance of Business ESP students. Focusing on the students' writing improvement in terms of fluency, complexity and accuracy. Accordingly, this study states the following research questions:

1. Is there any significant difference between the writing achievement of individual and collaborative groups of students?
2. What is the effect of collaborative writing approach on enlarging ESP students' observed engagement when writing texts?
3. What are Business College students' attitudes towards collaborative writing approach?

3. The Hypotheses:

Based on the context of the problem, the following hypotheses could be stated:

- Students who work collaboratively obtain better results in the final drafts of written text than those who perform individually.
- Collaborative writing approach enhances student's engagement when writing texts, and guides them to pay more attention and effort to the written task.
- Business College students at Delta University have positive attitudes towards collaborative writing approach, rather than those who perform individually.

4. Importance of the Study:

The present study is expected to be of value for:

- ESP Business faculty students to develop their writing skill for the further courses.
- Instructors to develop appropriate methodologies in teaching English writing and to perform alternative methods which meet the requirements of different students.

5. Delimitations:

- Business Administration freshmen Students, at Delta University.
- The academic year 2018-2019- Fall semester.
- "English for Business" course.

Writing descriptive paragraphs that is related to business topics.

6. Review of Literature:

There were various studies that have been conducted using collaborative writing approach to enhance students' achievement in writing skill. This topic have been treated in terms of activities, the process of writing in a collaborative manner, advantages, and the role of teachers and students.

The effect of pair activities on students' writing skills has been effective in comparison to individual activities in the literature. For example, Storch (2005) conducted a study in which twenty-three students were given a choice to write in pairs or individually. The results revealed that students who worked in pairs produced shorter but higher-quality texts in terms of task fulfillment, grammatical accuracy, and complexity. In similar, Kim (2008) compared the impacts of collaborative and individual tasks on the acquisition of L2 vocabulary. The results indicated that there was no significant difference between pairs who were engaged in collaborative tasks and individuals in the number of Language Related Episodes; however, pairs performed significantly better on the vocabulary tests. In another study, Fernandez and Blum (2013) compared the effectiveness of pair and group activities on collaborative writing tasks in comparison to individual activities. The collected findings from surveys showed that students engaged in both group and pair activities had positive attitudes toward the writing activities they were engaged in. Accordingly, most students realized the positive effects of working with a peer on different aspects of language learning and improving their writing skills.

Regarding the effects of pair groups writing, the study of (Biria R. & Jafari S., 2013) investigated the effectiveness of practicing in pairs on the writing fluency of EFL students. The subjects were 30 students representing a control group of, each producing a written text individually and 60 students standing for an experimental group that were working in pairs. The results indicated that performing in pairs enhanced the overall quality of the students' writing compositions. Furthermore, Rivera (1999) in his study of Collaborative Writing expanded on the significance of social interaction when he announced that collaborative

writing provided opportunities for students to write as part of a community where one can refer to each other for support and guidance. The author stated that students could learn more efficiently when they performed tasks in teams, small groups, or in pairs than when working individually. The purpose of Megnafi (2016) research was to demonstrate the readiness among EFL students for their involvement in collaborative writing groups. The data were collected under a number of research instruments such as a questionnaire for both subjects (EFL students and teachers), and classroom observation. The study focused on the significance of collaborative writing to improve the awareness of students, and to face their writing complexities when they benefit and learn from each other. Moreover, Al-Nafiseh, (2013) carried out a study in two classrooms to examine the impact of peer-editing and collaborative writing on students' writings and students' perceptions of the peer- editing and collaborative writing approaches. The study revealed that these approaches improved in-class interaction and enhanced students' writings by developing their awareness on a text writer's choices. In addition, the study of Jalili & Shahrokhi, (2017) investigated the effects of Individual and collaborative teaching on the writing anxiety of Iranian EFL learners. Moreover, the participants' attitudes towards collaborative writing were explored. The findings revealed that collaboration led to the reduction of students' writing anxiety rates. They also revealed that students had a positive attitude towards collaborative writing.

Rollinson (2005) explained the effect of collaborative writing on improving students' peer feedback, which is utilized in learning contexts because of its social, cognitive. It is also more affective and practical rather than teacher feedback which is product-oriented taking place at the end

of the task, while peer feedback is provided during the task as a process. (Lee, 2009)

Finally, in (2011), Shehadeh conducted a study on the effectiveness of collaborative writing on second language learning and student attitude towards using it. The results revealed that this effect was significant for grammar and sentence structure. It also indicated that the performance had been agreeable for the students. The same as in Fernandez Dobao's (2012) study, which proved that collaboration resulted in better lexical and grammatical accuracy of the texts written by the students.

It is obviously noticed that peer interaction, peer feedback and socialization are essential elements in learning language skills, particularly, writing skill. In general, it is crucial for the teachers to focus on the efficacy of providing students with opportunities to engage with each other in enhancing their language knowledge.

It is also clear that a number of studies have investigated the effectiveness of several types of activities, namely group, pair and individual; however, few studies have compared the effectiveness of pair activities and individual approaches.

Therefore, the aim of the current study is to estimate the performance of pair working students in the writing process, and comparing them with another group of students who work individually. The essential hypothesis of this study is that students who involved in pair activities could write more accurate and fluent texts through interacting, giving and receiving feedback from each other. Moreover, these students are highly engaged in interactive environment for writing task which may increase their autonomy and promote their perceptions of collaborative learning at all.

7. Methodology:

A. Participants:

A sample of 60 students of Business freshmen students, who studied "English for Business" course in fall semester of the academic year 2018-2019 were selected. The population was divided into two groups; namely, control group (N= 20) and experimental group (N=40) The subjects of the experimental group was twice in number because the participants of it were asked to write paired assignments.

B. Instruments:

1- The pre-post writing test

Both groups of students were exposed to the same pre-post composition test. The topic for the pretest and posttest writings was chosen as "Business operations in our life"

To ensure face validity, the chosen topics and the composition test have been submitted to a jury of experts in the fields of TEFL. A pilot administration of the test has been carried out to determine the time allotted for responding to the test. It has been given to (20) freshmen students of College of Business Administration/Delta University during the academic year 2018-2019. It has been found that the time allotted for answering the test by students is 45 minutes.

To get the internal consistency among the five components of the test, Alpha Cronbach Formula has been used. The reliability coefficient is found to be 0.82. The subjects' performance was evaluated by two scorers for both pre and post tests. To ensure the reliability of the rating process, inter scorers reliability was calculated. It was 0.81 which appeared as an acceptable value of inter-rater reliability.

The researcher has adopted an analytical scoring rubric proposed by O'Malley& Pierce, (1996) which is used with writing composition. This scoring rubric is composed of

five components to be rated and a series of ratings which have numerical values. It has allocated 4 marks for each component. So, the highest mark the student could get is 20 while the lowest mark is 5 (see Appendix A).

2- Collaborative Writing Questionnaire

This study applied the Collaborative Writing Questionnaire that was established by Wu (2015). It was administered after the treatment. The questionnaire contains 12 questions, and it measures students' attitudes towards collaborative writing approach. A 5-point Likert scale is performed in this questionnaire and the students were asked to complete it in the classroom. In order to examine the reliability of the questionnaire Cronbach's coefficient alpha was calculated in the current study. The results of Cronbach's coefficient showed that the reliability value was 0.76. which is acceptable for a measure with 12 number of items.

C. Procedures and Treatment

Before the treatment, the researcher assigned four sessions for the instruction period. The aim was to give all students the same background about writing skill. The pretest was administered for both the control and experimental groups Before the beginning of the training lectures. Then, the two groups were enrolled in the writing treatment which was lasted seven sessions. For the control group, students were required to write composition individually. The researcher was the evaluator of students' writings by giving corrective feedback for the next lecture. There were no interactions among students (see Appendix B). Regarding the experimental group, in which the collaborative writing was performed, students were asked to achieve the writing tasks in pairs. In each lecture students were performing on each other's writings then they submitted to the teacher to evaluate the given feedback by

students to their partners’ composition (see Appendix C). By the end of the treatment, the students of both groups have been post-tested to evaluate the impact of collaborative writing on the experimental group subjects’ writing performance in comparison with that of control group subjects who have been directed to write individually. At last, the members of the experimental group were exposed to the questionnaire of attitude towards the collaborative writing approach.

8. Data Analysis and Results:

The data obtained from performing pre- and post-tests of the two group was analyzed using Mean, Standard Deviation (SD). The t – test formula is also used to find out whether there is any statistically significant difference between the scores of the experimental and control groups in the pre-tests (Table 1).

Table (1) The Means, Standard Deviations,
 and t- Values for the Overall Performance in the Pretest
 Composition Writing

Items	Group	No.	Means	SD	t- value		df	Results
					Computed t- value	Table t- value		
Composing	EG	40	2.4102	0.741	1.18	2.041	31	Unsign.
	CG	20	2.1019	0.7015				
Style	EG	40	2.0449	1.08	1.62	2.041	31	Unsign.
	CG	20	1.4544	0.685				
Sentence Formation	EG	40	2.3734	0.726	1.52	2.041	31	Unsign.
	CG	20	1.9190	0.943				
Usage	EG	40	2.1918	0.663	0.363	2.041	31	Unsign.
	CG	20	2.0908	0.71				
Mechanics	EG	40	2.1265	0.562	0.61	2.041	31	Unsign.
	CG	20	2.2827	0.63				
Composite Score	EG	40	11.1363	2.676	1.43	2.041	31	Unsign.
	CG	20	9.8183	1.98				

The results (as shown in Table 1) indicate, according to the composite score, the mean score is 11.1363 for the experimental group, and 9.8183 for the control group. The

computed t- value is 1.43 which is less than the table t- value 2.041 under 31 degrees of freedom and at 0.05 level of significance. This means that there is no statistically significant difference between the two groups in their overall score of the pretest.

Table (2) The Means, Standard Deviations, and t- Values for the Overall Performance in Composition Writing Posttest of both groups

Items	Group	No.	Means	SD	t- value		df	Results
					Computed t-value	Table t-value		
Composing	EG	40	3.4102	0.58	4.2	2.041	31	Sign.
	CG	20	2.5456	0.53				
Style	EG	40	3.2272	0.685	5.18	2.041	31	Sign.
	CG	20	1.9190	0.706				
Sentence Formation	EG	40	3.1362	0.773	3-37	2.041	31	Sign.
	CG	20	2.288	0.468				
Usage	EG	40	2.728	0.62108	3.16	2.041	31	Sign.
	CG	20	2.0908	0.31152				
Mechanics	EG	40	2.8737	0.564	3.59	2.041	31	Sign.
	CG	20	2.1819	0.403				
Composite Score	EG	40	15.31	1.782	7.23	2.041	31	Sign.
	CG	20	11.01	1.182				

Table 2 shows the results of the posttest, which revealed that the mean score composite of the experimental group is 15.31 and that of control group is 11.01. The computed t-value 7.23 is higher than the table t- value 2.041.

This finding indicates that there is a statistically significant variation between the two groups in writing achievement in favour of the experimental group. Therefore, the hypothesis which states: "Students who work collaboratively obtain better results in terms of organization, fluency, complexity and accuracy in the production of written text than those who work individually" is accepted.

Engagement:

This section analyzed the second hypothesis of the current study which states: “Collaborative working increases student’s engagement when writing texts, encouraging students to pay more attention and effort to the written task”. The observations that occurred throughout data collection in both groups (observing the communications among students through the treatment, to the tasks that drafted by each student in the different pairs) reveal that students who performed in pairs were more cautious and motivated to what they had to do than students who done individually. It also showed that the students who performed in pairs communicated with their peers regarding the writing activities. Moreover, the students who performed individually have a tendency to inquire and depend on their teacher throughout the implementation of the task than those who performed in pairs, who always attempted to resolve their troubles by communicating with their partners.

In addition, it is also noticed that students with a lower proficiency in English who performed together with a classmate with a higher proficiency were more motivated in the tasks and activities than those with a lower level of English who had to work individually. The members of experimental group (who worked in pairs) with lower proficiencies in English attempted to participate with their partners and them in the production of the written assignments. This indicated that almost all the texts written by pairs had the same length, completeness and accuracy, while the written texts by individual students revealed evident varieties regarding these features.

Business college students' attitudes towards collaborative writing

Regarding the third study hypothesis, which is stated: "Business college students at Delta University have positive attitudes towards collaborative writing", the percentage frequency of the students' response to the questionnaire were calculated. Table 3 shows the descriptive statistics for the scores of each item of the questionnaire.

Table 3. Students' Attitude Questionnaire

Item	1(%)	2(%)	3(%)	4(%)	5(%)	Mean
1. I can write a better essay when I work with a partner than when I work alone.	2.8	5.3	10.1	34.1	47.7	4.22
2. I like the process of planning, writing, and revising my essay better when I work with a partner than when I work alone.	2.7	22.7	49.1	12.4	13.1	3.11
3. I like planning my essay better when I work with a partner than when I work alone.	2.9	12.5	48.4	33.5	2.7	3.21
4. I like writing my essay better when I work with a partner than when I work alone.	0	7.9	30.6	48.9	12.6	3.68
5. I like revising my essay better when I work with a partner than when I work alone.	10.7	12.4	20.7	43.4	12.8	3.37
6. I prefer that my teachers utilize several group approaches like collaborative writing.	5.5	18.1	32.2	42.4	3.8	3.21
7. I prefer to write an essay with a partner than writing alone.	0	7.9	51.1	36.1	4.9	3.39
8. Collaborative writing is useful for my English writing.	0	2.7	10.4	58	29	4.14
9. Collaborative writing has guided me to write faster in English.	2.9	17.6	52.8	26.7	0	3.04
10. Collaborative writing has guided me to recognize how to edit and revise my writing better.	2.8	15.2	49.8	27.1	5.1	3.19
11. Collaborative writing can help improve my English writing.	0	7.8	23.2	44.4	24.6	3.88
12. Collaborative writing has guided me to communicate myself in English better.	5.3	12.6	18.1	43.4	20.5	3.61
Total						3.48

As revealed in Table 3, the first 5 items of the questionnaire required the students' perception about collaborative writing with individual writing. Results showed that 34.1 % of the students stated that they were 'agree' and 47.7 % stated that they were 'strongly agree' with item 1. That is the majority of the students (82%) stated that they can write a better essay when they work with peer than when they write alone.

Furthermore, Table 3 showed that 33.5% chose 'agree' and 2.7% chose 'strongly agree' for the third item as "I like planning my essay better when I work with a partner than when I work alone". In response to the fourth item, 61.5% of the students (48.9% agree, 12.6% strongly agree) stated that they prefer writing their essay better when they work with a colleague than when they work individually. For item 5 as "I like revising my essay better when I work with a partner than when I work alone" 43.4% of the students chose "agree" and 12.8% mentioned "strongly agree".

Findings with regard to the second part of the questionnaire revealed that most of the students were agree with the items since the mean scores of all the items are greater than 3. Among these items, the participants mostly agreed with item 8 as "Collaborative writing is beneficial for my English writing" (M = 4.14). Moreover, the result with regard to the last item showed that 43.4% were agree and 20.5% were strongly agree that collaborative writing has assisted them to communicate in English better. As can be seen in Table 3, the mean score of all items were above 3. Besides. Overall, these results revealed that Business college students had a positive attitude towards collaborative writing. Based on the results obtained, assumptions could be confirmed that the students had positives attitude towards collaborative writing. As a result, the study third hypothesis was also accepted.

9. Discussion:

The present study investigated the effects of collaborative writing on the quality of written text by business college students and their involvement and engagement in the writing process comparing with the individual writing process. According to the first research question “Is there any significant difference between the writing achievement of individual and collaborative groups of students?”). In the light of the results obtained, collaborative writing is found to be practical and effective in enhancing students’ writing ability in ESP context. Students who work in pairs have the tendency to arrange their texts and created more reasonable texts in terms of accuracy and fluency than those who performed individually. The findings of this study have met the results of other studies to a great extent. (e.g., Jalili & Shahrokhi, 2017; Jahin, 2012; Storch, 2005; Wu, 2015).

Regarding the second research question “What is the effect of collaborative writing approach on enlarging ESP students’ observed engagement when writing texts?” the results showed that students who performed in pairs focused more on the written activity than those who performed separately. It is also noticed that collaborative writing improved peer feedback, since students who write in pairs attempted to resolve their troubles among their peers rather than depending on their teacher. In addition, it chiefly affected students with lower proficiencies in English, who performed collaboratively with a student with a higher proficiency in English were highly motivated and involved in the writing process than those who wrote separately. The students had a partner involved in the process of writing in order to assist the other member to create the final production. The results regarding this point are agreed with the findings of several studies (e.g;

Fernandez Dobao, 2012; Storch, 2005; Rollinson, 2005; Al-Nafiseh, 2013)

Results of the third study question; “What are Business College students’ attitudes towards collaborative writing approach?” showed that the participants had a positive attitude towards collaborative writing. Similar findings were found by Wu (2015), Shehadel (2011), and Storch (2005), in which most of the subjects declared positive attitudes towards collaborative writing. The findings of the questionnaire used by Wu (2015) recommended that the students express their positive motivation towards writing collaboratively in the classroom environment. These results also match Storch’s (2005) confirmation that most students who participated in her study were generally positive towards the CW experience. Similar to the students in these studies, most of the students (82%) in the current study stated that they can write a better essay when they work with a partner than when they write individually. Similarly, Beseler and Qi (2014) found that collaborative writing had a positive effect upon learners individually and as team members. In addition, participants in Jalili & Shahrokhi, (2017) showed improvement in writing attitudes after engaging in collaborative writing.

10.Implications and Recommendations:

It can be concluded that collaborative writing is a suitable and effective approach to be performed for teaching writing. CW used as a pedagogical tool to activate student collaboration and generate a positive social atmosphere in the classroom. Writing does not need to be a separate performance. In addition, CW guides to lessen the anxiety the students might have about writing. The related literature asserts that collaborative writing has the probability to be alternative approach for the individual writing to face inadequacies and weaknesses of the writing

process separately. The results revealed that group work is more practical than working separately, especially in case of writing skill teaching. Consequently, teachers can employ the Implications of this study to enhance the writing ability of their students. This way, students do not only write their ideas, but are also involved in discussions and getting knowledge from their group partners. Furthermore, the students can receive feedback as much as they can guide others. As such, students can practice and sight writing from a wider perception that of a writer as well as a reader. Integrating group work as an element of the instruction can be very supportive to students participating in any language program. Material developers can also employ the obtained results for integrating them into their developed materials.

Future research could expand on this topic, seeing the effect of collaborative writing on text structure, in addition to, seeing the effects of this approach in writing different pieces of writing such as reports and projects. Future studies are also required to examine the effects of collaborative approach on other language skills such as reading, listening and speaking.

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