



Exploring the Effects of Collaborative Writing on Students' Argumentative Essays and Their Perceptions about Its Implementation

Faradila Masuara¹ and Utami Widiati^{2*}

¹Universitas Khairun, Ternate

^{2*}Universitas Negeri Malang (UM), Indonesia

utami.widiati.fs@um.ac.id

Abstract

This study aims at exploring the effects of collaborative writing (CW) on students' argumentative essays and their perceptions about its implementation. It involved 42 students from a state university in Indonesia, grouped into two: 14 students of control group and 28 of experimental group. In the control group, argumentative writing tasks were completed individually; in the experimental group, these tasks were conducted in pairs. Writing quality was determined by a holistic rating procedure that included content, organization, grammar, vocabulary, and mechanics. Results of the study showed that CW had an overall significant effect on students' L2 argumentative writing quality. However, this effect varied from one writing aspect to another; the effects were significant for content, organization, and vocabulary, but not for grammar and mechanics. In addition, the findings also revealed that the students enjoyed the CW activities, and most of them perceived CW positively as it improved their L2 writing performance.

Keywords: *argumentative writing, collaborative writing, writing quality, students' perception*

1. INTRODUCTION

Evidence has indicated multiple benefits of collaborative work in L2 writing. Collaborative writing (CW) promotes students' L2 writing learning, because during collaboration, learners can acquire knowledge about transitioning, word choice, and appealing to an audience (Kim, 2008; McDonough, 2004). CW benefits learners because in the process of co-authoring, learners consider not only grammatical accuracy and lexis but also discourse (Storch, 2011). Some studies (McDonough et al., 2018; Shehadeh, 2011) also discovered that students gained development in writing as they wrote paragraphs collaboratively. Similarly, Dobao (2012) remarked that rating quality of collaborative texts (organization, vocabulary) are higher than rating quality of individual texts. Further benefits of CW were also witnessed in Storch (2005) who examined pair collaboration in writing procedures. She discovered that pairs produce shorter but better texts in terms of task fulfillment, grammatical accuracy, and complexity. She also pinpointed that most students perceived CW positively. Additionally, Hadiyanto (2019) examined how narrative CW projects being implemented in an ER program in an Indonesian setting. The results showed that both teachers and students perceived the narrative collaborative project as beneficial to enhance students' creativity and imagination.

Seeing the previous studies above, studies about CW on argumentative texts are needed as it is not clear yet whether CW can improve students' writing argumentative quality. Existing studies only indicated that CW affects significantly in paragraph writing (McDonough et al., 2018; Shehadeh, 2011), in narrative writing (Hadiyanto, 2019), and in sequencing or procedure (Storch, 2005). Meanwhile, as indicated by Widiati and Cahyono (2006), writing argumentative essays is of a highly demanding task. Therefore, the current study aims at exploring whether CW can affect significantly students' performance on argumentative texts in general and on content, organization, grammar, vocabulary, and mechanic aspects in particular. It is important to note that argumentative essays have their own styles and thus require more elaboration of ideas as opposed to other genres (Storch, 2007). It is therefore necessary to explore the effects of CW on argumentative texts and students' perceptions on CW, which can be formulated into these two research questions:



- (1) Is there any significant effect of CW on the students' overall writing quality in general and on the areas of content, organization, grammar, vocabulary and mechanics in particular?
- (2) How do the students perceive CW in writing argumentative texts?

2. METHOD

The study involved 42 students from a state university in Indonesia, 14 of whom were assigned to control group and 28 to experimental group. The control group composed the argumentative text individually, whereas the experimental group composed the argumentative text collaboratively. The students had passed essay writing course by the time of data collection.

The control group was given 50 minutes for completing the task, whereas the experimental group was provided 60 minutes. The longer time given to the experimental group was based on previous studies that pairs take a longer time to complete the writing tasks than individuals (Storch, 2005), particularly related to the technical problems in the grouping process.

The data included the students' argumentative essays and a survey on students' perceptions about CW. The essays were rated based on Hedgcock and Lefkowitz (1992)'s writing rating scales, from 0-100 point scale, covering content, organization, grammar, vocabulary, and mechanics. There are four levels for each component: very poor, fair to poor, good to average, and excellent to very good.

In terms of reliability, two raters were involved to reach inter-rater reliability. The raters were experienced teachers who hold a doctorate degree and taught language skills at college level for over 20 years each. The data were analyzed using independent sample *t*-test with the level of significance set at .05. The survey questionnaire was filled up by the students of the experimental group to unpack 2 aspects: how they found the CW activities and whether the CW activities affected positively or negatively on their writing ability. Time for completing the survey was 25 minutes

3. RESULTS

Effects of CW on Students' Argumentative Writings

The writing performance of the control group is presented in Table 1, whereas that of the experimental group in Table 2.

Table 1. The Writing Mean Scores of Control Group

| Aspects | Max Score | Control Group | |
|---------------------|-----------|---------------|------|
| | | M | SD |
| Total Score | 100 | 71.09 | 6.62 |
| Content | 30 | 23.38 | 2.14 |
| Organization | 20 | 15.65 | 1.78 |
| Grammar | 25 | 14.85 | 1.22 |
| Vocabulary | 20 | 13.79 | 0.90 |
| Mechanics | 5 | 3.42 | 0.58 |

Table 2. The Writing Mean Scores of Experimental Group

| Aspects | Max Score | Experimental Group | |
|---------------------|-----------|--------------------|------|
| | | M | SD |
| Total Score | 100 | 79.84 | 6.39 |
| Content | 30 | 26.72 | 2.26 |
| Organization | 20 | 17.69 | 1.58 |
| Grammar | 25 | 15.38 | 1.20 |
| Vocabulary | 20 | 16.52 | 0.83 |
| Mechanics | 5 | 3.53 | 0.52 |

As can be seen in Table 2, the mean score of the experimental group is 79.84, whereas in Table 1, the mean score of the control group is 71.09. These statistical results reveal that the students performed writing better as they wrote argumentative essays collaboratively than individually. The data also reveal



that CW affects significantly the students' L2 writing, but the effects were different from one aspect to another. More specifically, the mean score of the content aspect of the experimental group is higher (26.72) than that of the control group (23.38). Meanwhile, for the organization aspect, the experimental group also shows a higher rating (17.69) than the control group (15.65). The significant difference between both groups is also discovered in the vocabulary aspect. The mean of vocabulary of the experimental group is much higher (16.62) than that of the control group (13.79).

Further interesting findings are seen in the grammar and mechanics. The mean of the grammar of the experimental group is 15.38, and this is closely similar to the mean of the grammar of the control group (14.85). These results indicate that CW does not significantly affect students' grammatical performance. The similar case also occurs in the mechanics, in which the mean of mechanics of the experimental group (3.53) is not far different from the mean of mechanics of the control group (3.42). These findings remark that CW writing does not improve mechanics area.

Students' Perceptions about CW

To the questionnaire item about 'how the students found the CW activities', most of them in the experimental group responded positively. One student, for example, mentioned, *"I like writing together with my friend. I enjoyed it"*, and another student expressed *"I am happy writing together with my partner. It is useful"*. In addition, one student admitted, *"We do enjoy the CW activity, because we can reconstruct the sentences together. For me, it's enjoyable"*.

In responding to the question of 'whether CW affects positively or negatively', the majority of the students admitted that CW improved their writing performance. For example, one student stated, *"I feel more confident after writing collaboratively with my friend. It affects me positively"*, and another student expressed, *"Writing together with a friend is useful. It improves my knowledge in English writing because I get a lot of new knowledge when I discuss and write together with my pair"*.

4. DISCUSSION

Regarding the first research question, the results reveal that CW affects significantly on students' L2 writing quality (See Table 1 and Table 2). These findings confirm the previous studies that texts of CW receive higher rating than individual writing (Dobao, 2012; Storch, 2011). Yet, the effects were different from one writing aspect to another. As seen in the tables, there was a significant effect of students' writing in the aspects of content, organization, and vocabulary, but not in mechanics and grammar. These findings are in line with the previous studies by Storch and Wigglesworth (2007) and Wigglesworth and Storch (2009) in that CW affects significantly writing organization, content and vocabulary but not grammatical accuracy. However, the findings are in contrast with McDonough et al. (2018)'s findings which show that there were no significant differences between students' collaborative work and individual work in terms of content, organization, and accuracy. The different findings between this study and the one by McDonough et al. (2018) might be due to learners' proficiency level. The participants of this study were of intermediate level, whereas the participants in McDonough et al' study were of beginner to upper-beginner level.

Meanwhile, the result of no improvement of grammatical aspect is contradictory to Storch' study (2005) which suggested that the students who worked in pairs produced shorter and less syntactically complex compositions, but overall more accurate than those who wrote individually. This finding is surprising, because in the view of social constructivist perspective of learning by Vygotsky (1978), CW presumably leads to accuracy improvement in students' writing. However, some findings (Storch, 2005; Storch & Wigglesworth, 2007) confirm collaborative compositions are not significantly accurate than individual compositions.

Regarding the students' perceptions about CW, this study found that most of the students perceived CW positively, and this confirms many previous studies (Bhowmik et al., 2018; Dobao & Blum, 2013; Shehadeh, 2011) which reported students' enjoyment in writing collaboratively.



5. CONCLUSIONS AND SUGGESTIONS

Based on the results, it can be concluded that CW engages the students in the writing processes, leading to significant improvement in their L2 writing quality. In particular, CW affects the students' writing performance in terms of content, organization and vocabulary as opposed to individual writing. However, CW does not affect grammar and mechanic aspects.

Despite the benefits, this study has limitations. First, the samples for CW activities were relatively small. It would be better to involve more pairs to get more elaborative findings of the effects of CW. Second, there is only one genre explored in this study, that is, argumentative writing. It is advisable that future research scrutinize the effects of CW on the quality of different genres; this is because each genre has its own stylistic features. It is expected that by examining CW on different genres, theoretical contribution of CW across genres can be obtained more comprehensively.

REFERENCES

- Bhowmik, H.R. (2018). Peer collaborative writing in the EAP classroom: Insights from a Canadian Postsecondary context. *TESOL Journal*, 10 (2).
- Dobao, A. (2012). Collaborative writing tasks in the L2 classroom: Comparing group, pair, and individual work. *Journal of Second Language Writing*, 21 (4), 40-58.
- Dobao, A & Blum, A. (2013). Collaborative writing in pairs and small groups: Learners' attitudes and perceptions. *System*, 41 (4), 365-378
- Hadiyanto, A.K. 2019. Students' Collaborative Story Writing Project in an Extensive Reading Program. *TEFLIN Journal*, 30 (2).
- Hedgcock, J., & Lefkowitz, N. (1992). Collaborative oral/aural revision in foreign language writing instruction. *Journal of Second Language Writing*, 1, 255–276.
- Kim, Y. (2008). The contribution of collaborative and individual tasks to the acquisition of L2 vocabulary. *The Modern Language Journal*, 92(1), 114–130.
- McDonough, K. (2004). Learner-learner interaction during pair and small group activities in a Thai EFL context. *System*, 32, 207–224.
- McDonough, Vleeschauwer, & Crawford. (2018). Comparing the quality of collaborative writing, collaborative prewriting, and individual texts in a Thai EFL context. *System*, 74 (8) 109-120.
- Shehadeh. (2011). Effect and student perceptions of collaborative writing in L2. *Journal of Second Language Writing*, 20 (3), pp. 286-298.
- Storch, N. (2005). Collaborative writing: Product, process, and students' reflections. *Journal of Second Language Writing*, 14(3), 153–173.
- Storch, N. (2007). Investigating the merits of pair work on a text editing task in ESL classes. *Language Teaching Research*, 11, 143–159
- Storch, N. (2011). Collaborative writing in L2 contexts: Processes, outcomes, and future directions. *Annual Review of Applied Linguistics*, 31, 275–288.
- Storch, N., & Wigglesworth, G. (2007). Writing tasks: Comparing individual and collaborative writing. In M.P. García Mayo (Ed.), *Investigating tasks in formal language learning* (pp. 157–177). London: Multilingual Matters.
- Vygotsky, L.S. (1978). *Mind in society: The development of higher psychological processes*. Cambridge, ZMA: Harvard University Press.
- Widiati, U., & Cahyono, B. Y. (2006). The teaching of writing in the Indonesian context: The state of the arts. *Jurnal Ilmu Pendidikan*, 13(3), pp. 139-150.
- Wigglesworth, G., & Storch, N. (2009). Pair versus individual writing: Effects on fluency, complexity and accuracy. *Language Testing*, 26, 445–466.