EFL STUDENTS' PERCEPTIONS OF COLLABORATIVE WRITING DURING REMOTE TEACHING

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Abstrak

Penelitian tentang penulisan kolaboratif baik secara daring atau tatap muka telah banyak dilakukan untuk menggali manfaat teoretis dan pedagogisnya dalam pembelajaran bahasa. Terlepas dari bukti positif tentang manfaatnya, penelitian lebih lanjut perlu mengeksplorasi implementasinya dalam konteks tertentu seperti pembelajaran selama pandemi Covid-19. Makalah ini melaporkan persepsi dan sikap mahasiswa Pendidikan Bahasa Inggris tentang pengalaman mereka dan peran yang dirasakan dari menulis kolaboratif terhadap pengembangan bahasa dan *soft skill* mereka. Data dikumpulkan dari tiga kuesioner yang diberikan setelah mahasiswa menyelesaikan proyek penulisan kolaboratif mereka yang mencakup infografis puisi, teks deskriptif, dan teks diskusi. Selain itu, catatan reflektif mahasiswa setelah menyelesaikan semua tugas digunakan untuk melakukan triangulasi data. Hasil penelitian ini menunjukkan persepsi positif mahasiswa tentang pengalaman menulis kolaboratif mereka di tiga genre teks. Studi ini juga menunjukkan sikap positif mahasiswa terhadap peran menulis kolaboratif untuk pengembangan bahasa dan *soft skill* mereka. Implikasi pedagogis menulis kolaboratif juga dibahas dalam makalah ini.
Kata Kunci: menulis kolaboratif, pembelajaran jarak jauh, *genre* teks

Abstract

Whether online or face-to-face, research on collaborative writing has been widely conducted to explore its theoretical and pedagogical merits for language learning. Despite positive evidence on its benefits, more studies need to explore its implementation under specific circumstances such as teaching and learning during the pandemic Covid-19. This paper reports the EFL students' perceptions and attitudes of their experiences and perceived affordances of collaborative writing toward their language and soft skill development. Data were gathered from the three questionnaires administered after students finished their collaborative writing projects: poetry infographic, descriptive text, and discussion text. Additionally, students' reflective notes after completing all tasks were used to triangulate the data. The findings showed students' positive perceptions of their collaborative writing experiences across the three text genres. The study also revealed students' positive attitudes on the affordances of collaborative writing for their language and soft skill development. Pedagogical implications are also discussed.
Keywords: collaborative writing, remote teaching, text genres

INTRODUCTION

For decades, the collaborative writing approach has been used in EFL writing classes. Unlike the conventional writing instruction that assigns students to write alone, collaborative writing requires students to work together with their peers to produce a single text (Elabdali, 2021; Storch, 2019; Villarreal & Gil-Sarratea, 2020). Storch (2019) asserts that collaborative writing could be simply referred to as "the involvement of two or more writers in the production

of a single text" (p. 40). Collaborative writing has been promoted due to the benefits it offers. For example, collaborative writing facilitates language skills development such as speaking and writing, increases students' self-efficacy and learning regulation, and promotes changes in attitudes and participation (Hasanuddin et al., 2019; Hassini, 2006; Pham, 2021; Rezeki, 2017). Underpinned by Vigotsky's social-cultural theory (Vygotsky, L. S., & Cole, 1978), collaborative writing affords learners learning opportunities through social interaction. With his famous concept of Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), learners who undergo joint writing activities learn and develop with the support of others. When students write collaboratively with their peers, they share ideas, negotiate, and even debate with one another to reach a joint agreement. Within such processes, students practice using the target language, use scaffolding to assist, utilize various sources and develop strategies to overcome conflicts for meaningful collaboration (Chen & Yu, 2019; Khairul'azam & Yamat, 2019; Rezeki & Rahmani, 2021; Storch, 2019).

This research idea derives from students' observable problems or phenomena in learning during the pandemic. It has been observed that many students became demotivated to participate in class and do the required tasks (Chakma et al., 2021; Lampong Klomkul, 2021). Some students complained about feeling stressed as they have to learn in isolation, not meeting their peers regularly as in everyday situations. As this research focused on one particular course, writing, problems also occurred in students' progress in their writing. Based on this preliminary observation, the researchers, one of whom was the writing course instructor under investigation, sought to understand how the EFL pre-service teachers perceived remote collaborative writing as beneficial or otherwise for their learning.

Previous research has investigated collaborative writing and its effect on students' writing quality, both in face-to-face and online modes of learning (e.g., (Abrams, 2019; Challob et al., 2016; Khairul'azam & Yamat, 2019b; Pham, 2021; Villarreal & Gil-Sarratea, 2020). These studies have provided strong support on the efficacy of collaborative writing for writing fluency, accuracy, apprehension, and performance. For example, Villarreal and Gil-Sarratea's (2019) study focused on whether collaborative writing could benefit low-proficiency secondary school EFL students' writing. Thirty-two students were divided equally into two groups; experimental (n=16) and control group (n=16). Students in the former group were required to write individually, whereas the latter wrote collaboratively in pairs. The findings indicated that the texts produced in pairs were shorter but slightly more complex in lexical and grammatical features than individually written texts. These texts also scored higher in content, structure, and organization. The researchers concluded that collaborative writing is "a promising tool to

maximize the opportunities for meaningful interaction and EFL development in secondary classrooms" (p. 19).

Another study by Pham (2021) investigated the effects of collaborative writing on students' writing fluency and proposed a framework for writing an essay collaboratively. The study involved 62 second-year undergraduate students majoring in English in a university in Vietnam. Employing an experimental research method with control and experimental group design, data in the study were collected through pre-tests and post-tests in the form of essay writing in both groups and semi-structured interviews. Pham reported that collaborative writing had significant effects on the students' writing fluency, as seen from the increased length or number of words in their essays. The study also revealed that students performed collaborative essay writing by following this framework (in consecutive order): topic selection-brainstorming together-negotiating for agreement-making an outline-dividing each paragraph to each group member-combining paragraphs to form essay-feer feedback for cohesion and unity. While the study confirmed the positive benefits of collaborative writing on students' writing fluency, Pham's study also warrants the communication problems occurring during the collaboration, thus suggesting a framework for the students to collaborate better when writing essays with their peers.

In addition to face-to-face classrooms, research on collaborative writing had explored its implementation in online mode (Abrams, 2019; Kim & Kang, 2020; Said et al., 2014; Sulistyo et al., 2019). For example, Abrams (2019) explored how collaboration patterns during collaborative writing using Google Docs relate to the linguistic features of the texts produced in such a setting. The qualitative study involved 28 first-year students in a US university studying German. The study revealed that the texts written by collaboratively-oriented groups were more coherent and longer than the less collaborative ones. However, the study also showed that wide lexical variety

As reviewed above, a large body of research has shown that collaborative writing has been widely investigated, covering many aspects. However, little has been done to see how students perceived their collaborative writing experience across three different text genres, especially in remote teaching and learning during the pandemic of Covid-19. The current study aimed to fill in these gaps. Specifically, the study was formulated under three research questions: 1) What are the students' attitudes of their collaborative writing experience over the poetry infographics, descriptive text, and discussion text collaborative projects? 2) What are the students' perceptions of collaborative writing affordances for their English language

learning? 3) What are the students' perceptions of collaborative writing affordances for their soft skills development?

METHOD

Employing a descriptive study approach, this research explored the attitudes and perceptions of EFL students toward their collaborative writing experience. Thirty-six EFL pre-service teachers registered in two intact classes of Writing Skill Development participated in this study. Both classes were considered homogenous as they were taught by the same instructor using the exact teaching instructions. The participants' age ranged from 19 to 20 years old. Eight of the students were male, and the rest were female. Writing Skill Development is the first writing subject in their undergraduate curriculum to be completed in the second semester. Working in groups of 3 to 4 members, students undertook three collaborative writing projects in this study: poetry infographics, descriptive text, and discussion text. The following figure shows the procedures of the collaborative writing tasks:
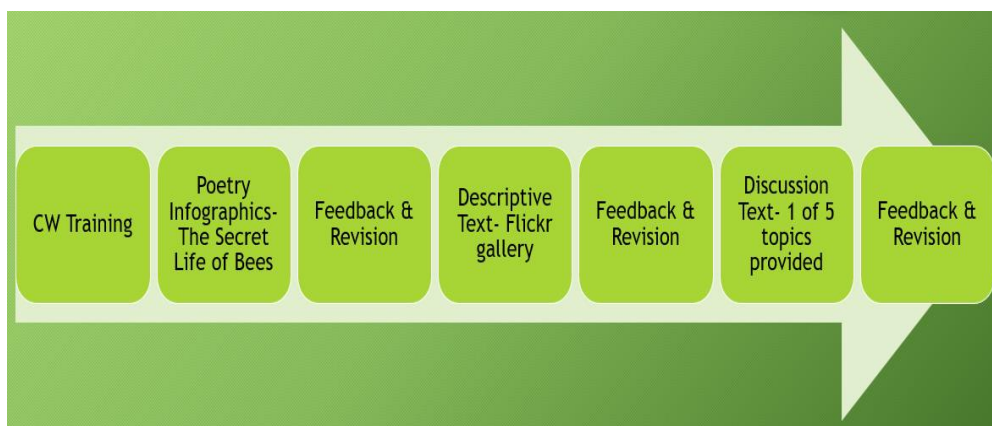

Figure 1. Collaborative Writing Procedures

Students were required to write a poem using the words from a novel entitled "The Secret Life of Bee" by Su Monk Kidd for the first project. To avoid plagiarism, the students were instructed to use words (not phrases or sentences) taken randomly from the novel's first chapter. They then presented the poem in the form of infographics. The next project asked students to write a descriptive text prompted by a picture they selected from a Flickr gallery. Finally, students wrote a discussion text collaboratively by choosing one of the five topics provided. Students revised their writing based on the instructor's feedback in each project. After they submitted each revised

Three sets of questionnaires were administered online using Google Form to collect the data. The questionnaires were created using Lickert Scale and Open-Ended Questions to complete each time students finished their collaborative writing project. At the end of all collaborative writing projects, students' reflective notes were also used to triangulate the data.

The results of the questionnaires were analyzed using descriptive statistics by tabulating the data and calculating the percentages of each category found. Next, the reflective notes were analyzed using thematic analysis to support findings based on the questionnaire's responses. The thematic analysis for the qualitative data was conducted following six steps: familiarizing with research data, generating initial codes, searching themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes, and producing the report (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

Framed under the three research questions outlined previously, the findings of this research were presented in three themes: students' attitudes of their three collaborative writing projects, students' perceptions of the extent to which their collaborative writing projects enhanced their English language learning, and student's perception on the extent to which the collaborative writing projects developed their soft skills.

Students' attitudes of Collaborative Writing

The first category drawn from the findings was the students' attitudes upon their experiences in writing poetry infographics, descriptive text, and discussion text. The summary of the results is presented in the table below:

Table 1. Students' Attitudes

Variables	Strongly Disagree (%)	Disagree (5)	Moderately Agree (%)	Agree (%)	Strongly Agree (%)
Poetry Infographics	0	5.1	23.1	33.3	38.5
Descriptive Text	0	0	12.8	51.3	35.9
Discussion Text	0	0	7.7	46.2	46.2

Based on the responses to the questionnaires asking the extent to which students enjoyed the three collaborative writing projects, the majority of the participants indicated positive responses. This is evident from the percentages of answers to their agreement. For the first project, which is writing a poetry infographic, the responses ranged from 23.1 %, 33.3 %, and 38.5% for 'moderately agree,' 'Agree,' and 'Strongly Agree' categories.

For the next project, a descriptive text writing task, all participants enjoyed doing the project together. As shown in Table 1, none of the students stated they disliked doing the project. With a slightly different amount, all students responded positively to the extent of preference, with 12.8% choosing Moderately Agree, 51.3% Agree, and 35.9% Strongly Agree.

As to the last project, which is writing a discussion text collaboratively, students also showed similar responses to the other projects. As seen from the above table, only 7,7 % reported enjoying collaborative discussion text writing in a 'Moderately High' degree. In comparison, the rest testified 42.2 % for Agree and the same amount for Highly Agree on categories.

Overall, the findings supported the students' positive attitudes upon implementing collaborative writing tasks or projects into language classrooms. Among the reasons for these supports toward collaborative writing were the opportunities to develop their language-related skills and encourage them to read, share, and discuss ideas with their peers. For example, one of the students described: "*I learned a lot from this collaborative writing, not only writing skills but also speaking skills, grammar, reading skills, and improving my vocabulary, because when I did those projects, I read some articles, and after that, I shared the results with my friends, then discuss them, and sometimes debate about them*" (MA., Ref,). Another explanation of the students' preference over collaborative writing was psychological, such as the feeling of comfort during the collaboration session, as stated by another participant: "*It feels good to have other people listen and understand me. I can also understand their thoughts*" (TT, Ref.).

Nevertheless, Table 1 also revealed a few students who disagreed that collaborative writing was a pleasant experience, especially at the first project, writing a poetry infographic. The table shows that 5.1% chose the 'Disagree' category. The reasons were possibly attributed to the nature of the task, as articulated by some students in the open-ended questionnaires and supported by their reflective notes. For example, TM stated, "*The thing that I found difficult or challenging from these projects is the limitation of the words. I found it difficult because I think we can't develop our ideas in every text*" (TM, Ref). This student described her concern on the difficulties of creating the poetry by using only the words from one of the novel's chapters provided by the instructor. Another reason could be students' unfamiliarity with collaborative writing and what to do for effective collaboration. As AF described:

> *…but honestly, it did not feel like a collaboration when we worked on the first and second projects because we did not get what it meant to collaborate. We weren't working together from the start, but we made things individually on the first hand before we discussed. So, I admit that our group was lacking in terms of the collaborative aspect* (AF, Ref.).

The above statement indicated that students had not possessed adequate understanding and skills to collaborate. They divided the tasks instead of working together from the beginning to the end. Storch (2019) argues that such activities could be regarded as cooperative rather than

collaborative writing since they did not share the task's responsibility in all writing stages. The "division of labor" (p. 40) is, according to (Storch, 2019), the part that distinguishes collaborative writing from cooperative writing. Though students have received some training on collaborative writing prior t doing the project, it seemed that more guidance is needed to perform better collaboration (Heinonen et al., 2020; Pham, 2021a; Rezeki, 2017b). Nevertheless, the overall findings of students' positive perceptions supported previous studies on the merits of the collaborative writing approach (Khairul'azam & Yamat, 2019b; Rezeki & Rahmani, 2021).

Affordances for Language skills and aspects development

The next focus of investigation within the implementation of collaborative writing across three text genres is its affordances for developing language skills and elements. At this point, the participants were required to respond how much they agree that writing poetry infographics, descriptive text, and discussion text collaboratively could develop their speaking and writing skills and language aspects such as grammar and vocabulary. Findings on the affordances of collaborative writing projects toward students' speaking and writing skills and Grammar and vocabulary are presented in the table below.

Table 2. Affordances for language learning

Variables	Speaking (%)	Writing (%)	Grammar (%)	Vocabulary (%)
Poetry Infographics	78	82	79.5	74.4
Descriptive Text	51.3	87.2	79.5	74.4
Discussion Text	79.5	94.9	89.7	89.7

After working collaboratively to produce a poetry infographic, the students' responses were positive, as shown by the percentages attributed to the questions. In the case of the first collaborative writing project, which is the poetry infographic, 78% of the students agreed that the collaborative writing poetry infographics project helped improve their speaking skills, and 82% favored its affordance for writing skills development. Moreover, 79.5% and 74.4% of the students approved positive contributions of collaborative poetry infographic projects upon their grammar and vocabulary development.

The responses were similar to the previous group work for the collaborative descriptive text writing project. Students displayed agreement on developing their speaking and writing skills and their grammar and vocabulary mastery due to writing together. Interestingly, while the trend is the same : the highest response was given to the development of writing skills,

students responded less to speaking skills in descriptive text writing than writing the poetry infographic together. This might be due to the nature of the descriptive text, which the students considered easier than poetry and discussion texts. The observation results on students' recorded collaboration displayed less complex and shorter conversation when they attempted to finish the collaborative descriptive text writing task. Some groups only used Whatsapp chats to communicate, while most did video conferences through Google Meet or Zoom for other projects.

Finally, students' agreement toward developing target language skills and elements resulting from the collaborative discussion text writing project indicated the highest response in the aspects of writing with 94.9 %. In contrast, Grammar and Vocabulary were in the second place equally, receiving 89.7%. The minor answers were given to the Speaking with 79.5%. The overall findings align with the previous studies on the benefits of collaborative writing in enhancing students' language skills other elements, including Grammar and vocabulary(Guo et al., 2021; Inayah, 2019; Storch, 2019).

Affordances of Soft Skills Development

Much research has presented evidence that collaborative writing could develop students' soft skills through their interaction with one another. The following table shows students' responses toward affordances of joint paper upon students' critical thinking, empathy, open-mindedness, understanding, and respect across three text genres.

Table 3. Affordances for Soft Skills Development

Variables	Critical Thinking (%)	Empathy (%)	Open-mindedness (%)	Understanding (%)	Respect (%)
Poetry Infographics	74.4	41	82.1	82.1	74.4
Descriptive Text	71.8	43.6	79.5	89.7	66.7
Discussion Text	92.3	61.5	87.2	97.4	79.5

As the table shows, students generally positively perceive the opportunities resulting from the three collaborative writing projects on their soft skills development. Understanding seems to have gained the highest response across the various soft skills being asked in the questionnaires compared to other skills over the three collaborative writing projects. For instance, after doing the poetry infographic project, 82.1% of the students chose Understanding as the skill their collective writing experience developed. Responses on the same skill were even higher for the

other two collaborative writing projects, that is 89.7% for descriptive text writing and 97.4% for the joint discussion text writing project. On the other hand, Empathy has received the most minor response than other soft skills, that is 41%, 43.6%, and 61.5% for poetry infographics, descriptive text, and discussion text, respectively. The most likely reason for the students' highest selection of Understanding for all collaborative writing projects was that they always had to appreciate differences of ideas or thoughts. Students' reflective notes mainly stated that they had to accept others' opinions and not impose their own toward others'. As all aspects were selected by more than 50% of the students, except for Empathy in poetry and collaborative descriptive text writing projects, it can be concluded that collaborative writing across the three text types has been regarded as adequate to promote soft skills development. This finding aligns with the previous studies investigating the students' perceived benefits of collaborative writing.

CONCLUSION

The primary goal of this research was to find out students' perceptions of their collaborative writing experiences situated in the remote teaching and learning during the pandemic of Covid-19. Specifically, the study sought students' general impressions and preferences toward collaborative writing across three genres, the perceived affordances of collaborative writing for target language learning and opportunities collaborative writing offered for soft skills development. The findings revealed students' positive attitudes toward their collaborative writing projects on poetry infographics, descriptive text, and discussion text writing tasks. Additionally, the study results reported students' agreement on the affordances of collaborative writing to promote their English language learning, especially in speaking and writing skills and Grammar and Vocabulary elements. Similarly, the study showed encouraging evidence that collaborative writing over the three genres allowed students' interpersonal skills development. Overall, the study suggests that collaborative writing is a practical pedagogical approach used in EFL writing classes. Yet, the study warrants the need for careful organization and clear guidance for the students before doing any collaborative writing projects, especially when it is to be conducted online.

Furthermore, while this study provides strong support for the implementation of collaborative writing in small EFL writing classes, it suggests several areas be addressed better. First, this study involved students in their beginning level of writing in their curriculum. Future researchers may consider involving students in a higher level of writing courses. Second, the study only investigated students' perceptions over the three collaborative writing projects; other researchers can explore the nature of the collaboration under each collaborative writing task and relate them to the writing quality of the text produced collaboratively in each project.

Last, while it focused on the collaborative writing projects conducted under remote teaching and learning instructions, the study overlooked the students' different online platforms or tools and how they may affect students' collaboration or the writing product. Further investigation could address these issues.

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