

THE EFFECTIVENESS OF APPLYING COLLABORATIVE WRITING STRATEGY TO IMPROVE MAJOR STUDENTS' WRITING ABILITY AT DONG NAI TECHNOLOGY UNIVERSITY

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Date received the article: 04/08/2022

Date received the review results: 03/02/2023

Date published the article: 29/02/2023

Abstract: *Writing is one of the two basic methods of communication, and students, during their studies and even graduates, may have to write a report and plan a strategy in the workplace. Therefore, improving writing skills in general and English writing skills, in particular is essential. In the process of learning writing skills at university, students often encounter both objective and subjective difficulties. To improve students' English writing skills, the author conducted a study in which collaborative writing was employed to assess students' writing ability. This study was completed within 15 weeks with 60 students in two classes in the same Department of Foreign Languages at Dong Nai Technology University. To evaluate the method's effectiveness, the author compared the pre-test and post-test results. At the end of the semester, the author also collected students' opinions on collaborative writing activities. The results show that the student's writing skills have improved through collaborative writing, considered better than individual writing. Most students also affirmed their interest in this activity and pointed out many advantages.*

Keywords: *writing skills, difficulties, faculty of foreign language, collaborative writing, individual writing.*

I. Introduction

Writing is always considered to be the most difficult skill for Vietnamese students in the process of learning English. As a matter of fact, even native learners of the language have to struggle themselves to write accurately and effectively. Needless to say, it is not easy at all for an EFL learner to write something that an average native

learner usually makes a lot of effort to do. Also, there are some reasons which can answer the question why writing is the most difficult skill for students at Dong Nai Technology University. Firstly, writing requires good grammar. Although grammar is taught from elementary level, students tend to learn it by heart in order to do grammar-based tests. Therefore, they seem

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to remember a large number of grammar rules, but fail to point out the use of appropriate grammar in writing. Secondly, students are often known to spend less time to write than to practice other skills. Thirdly, when students write something, they are always concerned about what they write is correct or incorrect, and teachers are not usually available to correct their papers due to the fact that teachers do not have enough time to correct for a number of students in a class. As a result, students have struggled to produce even a simple piece of writing which still contains lots of mistakes in grammar, vocabulary use and sentence structures.

For the above reasons, the study “the effectiveness of applying collaborative writing strategy” is necessary. It helps point out the students’ difficulties in learning to write and find out whether the method is interesting and improves the quality of writing for students. There are two questions raised: What are students’ views on collaborative writing? To what extent does collaborative writing improve the students’ writing ability?

II. Literature review:

2.1. Challenges faced by students and teachers on writing skills

Writing is the most challenging skill to master, according to Cullen [1], and many individuals consider writing to be a laborious process. Students may experience considerable stress when taking the writing test due to the time constraints, and the unpredictable nature of the content, Pearson [2]

According to Bagheri and Riasati [3], the existing problems stem from a

number of reasons, including the learners’ lack of exposure to English. This is because English is a foreign language in Vietnam. In addition, the curriculum has placed little emphasis on writing abilities, which encourages copying and plagiarism in huge classes. The writers also make it clear that inexperienced teachers contribute to the issues as well because they have inadequate professional training, which makes them more eager to teach reading and listening than writing. Besides from their fear and the effect of their mother tongue, learners also lack encouragement and develop unfavorable attitudes toward learning writing.

2.2. Academic writing approaches

Writing proficiency is essential for learning English as a foreign language (EFL), as it is required to assist learners’ academic achievement, according to Aliyu [4]. In teaching writing skills, teachers can usually choose one of two popular approaches: product-based or process-based. The former approach is the traditional, familiar route in which students will imitate a sample essay provided at the outset, Steele [5]. However, this approach is considered to be “boring, repetitive and counter intellectual” Pincas [6] (p. 185) and is more suitable for writing types such as letters, emails, and postcards rather than essays [5]. The later approach focuses more on developing the use of the language through activities such as idea generation, group discussion, and rewriting. In the process, students will gradually improve their writing skills [7]. This approach is considered suitable for teaching essay writing, when students need to have many ideas and know how

to organize and arrange those ideas in the essay on their own.

2.3. Collaborative writing strategy

However, in addition to self-motivation to learn to write, there is also a very effective method to enhance students' writing motivation, which is pair or peer writing. According to Nunan [8] "Students need to be motivated to study in groups to increase motivation and develop a good attitude towards writing" (p.87).

Collaborative learning is where collaborative writing first emerged. When Abercrombie [9] discovered that it was interactions among students at University Hospital in London assisted them in learning diagnosis successfully, collaborative learning was given significant attention.

One of the various methods a student might utilize to produce a piece of writing is collaborative writing. When used properly, it can be a useful technique for producing a high-quality entry. It's also no secret that writing collaboratively might have drawbacks. Hence, it is important to assess if the advantages outweigh the disadvantages of collaborative writing. On the one hand, collaborative writing is widely proven effective by researchers. Storch [10] asserted that collaborative writing activities give students the opportunity to learn more about the language. Shehadeh [11] found that collaborative writing brings out much higher quality than individual writing in terms of content, paragraph structure, and vocabulary. On the other hand, it is inevitable to have disagreement among collaborators because Vietnamese students are commonly believed to lack

collaboration skills, which makes teachers concern whether students would actively cooperate to help each other generate a decent product. Therefore, teachers need to pay attention during group discussions and always find the most appropriate way to harmonize the ideas of each individual in the group.

In order to produce quality writing, students are urged to collaborate in pairs or groups using the collaborative writing technique. With the help of this tactic, students can produce a specific text with their classmates. In addition to providing opportunities for academic reading and writing practice, collaborative writing also fosters reflection, knowledge sharing, and critical thinking Sukirman [12]. According to Dale in Utami [13] collaborative writing entails meaningful engagement and shared judgment between group members when a shared material is being written. As a result, it appears to be able to facilitate students' writing processes by offering a comfortable setting for them to work together with their partners. According to the concepts given above, collaborative writing is a social process that fosters student motivation since it requires them to engage with one another while working in a group.

The Collaborative Writing strategy must be implemented in a number of phases (Zuhri, 2009). The first step is coming up with ideas. The students are instructed to come up with as many suggestions as possible for the lecturer's topic. Drafting is the next phase. At this stage, the students are required to draft the topic they have been given, which is based on previously created ideas. Revision and editing come in third. The writer asks the

helper to edit the manuscript at this stage, and then the writer rewrites the edited thoughts to create a well-written piece. The updated manuscript is then edited jointly by the writer and the helper. The editing procedure is concerned with the usage of grammar, vocabulary, or writing structures. Publishing comes as the last phase. The students present their writing in front of the class in this step. Then, the lecturer asks other students to check the results of the writing to gain comments. Following that, the instructor grades the students' assignments.

III. Research methods

3.1. Design

In this study, the researcher used a quantitative and qualitative design due to it aims to measure the effectiveness of using assessment in writing papers and students' attitudes towards the method. Three credits of this required course are dedicated to teaching students how to write well in argumentative essays.

To encourage students to express their ideas in an acceptable manner in English language, the argumentative essay's premise was explained to them in great depth. Students at Dong Nai Technology University who are majored in English were given this topic during their third semester. There are 15 meetings on this subject, however for the current study, the authors only address 8. They began on February 6, 2023, and finished on March 1, 2023.

3.2. Participants

This study was conducted among 60 sophomore students of Writing 3

course. The students are considered to be at mixed-level and the majority of them are found to have problems with writing skills.

3.3. Instruments

A questionnaire, pre-test and post-test were used to collect data. The tests were used to measure the participants' writing ability, whereas questionnaire was used to explore the percentage of the students' psychological impact on the use of collaborative writing in the writing an argumentative essay. Researcher's notes from observations can be both quantitative and qualitative depending on what are being observed and the frequency of the phenomenon. It's true that memories can fade, and in those cases, taking notes is essential for recreating what happened.

3.4. The procedure of data collection

Data were collected by three procedures, namely (1) pre-test was given to all participants individually. Students' writing ability was measured by using IELTS writing scoring rubric; (2) the questionnaire was distributed for all participants; (3) post-test was given to all participants divided into groups of 3 or 4; (4) class observation notes were taken.

3.5. Data analysis

Data in this research were analyzed by using tables. Furthermore, data given by questionnaire and observation were displayed in the form of tables and charts.

3.6. Overview of steps of the collaborative process

On the first day of the course, students were informed by the lecturer about being

selected as a model for the research paper, and the purpose of the research paper was also clearly explained to the students. The aim was to help students know what they were doing and what needed to be done during the course. After the introduction, the learning process began. The researcher did a warming-up exercise, asking the students to recollect their understanding of the argumentative essay and how to write it down. This was done to check on the students' comprehension of argumentative essays. After the recalling process done, the researcher gave the students a sample of an argumentative essay to study. The researcher then instructed the students to locate the essay's primary concept, comprehend how it developed, and identify the language features utilized, such as tenses and other writing-related elements. At the end of the lesson, the students were asked by the lecturer to take a pre-test individually in class. The students are asked to write a 250-word essay in a period of 60 minutes.

Writing activities in class combined a variety of methods such as process-based and product-based approach.

At the second meeting, the researcher introduced Collaborative Writing strategy and how it was implemented in the teaching and learning process. The researcher then instructed the students to form groups of three or four and chose one student to serve as the writer while the other students served as the helpers. The researcher gave the students a topic regarding the environment and a sample of an argumentative essay to study. The students were then instructed to locate the essay's primary concept, comprehend how

it developed, and identify the language features utilized, such as tenses and other writing-related elements and exchange their worksheets with their friends to get feedback. Group members worked together to discuss the topic (discussion), develop ideas (brainstorming), and then jointly write a general outline (General outline). Then, the researcher assigned the students to work at home.

The students were required to turn in the assignment from the previous meeting at the third and fourth meetings (generating idea and drafting). The researcher then provided verbal and written feedback on the students' work, and instructed the students to review and alter their manuscripts once more after providing feedback on their work. The use of relevant language elements, the selection of suitable words, and the right application of writing mechanics, including capitalization, punctuation, and spelling, were the main areas of emphasis during the revising and editing process.

The learning process at the fifth, and sixth meetings concentrated on the publishing stage. The students were instructed to present their written work to the class. This was an opportunity for students to provide feedback on the work of their peers. The students received helpful advice on how to write argumentative essays at this section.

The researcher evaluated the students' work on their argumentative essay writing at the seventh meeting. The evaluation emphasized grammar (sentence structure), vocabulary (diction/word choice), organization (paragraph

structure), and mechanics in terms of content (subject development) (writing mechanism).

The post test was conducted at the eighth meeting. To assess the level of student achievement in the writing of argumentative essays, the researcher decided to administer a writing test to the students. Students took the test in groups, group members nominated one representative as the writer while the rest of the members were the helpers. The

students were asked to write a 250-word essay in a period of 60 minutes.

IV. Results and Discussion

4.1. Statistical analyses

The writing analytical scoring rubric result showed great differences between the pre-test and the post-test of 60 participants. Statistical analysis data, which is obtained from the pre-test and the post-test, can be more understood through Tables 1 and 2 below.

The numbers of the criteria in the tables are measured according to IELTS band scores

4.1.1. Pre-test mean scores

Table 1. Pre-test results

Writing components	Task Response	Coherence and Cohesion	Lexical Resource	Grammatical Range and Accuracy	Total
Mean score in the pre-test	4	4.5	5	5	4.5

Based on the data in Table 1 above, it can be said that participants' scores were at pre-intermediate level. This means that all aspects of writing evaluation should be developed.

4.1.2 post-test mean scores

Table 2. Post-test results

Writing components	Task Response	Coherence and Cohesion	Lexical Resource	Grammatical Range and Accuracy	Total
Mean score in the pre-test	5.5	5.5	6.5	6.5	6.0

The mean post-test results showed a significant change in the pre-test mean score (4.5 overall). This difference indicates an increase in the ability of students' English writing. The mean score of the post-test (6.0 overall) can be categorized at the intermediate level. All the criteria in writing rubric were much improved.

4.2. Observation notes

The use of collaborative writing affects not only students' writing skills

but also psychological factors such as confidence, motivation, and engagement in writing English pieces. As a matter of fact that, attitude plays an important role in learning. A good attitude will manifest in positive behaviors that bring interest in learning and vice versa. The researcher conducted a study of attitudes through observation in class. The results of each observation are presented in table 3 below.

Students' attitudes towards collaborative writing	Number of students	Rate
Students actively collaborate with peers.	54	90%
Students are engaged in writing with peers.	50	83%
Students keep silent and passive during the writing process.	6	10%
Students are concentrated on their writing pieces.	45	75%
Students are distracted with technological devices.	15	25%
Students find it boring to write with peers	10	17%

Table 3. Students' attitudes towards collaborative writing through class observation

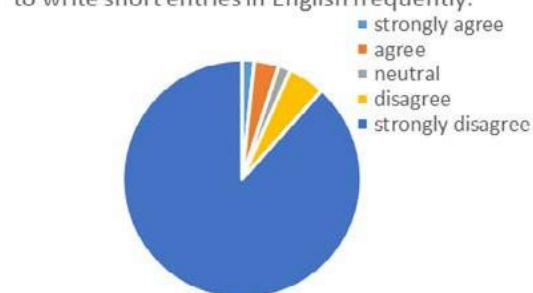
The data show that students have many different attitudes in the process of learning writing: Positive attitudes such as active, engaged, and concentrated are chosen by students, which accounts 75% or more. Negative attitudes such as boredom, silent, distracted account for a small proportion, from 10 - 25%.

4.3. Questionnaire results

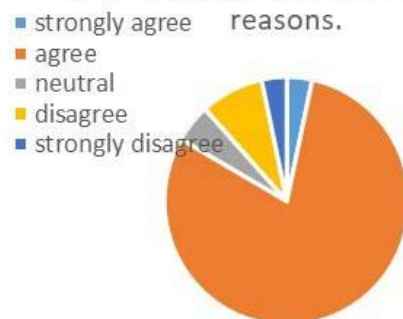
In addition, the researcher asked students about their writing habits and interest in working with peers through questionnaire (Appendix A), the results were as follows:

Questions 1 and 2 in the questionnaire are supposed to find out the students' writing habits. The results were as follows: the majority of students (53/60) were not focused on English skills, especially writing skill at high school, which is easily understood because high school students are taught to answer multiple choice questions. Therefore, it is understandable for students not to have a habit of writing in English. As a result, students have problems with the skill when they get in university.

During high school students were required to write short entries in English frequently.

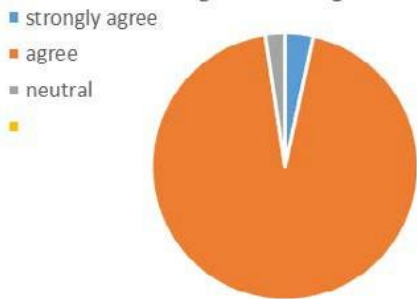


Until now students have never written much English for personal reasons.

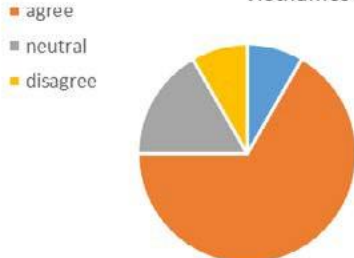


Questions 3 and 4 in the questionnaire are supposed to find out the students' awareness of the importance of writing skills. The results were as follows: most of the students (55/60) wanted to have good scores at the end of the semester, which shows a strong motivation among students. Also, a large number of students agree that writing is a vital skill that they should master both in English and Vietnamese in order to have a better career in the future.

My main goal in my writing course is to get a better grade.

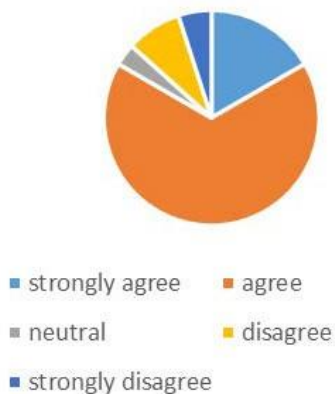


Writing is an essential skill that students should master both in English and Vietnamese.

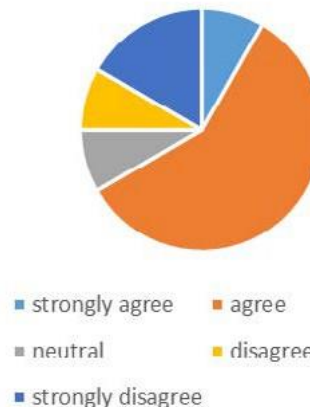


Questions 5 and 6 in the questionnaire are supposed to find out the students' weakness in writing. The results were as follows: about half of students still find it hard to avoid grammar mistakes or breakdown of sentences. Besides that, they struggle with expressing ideas in English due to the possible fact that they lack vocabulary.

frequent mistakes in grammars and sentence structures

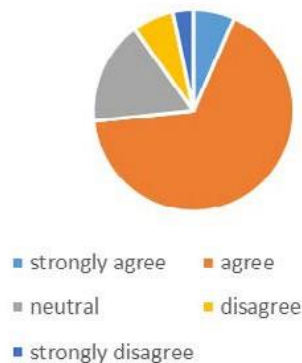


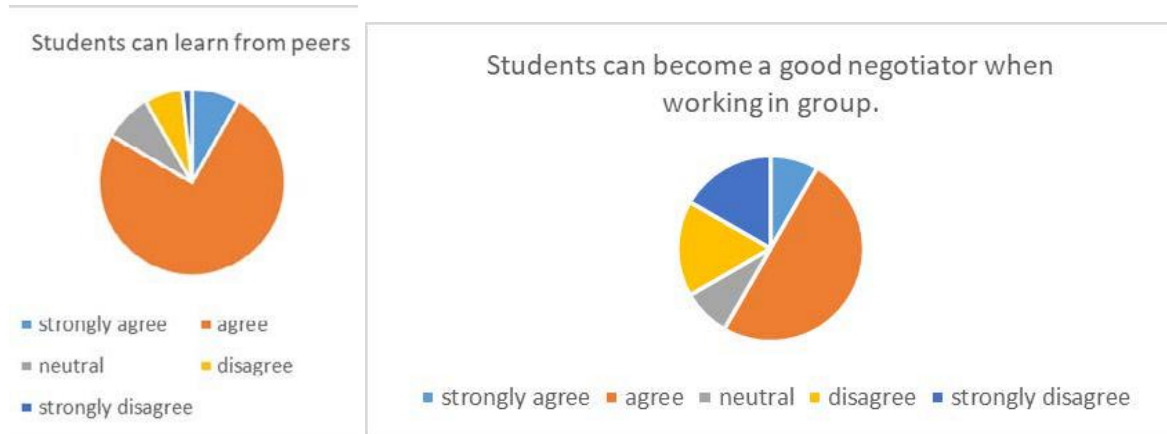
difficulty putting thoughts down on paper.



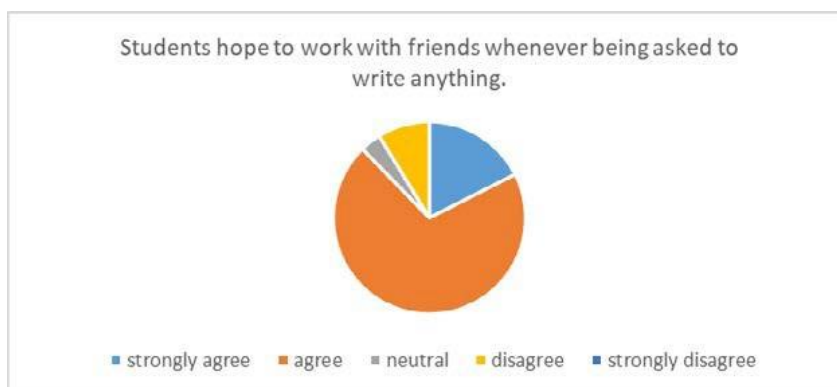
Questions 7 to 9 in the questionnaire are supposed to find out the effectiveness of applying collaborative writing in class. The results were as follows: the majority of students send positive feedbacks for using collaborative writing in class, 40/60 students feel interested in working with their classmates, 45/60 students feel motivated when they can learn more about the language from friends. Even half of the students find a different aspect of themselves that they can become good negotiators because writing lessons were about how to write an argumentative essay.

Students' interest in collaborative writing





Question 10 in the questionnaire was designed to make sure if the researcher can use collaborative writing in the future lessons and the results were really positive. 50/60 students support collaborative writing and expect to be involved in the future.



V. Conclusion

In conclusion, the results of this study showed that collaborative writing improved students' writing competence significantly. The method has a great influence on an individual's writing skills. Thus, teaching writing in large classes (35-40 students/class) and the weekly grading of many students can be greatly reduced. However, giving feedback to students to edit papers is indispensable in the teaching academic Writing for this study. If this element is missing, the students' writing effectiveness is not guaranteed.

The benefits of collaborative writing in varied proficiency groups have also been demonstrated to enhance

the students' sense of accountability for the work, encouraging the discussion of fresh ideas, exchanging information, and successfully negotiating their stand. Throughout their periods of collaborative writing, the students may have been made aware of the dedication and suitable behavior expected.

As a matter of fact, this study implements collaborative writing activities right in the classroom; the writing activities were controlled. If this activity is done as a kind of homework assignment, then the quality is difficult to guarantee due to the lack of control over student writing activity. If left unchecked, the outcome may be opposite. Therefore, there is a

need for more subsequent research helps create an effective management model for organizing group writing activities outside the classroom.

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APPENDIX A
DONG NAI TECHNOLOGY UNIVERSITY
FACULTY OF FOREIGN LANGUAGES
Writing Attitude Questionnaire

Name: _____

Writing course: _____

The following questionnaire asks you about your attitude toward writing and about the process you use whenever you write. Please respond as honestly as you can by checking the category that best describes your reaction to each statement listed.

Note: Your answers will not affect any courses you are now taking.

	Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree
1. During high school I was required to write short entries in English frequently.					
2. Until now students have never written much English for personal reasons.					
3. Writing is an essential skill that I should master both in English and Vietnamese.					
4. My main goal in my writing course is to get a better grade.					
5. I have difficulty putting my thoughts down on paper.					
6. I made frequent mistakes in grammars and sentence structures.					
7. I find it interesting to collaborate with my classmates during writing.					
8. I can learn more about the language from writing with my friends.					
9. I can become a good negotiator when working on argumentative essays.					
10. I hope to work with friends whenever being asked to write anything.					

