



COLLABORATIVE WRITING TASKS AND THEIR IMPACT ON THE DEVELOPMENT OF EFL STUDENTS' WRITING COMPETENCE

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Abstract. Many writing lessons continue to rely on individual assignments despite growing evidence that writing develops through interaction. Collaborative writing tasks challenge the assumption that students learn best when working alone. By requiring learners to discuss ideas, negotiate meaning, and jointly construct texts, these activities transform writing from a private exercise into a social process. This article examines how collaborative writing tasks influence the development of writing competence among EFL students. Particular attention is given to idea generation, text organization, learner engagement, and critical thinking. The discussion argues that collaborative writing improves not only the final quality of written products but also the decision-making processes that shape them. Evidence from contemporary research and classroom practice suggests that students often produce more coherent and better-developed texts when writing becomes a shared responsibility rather than an individual obligation.

Keywords: collaborative writing, EFL learners, writing competence, group work, collaborative learning, writing instruction


Introduction

The question facing many writing teachers is not whether students know English grammar. The more difficult question is whether students know what to do with that knowledge once they face a blank page.

Writing requires hundreds of decisions. A writer must select relevant information, organize ideas logically, anticipate reader expectations, and maintain coherence across an entire text. These demands explain why students frequently perform better on language exercises than on writing assignments.

Traditional instruction often treats writing as an individual responsibility. Students plan independently, draft independently, and revise independently. While this approach reflects assessment requirements, it does not necessarily reflect how writing skills develop.

Collaborative writing offers an alternative perspective. Instead of writing alone, students work together to generate ideas, construct arguments, and revise drafts. The process exposes



thinking that normally remains invisible. Learners explain their choices, challenge assumptions, and negotiate solutions to writing problems. As a result, writing becomes both a linguistic and intellectual activity.

Why Students Struggle With Writing

Many difficulties associated with writing originate before the first sentence is written.

Students often know what topic they are expected to discuss but struggle to identify a clear position. Others generate ideas but cannot organize them effectively. Some begin writing immediately without planning and later discover that their arguments lack direction.

These difficulties are rarely solved by grammar instruction alone.

A learner may understand sentence structure perfectly while still producing a poorly organized essay. Writing competence therefore depends on several interconnected abilities, including idea development, organization, coherence, revision, and audience awareness.

Collaborative writing addresses these challenges by distributing cognitive responsibility across multiple learners. Instead of solving every problem independently, students share the burden of planning, drafting, and revising.

Writing as a Process of Negotiation

One of the strongest advantages of collaborative writing is that it forces students to explain their thinking.

During individual writing, decisions often remain automatic or unconscious. Students choose words, examples, and organizational patterns without questioning their effectiveness. Group writing makes these decisions visible.

A simple discussion about a topic sentence may lead students to reconsider the purpose of an entire paragraph. A disagreement about evidence may reveal weaknesses in an argument. Questions from group members often expose assumptions that writers did not realize they were making.

The educational value lies in these moments of negotiation.


Students learn not only from successful decisions but also from disagreement. When group members defend different approaches, they must justify their reasoning. This process develops analytical skills that extend beyond writing itself.

Literature Review

Research on collaborative writing has expanded considerably during the last two decades. Early studies focused primarily on language accuracy, examining whether students produced fewer grammatical errors when working together. More recent research has shifted attention toward higher-order writing skills such as organization, coherence, and critical thinking.

Johnson and Johnson argued that cooperative learning environments promote deeper engagement because students become accountable not only for their own performance but also for the success of the group. This principle has particular relevance for writing tasks, where meaningful collaboration requires continuous communication.

Wonglakov and Deerajviset found that collaborative process writing improved students' ability to organize ideas and revise drafts effectively. Their participants demonstrated



stronger awareness of writing structure and produced more coherent texts than students working individually. Similar findings have been reported in studies examining collaborative drafting, peer revision, and digital writing platforms.

Research also indicates that collaborative writing contributes to metacognitive development. Learners become more conscious of how writing works because they must explain their choices to others. Rather than simply producing text, they reflect on the reasoning behind textual decisions.

Collaborative Writing Tasks in the Classroom

Not all collaborative activities produce the same results. The most effective tasks require genuine cooperation rather than simple division of labor.

Group essay writing remains one of the most widely used approaches. Students collectively develop a thesis, select supporting evidence, and construct the overall structure of the essay. This process encourages discussion at every stage of writing.

Collaborative storytelling provides a different type of challenge. Learners must maintain consistency while building a narrative together. Because each contribution influences subsequent sections, students become more aware of coherence and logical progression.

Project-based writing tasks often produce the highest levels of engagement. Students may create magazines, brochures, blogs, or reports over several weeks. Such projects provide authentic purposes for writing and encourage sustained collaboration.

Digital tools have expanded these possibilities further. Shared online documents allow multiple students to contribute simultaneously, track revisions, and discuss changes in real time. Collaborative writing no longer depends on physical proximity.

Classroom Observations

A collaborative writing lesson conducted with secondary school students revealed several interesting patterns.

Students were asked to write an opinion paragraph in small groups. Before drafting, they discussed possible arguments and selected supporting examples. The quality of brainstorming exceeded what is typically observed during individual writing tasks. Learners generated a wider range of ideas and evaluated them more critically.

During drafting, students frequently questioned each other's wording and organization. These discussions often resulted in revisions before the teacher intervened. In traditional writing lessons, many of these issues would remain unnoticed until the teacher provided feedback.

The revision stage produced the clearest evidence of collaboration. Groups debated alternative sentence structures, reorganized supporting details, and removed redundant information. The final drafts demonstrated stronger coherence and clearer argumentation than initial versions.

Perhaps the most important observation involved participation. Students who were usually reluctant to write individually contributed actively during group discussions. Collaboration appeared to reduce the anxiety often associated with writing tasks.



Challenges and Limitations

Collaborative writing is not without difficulties.

Unequal participation remains one of the most common concerns. Some students contribute extensively while others rely on stronger group members. Without careful monitoring, collaboration can become dependence.

Group disagreements may also slow progress. While productive disagreement supports learning, unresolved conflict can interfere with task completion.

Assessment presents another challenge. Determining how individual contributions should be evaluated within group work remains a complex issue for teachers.

These limitations do not undermine the value of collaborative writing, but they highlight the importance of thoughtful implementation.

Educational Implications

The success of collaborative writing suggests that writing instruction should move beyond the traditional model of individual production followed by teacher correction.

Students need opportunities to discuss ideas before writing, negotiate meaning during drafting, and evaluate texts during revision. These experiences help learners understand writing as a process rather than a product.

Teachers therefore play a different role within collaborative classrooms. Instead of functioning primarily as evaluators, they become facilitators who guide discussion, provide structure, and support reflection.

Such an approach aligns closely with contemporary educational goals emphasizing communication, critical thinking, and learner autonomy.

Conclusion


Collaborative writing improves writing competence because it changes what students do while writing. Learners are no longer isolated decision-makers. They become participants in an ongoing process of discussion, evaluation, and revision.

The greatest benefit is not better grammar or longer essays. It is the development of habits associated with effective writers: questioning assumptions, considering alternative perspectives, and revising ideas before accepting them.

Students may begin a collaborative task with different levels of language proficiency, confidence, and experience. What they share is the opportunity to think together. In writing instruction, that opportunity often matters more than any individual correction.

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