

The Effect of Different Methods of Collaborative Writing in English as a Second Language Classroom

Hana Elbakoush

Department of English, Faculty of Arts and Sciences, Omar Al-Mukhtar University, Derna City, Libya

ABSTRACT : The current research aims to investigate the effect of using different methods of teaching writing in English as a second language classrooms by synthesizing published research that has investigated collaborative writing from a variety of perspectives and experimental studies with evidence. Methods were selected to evaluate students ability of writing in the second language: (1) collaboration with different level groups and; (2) collaboration through web-based medium. The results of the research shows that collaboration with different level groups and inside the classrooms was more effective and attainable than the collaboration through web basedmedium.

KEYWORDS: *Collaborative Writing, Effective Methods, Second Language Learning, Second Language Classes.*

I. INTRODUCTION

Collaborative writing refers to the process which provides learners the opportunity to find out, argue, cooperate and improve learning capabilities (Dobao, 2012; Noel& Robert, 2004). The use of group work or collaboration in second language classrooms rests on strong pedagogical bases. In other words, the more able member or expert provides assistance to the lower level. Such assistance is referred to in the literature as scaffolding (Ghufron&MasnuatulHawa 2015). Scaffolding is one process that allows teachers to organize a writing activity systematically to meet the needs of all students, according to Gentry 2005 scaffolding assists struggling writers to work independently and ease their work to become proficient writers.

The concept of writing a paper about collaboration came up in the researcher's mind because of the enjoyable times that she had when she was teaching writing for different levels of second language learners in the department of English language of Omer Al-Mukhtar university in Libya. A great period that by using working in groups/ pairs method added more fun, discussion, cooperation and sense of positive competition among students and their teacher. With the increasing number of English Language Learners (ELLs) in today's Libyan classrooms, it is becoming progressively complicated for instructors to perpetuate their role as the primary communicator with their students via peers in language attainment via socialization (Beeckett, Gonzalez, Schwartz 2004).

The term socialization is a taxonomy of the sociocultural theory which its perspective is that learning as a social activity utilizes the language to instruct meaning from authentic texts with assistant from more capable others. Beeckett, Gonzalez, Schwartz (2004) called for the Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) approach which sees the language as a place that allows English as second language (ESL) students to participate in different and new academic contexts and relate it to the associated genres. This kind of method help teaching students how to use language to achieve goals such as participating in discipline-specific knowledge construction. Such ability is necessary for all learners because the sophisticated society expectations nowadays apply students to be able to meet the social and linguistic demands of diverse contexts for complete collaboration.

Thus, second language learners should be motivated to participate in activities which enhance interaction and joint construction . According to one experience as a second language teacher who teaches second language learners, collaborative writing is beneficial in English as second language classrooms, specifically to students who want to improve on their writing skills. One major benefit includes an increase of student engagement on an activity. In other words, students are actively participating in their learning through group collaboration. During working on tasks, students provide each other with suggestions and make final editions and revisions, such a task is called peer review. A number of researchers have noted the advantages of

such peer reviews. Among these advantages revisions are a process of enhancing students' awareness of spectator considerations (Leki, 1993), and they may assist learners improve critical and rigorous writing and reading skills. Students review each other's written text and make suggestions on how it could be improved. From a pedagogical point of view, the use of small group task and pairs is advocated by the communicative approach to L2 instruction and its significance in providing participants with opportunity to use the L2 (Ghufron & Masnuatul Hawa 2015).

Collaboration provides opportunities for students and instructors to work collaboratively, so they can introduce better results for learning and teaching. In this paper the researcher is not going to argue that collaborative writing has a significant effect on students' second Language writing, as it seems unanimous that it does. The purpose of this paper is to discuss the effectiveness of different methods of collaborative writing and its effect on students' second Language writing by then sign published research and researchers perspectives. The researcher will also discuss different group pairings during callable experiments in the classroom versus collaboration attempts over the Internet.

Storch's (2005) classroom-based study compared the writing introduced by two groups of adult ESL students completing degree courses who had to select to write individually or in pairs on a writing task (data commentary task). Participants were 23 and eighteen of them elected to work in pairs, and five chose to work individually. The study contrasted texts provided by pairs with those provided by individual subjects and explored the nature of the writing processes evident in the pair talk. The study also elicited the learners' reflections on the experience of collaborative writing. All pair work was audio taped and all completed responses that were later accumulated. All written responses introduced were examined by utilizing quantitative and qualitative approaches. Quantitative measures involved measures of fluency, accuracy and complexity. The texts were also evaluated globally utilizing a 5-scale scheme that took into consideration content, structure, and work fulfillment. The study found that pairs tended to introduce concise texts, but that the texts were more precise and the language more grammatically complicated. Collaboration provided students the opportunity to collect concepts and afford each other with feedback.

Most students were affirmative about the experience, although some felt uncomfortable about collaborative writing. One of the major reasons that make some students feel uncomfortable towards working with groups is that they feel embarrassed when giving feedback on their friends' writing tasks. Furthermore, pairs aimed to produce texts with a better structure and clearer concentration. However, given the relatively small-scale nature of the study, the differences were not statistically significant.

II. COLLABORATION WITH DIFFERENT LEVEL GROUPS

Kim and McDonough's 2008 study was built on a previous research that has offered Second Language learners reflect on language within collaborative tasks in classrooms. Their study reveals what kind of language constitutes Korean as Second Language students. The participants consisted of a group of two intermediate Korean second language learners with other learners of intermediate conversationalists, along with the professional conversationalists. The study investigated how learners' linguistic problems were accomplished when interacting with interlocutors from different efficiency levels. Eight intermediate Korean L2 learners collaborated with an intermediate interlocutor and with advanced conversationalists. Their collaborative conversation was examined in terms of (a) the appearance and resolution of lexical and grammatical language-related episodes (LREs) and (b) the designs of collaboration with their interlocutors.

The results showed that when collaborating with a professional peer rather than with an intermediate peer, subjects introduced more language-related episodes in extensive grammatical and lexical and a greater proportion of these language-related episodes were lexical. Seemingly, a greater proportion of language-related episodes were left unresolved or were resolved wrongly when learners worked with fellow intermediate peers rather than with more professional peers. In terms of patterns of collaboration, the study revealed that participants who were collaborative with an intermediate interlocutor tended to be more inactive with a professional interlocutor, whereas subjects who were controlling with an intermediate conversationalist were more collaborative with an advanced interlocutor. However, it is not obvious whether these patterns of pair collaboration influenced the number of language-related episodes production (Kim & McDonough, 2008).

Kim and McDonough (2008) compared the effectiveness of collaborative and individual tasks on the attainment of L2 vocabulary by learners of Korean as a second language (KSL). The task utilized was a dictogloss task, the concept of the dictogloss is simple. Learners listen to a passage and jot down key words. They are asked to write down as much as possible and in the correct order. Next, language learners are motivated to work together in small groups and create a reconstructed version of the text they have previously heard and taken notes on (Smith, 2012, p. 70). Language gains were measured by comparing grades on a pre-test and two post-tests over a three week period. The study had 32 participants half of the learners (16 were divided into 8 pairs) and worked the dictogloss in pairs, but the other half (other 16) carried out the task individually while using the think aloud protocol. The collaborative conversation and think-aloud protocols were recorded, and language-related episodes (LREs) were described or analyzed.

The study found that the number of language-related episodes provided by the pairs and by the individuals was similar, but fewer language-related episodes were resolved inaccurately or left unresolved in the pair task, because of the opportunity to accumulate knowledge in the pair work condition. More importantly, pairs implemented significantly better on the vocabulary post-tests than the participants who finished the tasks individually. However, it should be noted that the tests evaluated the learners' comprehension of word meanings rather than their ability to utilize the vocabulary; and therefore the acquisitions only reproduce one feature of vocabulary learning.

In Leiser's (2004) study, ten Spanish second language learners were assigned to pairs of similar advanced levels (two high-high and two low-low pairs) and mixed proficiency (one pair) and they were asked to finish a dictogloss task. The pair communication was analyzed for the number and type of language-related episodes (whether lexical or form focused) and their resolution. The study indicated that second language efficiency had an influence on the number of language-related episodes introduced: the high-high pairs produced the greatest number of language-related episodes, followed in descending order by the high-low and low-low pairs.

The concentration of the language-related episodes also seemed to be impacted by second language proficiency: the high-high pairs focused on grammatical forms; the low-low dyads basically on lexis. Although most language-related episodes were resolved correctly across all proficiency groups, and the highest proportion of unresolved language-related episodes was found in the data of the low-low pairs, again proposing that language may not be as successful among low-efficiency pairs. This is similar to the Kim and McDonough (2008) study, where collaboration effectiveness is maximized when the pairs/groups are at a higher level or there is collaboration with professionals.

This helps prove that having students collaborate works for the most part, but in order to maximize results, whom the students collaborate with is very important. Relating the findings of the study to my experience of teaching high and low level groups of English department in Libya, apparently, it was notable that low-level groups find it comfortable and beneficial working with high-level groups in solving problems and writing assignments. It also motivates students to achieve their goals and create a sense of positive competition among them.

Watanabe and Swain's (2007) study explored the influences of the second language (L2) advancement differences in pairs and patterns of collaboration on second language learning, with making use of mixed methods approaches (qualitative and quantitative data). The study utilized the learners' primary joint writing task as a pre-test and their consequently individually written task (after receiving reformulation feedback and processing it collaboratively) as the post-test to evaluate language acquisitions resulting from interactive activity. The Post-test was recorded by noting whether each participant got the reformulated items right or wrong.

The authors analyzed each pair's interactive conversation in terms of language-related episodes and patterns of pair collaboration in addition to each learner's individual post-test grades. The results proposed that collaborative activity led to language learning (retention of feedback) but that the patterns of pair collaboration greatly affected the post-test performance. When the learners formed a collaborative pattern of collaboration, they were more likely to accomplish higher post-test grades regardless of their partner's efficiency level. It seems that proficiency differences do not necessarily affect the nature of peer assistance and L2 learning. This study, unlike Leiser (2004) and Kim and McDonough (2008), gives insight into how to overcome efficiency level differences during collaboration.

III. COLLABORATION THROUGH WEB-BASED MEDIUM

Wheeler, Yeomans and Wheeler's (2008) study reveals the possibility of wiki-type open architecture software to encourage and advocate collaborative learning through the use of student created content. It describes or characterizes some of the affordances and constraints of wiki software as an open architecture that has the potential to simplify collaborative learning through community-focused inquiry. It pursues to promote discussion in this key region of improvement, and points out some current key contributions to the developing discourse on social software in what has been termed the "architecture of participation".

Wheeler, Yeomans and Wheeler's (2008) study indicated that although students did not have a problem posting their contributions to a wiki space for other group members to read, they were unhappy having their contributions changed or canceled by other group members. This phenomenon is highly spread among learners in Libyan English classes where they lose confidence, feel embarrassed and unsuccessful in having others adjust their writing on web-sites. To minimize the argument, the teacher attempts to persuade students to be more flexible and accept each other's comments/additions or changes.

Mak and Coniam (2008) described how Grade 7 (age 11) ESL students in an English-medium secondary school in Hong Kong introduced a text using wikis over an 8-week period as a part of their ESL assignments. The wikis were used as a collaborative writing platform to introduce – with minimal contribution and support from their teachers. In a case study of one group of four students, the researchers show that

primarily students' contributions were solely additions to other students' contributions. However, as the project improved and the students became more used to the wiki environment, they started to adjust one another's task as well as add to the content that had been written.

Mak and Coniam noted that the amount of each student's contributions varied a great deal over time for individual students and among students. Furthermore, most of the contributions made by the students were in terms of adding to the content, with very few examples of error corrections if it is for own or for peers. Mak and Coniam referenced this lack of attention to accuracy to the fact that Hong Kong students tend to spend little time on proofreading and correcting their work and are reluctant to adjust their peers' work, as they do not wish their peers to lose face with each other.

A study conducted by Kessler and Bikowski (2010) reports on attention to meaning among 40 non-native speakers (NNS) pre-service English foreign language (EFL) teachers as they interactively formed a wiki in a year and four months online course. Attention is located upon the nature of the participant's behavior and act when attending to meaning in a long-term wiki-based interactive project in addition to learners' collaborative independent language learning abilities. Stages for individual learners and group learners' language behaviors were examined. Student collaboration and language use occur to advantage from the flexible learning environment although subject utilization of these spaces may not be agreeable with the anticipations of the instructor. More salient than the quality of the last wiki is the procedure students interact in as they write interactively.

Kessler and Bikowski (2010) concluded with that the participants added, canceled, and elaborated on one another's contributions. However, the authors also reported that there is a willingness to be involved to the wiki text and the nature of the involvement changed over time. In the initial two weeks of the activity, very few students engaged, and the pattern of contribution was cancellation and substitute of existing texts.

In the following weeks, more students started to be involved, and the pattern of involvement changed. The cancellations were minor corrections rather than entire text cancellations, and there were also many examples of elaborations on one another's contributions. These results affirm that Mak and Coniam's (2008) study and propose that willingness to engage in and interact in a collaborative activity may take time to progress. According to one's experience about taking a while for a collaborative task to progress was a major reason for deleting and delaying some assignments by students. Choosing who want to work with was a difficult step to start.

Ware's (2004) study pursues to settle up the difference in how three ESL students engaged in web-based conversation boards and chat rooms in the first year of their university writing course. The author also discusses how students' awareness of technology produced pedagogical perception or declined particular type of web-based writing. Ware (2004) found that students participated in web-based writing according to methods that reflected on their comfort with technology, past writing experience, comfort with peers and expected instructor anticipations. He promotes flexibility in assessing interactive written task to avoid establishing a sense of competition rather than collaboration. The development of collaborative writing may be inherently associated with repetitions of technology since new improvements produce new opportunities for interaction.

In another study conducted by Cobb (2007) to explore the use of wiki to advocate active learning and collaborative problem solving in legal education. The study discusses a legal research and writing class in which learners utilized wiki site to interactively pool information. Findings indicated the usefulness of using wikis in active learning and collaborative problem-solving. Cobb wanted to reveal that using wiki by learners is beneficial because it does not have a Webmaster that anyone can post, replace or adjust the web site content. He realized that creating a wiki site for his learners would be a great tool for collaboration and achieving the study goals. Further, the author wished to do something different to the students and give them the sense of being writers.

Lundin (2008) conducted a study about the use of wikis in first year composition classes. It was presumed that wikis can challenge a number of traditional pedagogical assumptions about the teaching of writing. These assumptions were coordinated in four classifications of interest to composition studies. These classifications were new media composition, interactive writing, critical collaboration and online authority. Results showed that wikis were effective in helping facilitate development in composition classes.

The studies mentioned above help map out a technique for utilizing popular internet medium in order to help students collaborate in ways that were not possible before. With the internet playing a massive role in research and writing for students, it only makes sense to move the collaboration efforts from not just the classroom but to the world wide web.

IV. CONCLUSION

Ultimately, in this paper the researcher pursued to find out whether different methods of collaborative writing can bring about different results in English as second language classrooms/communities. The findings of other research studies were close to the findings that she had when she was teaching English language learners in Omer Al-Mukhtar university in Libya. One of her successful experience in teaching was with fourth year students for creative writing class. The students worked as groups and were active in responding to an activity

for example, (writing a short story, or writing poems). Students also exposed creativity in their work and practiced their abilities of being writers. According to Rollinson (2005), “by giving the students practice in becoming critical readers, we are at the same time helping them towards becoming more self-reliant writers, who are both self-critical and have the skills to self-edit and revise their writing. This may in the end be a more achievable pedagogical objective than getting them to do it right the first time” (p.29).

As I previously mentioned a number of researchers have noted the advantages of such peer reviews. Among these advantages revisions are a process of enhancing students’ awareness of spectator considerations (Leki, 1993), and they may assist learners improve critical and rigorous writing and reading skills.

Although collaboration has its positive side when done through the internet, such as being more willing to add more information to other’s contribution, there is also the tendency to ignore grammar/content correction (Mak & Coniam, 2008). Students are also less likely to feel comfortable having other kids on the internet scrutinize and change their contribution or edit their writings and in some case the need to compete rather than learn from each other (Ware, 2004). As a second language teacher, I believe that collaboration within the classroom has more profound influence on students’ writing, despite some challenges, like differing proficiency levels (Kim & McDonough, 2008), especially the difficulty with pairings of low-low proficiency level groups (Leeser, 2004). Although, some of these problems can be solved by using collaborative pattern of collaboration, which helps minimize the problems with differing levels of proficiency. Watanabe and Swain’s (2007).

In relating Kim and McDonough’s study to my experience of teaching high and low level groups of English department in Libya, and as I previously mentioned, apparently it was notable that low level groups find it comfortable and beneficial working with high level groups in solving problems and writing assignments. It also motivates students to achieve their goals and create a sense of positive competition among them.

Working with other students, face-to-face appears to have long-term learning effects. All teachers and instructors should recognize the slight problems/issues that will arise when participating in collaborative writing with students, and attempt to minimize these problems and maximize the benefits. Helping their student’s assist each other inside the classroom will help them acquire the target language more easily. More significantly, by providing the opportunity for students to engage in peer feedback, peer review and peer interaction, instructors should acknowledge that they are promoting learners in improving their skills, in writing or otherwise. Seemingly, the collaboration with different level groups and inside the classrooms was more effective and attainable than the collaboration through web based medium. Finally, the study needed to be practically implemented to provide more accurate results.

REFERENCES

- [1]. Beckett, G., Gonzalez, V., & Schwartz, H. (2004). Content-based ESL writing curriculum: A language socialization model. *NABE Journal of Research and Practice*.
- [2]. Cobb, T. (2007). Public interest research, collaboration, and the promise of wikis perspectives. *Teaching Legal Research and Writing*, 16 (1) 1-11.
- [3]. Dobao, A.F. (2012). Collaborative writing tasks in the L2 classroom: Comparing group, pair, and individual work. *Journal of Second Language Writing*, 21(1), 40-58.
- [4]. Gentry, J.R. (2005). Instructional techniques for emerging writers and special needs students at kindergarten and grade 1 levels. *Reading and Writing Quarterly* 21:113-34.
- [5]. Ghufron, M. Ali. & MasnuatulHawa. (2015). The Effect of Collaborative Writing Technique in Teaching Argumentative Essay Writing Viewed from the Students’ Creativity. *Language Circle: Journal of Language and Literature*, X/1.
- [6]. Kessler, G., & Bikowski, D. (2010). Developing collaborative autonomous learning abilities in computer mediated language learning: Attention to meaning among students in wiki space. *Computer Assisted Language Learning*, 23(1) 41–58.
- [7]. Kim, Y. (2008). The contribution of collaborative and individual tasks to the acquisition of L2 vocabulary. *Modern Language Journal*, 92 (1) 114–130.
- [8]. Kim, Y., & McDonough, K. (2008). The effect of interlocutor proficiency on the collaborative dialogue between Korean as a second language learners. *Language Teaching Research*, 12 (2) 211–234.
- [9]. Leeser, M. J. (2004). Learner proficiency and focus on form during collaborative dialogue. *Language Teaching Research*, 8 (1) 55–81.
- [11]. Leki, I. (1993). Reciprocal themes in reading and writing. In J. Carson, & I. Leki (Eds.), *Reading in the composition classroom: second language perspectives* (pp. 9-33). Boston: Heinle & Heinle.
- [12]. Lundin, R. (2008). Teaching with wikis: Toward a new worked pedagogy. *Computers and Composition*, 25 (4), 432-448.
- [13]. Mak, B., & Coniam, D. (2008). Using wikis to enhance and develop writing skills among secondary school students in Hong Kong. *System*, 36(3) 437–455.

- [14]. Noel, S., & Robert, J. M. (2004). Empirical study on collaborative writing: What do co-authors do, use and like? *Computer Supported Cooperative Work*, 13(1), 63-89.
- [15]. Rollinson, P., (2005). Using peer feedback in the ESL writing class. *ELT Journal* 59 (1), 23-30.
- [16]. Smith, K. (2012). Dictogloss: A multi-skill task for accuracy in writing through cooperative learning. Retrieved from <http://thtjapan.org/pubications/2011/069-080smith.pdf>.
- [17]. Storch, N. (2005). Collaborative writing: Product, process and students' reflections. *Journal of Second Language Writing*, 14 (3) 153–173.
- [18]. Storch, N. (2011). Collaborative writing in second language contest: processes, outcomes, and future directions. *Annual Review of Applied Linguistics*, 31, 275- 288.
- [19]. Ware, P.D. (2004). Confidence and competition online: ESL student perspectives on web based discussions in the classroom. *Computers and Composition*, 21(4), 451–468.
- [20]. Watanabe, Y., & Swain, M. (2007). Effects of proficiency differences and patterns of pair interaction on second language learning: Collaborative dialogue between adult ESL learners. *Language Teaching Research*, 11 (2)121–142.
- [21]. Wheeler, S., Yeomans, P., & Wheeler, D. (2008). The good, the bad and the wiki: Evaluating student-generated content for collaborative learning. *British Journal of Educational Technology*, 39(6)987–995.