The Effects of Collaborative Writing on EFL Learners' Writing Skills and Their Perception of the Strategy

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Abstract—This mixed-method study observes the effects of collaborative writing strategy on EFL learners' writing skill and their perception of the strategy. The population consists of 80 students from a public senior high school in West Sumatra, Indonesia. The samples, which were selected by using cluster random sampling, were categorized as the experimental and control class. Each class were taught with different teaching strategies, experimental class was taught by using collaborative writing strategy and the control class was taught by using conventional teaching strategy. The data were collected through writing tests and interviews to measure the students' writing skill and their perception of collaborative writing. The result of the analysis reveals that collaborative writing strategy has helped students in generating their writing ideas and activating the students' background knowledge of the topics assigned to them to develop in their writings. The result of this study also highlights the students' positive perception on collaborative writing strategy.

Index Terms—mixed-method study, collaborative writing, learners' perception, writing skill

I. INTRODUCTION

There are many popular strategies that teachers can adopt in teaching writing to help their students accomplish their writing tasks well. One of the strategies is collaborative writing. According to Barkley et al (2005), collaborative writing is a strategy that requires students to work in pairs or triads to write a formal paper together. This strategy will allow students with varying abilities to work together in completing a writing assignment (Storch, 2005). Then, he adds that in collaborative writing students may work together include all stages of writing process, started from initial stage (brainstorming ideas), second stage (gathering and organizing information the ideas into an outline), third stage (drafting the writing), fourth stage (revising), and last stage (editing the writing into a good writing). McDonough et al (2015) argue that although writing together, each student is responsible to reach a higher quality of individual writing. In addition, collaborative writing also provides an opportunity for the students to generate ideas and give peer feedback (Shehadeh, 2011; Dobao, 2012; Kesler et al., 2012; ShinWanTeow, 2014).

Some studies have been conducted to measure the effectiveness of collaborative writing for the writing process (Shehadeh, 2011; Ghufron & Hawa, 2015; Jalili & Shahrokhi, 2017). Those studies find that collaborative writing contributes to improving students' critical thinking and developing their writing products in terms of the content, organization and vocabulary, but not in term of achieving accuracy of writings. Other findings related to students' perception on collaborative writing implementation by Shehadeh (2011), Dobao & Blum (2013) and Khodabakhshzadeh & Samadi (2017) reveal that collaborative writing strategy was able to improve students' motivation, vocabulary, and comprehension of the topic and to change some of the students' ineffective writing habits.

Despite its positive impacts, collaborative writing is however not so popular in many schools in Indonesia, especially at the school where this study was conducted. The teacher's emphasis on the student's writing product has neglected the opportunities to enable students to work collaboratively. Leaving the students to focus on the mechanic aspects and generic structures, their critical thinking was not developed and the values of collaborative work were not nurtured among the students. Thus, this current study is aimed to investigate the effects of implementing collaborative writing strategy on students' writing skill as well as their perception on this strategy.

II. TEACHING WRITING STRATEGIES

Ur (2003) mentions that the goal of teaching writing is let the student acquires the capabilities and skills in order to compose various types of written texts properly in their own language. Besides, one of the most important long-life

skills that should be own by students is writing effectively. In teaching writing, teachers must consider the appropriate strategies, writing resources, and supporting materials that help both teacher and students in learning process.

Dealing with a particular strategy to teaching writing is commonly among teachers in order to meet a range of learning objectives (Eggen and Kauschak, 2012). Eacott (2007) states that a strategy is a set of constructive practices in achieving specified expectations. For more detailed, constructive practices refer to the progressive activities that involve students in teaching writing, and the specified expectations refer to the objective of teaching writing. Particularly, the use of strategies in teaching writing gives an opportunity for the teachers to facilitate their students in developing ideas and organizing them into a good writing. Thus, the teacher must be able to implement this strategy well in order to reach the expectations.

III. COLLABORATIVE WRITING

Collaborative writing is defined as two or more people are jointly composing, editing and drafting the complete text of a document based on their ideas (Spring, 2007). In the same vein, Barkley et al (2005) state that in collaborative writing, since the class was divided into some groups, group members compose a paper together. Each of them participate in initial stage (brainstorming ideas), second stage (gathering and organizing information the ideas into an outline), third stage (drafting the writing), fourth stage (revising) and last stage (editing the writing into a good writing), which are the stages of writing process. It is supported by McDonough et al (2015) who claim that students' responsibility on each steps of collaborative writing process reaches a higher quality of writing. The group works on each stage of collaborative writing can produce better writing rather than individuals' work (Barkley et al, 2005). In addition, Gousseva-Goodwin (2000), Storch (2005) and Wiglesworth and Storch (2007) also find that the students' taught to write collaboratively achieve higher scores than those taught to writing products.

The main core of collaborative writing is a process of a pair of students or a group of students in producing a writing where cooperating and contributing of the group members plays an important role. So, the product of the writing will be better than before and also result social interaction between both teachers and students. In collaborative writing process, teachers as a facilitator need to provide how a group or pairs of students give review to each member of the group, searching for help from others, discussing and negotiating strategies about the concern of writing (Kessler et al., 2012). In response to the need for structural guidelines, Murray (2006), Storch (2009) and Mulligan & Garofalo (2011) suggest some guidelines of collaborative writing in order to allow students not only to do the different task in the same writing, but also simultaneously check and correct others' work.

Some researchers have conducted the investigation on collaborative writing implementation (Storch, 2005; Shehadeh, 2011; Dobao, 2012; Fong, 2012; Biria and Jafari, 2013; Ghufron & Hawa, 2015; Jalili & Shahrokhi, 2017; Khodabakhshzadeh & Samadi, 2017). Those studies show the benefit of using collaborative writing for teaching and learning process. Storch (2005) finds that collaborative writing helps students in improving their quality of writing as well as providing an opportunity to generate ideas and feedback from one to another student. Similar finding is reported in Shehadeh (2011), Dobao (2012) and Fong (2012). Other studies find that practicing in pairs improves the overall quality of learners' writing even though the fluency of written text does not change significantly (Biria & Jafari, 2013). Furthermore, McNenny and Roen (2008) claim that despite the students various background, collaborative writing encourages students to work together and respects one another.

Other findings are related to the students' perception on collaborative writing implementation. In a long-term study, Shehadeh (2011) states that most of the student express positive attitudes on collaborative writing and enjoy the experience. Then, Dobao & Blum (2013) claim that collaborative writing provides more opportunity for the students to broader their horizons in terms of sharing ideas and knowledge. In addition, Khodabakhshzadeh & Samadi (2017) find that the students hold positive views towards collaborative writing because this strategy was able to boost their motivation, prompt them to apply peer-feedback during study, obtain comprehensive view over the topic change ineffective writing habits and learn more vocabulary. To sum up, collaborative writing has given positive effects on not only the students' writing skill but also their perception of the collaborative writing itself.

However, in many teaching writing process, teachers still tend to use conventional teaching strategies. Generally, in conventional teaching of writing, teacher asks the students to compose such a text freely in limited time without considering the stages of writing process itself (Gibbons, 2002). Then, teachers rarely give brainstorming to stimulate students' ideas so that they can share their ideas before being expressed in written form (Wiggins & McTighe (2007). Other stereotype pattern of conventional teaching of writing to EFL learners is that the teacher gives a topic and the students write a paper on it (Lestari, 2008). Students, then, work alone without getting any guidance from the teacher to develop and express their ideas properly. Moreover, the conventional strategy does not prompt the students to be mindful of other writing aspects either such as content, grammar, mechanic, vocabulary and organization.

In many other cases, for writing tasks, it is also found that teachers only focus on grammar rules in order to prepare their students to face test or examination (Mokhtar, 2016). Thus, students were assigned to memorize English grammar rules and vocabulary and apply their translation skills. Furthermore, conventional teaching can also be characterized as a face to face teacher-centered learning (Lesiak, 2015) because the learning process is dominated by direct and unilateral instruction. It does not facilitate class discussion or exploration of the concept involved. Thus, in teacher-

centered learning, students highly depend on the teacher in receiving new knowledge. In conclusion, this type of learning often results in creating passive students who lack creativity and interaction.

IV. METHOD

This mixed method study is aimed at finding out the effects of collaborative writing on EFL learners' writing skills (quantitative) and their perception of the strategy (qualitative). The main independent variable in this study, is collaborative writing and the dependent variable is learners' writing skill. This study employs a writing test (post-test) and interviews as the method of data collection. A post-test is implemented in the class after eight meetings of treatment. Then, a semi-structured interview was conducted to 14 students who were selected randomly.

Eighty students of a public senior high school in West Sumatra, Indonesia were involved in this study. Then, the samples were selected by using cluster random sampling. The 26 students in the experimental class were taught by using collaborative strategy and the 27 learners in the control class were taught by using conventional teaching strategy.

Two instruments were used in this study; writing test and interview. After completing eight meetings of learning and teaching writing, the participants in both experimental and control classes were assigned to write hortatory exposition text to measure their achievement in writing skills. Then, three general questions of semi-structured interview were obtained to elicit students' perception on the implementation of collaborative writing.

V. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

A. Findings

What is the effect of using collaborative writing strategy into the EFL learners' writing skill?

For answer the first question, SPSS version 24 was used with independent sample test, and the result of t-test is shown in the table 1 below:

 ${\it Table 1.}$ The Summary Of T-Test Analysis Of Writing Test In Experimental And Control Class

_	Experimental Class		Control Class
Doto -	N:26		N:27
Data –	μ:81.35		μ: 74.26
_	SD: 5.374		SD: 5.332
t _{observed}	4.819		
t _{table}	1.675		
Conclusion	$t_{ m observed} > t_{ m table}$		

From the table above, it can be seen that the result of the t-test analysis indicates that the value of $t_{observed}$ is 4.819 which higher than t_{table} 1.675 (df=51; α = 0.05; SD=1.471). It means the students who were taught by using collaborative writing had better writing skill than those who were taught by using conventional teaching. Moreover, if it is looked at the mean score of students' writing of both groups, the mean score of the students who were taught by using collaborative writing (81.35) is higher than those who were taught by using conventional teaching (74.26). Thus, it indicates that collaborative writing gives better results than conventional teaching strategy in teaching writing. This happens because the students in experimental class are given more opportunities to think critically and objectively about a topic than the students in control class. By discussing the topic in the group, the students learned how to generate their ideas. As a result, alternative hypothesis (Ha) is accepted and the null hypothesis (Ho) is rejected.

What is the EFL learners' perception of collaborative writing?

For the second research question, the students in experimental class (N=14) were interviewed. The format of the interview was semi-structured and learners were encouraged to explain their view in detail. There were three general questions asked in the interview to address the research objectives.

The first answer indicates that the majority of the respondents (n=10) have a positive view of collaborative writing and perceive it to be helpful in developing their writing skills. For instance, HH stated, "Working in the group is fun. We can help each other and share much information related to the topic. Sometimes we can laugh together when we cannot guess our friends' idea". While four respondents (n=4) disagree that it contributed some significant effects on their writing skills. One respondent (n=1) sees that collaborative writing did not give much impact on enabling all members in her group to engage in the group discussion during the learning process. For example, HS said, "Some students did not pay attention when the others share their ideas". Then, two respondents (n=2) report that they prefer to keep silent even if they disagree with other group members' opinions because they did not want to offend their friends and were unwilling to get into arguments. For example, SL said, "When we had different ideas on a topic assigned by our teacher, we usually had difficulties to decide whose ideas would be chosen. This sometimes cause conflicts among us". And the last respondent (n=1) states that during the collaboration process, the group discuss in Bahasa Indonesia. KA states, "In group discussion, I used Bahasa Indonesia since I feel difficult to communicate in English". It appears that their limited English language proficiency creates barriers to conduct group discussions in English.

As shown in table 2, the first question of semi-structured interview was answered by 14 respondents of the experimental class. Ten respondents (71.43 %) stated that collaborative writing had contributed positively to the

improvement of their writing skill. Meanwhile, four respondents (28.57 %) claimed that the implementation of collaborative writing did not give any significant effects on their writing skills.

 $\label{thm:table 2} Table \ 2.$ The percentage of collaborative writing effectiveness on writing skills

Question	Agree	Disagree
Do you think that collaborative writing is an	71.43 %	28.57%
effective strategy to accomplish a writing task?	(n=10)	(n=4)

The second question informs that most of the respondents (n=8) could improve their writing skills as seen through the development of their vocabulary, better content, greater grammatical accuracy, and a variety of writing styles. For example, GA said, "I learned many vocabularies when we discussed a topic. I also learned how to write better sentence with different words to explore the content of a text". Furthermore, some respondents (n=3) believe that collaborative writing has helped increase their confidence in writing. For instance, IEP said, "I disliked writing because I did not know what to write. By using collaborative writing I felt that I get more ideas and I did not feel scare about the grammar and vocabulary in writing a hortatory text anymore". In addition, several other benefits were identified by other students (n=3)who saw the strategy helpful to engaged students with the sociocultural features of collaborative writing, specifically the co-construction of knowledge and language, where students discuss about the best way to articulate their meanings in the target language. For instance, BPN expressed, "During the collaboration I could combine all of groups' opinion and decide whether it is right or wrong, useful or un-useful". He further adds that "learning about other people's opinions was important. In a similar viewpoint, HH states "the opportunity to discuss and talk to each other about the best way to speak English in expressing his thoughts and ideas".

As shown in the table 3, the second question of semi-structured interview was answered by 14 respondents in the experimental class. Eight respondents (57.16 %) stated that the positive changes occurred in their writing include a wider range of vocabulary, better content, greater grammatical accuracy, and a variety of writing styles. Then, three respondents (21.43 %) felt that collaborative writing increased their confidence in writing. Furthermore, three respondents (21.43 %) corresponded with sociocultural of collaborative writing.

TABLE 3.
THE PERCENTAGE OF THE ADVANTAGES OF COLLABORATIVE WRITING IMPLEMENTATION

Question	Better	Increase	Co-
	writing	confidence	construction
What does the advantages	57.16 %	21.43 %	21.43 %
that you get from the	(n=8)	(n=3)	(n=3)
implementation of			
collaborative writing?			

Then, the third question of semi-structured interview indicated that there were obstacles faced by the students in implementing collaborative writing. Some respondents (n=5) felt taking a longer time to finish the writing task in a group than they done it individually. Then, other respondents (n=4) felt that the domination of discussions by certain group members became a problem that occurred in implementation of collaborative writing. Furthermore, some respondents felt (n=5) that the unfair distribution of work, differences in opinion and learning style caused conflicts among the members of group.

As shown in table 4, the third question of semi-structured interview was answered by 14 respondents in the experimental class. Five respondents (35.71 %) states that the obstacle that they faced in collaborative writing is due to their preference of working individually to collaboratively. Then, four respondents (28.57 %) felt that the domination of certain group members occurred in the discussion. In addition, five respondents (35.71%) have conflicts due to their differences on learning style and opinions.

Question	Work individually	Domination of certain group member	Conflict due to the differences
What does the obstacle	35.71 %	28.57 %	35.71 %
that you get from the implementation of collaborative writing?	(n=5)	(n=4)	(n=5)

B. Discussion

The Effect of Collaborative Writing on EFL Learners' Writing Skill

This study reveals that collaborative writing gives some benefits to students' writing. First, it may help a group of students to use the potential strength of all its members to accomplish their work. This finding can be considered consistent with Widodo's (2006) insight that each student may accomplish one section of the tasks with regards his/her

area of strength. For example, one member of the group is good at organizing the ideas while another is very good at vocabulary. So, we can say, they can collaborate and get benefits from each other, the group members, while doing a writing task.

Second, it helps group members to get used to do peer-review when completing their writing project. By pairing different learners with different proficiency levels together it can be expected that the transferring of different kind of knowledge among pairs will take place. These results support earlier remarks by Shehadeh (2011) and Sajedi (2014) who claim that collaborative writing impact on students' writing performance in second language significantly, especially in content, organization, vocabulary, but grammar and mechanic are not included. In line with Dobao & Blum (2013), the students in experimental class get a lot of chances to get in touch with the group members and share their thought and ideas about the content of the writing task; mechanic, cohesion, coherence, grammar, paragraph organization, etc. As a result, they produce an appropriate and properly writing viewed from the grammar, coherence and lexicon.

Third, collaborative writing motivates students in considering their audiences when there is an opinion and feedback about a topic that they are going to write in their writing. As a result, they consider and change the content, manner and other components of writing likes vocabulary. While, they are more focus and pay attention of feedback they got in establishing their knowledge.

Then, students can build and develop their critical thinking skills. In groups, students may be unable to automatically evaluate the writing critically, but through step by step process, they will learn how to evaluate their writing and critique their peer' pieces of writing. As Stapleton (2001) maintains, critical thinking can be promoted through content familiarity and schemata (prior knowledge) because these shape the range and depth of argumentation. For example, if students are familiar with the content, they have a greater chance of refining their ideas and provide critical feedback on their peers' pieces of writing.

To conclude, collaborative writing can be used to build a supportive learning atmosphere for students and provide them with an opportunity to experience the process of writing collaboratively. That is why collaborative writing can optimize mutual benefits in a stress reduced classroom atmosphere and give better result in students' writing skills (Gaith, 2002).

EFL Learners' Perception in Implementing of Collaborative Writing

From the survey findings and interview responses, the majority of respondents had a positive perception on the use of collaborative writing in the classroom in terms of a variety of aspects. In terms of motivation, students felt that collaborative writing had improved their confidence to write in English. This finding echoed the results of past research such as Shehadeh (2011) whose subjects found collaborative writing to enhance their self- confidence, and Yong (2006) who proposes that collaboration fosters self-confidence. Two socio-cultural constructs commonly identified in collaborative writing, the co-construction of knowledge and language, were also cited by students as major benefits.

Most of the respondents agreed that they discussed about the best way to use the target language to express their ideas, in terms of grammar, vocabulary, sentence structure, and spelling among others. This corresponds to instances of language or language-related episodes identified in Swain (2007) and utilized as a variable in a number of studies on collaborative writing. It is shown, for instance, that frequencies of language-related episodes corresponded to quality of written text produced (Watanabe & Swain, 2007). Furthermore, the interview responses suggest that the respondents perceived collaborative writing to have a positive impact on their grammar.

VI. CONCLUSION

The results of this study show that collaborative writing gives positive effect on EFL learners' writing skill significantly. Besides, EFL learners get positive perception on collaborative writing itself, especially in writing motivation, peer-feedback, topic comprehending, habits and enriching of vocabulary. This findings give advantages for teachers who implement collaborative writing strategy in the classroom. It also helps the teachers to compare this strategy to another strategy (individual writing strategy). As collaborative writing strategy proves to have significant effect on EFL learners writing skill, it can be adopted as an alternative strategy in teaching writing.

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