

Collaborative Writing

In L2

Learning and Teaching

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Abstract

In recent decades, there has been a growing interest in and recognition of collaborative writing (CW) in many classroom contexts around the world. The current view of language learning and teaching has suggested the use of CW as essential in language classrooms. However, many L2 teachers and EFL instructors have been reluctant to employ collaborative activities in their classrooms. The present review aims to display CW as a useful tool in English language learning classrooms in a foreign context. In this review, I illustrate the main difficulties of individual writing, define what collaborative writing is and describe its methodology by focusing on one of the main factors that influence collaboration: the relationship learners build. Additionally, the paper examines the benefits of CW, considers students' perception of CW, and presents some limitations. Data was gathered over three studies that considered collaborative work in a written task in comparison to individual writing. Considering students' perception of CW, a clear preference for CW was observed over individual writing as it offered them better learning opportunities as well as the chance to learn from peers through interaction. As for the limitations, L2 teachers' uncertainty over CW rests on challenging assessment issues, doubts about student pairing, monitoring of equal participation, and the use of the L1. Finally, a number of theoretical and pedagogical implications are presented.

Keywords: collaborative writing; second language learning; group work; individual work; students' perception

Introduction

When students work in pairs or small groups, they feel less intimidated as they realise that the rest of the members of the group are struggling as much as they to find an appropriate word or sentence to communicate their ideas. In this manner, stress and anxiety are reduced (Oxford, 1997). Influenced by the perspectives of a Social Constructivist Theory of learning which highlights the importance of communication in the development of knowledge, many teachers and instructors started to make use of different collaborative learning activities to help students brainstorm ideas, create outlines to help each other to produce a piece of writing or even give feedback when revising their texts. Nevertheless, in the last three decades, regardless of some teachers' reluctance, collaborative writing tasks have been frequently employed in second language learning classrooms (Storch, 2013).

As an emerging area in second language learning, many researchers have tried to explore the effectiveness and benefits of collaborative writing (CW). As noted by Villarreal and Gil-Sarratea (2019, p. 875), "collaborative tasks place the learner at the centre of the learning process". Furthermore, these tasks are claimed to promote students' independence, offer opportunities for genuine negotiation of meaning, and increase oral interaction in L2 contexts (Storch, 2005, 2013). Specifically, written collaborative tasks, such as jointly written essays, have been claimed to allow language learning opportunities for foreign language students (Shehadeh, 2011; Storch 2005). All these statements are in line with Vygotsky's (1978) view of learning, which emphasises the importance of socialisation with other learners to improve cognitive development.

The present review aims to show that CW is a useful tool in English language learning classrooms in a foreign language context. To this end, I will first introduce the major drawbacks of individual writing that led to working in collaboration. Secondly, I will explain what CW is, what the motivation behind it is, and I will describe its methodology. Then, I will analyse three specific studies that implemented work in collaboration and I will depict students' perceptions of CW. Finally, I will identify some limitations in the use of CW writing in language classrooms.

Individual Writing: Main Difficulties that Led to CW

As reported by Ghufron & Hawa (2018, as cited in Moonma & Kaweera, 2021), writing is usually considered to be the most challenging skill of language learning because the writer is asked to implement several formal features to help readers grasp a specific meaning. Indeed, failure to apply these characteristics accurately may lead to obscurity, ellipsis, and ambiguity in the written texts. Thus, considering that writing is a complicated task by itself, writing in English as a foreign language is complicated for both teachers and learners. On account of the above, diverse studies have compared texts produced by learners working solitarily and texts produced by learners working collaboratively with the intention of making writing tasks more beneficial for students. Although most of these studies have been conducted on L1 learners, recently, research on L2 learners has been carried out. However, the comparison between texts generated by L1 writers and those produced by L2 learners differs. While the former is based on the quality of the texts produced, the latter focuses on grammatical accuracy (Storch, 2013).

The findings of these studies have revealed that the major drawback of writing individually is the lack of opportunity to interact with other learners while deliberating on language. In addition, if we focus on the L1 contexts, O'Donnell et al. (1985) demonstrated that the written scripts generated in collaboration were better than those produced alone in terms of quality. On the other hand, research on L2 learners has also confirmed disadvantages in writing individually in reference to text quality, grammatical accuracy, and feedback.

Firstly, despite needing more time to complete the task, students who worked collaboratively generated better quality texts. Learners managed to produce a written text that had a clearer structure and focus, and greater linguistic complexity.

Secondly, individual texts were less grammatically accurate than those built in collaboration. Storch (2013) reported that students working solitarily spent less time on the task, and therefore, they made little revision and improvement of their texts by spending less time on editing the written texts. Likewise, learners were less motivated and focused when working alone, and thus, submitted their tasks just after having finished the assignment. However, those working in pairs devoted time to checking and editing the text several times before handing the text in, and probably, felt some kind of pressure from peers to accomplish a more accurate text.

Lastly, studies showed that feedback on individual texts and group texts showed some dissimilarities. To start with, when working individually, learners could only rely on their own linguistic resources to find a solution to their deliberations, while CW offers them a wider pool of knowledge to rely on. Similarly, learners who write individually, in contrast to learners performing the task in pairs or groups, cannot get immediate feedback while generating their texts; they need to wait until the task is concluded. In addition, they lack the opportunity to discuss and negotiate upon the feedback provided by the instructor, making it developmentally less appropriate and less effective. In short, students working alone are more reluctant to question or take up the feedback given, missing the chance to build new language knowledge (Storch, 2013).

Taking into consideration the results described above, CW may be seen as an effective teaching method that offers more learning opportunities than individual writing. Thus, it is not surprising that CW has become an emerging tool employed in second language learning classrooms.

Definition and Motivation Behind CW

To understand what CW is, it is crucial to define what collaboration is. According to Merriam-Webster (n.d., definition 1), to collaborate is “to work jointly with others or together, especially in an intellectual endeavor”. Therefore, we could understand as CW a text that has been co-authored by two or more writers. Still, such a broad definition could lead to a misinterpretation of what CW means. In this manner, Ede and Lunsford (1990) proposed an alternative perspective by describing three distinctive characteristics: (i) there must be a real interaction throughout all the phases of the writing process, (ii) decision-making power and responsibility must be shared by all the authors, and (iii) a single written document must be generated. Accordingly, CW is a specific process and product, where participants work collectively and interact in the whole writing process. Indeed, Schrage (1994, as cited in Storch 2013, p. 11) affirms that the writing process is “not merely exchange of ideas but negotiations which arise as a result of struggle to create a shared understanding and shared expression”. As such, tasks and contributions to the text production must go hand in hand with promoting mutual engagement and coordinated effort by each participant (Storch, 2013).

In the last twenty years, CW has been employed in the learning contexts around the world. Actually, as stated in Shehadeh (2011), the present view of language learning and teaching highlights the usage of collaborative work as essential in language classrooms. This view rests on both strong theoretical and pedagogical considerations. From a theoretical perspective, the use of CW in the L2 classroom is supported by a social constructivist perspective of learning based on Vygotsky's work (1978). Vygotsky's sociocultural theory of mind (SCT) is a sociocognitive theory that emphasises the significance of verbal interaction for learning. In this respect, interaction is viewed as a key factor in all cognitive development, including language learning.

More specifically, SCT affirms that the development of higher-order cognitive functions, such as voluntary attention or language learning, arises in interaction between humans, where an expert participant (an adult or a more knowledgeable peer) provides the novice (a child or a less knowledgeable peer) with the convenient level of assistance. In this manner, experts facilitate novices to reach their potential level of development.

Nevertheless, not all forms of assistance are successful and lead to development. It is crucial that the expert bears in mind the novice's current state of knowledge and the potential state that they can achieve with assistance. Thus, the role of the expert is both to assist the novice in considering their performance and needs and to encourage them to participate and take responsibility in the activity progressively. Such assistance is what Wood, Brunner and Ross (1976) refer to as scaffolding. Scaffolding is language-mediated. As stated by Wells (1999), it is the language that permits coordination and communication between the expert and the novice. Hence, Vygotsky's sociocultural theory not only establishes learning as a fundamentally social experience but also justifies the use of interaction between an expert and a novice learner along with peer interaction (Storch, 2013).

On the pedagogical side, communicative language teaching (CLT) and task-based approaches to language teaching (TBLT), which uphold interaction and the use of significant tasks in the language classroom, provide a rationale for the use of CW tasks. Indeed, many scholars acknowledge that CLT and TBLT approaches to L2 instruction have considerably influenced the curricula and teaching of second languages around the world, specifically the teaching of English as a second and foreign language (Butler, 2011; Littlewood, 2011; Savignon, 2005).

As reported by Savignon (2005), the principle of communicative language teaching is the engaging of the learner in communication for them to be able to develop their communicative competence. On this account, the objective of language teaching is communicative competence, which is understood as the ability of the learner to produce language that is correct, relevant, and suitable for the context in which it is used. Accordingly, the means to guarantee communicative competence in the L2 classroom is by activities that involve students' communication, sharing of ideas, and negotiation for meaning and form. Therefore, one of the main characteristics of CLT is the use of group and pair work to provide the learner with the chance of using the target language. This chance is crucial in foreign language classrooms, as it is often the only chance learners have to make use of the L2.

As well as CLT, TBLT aims for learners to achieve high levels of communicative competence by arranging the content of the L2 teaching programme concerning tasks or group projects whose outcome is non-linguistic, but simultaneously presents the learners with linguistic challenges that promote an accidental focus on form. Putting it differently, these tasks need to be thoroughly designed, focusing primarily on meaning, but also encouraging the learner to focus on language use and accuracy. In this manner, the learners are provided with the chance to make use of the target language. As a result, CW accomplishes all the requirements of tasks noted above, where focus on meaning is fundamental and learners' attention to form is imperative (Storch, 2013).

At the same time, many scholars have supported CW in L2 classrooms with the positive results gathered from CW in the L1 environment. Indeed, research has demonstrated that writing is a recursive activity where planning, formulation of ideas, and revision occur throughout the writing process. Furthermore, research has also shown that novice writers, regardless of language level, do not spend enough time planning and editing their writings, focusing mainly on surface-level errors. Consequently, according to Ferris and Hedgcock (2005), L1 composition scholars make use of pre-writing activities such as group brainstorming, drafts, revision, and teacher and peer feedback where the focus is primarily on the articulation and development of ideas. In this process, teachers act as guides and the rest of the peers provide the learners with feedback on their draft through dynamic interaction. In other words, L1 composition scholars, such as Elbow (1973) or Bruffee (1984), supported the use of CW in the writing instruction. Actually, as stated by Bruffee (1984), when learners work together on their writing

assignments, they talk about and as a part of the process. In this manner, students not only act as tutors but also as critical readers, transforming the act of writing into a process rather than a product.

In addition, CW provides a natural environment for peer feedback. When writing collaboratively, students both provide and receive feedback. In contrast to solitary writing, feedback is immediate and takes place during the whole writing process, and it is better adjusted to the learners' linguistic and cognitive capacity. Likewise, learners seem to be more committed to text editing because all of them share the authorship of the text. Correspondingly, co-authors may have different opinions and ideas, and this may lead to debates about which ideas may be more suitable to include, how to express ideas, or even how to organise them. Research has shown that L2 composing process is exactly the same as in L1 writing. However, the L2 writing process is more challenging and tedious because learners have to think not only about ideas related to the topic but also need to think about how to express those ideas in the L2. Yet if writing collaboratively, students are provided with a wider range of resources, by sharing their knowledge and ideas with other L2 writers. Furthermore, CW also provides the learners with the opportunity to practice L2 outside the learning environment (Storch, 2013).

To conclude, CW tasks satisfy all three principles the second language learning theories propose for L2 language instruction:

- (i) Learners involved in CW activities are engaged in interaction.
- (ii) This interaction is always relevant and suitable, focused on meaning.
- (iii) It encourages students to focus on accuracy and provides them with the space and time to do so.

In addition, research conducted in L1 setting on group and pair work has demonstrated that CW is conceivably more advantageous than solitary writing when it comes to both language learning and learning to write. Accordingly, these results reinforce the employment of collaborative work in L2 environment.

Methodology

Having defined CW as an activity in which two or more students communicate with each other throughout specific tasks with the purpose of producing one single text, CW is distinguished for promoting interaction between learners and facilitating learning of the L2 (Shehadeh, 2011). Nevertheless, as Storch (2002) argued, asking students to work in pairs or groups to generate a text does not guarantee that they work in collaboration. In the light of the above, one decisive factor that influences the quality of the interaction that takes place while working collaboratively is the relationship that learners build during the task. Indeed, research clearly suggests that collaboration types influence the amount of scaffolding in the CW tasks as well as the amount of knowledge that can be transferred into solitary writing (Donato, 1989).

The significance of the contrasting types of collaboration was first recognised in Donato (1989). According to Donato, it is essential to understand the dynamics of the interaction among the members of the group to be able to examine the potential of group work for L2 learning. He described two different types of collaboration: loosely knit groups and collective groups; and he affirmed that the amount of scaffolding fluctuated across collaboration types. Similarly, Damon and Phelps (1989) analysed collaboration types in the L1 environment and proposed three collaboration types: peer tutoring, cooperative learning, and peer collaboration. These three types of collaboration were based on two criteria: equality and mutuality. The former referred to the contribution and control learners had over the task, while the latter made reference to the reciprocity of peer interaction (Damon & Phelps, 1989).

On account of previous research, Storch (2002, 2005, 2013) led some studies to try to understand how the collaboration worked in groups. Considering the parameters of equality and mutuality and the analysis of dyadic interaction, Storch (2002) identified four different patterns of collaboration in CW. The first is the collaborative pattern, where learners make an equal contribution and share equal control over the tasks. The second is the dominant/dominant pattern which is characterised by high equality and low mutuality. In this case, both learners share equal responsibility and contribution to the task; however, they tend to ignore each other's input. The third is the dominant/passive pattern which involves low equality and mutuality, where students' contributions and control are unequal, and there is little interaction between them. The fourth is the expert/novice

pattern in which one member of the pair acts as the expert that contributes the most to the task and constantly assists the novice member throughout the task. Nonetheless, in 2013 Storch included a new collaboration type to her model: the cooperative pattern. Such pair work, as well as the dominant/dominant pattern, is characterised by equal contribution and control over the task. Nevertheless, in this case, learners show less conflict than the dominant/dominant pattern and just attend to their own contribution without manifesting much tension.

Over the years, Storch's model has been widely employed in CW to explore the dynamics of collaboration in different settings. Yet as reported by Zhang (2019), this model does not consider the fluid nature of dyadic interaction in CW. Putting it differently, Storch's model forces the researcher to choose one predominant model of collaboration without considering the possible different types of collaboration that may arise throughout the task. Considering the limitations of Storch's model, Zhang (2019) proposed different collaboration types that also considered the learner's involvement in various phases of the task. Specifically, these collaboration types were based on four task-related functions: organization, content, language, and task management.

Having these four task-aspects in mind, Zhang (2019) described five types of collaboration. The first is the Organization Noncollaborative Pattern distinguished by unbalanced contributions related to organization and content. While one of the members is in charge of most of the contributions related to organization, the other pair member dominates content-related input. However, both learners are fairly involved in the discussion of linguistic issues and task management. Specifically, learners are actively engaged in the retrieval of vocabulary, and the evaluation and proposition of word-forms.

The second type is the Language Use Noncollaborative Pattern. It is characterised by the inequality of contributions related to language use and content. One pair member dominates language use, such as vocabulary, grammar, and mechanics; and half of the time one pair member leads the content of the task, such as eliciting ideas. Still, both pair members show equal engagement in task management and organization. Learners may share different opinions on task management but are able to actively negotiate with each other to reach an agreement and scaffold each other to bring out different approaches to organise ideas.

The thirdly type is the Task Management Noncollaborative Pattern. Such pair work involves one pair member being more engaged in task management, the other member of the pair dominating content, and both learners making balanced contributions to organization and language by scaffolding each other, evaluating alternatives, and justifying choices.

The fourth type is the Content Noncollaborative Pattern. This pattern requires noncollaborative interaction only on content elicitation and balanced commitment when it comes to discussing organization, task management, and language use.

Taking into consideration the abovementioned four collaboration types, we may conclude that an unequal contribution to organization, language use, and task management is reasonably associated with an unbalanced involvement in content elicitation. Yet an unbalanced contribution to content contribution does not influence an equal engagement in other aspects of the task. Therefore, such relation points to the need to promote learners' balanced contribution to all aspects of CW so as to help them commit to content elicitation.

Different from the aforementioned collaboration types, the Collaborative Pattern correlates to the collaborative type in Storch's model. This collaboration type implies equal engagement in all four task-related aspects of CW. As noted by Storch (2013, p. 61), a collaboration pattern involves two members who "contribute to all aspects of the task and engage with each other's suggestions, often pooling their linguistic resources (collective scaffolding) in resolving deliberations about language". However, there is a difference between these two classifications. While Storch relies on equality and mutuality, Zhang (2019) considers pair members' contributions to each of the four task-related aspects of CW.

Studies Implementing CW

Over the past 20 years, collaborative pair and group work has become popular in many classroom contexts due to both theoretical and pedagogical implications. Yet if we compare research carried out to investigate the benefits of collaborative work in spoken tasks with research conducted to analyse the advantages of collaborative work for the written discourse in L2, the latter is scarce. Actually, as stated by Storch (2005), even

though the use of collaborative work in language classrooms is very common, just a few studies have explored the nature of such collaboration when learners create a jointly written text. Specifically, most existing research has considered the advantages of group feedback or issues related to group dynamics rather than focusing on the benefits of CW itself. In addition, although some researchers have explored the advantages of collaborative work, few have focused on foreign language contexts (Shehadeh, 2011). In the following sections, I will introduce the results of three different studies that considered collaborative work in written tasks. These three studies are interesting because they compare the texts produced by students solitarily to those written collaboratively indicating the benefits CW brings about.

Pair versus Individual Writing: Effects on Fluency, Complexity and Accuracy (Wigglesworth & Storch, 2009)

The present study aimed to examine the performance of students working together in comparison to those working alone and to explore the processes in which the learners are engaged when working collaboratively to analyse the discussions the learners have in terms of language use, specifically, lexis, grammar, and mechanics. The participants were 144 male and female, ranging in age from 18 to 41 years old, with an average of 26, all met the standard of English language required for university entrance and had learnt English as a foreign language. Most of the participants were from Asian backgrounds, and were predominantly Chinese. They were divided into two groups, 48 learners completed the task individually while 96 of them self-selected into pairs. Learners were asked to write an argumentative essay considering the advantages and disadvantages of exam-based assessment under a time limit. As Storch (2005) argued pairs took longer than individuals to complete any written task; the researchers set different time limits for those working alone and those that worked collaboratively. The former was given 40 minutes to complete the task, while the latter had 60 minutes. To be able to identify differences among the written texts produced by pairs and individuals, they were analysed for fluency, complexity and accuracy.

The results of this study, involving advanced-level learners, showed that CW did not result in longer texts or more complex use of language. However, it does appear to bring more accurate texts as students working in pairs are able to pool their resources by

allowing them the opportunity to learn from their partners. Having compared individual and CW, the second objective of the paper was to analyse the transcripts of the pair dialogues to explore what aspects of CW assessment can provide students with chances for language learning. The pair dialogues were analysed at three different levels:

- (i) Planning, composing and revising
- (ii) Identification of episodes in transcripts
- (iii) Analysis of language related episodes (LRE)

First, three different phases were identified in the process of writing: time spent planning the text, time spent composing or writing the text, and time devoted to revising activities. Then, all the talk was segmented into episodes which were categorised as one of the following: task clarification and management, idea generation and discussion of content, structure, revision activities, LREs, and other (including discussion in L1). However, the main focus of the analysis was on LREs which serve as tools to explore the learners' understanding about language. As such, LREs were classified for focus, distinguishing Lexis-focus (L-LRE), Form-focus (F-LRE), and Mechanics-focus (M-LRE).

The analysis of the pair discussions revealed that the learners spent most of the time on the composition phase, while planning took 15% of the time, and revising 7%. The discussion on the content of the essay also took a greater amount of time as learners brainstormed ideas and made notes of the main points they would later include in their texts in this phase. In terms of revision, learners seemed to be aware of time constraints and decided to revise their texts while composing them. Yet there were considerable differences between the pairs' focus. For instance, some of them aimed their discussions in terms of content while others approached the task by adopting different approaches. Other disparities among pairs included the nature of input into decision making and the use of L1 in their deliberations.

The examination of LREs disclosed a greater focus on lexis and grammar than on mechanics. However, great variations between pairs were noted in reference to language attention and task approach. The dominant focus of discussion in the lexical LREs was word choice, particularly, the choice of some context-specific nouns. There was also considerable focus on verb choice and the main concern for learners was over parts of speech. F-LREs showed that learners worked together over the same grammatical points,

discussing and confirming their choices collaboratively and even providing their peers with explanations for the use of specific verb forms. By contrast, M-LREs were scarce and mainly focused on spelling.

By means of this study, Wigglesworth and Storch (2009) confirmed that working in pairs on a CW task gives rise to more accurate texts compared to those written individually. The students are provided with learning opportunities as well as enable teachers to explore the improvements learners are making. The examination of pair dialogues indicates that working in collaboration gives the learners the chance to interact on different aspects of the writing process. Specifically, analysis of the interaction proved that CW afforded the learners the opportunity to share ideas and pool their language knowledge. Regardless of the inability to find a correlation between the amount of language discussion and the accuracy of the texts produced, it does appear that this pooling of linguistic knowledge gives them the opportunity to build more accurate texts. Indeed, the fact that the learners spent on average 30% of their time deliberating about language may demonstrate why texts produced in collaboration were grammatically more accurate than those written individually.

Effects and Student Perceptions of CW in L2 (Shehadeh, 2011)

In conjunction with the preceding study, the following paper examines the effectiveness of collaborative work on students' L2 writing quality after being engaged in such task for a prolonged period. This study acknowledged three aspects of language accuracy (grammar, vocabulary, and mechanics) as well as components of content and organization in a foreign language context. The participants were thirty-eight female EFL students from a large public university in the United Arab Emirates, ranging in age from 18 to 20 years old, and low-intermediate learners of English as L2.

The study was conducted in two parallel intact classes. The first class was made up of 20 students and was considered the control group, while the second consisted of 18 students (that would form 9 pairs) and was treated as the experimental group. Data was collected employing a pre-and posttest design which constituted the quantitative data, and a student survey after the posttest which provided qualitative data on the students' perceptions and views of CW. Students' writings were assessed using the writing scale that was originally developed by Jacobs et al. (1981) and adapted by Hedgcock &

Lefkowitz (1992) to conclude the differences between the two groups on the pre- and posttest. The scale describes the following five component areas on a 0-100 point scale: content, organization, grammar, vocabulary, and mechanics of writing.

Before any instruction, in week 1, the two groups were provided with 30 minutes to write a paragraph (100 words) describing their house. Then, the paragraphs of both groups were collected and evaluated by two trained raters (native speakers of English who have taught EFL/ESL and language skills at the college level over a long period of time) using the writing scale mentioned above. As expected, no meaningful differences were found between the two groups regarding the total score or the five components scores. The texts of these students showed:

- (i) Limited knowledge and minimal thematic development (content)
- (ii) Loose connection and sequencing of ideas (organisation)
- (iii) Significant problems in the use of complex instructions and frequent errors in agreement, number, tense, negation and sentence fragments (grammar)
- (iv) Limited range of vocabulary, frequent word errors, inappropriate choice and usage of words (vocabulary)
- (v) Frequent spelling, punctuation, capitalization and paragraphing errors (mechanics)

After the pre-test, the instructional syllabus was the same for both the control and experimental group. Both groups shared the same instructor who followed the syllabus, lesson plans, and material provided by the course textbook. All variables were kept constant, including the participants' first language, gender, age, language profile, syllabus, and instructional method. However, to control any incidental factor, some adjustments were made to maintain the consistency of the study. The students were given similar topics to write about, and feedback was provided just by the instructor in both groups. All tasks were time-limited; while the control group was provided with 30 minutes to produce their texts, the experimental group was granted 40 minutes. This last adjustment was based on previous studies that have shown that pairs need more time to complete writing tasks than individuals (Storch, 2005). Therefore, the main difference between the control and experimental condition was that while the former carried out all the stages of the writing process individually, the latter carried them out in pairs. This process was more arduous for students in the experimental condition because they had to

brainstorm and pool ideas; discuss the relevance of ideas; plan, generate and revise the text together.

Students in both conditions performed 12 writing tasks during the semester carried out over 16 weeks: weeks 1 and 16 were used for the pre-and posttests respectively, and 14 weeks, 2- 15 included, were used for treatment. Students in control and experimental condition handed in their texts to their instructor, and the following session, he returned the texts and provided them with both oral and written feedback. In week 16, having covered all the instruction process, learners in the two groups were asked to write a paragraph (100 words) describing the university campus in 30 minutes, exactly under the same conditions as in the pre-test. Later, the paragraph assignments were collected and evaluated by the same two raters who used the same rating scale as in the pre-test.

All things considered, Shehadeh (2011, p. 295) concluded that “CW has an overall significant effect on improving students’ writing in L2; nevertheless, this effect varied from one area to another”. The differences were meaningful in the areas of content, organization, and vocabulary, where students in the experimental group obtained significantly better results. In contrast, both control and experimental groups scored similarly in the area of grammar and mechanics. It was surprising that students who worked collaboratively obtained similar results in grammar considering that the social constructivist learning affirms that work in collaboration leads to grammatically more accurate written texts. Yet their low proficiency in English may possibly explain the lack of accuracy expected from the experimental group.

In the light of the findings of this study, numerous theoretical and pedagogical implications for CW may be derived. From a theoretical perspective, CW tasks provide the students with the scenario for meaningful and purposeful communication as well as engagement in cognitive processes that may be excellent chances to learn the L2. Likewise, the results gathered from the survey carried out among the participants showed that students who were part of the experimental condition felt that collaborative work enabled them to generate ideas, exchange and pool ideas, discuss, plan and produce the text better than those working individually. With respect to pedagogical implications, the results obtained from this study prove the usefulness of CW in foreign contexts by portraying collaborative work as a pedagogical tool in the learning and teaching of writing that enables learners to enjoy the writing activity more and produce better-written scripts.

Collaborative and Individual Writing: Effects on Accuracy and Fluency Development (Sarkhosh & Najafi, 2020)

As in the case of the aforementioned studies, the literature reveals that very few studies have been conducted where the long-term effects of CW on the development of fluency and accuracy are explored. This third study aimed at filling this gap by examining the effects of CW on both the accuracy and fluency development of males and females after various consecutive writing sessions. The participants were 120 students at an elementary level of proficiency at English in Iran Language Institute, ranging in age from 12 to 14 years old. The study took place over seven successive sessions with an experimental pre-test, immediate, and delayed posttest design. The study considered two independent variables: writing approach at individual and collaborative level, and sex (male and female); and two dependant variables: accuracy and fluency in the short and the long run.

The study was conducted in four different classes: two of them consisted of 30 male students each, and the other two were made up of 30 female learners each. In one male and one female class, the students were asked to work in collaboration with self-selected pairs (experimental condition) whereas the rest of the students worked individually (control condition). During the seven sessions the experiment lasted, the students both in the control and experimental groups were asked to produce 100-150 word descriptive compositions on given topics.

Before the instruction began, writing session 1, the researchers asked all the students, regardless of which group they belonged to, to produce a composition individually for 20 minutes to analyse and confirm that all students were more or less at the same level in writing skills. In the second writing session, the researchers returned the compositions corrected to the students, and students were provided with time to think about mistakes and the corresponding corrections. The feedback students were given was not focused but targeted any kind of grammatical mistake from spelling mistakes.

After the pre-test (in the second session), the students under experimental conditions were asked to produce their compositions collaboratively while the students in the control condition worked alone. The same method was employed in the afterward

six writing sessions: students were asked to write a composition, and then error reflection and feedback took place. From the first writing session until the last, a month had gone by, writing session six being considered the immediate posttest. One month later, the students that worked collaboratively and those working solitarily were asked to write a seventh composition to analyse the effects of CW in the long.

Sarkhosh and Najafi (2020) confirmed that CW improves both fluency and accuracy. Concerning fluency, immediate and delayed posttest results show significant differences between the collaborative and the individual male and female groups. Students who worked collaboratively produced more fluent texts. As for accuracy, the results of immediate and delayed posttests displayed better compositions for students working: students working under CW conditions generate more accurate texts than students working solitarily.

Considering the findings of this study, CW has proved to be beneficial in developing writing skills in the L2. Firstly, given Vygotsky's work (1989), learning a language is a social activity, and students can benefit in several ways from the interaction with other learners. As this interaction demands reflective thinking from the learners, it helps them focus on grammatical accuracy, lexis, and discourse; and it also encourages students to share their knowledge about the language. In addition, students need to negotiate and scaffold to reach an agreement and make better choices for their texts concerning vocabulary use and grammatical structures. CW also provides the students with the opportunity to get feedback on errors from peers, granting a perfect scenario to learn about L2 while building a written text. To sum up, as noted by Sarkhosh & Najafi (2020, p. 40) learners who work collaboratively "become more autonomous as they exchange knowledge, skills, and strategies".

Students' Perception of CW

Over the past few decades, regardless of the many studies that have suggested CW as a method that enables students to work on four English language skills (speaking, listening, reading, and writing) in an integrated manner, the traditional teaching method has still been in use. Although the decision to opt for one teaching method may seem to be minor, Abahussain (2020) argued that instructors must understand students' perception

and view of the theories of the L2 writing pedagogy to be able to offer them writing teaching methods and approaches that they find effective, useful and entertaining.

Throughout the literature, many papers describe learners' individual differences and learning strategies as factors that influence L2 learning. The vast majority of them confirm the existence of a correlation between learners' attitudes and the learning process. For instance, Petric (2002, as cited in Abahussain, 2020) noted that students' positive attitude toward specific learning strategies entails better results. Shehadeh (2011) and Storch (2005) reported the significance of learners' attitudes to the success of L2 learning by confirming that students' engagement in certain activities may be directly correlated to their belief that such activity presumably will promote their language learning. Similarly, Storch (2013) found that students' preconceived opinions influence the enjoyment and effectiveness of the activities carried out in the classroom. If students accept that they can learn a language it, they will not be reluctant to participate in activities that promote a communicative approach, for example, CW.

To gain a deeper understanding of students' attitudes toward teaching methods, Abahussain (2020) conducted a study comparing participants' perceptions of CW and individual writing. Participants were 30 Saudi male full-time second-year students majoring in English ranging in age between 20-22 years that shared an intermediate level of English proficiency and Arabic as their first language. The study employed a within-groups design where the same group of students received both individual and CW assignments to be able to analyse their views on writing solitarily and writing in collaboration. In addition, semi-structured interviews were carried out to examine not only participants' attitudes but also the benefits and challenges they faced.

The findings showed that individual writing was not a preference for students with regard to the improvement of writing skills and improvement of English language skills in general. Students perceived that individual writing did not promote their language learning in general and did not find it useful in helping them to develop their writing skills. By contrast, results revealed that learners presented a clear preference for CW compared to the more traditional writing approach. CW was considered effective and useful to improve their writing skills as well as the learning of English language skills. Learners affirmed that writing in collaboration was advantageous in terms of the generation of ideas, essay organization, grammar, and vocabulary (Abahussain, 2020).

Abahussain (2020) affirms that students enjoyed the process of planning, writing, and editing the text when carried out with friends rather than doing them alone. Students also thought that they were able to produce better papers when working in pairs and small groups because they viewed these group assignments as an opportunity to achieve new ideas and vocabulary, learn more complex sentence structures, new learning innovations and revision strategies, and develop a deeper perspective of thinking. They found the collaborative experience confidence-boosting and felt less anxious about writing individually. On the whole, most participants did not address major issues in relation to working collaboratively. However, they stated that it was key for them to be able to work with peers they were familiar with to show their preference for CW.

All in all, the findings of this study confirm the results of previous research (e.g., Shehadeh, 2011; Storch 2005). In general, learners prefer CW over individual writing since it provides them with the chance to learn from each other as well as the opportunity to practice the L2 with peers without being afraid of making mistakes.

Limitations

As previously mentioned, in recent years, CW has brought the interest of researchers and instructors alike, becoming an essential tool in the language classroom (Shehadeh, 2011; Storch 2005). Notwithstanding, as reported by Villarreal and Gil-Sarratea (2019), many teachers have hesitated to carry out pair and group activities in their classrooms due to various reasons: challenge by assessment issues, unsureness about student pairing, monitoring of equal participation, and the use of the L1 by learners.

First of all, when instructors implement CW tasks in their lessons, they have to aim attention to all the tasks that take place during the process of writing. That is to say, rather than focusing entirely on the language form, as they would do in writing activities performed individually, they must also examine the amount of time students devote to planning, writing, and revising their texts, and thus, assess their work in terms of content, organization and task management (McDonough et al., 2018). Accordingly, assessment issues in pair and group work activities are more challenging (Villarreal & Gil-Sarratea, 2019).

Similarly, Storch and Aldosari (2013) pointed out that another concern for teachers is whether to pair students with similar or different L2 proficiency. Thus, inspired by Loser's (2004, as cited in Storch & Aldosari, 2013) findings on the effect of paring students considering their proficiency in the L2, Storch and Aldosari concluded that the most favourable paring of students may depend on the objective of the activity. If the target of the task is to develop fluency, learners with lower proficiency should be paired up with a fellow low proficiency learner. In contrast, if the goal of the activity is language use, mixed proficiency paring may be beneficial for lower proficiency students. In addition, apart from the proficiency, the kind of relationship learners build also influences learners' pairing (2013). Consequently, instructors seem to be unsure about how to best pair students (Villarreal & Gil-Sarratea, 2019). Additionally, considering Storch's model of collaboration types (Storch, 2013), learners form different types of relationships when working in pairs, and therefore, assume different responsibilities during the task and may engage in diverse levels of participation. However, as stated by McDonough and García Fuentes (2015), writing in an EFL context should promote equal participation in the task. Hence, implementing CW in the classrooms may suppose a challenge for the instructor when it comes to monitoring equal participation in the task (Villarreal & Gil-Sarratea, 2019).

Lastly, the major rationale behind teachers being reluctant to employ work in collaboration in class is the fear of excessive use of the L1 during the task (Villarreal & Gil-Sarratea, 2019). As claimed by Carless (2008), the use of the mother tongue in task-based interaction has both positive and negative outcomes. While the L1 may have useful social and cognitive functions, such as the construction of scaffolded assistance or the creation of collaborative dialogue, disproportionate use of it may undermine the psycholinguistic rationale for task-based interaction. As a consequence, instructors may question the viability of CW as a language teaching method. Indeed, on the basis of a survey carried out among instructors (Carless, 2008), the use of L1 is considered a key challenge in collaborative tasks in language classrooms.

Conclusion

Writing has always been considered to be the most arduous skill of language learning and teaching. On account of this challenge, many researchers have conducted diverse studies comparing individual writing tasks to CW tasks with the intention of becoming the learning and teaching of L2 writing more beneficial for both learners and teachers.

Research on second language writing has revealed a preference for CW in language learning and teaching classrooms in foreign contexts compared to individual writing. CW is portrayed as a more effective teaching method that offers students better learning opportunities. By contrast, individual writing tasks result in more simple and grammatically less accurate texts produced by a single student with no interaction with other mates. These texts are built in isolation having to rely on one's linguistic resources and without having the chance to get immediate feedback while generating them. As a consequence of these difficulties, collaborative pair and group work has become popular in L2 learning and teaching classroom in the last three decades.

In view of The Social Constructivist Theory of learning, and supported by both theoretical and pedagogical considerations, L2 teachers and EFL instructors should consider CW as a beneficial and effective tool to employ in their classrooms. CW has been confirmed to produce grammatically more accurate texts and more language learning opportunities. Writing in pairs or small groups enables them to share and exchange ideas, discuss, plan and produce their texts as they pool their language knowledge. Students need to think reflectively, negotiate and scaffold to reach an agreement and make the best choices for their texts. CW also provides them with the chance to get immediate feedback from peers granting them the opportunity to improve their writing skills and to learn about L2 throughout the process of the written assignment. In addition, CW enables the instructors to explore the improvements learners make. Students have also confirmed their preference for CW as they recognise this teaching method to improve their English language skills as well as their writing skills while enjoying the process of building the written texts.

Nevertheless, although the literature and students' perceptions have confirmed the positive results of CW, many teachers and instructors feel reluctant to employ collaborative activities in their classrooms. The rationale for their reluctance is based on

different factors that could influence CW: challenging assessment, concerns about student pairing, equal participation monitoring, and the use of L1.

To conclude, the research reviewed shows that CW is efficient and advantageous for L2 teachers, EFL instructors and students. Although its employment potentially entails some challenges, CW tasks are an effective teaching strategy that gives rise to higher quality texts, promotes critical thinking and pools students' knowledge of L2.

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