VLU EFL Students' Perceptions Toward the Use of Collaborative Writing

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ABSTRACT

Keywords: perceptions, collaborative writing, benefits, drawbacks	Collaborative writing has a good influence on both students' writing skills and their perceptions of the strategy itself. However, the existing studies did not examine the more personal and subjective views of the participants. Moreover, the previous studies were limited to exploring the solutions to the problems that EFL English majors faced during their learning process. The purpose of the study is to investigate the perceptions of the English-majored juniors at Van Lang University towards the collaborative writing technique. To get optimal results, the third-year English majors at Van Lang University who participated in the Writing 5 course and experienced the collaborative writing method completed the questionnaire and answered the interview questions. The result of the study indicates that the collaborative writing strategy has a positive impact on students' writing outcomes. Also, this study's findings show a high percentage of students gain great satisfaction from the strategy. Therefore, it is believed that students' writing skills can be enhanced by using collaborative writing techniques as an effective learning tool.

Introduction

More recently, collaborative learning has been widespread in many academic settings around the globe. Currently, the emphasis on teaching and learning languages utilizing pair-work or group-work to help students practice the language together has grown essential in language classrooms. In fact, many popular learning strategies can be employed by instructors with the hope of assisting their students in successfully accomplishing writing tasks, and collaborative or cooperative writing is one of the strategies. Barkley et al. (2005) stated that the collaborative writing strategy requires students to collaborate in pairs or in triads to produce formal papers together. Likewise, Storch (2019) described collaborative writing as a process in which two or more writers collaborate to generate a single text. According to McDonough et al. (2015),

students working in a group can share their work fairly, and each member has to assume responsibility for their contributions to reach a higher standard of individual writing. This can be seen as advantageous for students' writing production and for helping them learn from one another as they must brainstorm ideas, draft an outline, and give peer feedback (Pham, 2021).

Specifically, a collaborative writing strategy was employed for English-majored juniors at Van Lang University who learned the Writing 5 course. The textbook used to train the students in the Writing 5 course was "Academic Writing – A Handbook for International Students – Third Edition" by Stephen Bailey (2011), Routledge publisher. The whole course lasted for 10 weeks, and the course took place once a week for a total of 2 hours and 30 minutes. They had an opportunity to experience the strategy and created many writing assignments together. In addition, they spent 10 weeks working and learning to complete the course, which accounted for 2 credits. During the process of learning, different students with the same levels of writing abilities might have varied opinions about the strategy, and a majority of students might find this strategy effective and appropriate and vice versa. That is why this paper is conducted with the prominent purpose, i.e., examining the perceptions of third-year English majors at Van Lang University towards the collaborative writing strategy used in the Writing 5 course.

Literature Review

Definition of collaborative writing

American Heritage (1969) and Merriam-Webster (2013) defined collaboration as "working jointly with others or together particularly in an intellectual activity." One of the earliest definitions offered by Allen (1987) is that collaborators produce a shared document by participating in significant interactions and sharing decision-making and accountability for it. Dale (1994), however, centered on the dialogic nature of group writing which emphasizes the context of the writing scenario as well as the connections of students' interactions. It was described by Rice and Huguley (1994) that collaborative writing was any task, namely idea generating, researching, planning, organizing, drafting, revising, and editing, that resulted in a finalized document with the cooperation of multiple people to create a written paper. Similarly, that collaborative writing is referred to as a single text is the result of a collaboration of two or more writers (Storch, 2019). Likewise, according to Lowry et al. (2004), collaborative writing is a social process as it involves a group of people working together, concentrating on a common goal, discussing a common topic, and producing a common piece of writing.

The teachers' roles in collaborative learning

Teachers or instructors frequently use the collaborative learning strategy in academic writing classes to encourage students to pool their ideas, and develop an outline to aid students in conducting their writing. In addition, teachers or instructors applied peer feedback for writing revision to enable students to benefit from one another's experiences and increase the quality of their writing (Harmer, 2007; Hyland, 2003; Nation, 2009; Pham et al., 2020; Pham & Nguyen, 2020; Pham, 2021). According to Pham (2021), some academic writing teachers or instructors prompt their students to write essays together to take advantage of collaborative learning and produce better writing.

The students' roles in collaborative learning

Veramuthu and Shah (2020) claimed that in order to write collaboratively, each person in the group must contribute ideas and effort at each stage of the process. Collaboration starts at every first phase of writing, including pre-writing, drafting, revising, and editing. Each individual is in charge of one component of the project to guarantee that it finishes more quickly and with better outcomes.

Process-based approach in collaborative writing

In the setting of an EFL classroom, it is crucial to improve English language learners' writing abilities. In addition to listening, speaking, and reading, writing is one of the skills that is taught and evaluated. In an English writing class, EFL students are introduced to a variety of formal and informal writing tasks which are articles, descriptive, narrative, argumentative, letters, emails, etc. These writing tasks are all formatted according to examinations. Thus, it is a fact that students should be proficient in their writing skills so as to be able to write all the different writing genres. As far as the benefits of collaborative writing toward writing fluency are concerned, Le (2021) emphasized that collaborative writing could be a framework for lecturers to motivate students both inside and outside academic institutions. Also, Tran (2021) indicated that regarding learning a new language, it is an obligation to collaborate and interact with one another instead of one-way communication for the sake of learners' acquisition.

Although there has been discussion about the problems with English language writing over the years, this challenging skill can be mastered with proper techniques. Students in a typical EFL classroom have varying levels of literacy, so collaborative writing techniques should be encouraged in the EFL curriculum as it satisfies the demands of the students. To be specific, students enable to exchange ideas, knowledge, and skills thanks to collaborative writing, according to Baria & Jafari (2013) and Zaky (2018). Furthermore, Zaky (2018) also emphasized that group formation, as well as task segmentation among group members, is integrated into collaborative writing. According to Vygotsky (1978), both students and teachers play active roles in class via collaborative writing practice. Peer interaction allows students to assist and guide one another while learning. Weissberg (2006) asserted that a collaborative task might be more beneficial than an individual one. In order to collaborate effectively, students have to take on several responsibilities so that they may embrace the roles of mentors, co-authors, and critical observers.

Incorporating collaboration into the process writing approach, according to Widodo (2013), fosters a positive and supportive learning environment. Students typically reap and gain the benefits of collaboration while working together in each step of the process writing approach. Hasan & Akhand (2010) confirmed that the importance of a process-based approach in EFL writing cannot be overstated. This approach places a focus on the essay-writing process, which helps students control their own thoughts and have more tremendous opportunities to express their ideas in written form.

The process-based approach consists of many stages of writing, and they involve brainstorming, discussion, and rewriting. Not surprisingly, collaboration can be integrated at every stage. For brainstorming, students can share their ideas in groups. They can engage in negotiation and

reach a decision. Furthermore, students can share any information they have with their groups. Especially, members of a group can give peer feedback to one another, and they can assess the strengths and weaknesses of their work from this stage. According to Hirashima et al. (2011), the process-based writing approach encourages peer collaboration and group work at most of the stages, so it is considered effective.

Previous studies

The implementation of collaborative writing, which demonstrated the advantages in the teaching and learning process, has been studied by several researchers, and other investigations are relevant to the perceptions of students towards the use of collaborative writing (e.g., Storch, 2005; Shehadeh, 2011; Dobao, 2012; Fong, 2012; Biria & Jafari, 2013; Ghufron & Hawa, 2015; Jalili & Shahrokhi, 2017; Khodabakhshzadeh & Samadi, 2017).

According to the research in the United Arab Emirates by Shehadeh (2011), the purpose of the study is to investigate the effectiveness of collaborative writing and students' perceptions towards the application of it. The study taking place over 16 weeks, used the quasi-experimental method from 38 first-year students. 18 students belonging to the experimental group were asked to do their tasks in pairs, while the other 20 students who were in the control group carried out their tasks individually. The study found that collaborative writing had a great impact on the students' writing performances, and most of the students had a positive attitude toward the strategy as well as enjoyed it. Moreover, the strategy contributed considerably to the students' learning results in terms of content, organization, and vocabulary.

Dabao and Blum (2013) conducted a study to discover 55 Spanish EFL learners' attitudes and perceptions towards collaborative writing in small groups of two or more students. Particularly, 28 of them completed the writing assignments in couples, while 27 others did it in four-member groups. The findings revealed that the students working in pairs have favorable opinions of collaborative writing due to the fact that it has helped them participate actively. Nevertheless, the sharing of information and ideas through collaborative writing enables students to work in groups to broaden their perspectives. Additionally, the students noted that this was an excellent opportunity to improve their language skills, such as their knowledge of grammatical and lexical aspects of language.

More recently, in the study titled "Effectiveness of Collaborative Writing among Secondary School Students in an ESL Classroom," Veramuthu and Shah (2020) conducted to study with the aim of figuring out students' perceptions of enhancing writing skills utilizing collaborative writing. 32 secondary school participants from Klang, Selangor, were involved in this study. In order to collect the survey research data, a questionnaire was distributed to the students to assess the students' attitudes toward collaborative writing. The findings reported that when the students composed their essays collaboratively, they expressed positive attitudes toward the strategy. Therefore, language teachers can apply this approach to help students improve their language learning and teaching.

Research gap

As can be seen from the relevant studies above, in general, collaborative writing has a good influence on both students' writing skills and their perceptions of the strategy itself. However,

the existing studies did not examine the more personal and subjective views of the participants. Moreover, the previous studies were limited to exploring the solutions to the problems that EFL English majors faced during their learning process. Although there is numerous research about students' perceptions towards the implementation of collaborative writing, the researcher of this study would like to bridge the gap in expanding the respondents of the study in the context of learning Writing five course and to know whether there are any other possible results at the Faculty of Foreign Languages of Van Lang University. Based on these reasons, therefore, this current study aims to investigate third-year English majors' perceptions towards the use of collaborative writing. Also, the study is to find out some potential solutions to the difficulties English-majored juniors encountered during their learning process, and both the questionnaire and the interview were used to understand more about the student's views on the strategy.

Research Questions

The two research questions below are intended to be addressed in order to achieve the purpose of the study:

Research question 1: *What are the students' perceptions towards the use of the collaborative writing strategy?*

Research question 2: *What can be done to facilitate students' better learning in the Writing 5 course employing the collaborative writing strategy?*

Methods

Pedagogical Setting & Participants

This study was conducted in the first semester of the academic year 2021 – 2022. The study took place on campus 1, Van Lang University, which is located at 45 Nguyen Khac Nhu Street, Co Giang Ward, District 1, Ho Chi Minh City, with 50 VLU third-year English majors who took Writing 5 courses as a sample.

The main target of this study is to find out the perceptions of third-year English majors toward the use of collaborative writing methods. Therefore, fifty VLU third-year English-majored students who attended the Writing 5 course were obviously the research participants. Particularly, 50 English-majored juniors participated in the questionnaire survey, and 10 out of these students were randomly chosen to answer the interview. Their ages range from 20 to 22 years old, regardless of gender. Before taking part in this study, the students had taken the 4 previous writing courses as compulsories of the curriculum from which they learned how to write academic paragraphs and essays; consequently, their writing skills are supposed to be proficient.

Design of the Study

Quantitative and qualitative methods were used to conduct this study. To be more specific, the data were gathered by analyzing the questionnaire that was distributed to VLU 50 third-year English majors during the 2021 – 2022 school year. Then, 10 participants have randomly opted for the interview, which served as a means of collecting qualitative data.

Data collection & analysis

The data collection and analysis procedures were conducted for approximately two months and achieved considerable results. Questionnaires were designed via an online website named Google Forms. By using this, data were able to be gathered conveniently and effectively. After three weeks, the researcher could collect information from 50/50 participants. When it came to the interview, it took nearly 7 days to finish interviewing 10 targeted students. For the sake of the interviewees, the interview took place online with the help of Microsoft Teams and Zalo Call. The researcher spent about 10 minutes asking and taking notes of what the participants shared. After gathering both the descriptive and qualitative data successfully, the researcher would tabulate them into statistical figures and interpret their meaning. Then, the opinions would be categorized into subgroups to be interpreted deeply.

The questionnaire

Based on the five-point Likert scale, the response section of the questionnaire was designed due to five degrees of affirmation from the lowest degree, "strongly disagree" to the highest degree, "strongly agree" (1 = Strongly disagree; 2 = Disagree; 3 = Neutral; 4 = Agree; 5 = Strongly agree). Hence, the 24-item questionnaire was to figure out each sample's perception of the collaborative writing strategy utilized in the Writing 5 course. Particularly, the questionnaire was divided into two sections. The first section referred to the individual's attitudes toward the benefits of using collaborative writing in facilitating their writing ability. The second section related to the downside of collaborative writing use in the process of improving their writing learning process and outcomes.

The researchers used KMO and Bartlett's Test on the questionnaire data to determine the data's validity. In Table 1, the KMO value is .934 (>0.5), and the significant level of Bartlett's test is .000, which was regarded as valid for the research.

Table 1. KMO and Bartlett's Test

Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy		.934
Barlett's Test of Sphericity	Approx. Chi-Square	2906.849
	df	105
	Sig.	.000

The interview

As far as the interview was concerned, 10 out of 50 participants were randomly selected and invited for an interview after they completed the questionnaire. Particularly, the interview contained two questions: The first question was to find out the difficulties that the students might face while learning writing via collaborative technique, and the second question was to explore some potential solutions to help the students overcome the challenges during the learning process of Writing 5 course.

The students were asked to answer two following questions:

1. What were the difficulties that you usually faced while learning the Writing 5 course with a collaborative strategy?

2. How did you overcome those difficulties?

Results/Findings

Research question 1: What are the students' perceptions towards the use of the collaborative writing strategy?

This study included 50 respondents in total. A 24-item questionnaire was created to gather descriptive data. The findings were analyzed and presented in the form of descriptive statistics and graphs. The following sections aim at addressing the first research question:

Students' perceptions of the benefits of collaborative writing use

As indicated in Table 1, students generally tend to have positive attitudes towards collaborative writing activities, which is first clearly seen in Items 1 and 2. Regarding Item 1, most students (78%) perceived that it was a worthwhile experience for them when writing collaboratively. In contrast, it was considered unhelpful by only 3% of the students, and there were about 16% of the respondents displayed uncertain decisions on whether the collaborative writing method was effective for them or not. Similarly, in Item 2, the number of students who liked to work alone rather than working collaboratively accounted for just 6%; however, 84% of the participants agreed that they preferred working in groups to working alone after implementing collaborative writing.

In response to Item 3, a majority of English-majored juniors agreed that collaborative writing helped them better exchange their knowledge, information, and experience among group members (74%). Only 16% of the students disagreed with the facilitation of the sharing of knowledge, information, and experience due to collaborative writing, while the remaining 10% were unsure.

As evidenced in Item 4, 68% of the students acknowledged that they had more opportunities to work in a more pleasant environment. Some respondents (14%) were still unsure of their competency, while 18% of the others thought they did not work in a relaxed learning atmosphere.

Regarding peer feedback in collaboration (Item 5), 74% of the participants reported that feedback from their group members in collaborative writing was useful and assisted them in improving their writing skills. For 14% of the students, giving or receiving feedback was not viewed as an effective learning strategy. 12% of respondents were unsure, indicating that they did not have a clear opinion about the issue stated.

Table 1.

EFL students' perceptions of the benefits of collaborative writing use

No.	Items	SD	D	N	A	SA
1	*Collaborative writing was a worthwhile experience to me.*	2%	4%	16%	36%	42%
2	*I preferred working in groups to working alone after I had written collaboratively.*	2%	4%	10%	38%	46%
3	*Collaborative writing facilitated better exchange of knowledge, information, and experience among group members.*	6%	10%	10%	40%	34%
4	*Working in groups gave me the opportunity to work in a more relaxing atmosphere.*	8%	10%	14%	36%	32%
5	*I got useful feedback from collaborative writing.*	6%	8%	12%	44%	30%
6	*I was able to concentrate more on group efforts than individual ones, thanks to collaborative writing.*	2%	10%	8%	42%	38%
7	*Working in groups gave me a greater sense of responsibility for both me and the group.*	4%	4%	10%	44%	26%
8	*I actively took part in the learning process while working collaboratively.*	2%	2%	14%	40%	42%
9	*I felt more confident to collaborate in writing with other students during the process of completing group projects.*	4%	8%	10%	42%	36%
10	*I had many chances to express my opinions in the group.*	4%	6%	14%	44%	32%
11	*Working with other group members helped me complete more work.*	2%	12%	14%	42%	30%

(Notes: SD: Strongly Disagree; D: Disagree; N: Neutral; A: Agree; SA: Strongly Agree)

More than 10% of the students expressed dissatisfaction with the statement regarding the concentration of learning writing through collaborative writing (Item 6), noting that it was more difficult for them to pay attention to group efforts than individual ones. A quarter of the students, or 8%, also showed ambiguous opinions on this matter. Nevertheless, more than 80% of the respondents claimed that they were able to concentrate on group efforts well because of collaborative writing.

According to Item 7, a sense of responsibility received a remarkable agreement rate (up to 82%). Surprisingly, the number of participants who disagreed and were not sure about the statement was 8% and 10%, respectively.

Item 8 mentioned the active participation of the students in the learning process. Only 4% of respondents said they were unwilling to actively participate in writing sessions, compared to 82% of students who did so. The others were still determining their competence (14%).

With respect to students' confidence in collaboration (Item 9), 78% of the students believed that they felt more confident to collaborate in writing with other students during the process of completing group projects. Meanwhile, only 12% of the students disagreed that collaborative writing gave them more confidence in group work, and the undecided rate occupied 10% to show students' uncertain evaluation of the problem stated.

As shown in Item 10, the percentage ratio of students who had many chances to express their ideas in their groups made up 76%. This described the students' satisfaction level when they could say what they thought in groups. 10% of the respondents expressed their disagreement, whereas some were not sure (14%).

It is obviously seen in Item 11, 72% of the students agreed that cooperating with their group members enabled them to finish more work, but 14% of them thought the reverse. The remaining students (14%) expressed unclear opinions towards this item.
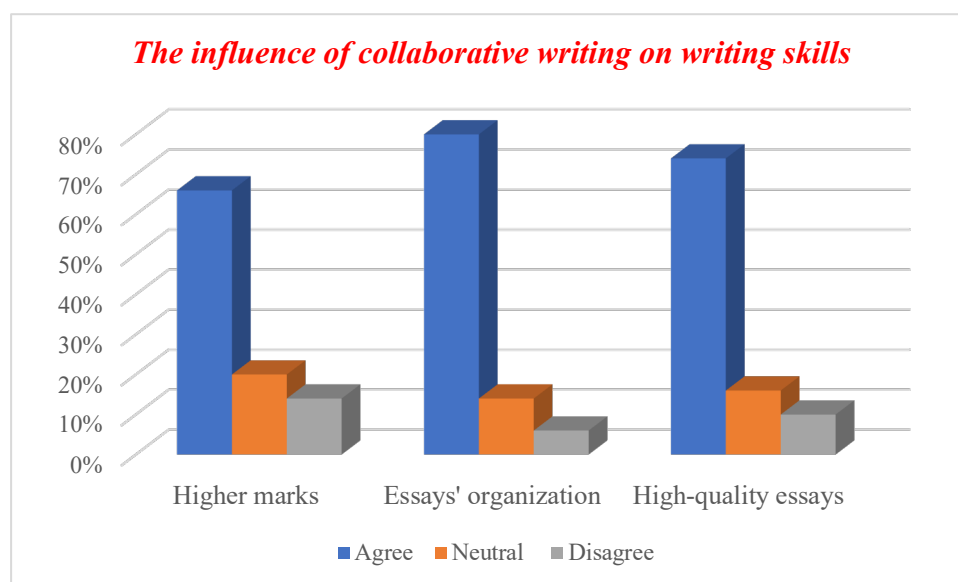

Figure 1. Students' perceptions toward the influence of collaborative writing on writing skills

From Figure 1, a great number of respondents displayed positive views on the possibility of getting higher marks when working collaboratively (66%). For 14% of the students, achieving better grades through collaborative writing was not a significant benefit, while some were still unaware of this problem (20%).

The second listed feature was new ways of organizing paragraphs and essays, which gained 80% agreement. This suggested that working in groups substantially benefits the students' paragraphs and essay organization. In contrast, only 6% of the participants did not favor the advantages of collaboration regarding the structuring and organization of essays, whilst the others could not decide on this matter (14%).

Producing high-quality essays, more than 74% of the students affirmed that they were able to

compose more high-quality paragraphs and essays thanks to group work. Still, 10% of the respondents claimed they could not generate excellent essays through group projects, and the remaining students did not have obvious opinions about the issue (16%).
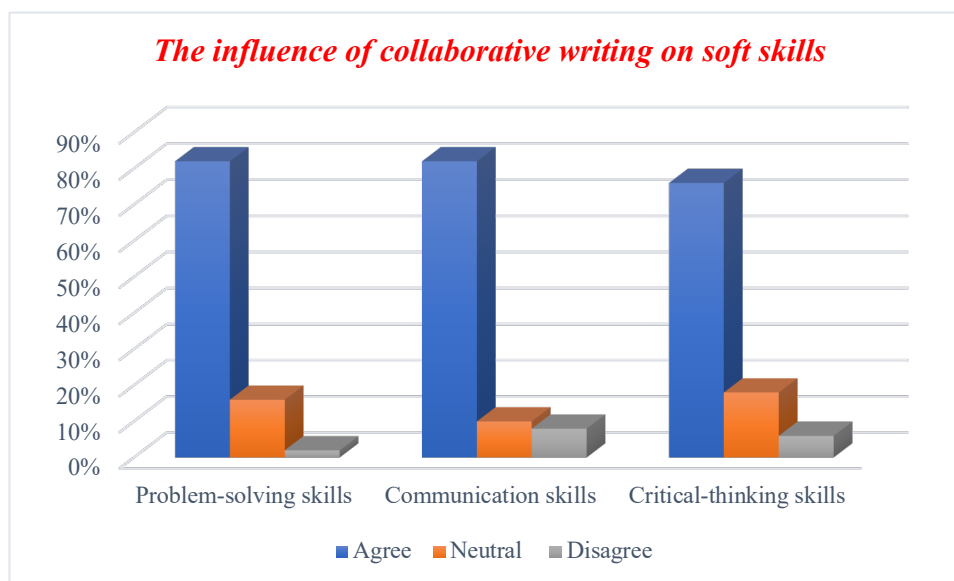

Figure 2. Students' perceptions toward the influence of collaborative writing on soft skills

As can be seen from Figure 2, collaborative writing has a positive influence on students' soft skills. Specifically, the tendency to problem-solving and communication skills went even remarkably. 82% of the students agreed that both communication and problem-solving skills were important. On the other hand, only 2% and 8% of the participants, respectively, disagreed on the benefits of problem-solving and communication skills when applying collaborative writing. There were 16% and 10%, respectively, of respondents who were unsure of the advantages of problem-solving and communication abilities in working collaboratively.

When it comes to critical-thinking skills, 76% of the students thought that working in groups improved their ability to think critically. The undecided rate was 18% for the students who were hesitant to make their choices. However, only 6% of the participants showed their dissatisfaction with critical-thinking benefits in collaboration.

Students' perceptions of the drawbacks of collaborative writing use

Table 2 illustrates how students perceived the level of difficulty they encountered during the learning process. To be more specific, in Item 18, 68% of the students thought that it was time-consuming to work in groups as they constantly explained things to other group members. However, working collaboratively was not a waste of time for 18% of the students. Next, 14% of the respondents could not decide on this drawback.

Table 2.

Students' perceptions of the drawbacks of collaborative writing use

No.	Items	SD	D	N	A	SA
18	*I wasted lots of time to work in groups because I constantly explained things to others.*	4%	14%	14%	38%	30%
19	*Working in groups made it challenging to actively engage members in tasks.*	4%	8%	18%	50%	20%
20	*I sometimes disagreed about what to say or how to express my ideas with other group members.*	6%	10%	12%	48%	24%
21	*Every group member contributed unequally to the project during working in groups.*	12%	4%	14%	40%	30%
22	*I spent more time planning while I was writing collaboratively than I did when writing alone.*	8%	8%	10%	42%	32%
23	*I spent more time checking spelling, punctuation, and grammar while I was writing collaboratively than I did when writing alone.*	6%	10%	16%	30%	38%
24	*I spent more time revising while I was writing collaboratively than I did when writing alone.*	6%	6%	12%	38%	38%

(Notes: SD: Strongly Disagree; D: Disagree; N: Neutral; A: Agree; SA: Strongly Agree)

The challenge of students' active engagement in tasks was shown in Item 19. It was evident that the highest adoption rate belonged to the agreement column, which was difficult for the students to engage actively in tasks (70%). Only 12% of the students disagreed with the difficulty of students' active participation in writing classes when using collaborative writing, while 18% of the others were uncertain.

As demonstrated in Item 20, 72% of the students sometimes disagreed about what to say or how to express their ideas with other group members, while 16% of the respondents believed the opposite. Still, the remaining students (12%) gave ambiguous answers.

During working collaboratively, according to Item 21, it was believed that there was an unequal contribution to the group projects among members (70%). Respectively, 16% and 14% of the students disagreed with the statement and expressed uncertainty about it.

In response to Item 22, spending more time planning in collaboration received a considerable agreement rate (74%). While 16% of the students claimed they spent less time planning while they were writing collaboratively than they did when writing alone, the others were not sure about this disadvantage (10%).

For Item 23, spending more time checking spelling, punctuation, and grammar in group work gained 68% agreement. In contrast, checking spelling, punctuation, and grammar during collaborative writing was not an obstacle for 16% of the students. Next, several students revealed unclear opinions on this matter (16%).

Concerning Item 24, 76% of the respondents reported that they spent more time revising while writing collaboratively than when writing alone. While 12% of the students disagreed with the statement, 12% of the remaining respondents were still unclear about their points of view.

Research question 2: What can be done to facilitate students' better learning in the Writing 5 course employing the collaborative writing strategy?

In order to answer research question 2: "*What can be done to facilitate students' better learning in the Writing 5 course employing the collaborative writing strategy?"* this study was conducted with semi-structured interviews with 10 participants. Then, the data were presented and discussed in the form of encoded keywords based on the students' perspectives.

Interview question 1: What difficulties did you usually face while learning Writing 5 course with collaborative strategy?

Collaborative writing has grown in popularity among VLU's English-majored students because of its advantages and convenience; however, based on the student's perspective, they experienced certain challenges during the learning process. After collecting answers from the interviewees, it was determined that there existed some particular categories of difficulties in terms of (1) unequal contributions, (2) student conflicts, (3) time management, (4) students' motivation and learning autonomy, and (5) the lack of vocabulary and speaking skills for discussing writing topics. The following extracts and analyses represented these obstacles:

Unequal contributions

> *"Some members did not do the same amount of work as others, but they got equal grades like all members. I was occasionally the one who helped to finish tasks for my friends."* **(Student 2, interview extract)**

> *"I think in many groups, some students were hard-working, but some students weren't. The biggest problem was that all group members had the same scores."* **(Student 5, interview extract)**

When it comes to uneven contributions in writing collaboration among group members, two interviewees agreed that it was unfair when active students in groups took responsibility for more work, such as generating ideas, editing, revising, giving more peer feedback, etc. However, finally, all group members received the same marks. Also, unequal contributions occurred when highly active students cooperated with sedentary ones, but they gained equal grades, which caused discomfort and affected cooperative team spirit.

Students' conflicts

> *"We didn't really understand one another when coming up with ideas for essays. We frequently had small quarrels."* **(Student 1, interview extract)**

> *"Our group members sometimes had difficulty agreeing on decisions about the shared writing. Each member had their own ideas, they devoted their time to the writing task, and they all wanted their ideas to be chosen."* **(Student 2, interview extract)**

> *"In some cases, we also had conflicts with our teammates because one member wanted the other to follow their lead."* **(Student 6, interview extract)**

> *"Sometimes we disagreed with opinions and views when working in groups; it affected the mood of the whole team."* **(Student 7, interview extract)**

> *"I had a hard time studying Writing Course 5 with my partner when many people had many different ideas, and it was very difficult to reach a consensus."* **(Student 10, interview extract)**

Regarding students' conflicts when working collaboratively, half of the interviewees reported that they had to deal with teammates' disagreements, which discouraged them to some extent. Additionally, continued conflicts, even minor ones, negatively impacted how they completed their assigned work and the final outcomes. It is clear that disagreement among group members seems to be unavoidable as there are a variety of opinions on only one topic. Especially when a group of students are put together to produce a piece of project that is significant to them, conflicts are prone to emerge.

Time management

> *"Some members did not finish their parts on time, so we sometimes submitted our assignments late."* **(Student 2, interview extract)**

> *"The process of thinking ideas together took a lot of time because we didn't know much about some writing topics."* **(Student 5, interview extract)**

> *"To have final products, it wasted a lot of time giving peer feedback. I hesitated to give peer comments because I didn't know whether my comments were right or not."* **(Student 9, interview extract)**

In terms of time management in group work, two students claimed that collaborative writing was time-consuming. They spent a great deal of time brainstorming ideas since they did not have a deep insight into the topics given. Also, it is considered a waste of time to give peer feedback as they were not able to assess their comments and hesitated to give them to their teammates. Moreover, one student thought that some group members were incapable of controlling their time, so they sometimes submitted their projects later than expected. Consequently, time management, in any case, affects students' attitudes toward collaborative writing use and students' writing results.

Students' motivation and learning autonomy

> *"Some members were lazy and didn't give ideas to the team."* **(Student 1, interview extract)**

> *"Being lazy was the reason why some students did not complete their tasks well."* **(Student 6, interview extract)**

> *"I was shy and reluctant to work with others because they're strange to me."* **(Student 8, interview extract)**

With respect to students' motivation and learning autonomy, two students said that some group members were lazy to express their opinions. These students do not prioritize collaborative tasks, and they do not commit themselves to full participation. They refuse to invest the time and effort needed for group projects. In addition, the other student confirmed that working with other group members was challenging because she was unfamiliar with them.

The lack of vocabulary and speaking skills for discussing writing topics

> *"I was not really good at speaking, so it was hard for me to show my ideas and discuss in my group."* **(Student 3, interview extract)**

> *"I found it difficult to discuss because my vocabulary was not enough to describe things. I didn't feel confident at all."* **(Student 4, interview extract)**

> *"My vocabulary was still limited, and my grammar was not perfect. This made me not ready to have a discussion in my group."* **(Student 7, interview extract)**

> *"I struggled with using lexical forms to express my ideas when discussing topics."* **(Student 8, interview extract)**

As far as the lack of vocabulary and speaking skills for discussing writing topics was concerned, four students stated that having poor speaking abilities prevented them from discussing and developing ideas for writing topics. Furthermore, the lack of a diverse bank of vocabulary to describe things and express their viewpoints was a major barrier to discussions. Additionally, there is one student who is not excellent at English grammatical points and encountered the same difficulty. These students provided their personal challenges in terms of vocabulary and speaking skills with their own experience in collaborative writing.

Interview question 2: How did you overcome those difficulties?

The researcher discovered several potential solutions to the difficulties faced by the English-majored juniors while they studied Writing 5 courses via collaborative writing strategy. Specifically, the participants shared some practical ways to overcome the challenges during the learning process, including (1) setting a timekeeper to remind group members of progress, (2) creating votes to decide general opinions, (3) enriching vocabulary and practicing speaking skills for effective group discussions, and (4) giving constructive feedback and building a respectful learning environment. The solutions to the difficulties were demonstrated by the extracts and analyses that follow:

Setting a timekeeper to remind group members of progress

> *"We should ask a person in our groups to automatically notify members to finish their tasks and increase the ability they would submit on time."* **(Student 2, interview extract)**

> *"The team leader should vote a group member to remind all members of doing their own tasks on time."* **(Student 5, interview extract)**

> *"Urging and reminding should be usually done by a person in the group to motivate the whole group to do their best."* **(Student 6, interview extract)**

Regarding the timely reminder of group members' progress by setting a timekeeper in collaboration, three students stated that a group member should be elected by the group leader or by the whole group to remind all the members to complete their individual tasks on schedule. It is considered important to the group since an appropriate reminder can both motivate students to fulfill their duties and promote their sense of self-discipline successfully.

Creating votes to decide general opinions

> *"We created polls to choose the answer that most people agreed with. This way could help avoid conflicts"* **(Student 1, interview extract)**

> *"After listening to many ideas and considering others' aspects, we would create a vote in our group. In that way, we could choose the options without any bias"* **(Student 2, interview extract)**

> *"We each gave an opinion and then voted and went for the best ideas to write our essays. This was the suitable way to have a more comfortable atmosphere."* **(Student 10, interview extract)**

When it comes to voting opinions to reach a consensus, three students agreed that creating votes for choosing the best options among many other ones could help reduce the conflicts and tensions that were likely to occur in group work. Therefore, creating votes is an effective solution to finalize general ideas and produce a common writing piece.

Enriching vocabulary and practicing speaking skills for effective group discussions

> *"I had to take part in some speaking clubs to improve my speaking skill to help me discuss better in my group."* **(Student 3, interview extract)**

> *"I tried to improve my speaking skills and ways of communicating by learning more vocabulary on English learning websites. This made me more confident when discussing in my group."* **(Student 4, interview extract)**

> *"I noted all the new words, key phrases, and the latest information on the Internet in the notebook, so I could both learn them all the time and effectively use them for any later discussion."* **(Student 8, interview extract)**

> *"I tried to practice speaking a lot by taking notes of some useful vocabulary and phrases about writing topics for better group discussions."* **(Student 9, interview extract)**

As far as vocabulary enrichment and speaking skills improvement for effective group discussions in collaborative writing were concerned, one student claimed that in order to engage in more productive group discussions, he participated in a few speaking clubs, which helped enhance his speaking abilities with his group members. Additionally, the other students reported that they enriched their vocabulary for more successful discussions in group work by means of taking notes of new words and key phrases about the assigned writing topics on the Internet, and they could learn them at any time. Also, when their speaking abilities were improved, they gained self-confidence in group discussions.

Giving constructive feedback and building a respectful learning environment

> *"I think when a student gave an opinion, he or she should have constructive comments, and the whole group would peacefully discuss ideas together to come to the best conclusion."* **(Student 7, interview extract)**

> *"I think when giving comments on something in groups, we should comment on the strengths first, and then the weaknesses. We also should limit impolite words and*

actions." **(Student 8, interview extract)**

"Students should talk with their team members openly and respectfully, seek to understand different perspectives." **(Student 10, interview extract)**

In terms of giving constructive peer feedback and building a respectful learning environment in collaborative writing, three students said it was essential to provide constructive criticism and refrain from rude language and behaviors. Moreover, mutual respect among group members was the key to collaborative writing, as members of a group should respectfully communicate with one another to find the best choice that works for every individual.

Discussion

The current study investigated the perceptions of the English-majored juniors at Van Lang University towards the use of collaborative writing strategy as well as exploring some potential solutions to the difficulties that the students encountered during the learning process. The results revealed that the students' perspectives on collaborative writing employment were positive regarding writing performance, writing outcomes, and soft skills. Moreover, a majority of students responded favorably to collaborative writing activities and found this strategy effective and appropriate. To be more specific, 74% of the respondents of this research realized that collaborative writing was a worthwhile experience for them, and the highest agreement rating (84%) belonged to group-work preference that a great number of students preferred working in groups to working alone after they had written collaboratively. Also, the highest rating (84%) in this study illustrated that collaborative writing could increase students' enthusiasm for writing skills. In fact, these findings were supported by the results of Veramuthu and Shah (2020). Similarly, collaborative writing had a great impact on the students' writing performances (Shehadeh, 2011).

With respect to knowledge and experience exchange in collaborative writing, the research showed that collaborative writing facilitated better exchange of knowledge, information, and experience among group members. The result was also similar to the finding of Laal (2012) and Dabao and Blum (2013). Specifically, Laal (2012) claimed that providing a learning space for knowledge and information transmission was the key feature of collaboration. According to Dabao and Blum (2013), the sharing of information and ideas through collaborative writing enabled students to work in groups to broaden their perspectives.

Regarding the completed workload in collaborative writing, this study indicated that working with other group members helped students complete more work, which was compatible with the finding of the study carried out by Veramuthu and Shah (2020). According to Veramuthu and Shah (2020), it was agreed by many students that more work was done in groups.

Regarding peer feedback in collaborative writing, the finding demonstrated that group projects helped to receive useful feedback, which greatly improved writing skills and raised awareness among students to recognize writing problems (Barnawi, 2010).

Concerning the opportunity to express ideas in groups, the students benefited greatly from collaborative activities because there were numerous chances for them to express their ideas in

groups. This finding was supported by Rokhaniyah (2016), who said that students were offered chances to express their relevant opinions based on evidence and reason to support their viewpoints.

When it comes to participation in collaborative writing, the finding indicated that 82% of the students actively took part in the learning process while working collaboratively. This positive result agreed with the study of Alhabeedi (2015). When students actively engaged in writing classes and utilized collaborative tasks, the learning appeared to be effective.

As far as confidence in collaborative writing was concerned, the finding showed that a great number of students felt more confident to collaborate in writing with other students during the process of completing group projects. This finding agreed with the finding of Talib and Cheung (2017), which stated that the outcome of working in groups encouraged students and boosted their confidence in learning. Furthermore, the data of this current study was consistent with the result of Veramuthu and Shah (2020). To be more specific, students worked in a more relaxing atmosphere while writing collaboratively.

Regarding students' perspectives on the influence of collaborative writing on writing skills, the study revealed that 80% of the respondents agreed that working in groups helped them gain new ways to organize their paragraphs and essays, as supported by Veramuthu and Shah (2020). Additionally, knowing the organization of essays in collaboration was one of the stages of process-based learning, which was useful for generating a common writing product Veramuthu and Shah (2020). Next, 66% of the students acknowledged that working in groups helped them get higher marks, which was supported by the study of Adolphus & Omeodu (2016). Specifically, they affirmed that students tended to have better writing performance with collaborative writing support. Getting higher marks had the least rating in the study might be explained by one reason which was a gap between passive members and active ones in a group. Unproductive students received the same marks compared to productive ones, regardless of their unequal contributions (Al Ajmi & Ali, 2014).

In terms of soft skills, the result showed that collaborative writing positively influenced students' problem-solving, communication, and critical-thinking skills. First of all, 82% of the students agreed that working in groups was a useful way of learning and improving their problem-solving skills. This finding was compatible with the study of Laal (2012) and Gohkale (1995). According to Laal (2012), collaborative writing offers responses to social issues and the ability to manage disagreement. Similarly, Gohkale (1995) placed special emphasis on the growth of collaborative learning, one of which was to develop students' problem-solving abilities. Secondly, the finding showed that collaboration fostered their communication skills. This result was consistent with the study of Tamimi & Attamimi (2014) which speaking ability could be improved to the maximum extent through collaborative writing. Furthermore, Aliyu (2007) claimed that the use of collaborative learning as an instructional approach developed social skills. Thirdly, the current research found that working in groups improved students' critical thinking skills, which obtained higher thinking order. Ali (2018) stated that collaborative writing gave students a place for constructive debates, which indicated their higher level of thinking. Also, the study of Mandusic & Blaskovic (2015) aligned with the finding collaborative tactics helped to reinforce critical thinking skills. This approach was observed as advantageous

as students could cultivate these soft skills through discussion, explanations of concepts, and evaluation (Veramuthu & Shah, 2020).

In response to students' perceptions of the drawbacks of collaborative writing, the results showed that despite the various advantages of collaborative writing, this study explored several concerns that the students in the EFL context experienced. First, in contrast to Jalili & Shahrokhi (2017), who suggested that it was not time-consuming in collaboration because receiving feedback from team members was helpful in planning, the data from this study revealed that a majority of students spent more time planning while they were writing collaboratively than they did when writing alone. Second, unequal contributions among group members occurred during the learning process. This finding was compatible with the study conducted by Ajmi & Ali (2014). They stated that passive members in the group depended on active ones for task completion, which caused unfairness in group work. Third, the finding illustrated that students faced the challenge of teammates' disagreement, so they lost their motivation to participate in collaborative writing activities, which was supported by Talib & Cheung (2017). They explained that due to continued conflicts among group members, some students might not be encouraged to get involved in group work.

Conclusion

In conclusion, depending on the findings from the questionnaire and interview questions, the study explored EFL students' perceptions towards the use of collaborative writing in Writing 5 course and suggested some solutions to the difficulties that third-year English majors encountered during the learning process. On the whole, students had positive perspectives on the strategy and found it a worthwhile learning writing method. Students who preferred working in groups to working alone after they had written collaboratively gained the highest rating. This implied that working in groups offered good experience and positive learning outcomes. Moreover, the influence of collaborative writing use on writing skills and soft skills had positive results, which indicated that collaborative writing assisted students in developing themselves in many different aspects. Apart from the advantages of collaborative writing, the questionnaire data revealed some typical drawbacks regarding time, engagement, disagreement, and contributions, which could be overcome through teachers' right instructions in accordance with students' learning styles.

In response to the second research question, the difficulties were attributed to students' contributions, time management, student conflicts, as well as students' motivation and learning autonomy. Among these obstacles, students' conflicts were seen to be the most problematic hardship that was right at students' concerns. It was due to the fact that many students working in a group had various opinions, which led to students' disagreement. Moreover, some potential solutions were shared from students' experience, including (1) unequal contributions, (2) student conflicts, (3) time management, (4) students' motivation and learning autonomy, and (5) the lack of vocabulary and speaking skills for discussing writing topics. These solutions can be a good reference for both students and lecturers to deal with the difficulties that students face while learning writing courses that employ collaborative writing.

Limitations

All things considered, shortcomings found in this thesis are unavoidable. For adequate argument, the thesis should have been strengthened by a larger size of participants, funds for deeper investigation, the researcher's sufficient practical experience, a specialized design for the questionnaire, and a better design for interview questions. The researcher is willing to collect any feedback, criticisms, comments, and judgments to accomplish the thesis. Furthermore, these assessments intend to reinforce the researcher's ability to execute other studies flawlessly in the upcoming years.

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