

# The Effect of Collaborative Writing Activities on Iraqi EFL College Students' Performance in Writing Composition

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أثر فعاليات الكتابة التعاونية على أداء طلبة الكلية الدارسين للإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية في كتابة الانشاء

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## المخلص

تهدف الدراسة الحالية الى ايجاد اثر الكتابة التعاونية على تطوير أداء الطلبة العراقيين الدارسين للإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية في كتابة الانشاء، ولتحقيق هدف الدراسة، تم اختيار 33 طالب وطالبة من طلبة المرحلة الاولى لتكون عينة الدراسة، انخرط اثنان وعشرون منهم في مجموعة تجريبية تضمنت الكتابة ببيئة ازواج بينما انخرط الاحد عشر الاخرون في مجموعة ضابطة عن طريق استخدام الكتابة بصورة فردية، وقد بينت النتائج عند انتهاء التجربة ان أداء طلبة المجموعة التجريبية في الكتابة اعلى من أداء اقرانهم في المجموعة الضابطة في الاختبار البعدي لكتابة الانشاء، وفي ضوء ما تقدم من نتائج، وجد بأن الكتابة التعاونية ذات اثر في تطوير قابلية الكتابة لدى الطلبة العراقيين الدارسين للإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية.

**الكلمات المفتاحية:** متعلمي اللغة الانجليزية كلغة أجنبية، الكتابة، الكتابة التعاونية.

## Abstract

The present study aims at investigating the effect of collaborative writing on developing Iraqi EFL college learners' performance in writing composition. To achieve the purpose of this study, 33 first-year students were chosen to be the sample of the present study. Twenty two students were enrolled in an experimental group in which the pair writing was the desired treatment. The other eleven students were enrolled in a control group, in which individual writing is used. The findings indicate that the experimental group subjects' performance in writing has been found to be better than that of the control group subjects on the writing composition post-test. On the basis of the results obtained, it has been found that collaborative writing is effective in developing writing ability of Iraqi EFL learners

**Key Words:** EFL learners, writing, collaborative writing

## 1. Introduction

### 1.1 The Problem and its Significance

Writing, as one of the productive skills, is considered a complex process that allows learners to make their thoughts and ideas visible and concrete. It is a cognitive act that encourages thinking and makes thoughts available for reflection. When thoughts are written down, ideas can be examined, reconsidered, added to, rearranged, and changed (Tompkins, 1994: 13). In this regard, Lombana (2002:46) asserts that writing skill is the most difficult skill to master in any language and especially when learning a new one because it requires aspects such as linguistic knowledge, cognitive and socio cultural aspects to convey meaning. Writing influences each person's abilities which need the practice and reflection of a spoken language.

Zeng ( 2005:69) explains that writing is different from the other three language skills. It seems to be too difficult and time-consuming to teach, so little attention has been given to teach

and practice writing in the class. Students need enough knowledge to create and generate ideas in order to write a composition. Students receive little practice in writing in English. Due to students' limited proficiency, time limitation, and poor motivation, writing still remains a big hurdle.

Despite that writing is generally considered an individual activity through which ideas are transmitted from an addressor to an addressee, collaboration in writing has been drawing an increasing attention in language teaching and assessment. (Storch, 2005:161)

Studies conducted on second/foreign language writing asserted that the implementation of collaborative writing provides an effective means to enhance students' interaction, lower their anxiety than when completing a written task alone and improve their writing quality as well (Hsu, 2009; Hu, 2005; Yuko, 2008).

In the light of the beneficial effect of collaborative writing on writing performance, collaborative writing has been used in this study.

### **1.2 Aim of the Study**

The present study aims at identifying the impact of collaborative writing activities on EFL college students' performance in composition writing.

### **1.3 Hypothesis**

There is no statistically significant difference between the mean scores of writings produced by Iraqi EFL students working in pairs (experimental group) and those of students working individually (control group).

### **1.4 Limits of the Study**

This study is limited to:

1. Iraqi EFL first year students/ Department of English/ College of Education/University of Al-Qadissiyah during the academic year 2015-2016.
2. The prescribed textbook “**College Composition**” by Razzak, F. and Al-Hassan, H (1986).

### **1.5 Value of the Study**

1. The present study is expected to be of value for Iraqi EFL college students to enable students to write in English and to improve their writing ability for the future course in composition writing.
2. It is also expected to help instructors develop appropriate methodologies in teaching English writing.

### **1.6 Procedures**

To achieve the aim of the present study, the following procedures will be adopted by the researcher to collect data:

1. Conducting a composition test to be applied on the experimental and the control group before the experiment.
2. Randomly selecting two groups of first year students. The experimental group instructed to write composition tasks in pairs, whereas the control group is instructed to do the tasks of writing composition individually.
3. Applying a post composition test to both groups at the end of the experiment.

## **2. Theoretical Background**

### **2.1 Definition of Writing**

Archibald (2001:153-160) defines writing as a skill that needs knowledge and proficiency in many areas. It is a multidimensional skill. It is a complex skill that results from the interaction of the writer's knowledge, experience, skills and the cognitive demands of the task.

Writing is a decision-making process in nature where writers define the rhetorical problem. This includes all aspects of the writing situation, i.e. the purpose of writing, the likely audience, the topic, the writer's knowledge of the topic and the writer's own goal in writing (Isleem, 2012:17).

## 2.2 Collaborative Writing

Haring-Smith (1994:360) states that collaborative writing is a way of involving more than one person who contributes to the creation of a text so that sharing responsibility becomes essential.

Rice and Huguley (1994:167) assert that collaborative writing is an activity that is performed collectively by more than one person to produce a single text and that leads to a completed document, including idea generating, researching, planning and organizing, drafting, revising, and editing.

According to Lowry et al. (2004:72) collaborative writing can be defined as interactive and social process that involves a team focused on a common objective that negotiates, coordinates, and communicates during the creation of a common document.

Collaborative writing is a means that entails the student teams up with one or more peers to go through the writing process. It is a way to prepare students for future assignments where team abilities are required (Montero, 2005:37).

## 2.3 Importance of Collaborative Writing

Boud (2001:13) explains that Peer learning is a two-way reciprocal activity in which peers of the same level learn from and with each other. Since learners in peer collaboration follow a single goal, they share their cognitive resources, modifying solutions, and make joint decisions.

Smith and MacGregor( 2009:7) assert that collaboration process enhances students' learning and develops their social skills like decision-making, conflict management, and communication. It is by collaborating with each other in creating and communicating meaning, learners are able to engage in the composition process with more clarity and understanding.

Banerjee (2000:3) points out that in the collaborative learning process knowledge can be pooled and shared among group members. As a result, each student is a dynamic contributor to both the learning and the teaching process.

It has been emphasized that collaborative writing effects overall writing performance and improvements of students' writing. Students' writings can be more grammatically accurate, more linguistically complex and had better content, organization and vocabulary (Wigglesworth and Storch, 2009:451).

Furthermore, collaborative writing is useful in reducing anxiety (Dornyei, 2001:47), helping to form cohesive and mature groups (Dornyei and Murphy, 2003:53), and promoting motivation in the writing learning environment (Brown, 2001:83).

Peer feedback provides opportunities for the learners to negotiate meaning, to give comments and suggestions, and to make corrections (Jiao, 2007:11; Kamimura, 2006:19). What is more, learners can find their strengths and weaknesses (Hyland, 2003:25).

## 2.4 Stages of Writing Composition Process

Writing process as a classroom activity incorporates three basic writing stages: pre-writing, writing, and post-writing (Seow, 2002:316).

### 2.4.1 Pre-Writing

Pre-writing is perhaps the most important part of the writing process as it lays a foundation for the writing that is to come. During this stage, writers establish the purpose of the work, generates ideas for the topic as well as writing an outline for the piece (Wilson, 2013:7). Daniels (2012:1) states that the main pre-writing techniques that eliminate confusion and minimize

writer's block while actually writing are: brainstorming, free writing, listing, clustering, questioning and outlining.

### 2.4.2 Writing Stage

In the writing phase of the process, the focus should be on the higher level aspects of writing (content and cohesion rather than spelling, handwriting, and mechanics) (Tyner, 2008: 2). Drafting, responding, revising, editing, and evaluating are the main steps of the writing stage (Seow, 2002:316).

### 2.4.3 Post-writing Stage

Post-writing constitutes any classroom activity that the teacher and students can do with the completed pieces of writing. This includes publishing, sharing, reading aloud, transforming texts for stage performances, or merely displaying texts on notice-boards. The post-writing stage is a platform for recognizing students' work as important and worthwhile (ibid).

## 3. Methodology

### 3.1 The Experimental Design

To achieve the aim of the present study, the Experimental-Control Group Pre-Posttest Design has been used. Before the beginning of the writing phase, all subjects in both the control and experimental groups were submitted to a pre-test in writing composition.

### 3.2 Population and the Sample of the Study

The population of the present study consists of first-year students at the Department of English Language, College of Education, Al-Qadisiya University during the academic year 2015-2016. Out of three sections, two samples are selected randomly to be the control and experimental groups. The control group consists of 11 students, whereas that of experimental one includes 22 students.

### 3.3 Group Equalization

The equalization of both groups is checked according to the age, writing performance in composition in the pre-test.

#### 3.3.1 Age

By using t-test formula, it is indicated that the mean of the control group is 19.72 whereas it is 19.68 for the experimental group. The computed t-value is -0.157 which is lower than that of tabulated value 2.042 at 0.05 level of significance. The comparison has indicated that there is no significant differences between the two groups (see Table 1).

**Table (1) The Mean, Standard Deviation and t- Value of the Students' Age**

Variable	Groups	No. of Subjects	Mean	Standard Deviation	Degree of Freedom	t-Value		Significance Level at 0.05
						Computed Value	Table Value	
Age	Experimental	22	19.68	0.779	31	-0.157	2.042	Not Significant
	Control	11	19.72	0.786				

#### 3.3.2 The Students' Pre-Test Performance in Composition Writing

The pre-test is conducted to ensure the equalization of the groups involved in the study. The *t* – test formula is also used to find out whether there is any statistically significant difference between the scores of the experimental and control groups in the pre-tests (see Table 2).

**Table (2) The Means, Standard Deviations, and t- Values for the Overall Performance in the Pretest Composition Writing**

Components	Groups	No. of subjects	Mean	Standard Deviation	t-value		df	Results
					Computed t-Value	Table t-Value		
Composing	Experimental	22	2.4091	0.734	1.19	2.042	31	Un significant
	Control	11	2.0909	0.7006				
Style	Experimental	22	2.0455	1.09	1.63	2.042	31	Un significant
	Control	11	1.4545	0.687				
Sentence Formation	Experimental	22	2.3636	0.727	1.53	2.042	31	Un significant
	Control	11	1.9091	0.944				
Usage	Experimental	22	2.1818	0.664	0.364	2.042	31	Un significant
	Control	11	2.0909	0.70				
Mechanics	Experimental	22	2.1364	0.563	-0.62	2.042	31	Un significant
	Control	11	2.2727	0.64				
Composite Score	Experimental	22	11.1364	2.677	1.44	2.042	31	Un significant
	Control	11	9.8182	1.99				

The results (as shown in Table 2) indicate, according to the composite score, the mean score is 11.1364 for the experimental group, and 9.8182 for the control group. The computed *t*-value is 1.44 which is less than the table *t*-value 2.042 under 31 degrees of freedom and at 0.05 level of significance. This means that there is no statistically significant difference between the two groups in their overall score of the pretest.

### 3.4 Instruments of the Study

The subjects of writing composition have been chosen according to the students' interest so as to ensure that mostly all students are motivated to take the test willingly.

Both groups of students are exposed to the same pre-post composition test. The topic for the pretest and posttest writings was chosen as "The need for learning English"

To ensure face validity, the selected topics and the composition test have been exposed to a jury of experts in the fields of ELT and Linguistics (see Appendix A).

In order to estimate the time allotted for responding to the test, the pilot administration of the test has been carried out on 6<sup>th</sup> of December. It has been given to (20) first-year students/ Department of English/ College of Education/University of Al-Qadissiyah during the academic year 2015-2016. It has been found that the time allotted for answering the test by students is 60 minutes.

For the purpose of objectivity and reliability, the researcher has adopted an analytical scoring scheme proposed by O'Malley & Pierce (1996:145) which is used with writing composition. This scoring scheme consists of five components to be rated and a series of ratings which have numerical values. The scoring scheme has allocated 4 marks for each component. Thus, the highest mark the student could get is 20 while the lowest mark is 5 (see Appendix B).

To obtain the internal consistency among the five components of the test, Alpha Cronbach Formula has been used. The reliability coefficient is found to be 0.82. The subjects' performance was assessed by two scorers\* for both pre and post tests. To ensure the reliability of the rating process, interscorers reliability was computed. It was roughly 0.84 which appeared as an acceptable value of inter-rater reliability.

\*The scorers are: 1.The researcher himself.. 2.Inst..Saadiyah Wdaah Hasan/College of Education/University of Al-Qadissiya

### 3.5 The Experimental Application

The experiment started on 20<sup>th</sup> of December, 2015 and lasted for four weeks during the academic year 2015-2016, to end up on the 11<sup>th</sup> of January, 2016. The lectures have been

arranged on Sunday for the control group and on Monday for the experimental group. Three hours a week have been allotted.

### 3.6 Procedures

The study comprises two phases, an instruction phase and a writing phase respectively. In the instruction phase, which lasted for five lectures, the objective was to provide all the participants with somehow the same background knowledge about paragraph development and composition writing. Before the beginning of the training lectures, the pretest was run for both the control and experimental groups.

Concerning the writing phase, which took six lectures, the two groups were enrolled in writing. For the control group, students were asked to write composition individually. The teacher (the researcher himself) was the only assessor of students' writings. During each lecture, the students were reading their writings and the teacher gave corrective feedback on the spot of reading time. Then the papers were gathered and the teacher gave corrective feedback on them for the next lecture. There were no interactions among students (see Appendix C).

With respect to the experimental group, in which the collaborative writing was the desired treatment, students are required to complete the writing tasks in pairs. Since each pair was writing one text, 11 texts were produced by 22 students in each lecture. In each lecture students were working on each other's writings then the papers gathered and delivered to the teacher to assess the given feedback by students to their partners' composition (see Appendix D).

### 3.7 The Post-Test

At the end of the writing period, the students at both groups have been post-tested on 11<sup>th</sup> of January, 2016. The purpose of the post test was to evaluate the impact of collaborative writing on the experimental group subjects' writing performance in comparison with that of control group subjects who have been directed to write individually.

## 4 Results and Discussion

Using t- test for two independent samples, at 0.05 level of significance and 31 degree of freedom, the results reveal that the mean score composite of the experimental group is 15.32 and that of control group is 11.00. The computed t-value 7.24 is higher than the table t- value 2.042 (see Table 3).

**Table (3) The Means, Standard Deviations, and t- Values for the Overall Performance in Composition Writing Posttest**

Components	Groups	No. of subjects	Mean	Standard Deviation	t-value		df	Results
					Computed t-Value	Table t-Value		
Composing	Experimental	22	3.4091	0.59	4.1	2.042	31	Significant
	Control	11	2.5455	0.52				
Style	Experimental	22	3.2273	0.685	5.17	2.042	31	Significant
	Control	11	1.9091	0.705				
Sentence Formation	Experimental	22	3.1364	0.774	3.38	2.042	31	Significant
	Control	11	2.287	0.467				
Usage	Experimental	22	2.727	0.63109	3.15	2.042	31	Significant
	Control	11	2.0909	0.30151				
Mechanics	Experimental	22	2.8636	0.563	3.58	2.042	31	Significant
	Control	11	2.1818	0.404				
Composite Score	Experimental	22	15.32	1.783	7.24	2.042	31	Significant
	Control	11	11.00	1.183				

This result shows that there is a statistically significant difference between the two groups in writing performance in favour of the experimental group. Thus, the hypothesis which states

“There is no statistically significant difference between the mean scores of writings produced by Iraqi EFL students working in pairs (experimental group) and those of students working individually (control group) is rejected.

The findings of the present study demonstrate the positive effect of collaborative writing on students’ writing performance. The reason of the present study, from the researchers’ point of view, is to help Iraqi EFL students to have some awareness and control over their writing skill and to improve their writing ability for the future courses in composition writing.

## 5. Conclusions

In the light of the results obtained, collaborative writing is found to be effective and an excellent mean in developing students’ writing ability in EFL context. In this way, teachers and instructors may be able to take advantage of collaborative writing in their writing classes to improve their students’ writing ability.

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### Appendix A

#### The Academic Rank, Names, and the Location of the Jury Members

No.	Academic Rank	Name	Location
1	Prof., Ph.D. in ELT	Hameed H. Al-Mas'udi	College of Education for Human Sciences - University of Babylon
2	Prof., Ph.D. in ELT.	Hashim A. Hussien	College of Education, University of Al-Qadissiya.
3	Asst. Prof., M.A., in Linguistics	Rajaa Mardan	College of Education -University of Al-Qadissiya
4	Asst. Prof., Ph.D. in ELT	Salam Hamid Abbas	College of Education for Human Sciences /Ibn-Rushd-University of Baghdad.
5	Asst. Prof., M.A., in Linguistics	Saleema Abdulzahraa	. College of Education -University of Al-Qadissiya

### Appendix (B)

#### The Analytical Scoring Scheme for Composition Writing

SCORE	Composing	Style	Sentence Formation	Usage	Mechanics
4 marks	Focuses on central	Purposefully	Standard word order	Standard	Effective use of

	ideas with an organized and elaborated text	chosen vocabulary , sentence variety , information ,and voice to affect reader	no enjambment (run – on sentences) Completeness (no sentence fragments ), standard modifiers and coordinators , and effective transitions	inflections(e.g., plurals, possessive , -ed, - ing with verbs, and – ly with adverbs ), subject-verb agreement (we were vs . we was ), standard word meaning	capitalization , punctuation, , spelling ,and formatting (paragraphs noted by indenting)
3 marks	Central idea , but not as evenly elaborated and some digressions	Vocabulary less precise and information chosen less purposeful	Mostly standard word order , some enjambment or sentence fragments	Mostly standard inflections , agreement ,and word meaning	Mostly effective use of mechanics, errors do not detract from meaning
2 marks	Not a focused idea or more than one idea , sketchy elaboration ,and many digressions	Vocabulary basic and not purposefully selected ;tone flat or inconsistent	Some non –standard word order, enjambment , and word omission (e.g.; verbs)	Some errors with inflections, agreement, and word meaning	Some errors with spelling and punctuation that detract from meaning
1 mark	No clear idea , little or no elaboration ,and many digression	Not controlled, tone flat , sentences halted or choppy	Frequent non – standard word order , enjambment, and word omissions	Shifts from one tense to another; errors in conventions (them/those, good /well, double negatives, ,etc.)	Misspell even simple words; little formatting evident.

### Appendix (C)

#### Sample Lesson Plan-The Control Group

**Subject:** Composition Writing

**Class:** First -Year

**Topic:** The most beautiful place I've ever seen

**Instruction Objectives:** The students are required to write composition individually.

#### **Procedures:**

1. The teacher (the researcher himself) suggests the topic of writing to elicits students' prior knowledge and ask them to think about it.
2. While students are thinking and writing, the teacher monitors them.
3. Students are not allowed to share ideas or make corrective feedback with each other.
4. After finishing their writings, the students are asked to read their writing to give corrective feedback on them by the teacher who the only assessor of students' writings.

**Appendix (D)****Sample Lesson Plan-The Experimental Group****Subject:** Composition Writing**Class:** First -Year**Topic:** The most beautiful place I've ever seen**Instruction Objectives:** The students are required to write composition in pairs.**Procedures:**

1. The teacher (the researcher himself) suggests the topic of writing to elicits students' prior knowledge and ask them to think about it.
2. Students work on each other's writings. This means that they have the right to share ideas and exchange knowledge.
3. During their writing, students are permitted to make corrective feedback for each other (enhance students engagement)
4. Finally, the papers of writing are gathered and delivered to the teacher to assess the given feedback by students to their partners' composition.