

COLLABORATIVE WRITING AS A TOOL FOR IMPROVING NARRATIVE ESSAY WRITING FLUENCY AND WRITING PROFICIENCY IN ESL STUDENTS

¹**Farvah Maryam**

MPhil Research Scholar, Hamdard University, Karachi

Email: farvah.abbasjuw@gmail.com

²**Hafiz Imran Nawaz**

Senior Lecturer, Department of English, Hamdard University, Karachi

Email: Imran.nawaz@hamdard.edu.pk

Abstract

The purpose of this research is to study the efficacy of collaboration in writing on ESL learners' ability to craft a narrative essay. The setting of the research is a Private university in Karachi. The participants selected for the study were 60 ESL undergraduate students who were selected through purposive sampling technique, with 30 placed in each of the two groups, i.e. an experimental group with the treatment of collaborative writing and a control group with individual writing. The research problem underwent a quantitative study and was analyzed by using pre and post tests to determine changes in students' writing fluency and narrative essay creation. The study revealed the experimental group to have a significantly favorable dominance over the control group with respect to the quality and writing performance and writing fluency of narrative essay. It was evidence of the impact of collaborative writing through the use of peer interaction and feedback, and writing in partnership to achieve a more advanced level of content improvements and better organization of ideas as well as language use. The study findings show that collaborative writing excels in the area of establishing and enhancing writing skills in an ESL classroom by encouraging students to think critically as narrative essay writing and writing fluency improve. This study strongly advocates for collaborative writing to be used in combination with ESL teaching.

Key Words: Collaborative Writing, Narrative Essay, Writing Fluency, Writing Skills, ESL

INTRODUCTION

Since the communicative language teaching approach was introduced in 1970s, to learn English language by changing the traditional teacher- centered classroom settings into student- centered approach, the instructors also employed pair-work or sometimes group-work to help student to learn or practice each other. This practice helped a lot to bring a big change in the ESL classroom setting in the form of collaborative learning and now it considered as an important activity for the learning at undergraduate level especially. As Vygotsky (1978) claimed that language acquisition is basically a social process and development. The zone of proximal development for the students who learn a language by interacting among peers and the learning environment around them. Pham (2021) also assert learning collaboratively is such an important and beneficial activity for the language learning classrooms to increase the interest and language skills of ESL learners.

Writing is a skill that has repeatedly been underscored as an integral aspect of second language (L2) acquisition (Matsuda, 2012).

Many scholars note the challenges of writing, in the field of language pedagogy, collaboration has been one of the several instructional methods used. Research has shown the benefit of instructional prewriting organizational scaffolds in enhancing narrative writing (Fu & Relyea, 2024). Experimental studies have shown that ESL students benefit the most from scaffolding interventions on the use of mind mapping and other graphic organizers as prewriting tools to help

them draft narratives with richer vocabulary, more complex and accurate syntax, and texts that demonstrate the organizational accuracy and other expected writing attributes. Writing in pairs, which is the focus of much research, is often referred to as collaborative co-authored texts, where learners are encouraged to interact purposefully (Zhang & Chen, 2022; Zhang & Plonsky, 2020). According to the study of (pardede, 2024) collaborative writing highlights its effectiveness in the improvement of learners' language by engaging them in the interactive way especially in the setting of ESL.

Collaboration in Writing

Collaborative techniques, according to the research of (Shehadeh, 2011) have become popularized all around the world. Thus, an increasing number of educators and researchers have been using collaborative techniques to improve the writing of ESL learners. As collaborative writing promotes interaction and negotiation that may shape co-construct text which clearly shows effective language development (Li & Zhu, 2013). The benefits of Collaborative writing, Storch's estimations, go beyond the confines of the classroom and equip learners with the competences and skills required for communication in their later academic and professional lives. Collaborative writing enhances learners' language abilities by assisting in the consolidation of their language knowledge (Swain, 2010). Collaborative writing is, therefore, deemed positive in the literature concerning L2 learners.

Objective of the Study

The aims of the Objectives are;

- To analyze the effectiveness of the collaborative writing approach in enhancing ESL students' narrative essay writing skills.
- To assess the role of collaborative writing in improving the fluency of ESL students' narrative essay writing skills.

Research Questions

1. How effective is the collaborative writing approach in enhancing the narrative essay writing skills of ESL students?
2. Does collaborative writing approach improve the fluency of ESL students' narrative essay writing skills?

Literature Review

Research shows that participation in joint writing activities in writing classes improves students' writing and helps them acquire social and affective skills (Storch, 2007, 2013; Williams, 2003; Graham, 2005). They noted that writers in collaboration produced better texts than writers working alone, and learners in collaboration also expressed more contentment with their writing than their peers completing writing alone. Thus, the implementation of collaborative writing activities in EFL classes is likely to enhance learners' academic writing skills. When students participate in collaborative writing, they reflect on content more than when they explain and defend their propositions. (Chen, 2019; Khodabakhshzadeh & Samadi, 2017; Zhang, 2018). Wahyuni (2014) reported that more proficient students assist their peers by improving their writing in terms of organization, word choice, spelling, and grammar. Also, Bueno-Alastuey and Martinez (2017) reported that the quality of collaborative work is likely to be better in terms of writing accuracy, fluency, and complexity with the involvement of more than two participant writers in the work. Moreover, the design of collaborative learning forges positive attitudes due to the role of peer engagement, motivation factors, and the shared responsibility that enables learners to feel at ease

and empowered in the learning experience (Johnson & Johnson 2006). Storch, and other researchers who focus on the sociocultural paradigm in L2 claim that learners, in alternating roles of beginners and experts, constructively influence one another's growth (Storch, 2002). So according to his study Learners have varied abilities and limitations, and in collaborative activities, learners benefit from one another by scaffolding, ensuring that the group, with their combined resources, achieves more than the individual members would separately. The benefits of contemporary peer assessment, collaborative writing, and peer feedback have been studied, and more attention to language and awareness, and critical thinking especially in peer feedback have been distributed (Lin & Yang, 2011). Recently, the attention of researchers in EFL is on collaborative writing as it shows the increase of students' language-related competencies. Still, comparative studies do not all agree on its effectiveness, especially when looking at individual writing strategies. In spite of these discrepancies, collaborative writing is generally viewed as more effective than working alone, especially when it comes to students' grammatical accuracy. Also, research by Wigglesworth and Storch (2007) shows that students who are taught collaborative writing perform at higher levels of writing than students who are taught to write independently. This shows that collaborative strategies are effective in helping students produce better quality written work.

.Collaborative Writing and ESL Classrooms

In the last two decades, the influence of collaborative writing in the classroom on the second language (L2) classroom environment has started to attract the interest of scholars, who have centered on analyzing its impact (e.g., Al Tai, 2015; Aminloo, 2013; Dobao, 2012; McDonough et al., 2019; Shehadeh, 2011; Zenouzagh, 2020), in addition to analyzing learners' perceptions of these practices (Alkhalaf, 2022). Overall, the bulk of evidence suggests that these studies acknowledge the impact of collaborative writing on the acquisition of the L2. L2 studies that compare individual versus group writing tasks also reinforce the value of collaborative group learning. For example, using sociocultural theory, Dobao (2012) analyzed language-related episodes (LREs) generated by university students working in pairs or small groups. The results showed that LREs were produced in greater numbers during group activities, and a higher percentage of these LREs were generated with successful resolution. Al Tai (2015) also investigated group versus individual and pair writing in secondary school, with 45 female students from Oman. The group participants were able to produce more extensive and accurate texts and were awarded higher scores.

According to the authors' studies collaborative writing was highly beneficial particularly in the ability to perform tasks and fluency. Some studies (Aminloo, 2013; Shehadeh, 2011) have documented short-term changes, and others (Zenouzagh, 2020) have documented long-term changes in second language (L2) writing in studies employing pre-/post-test design frameworks. Collaborative writing was the focus of a longitudinal study conducted by Shehadeh (2011) in which there were two groups. One was a pair work group (n=18) and the other was a solo work group (n=20), and both groups worked on the same writing topics. The study results showed that the paired group was more advanced in the areas of content development and organization of the text. In these areas, the collaborative experience appeared to aid the enhancement of the learners' ability to plan, discuss, and utilize the necessary linguistic elements.

Collaborative Writing and Narrative Skill Enhancement

There is an upward growing research on collaborative writing as a pedagogical model that facilitates the process of developing narrative essays and, in particular, among ESL undergraduates. Recent researches state that group work allows promoting creativity, developing the narrative, and ensuring the involvement of students in the writing process. Collaborative environment promotes peer discussion, and by which meaning and construction of thoughts can be negotiated--both critical toward development of compelling narratives. The research of Zahng and Chen (2022) investigated the impact of online collaboration provided in Facebook and discovered that the group narrative paragraph writing markedly enhanced the use of description and book-level coherence of the story. Real-time peer feedback was beneficial to ESL students as it improved confidence and collaborative writing that is, revising drafts. The combination of social sites rendered the procedure interactive and student-wise. Li and Zhu (2013) emphasized that constructivist, participatory methods like role-playing and tale-telling-improve the result of writing narratives through fertilizing prior knowledge and invigorating student agency. The analysis found that group composition activities increased stronger narrative components such as plot clarity, transitions, and personal voice in writing of ESL learners. Combined, these studies can indicate that collaborative writing offers, not only linguistic aid, but also a creative and collaborative space that develops narrative skill. It assists ESL students in constructing more fluent, interesting, and structurally sound narrative essays by means of common learning and through scaffold learning. One of the theories that explain the importance of interaction is that proposed by Vygotsky, the concept of the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) which not only emphasizes the distance between a learners current stage of development and the one they are capable of achieving with proper assistance (Vygotsky, 1978).

Constructivist principles greatly affect collaboration learning, in which the students are expected to be active and engaged in the learning process. Constructivism is a student-centered approach to education at its center, this theory contributes to Vygotsky and Piaget in the points of social interaction and the view that learners are active in developing knowledge basing on experience. Students, in the learning of entities i.e. second language (L2) will respond positively towards assuming their progress when they are engaged in group activities that entail the generation of language as a group. According to the discussed studies learners in peer collaboration not only share their mental energies but also hone their ideas and also make decisions communally. The practice of collaborative writing has come out as an effective intervention in improving the general quality of narrative essays among ESL writers. As a result of the interaction and feedback mechanisms, the researchers concluded participants of collaborative writing were able to better grasp and comprehend the organization and thematic cohesion of the narratives.

Collaboration is critical for writing fluency and lexical variety, which are important for the success of a writer. So the discussed studies state, the students who participated in peer collaboration writing received major benefits while developing writing fluency and grammatical accuracy. The participants were able to improve their writing in real-time and received feedback while writing. Williams (2022) supports this by showing that writing in a group and speaking the ideas that students have improves their writing by helping them process syntactically and choose words that are more appropriate, thereby making their writing more fluid and expressive. Yong (2006) described collaborative writing as a process in which all members of the group write together beginning with the brainstorming and ending with editing. Unlike most group work, collaborative

writing encompasses the whole process of composition, demonstrating the social and interactive aspects of writing. In this scenario, responsibilities are not divided, but all team members are equally involved in producing the final document. It notes the shared ownership and collective decision-making that students need to employ in collaborative writing (Nawaz et al., 2025).

The final product is not the only factor contributing to the learning. The outcomes also include the learning of new linguistic materials, the improvement of writing skills, and the development of teamwork abilities. Yong (2011) reported that the less competent learners demonstrate extremely positive behavior when they are assigned to work with the more competent learners, especially concerning the high quantity of idea generation, the construction of sentences, and the selection of appropriate words. One of the findings of the current study is that the majority of participants, eight of ten, considered collaborative writing as a source of motivation in the learning process.

Theoretical Framework

This study adopts Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory as its theoretical framework to examine the impact of collaborative writing on the narrative essay writing skills and writing fluency of undergraduate ESL students. The theory emphasizes social interaction, mediation, scaffolding, and the Zone of Proximal Development as key mechanisms through which collaborative writing facilitates writing development and fluency.

Methodology

The study was conducted in one of the private universities in Karachi, Pakistan. This study is quantitative in which the data were collected by quasi experiment utilizing pre-test and post-test measures, the population of the study was 60 students and they were divided into two groups experimental and control. The experimental group was taught through collaborative writing activities whereas the control group was taught through traditional teaching. A standardized rubric was used to give marks. Later, the data were analyzed through SPSS Version 25.

Findings

Table 1

Comparison of the Students' Writing Fluency in the Pretest of control group and experimental group

Group	M	Independent Sample Test		df	p
		SD	t		
Control Group	390.8	120.8			
Experimental group	359.8	85.5	- 1.12	39.45	0.27

Interpretation

As shown in table 1, an independent-samples t-test was conducted to measure the writing fluency difference between the control group and experimental group before the intervention. The mean score for the control group was $M = 390.8$, while the standard deviation stood at $SD = 120.8$, and on the other side, the experimental group had a smaller mean score of $M = 359.8$ ($SD = 85.5$) with a low standard deviation. The t-test value was -1.15 with a degree of freedom of 39.45 and a p-

value of 0.27 that is far from 0.05, which is the threshold for significance. Therefore, the difference in writing fluency between the control group and experimental group in the pre-test was not statistically significant. In conclusion, the results from the pre-test revealed that there was a statistical equivalence of writing fluencies among the experimental group and control group.

Table 2

Comparison of Students' Writing Fluency between the Pretest vs. Posttest of the control Group

Group	M	SD	Mean difference	t	df	P
Control group	390.8	120.8	-26.37	-1.25	26	0.22
Experimental group	417.2	149.5				

Interpretation

Table 2 provides the paired samples t-test results which aim to analyse the difference in the control group's writing fluency from the pretest to the posttest. The pretest scores for the control group were $[M = 390.8]$ and $[SD = 120.8]$ whereas the posttest scores were modestly increased to $[M = 417.2]$ and $[SD = 149.5]$. Even though the posttest scores indicate some increased writing fluency, there was actually a mean difference decrease of $[-26.37]$ which suggests that there was not a significant difference in the means statistically. The results of the test were a t score of $[-1.25]$ and there were 26 degrees of freedom (df) with $[p = 0.22]$ which is considerably higher than the 0.05 which is the significant level of measure meaning the students were performing consistently and similarly across the two time periods. The findings can be interpreted as the control group did not demonstrate significant gains in writing fluency while the study was conducted, especially considering the fact that the students probably did not receive any purposeful instructional method, for example, the students did not receive any collaborative teaching strategies.

Table 3

Comparison of the Individual Writing Fluency in the Pre-test versus Posttest of the Experimental Group

Variable	M	SD	Mean difference	t	df	P
Pretest	359.8	72.5	-57.35	-4.42	35	0

Posttest	417.2	80.4				
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Interpretation

Table 3 summarizes the t-test results which evaluate the differences in the transferable skills the students in the experimental group obtained from the collaborative learning exercise in writing. The average score in the first assessment test was M 370.5 with a standard deviation (SD) of 58.5. The average score in the second test increased to M 426.7 with an SD of 75.4, showing an increase in performance with the writing skills learned in the collaborative writing tasks. The average score difference between the first test and the second test was -65.75. The t was -5.23 with 35 degrees of freedom (df) and was significant with a p of 0.00 which is significant at $p < .001$.

Table 4

Comparison of the Collaborative Writing Fluency between the Pretest Versus Posttest of experimental group

Variable	M	SD	Mean Difference	t	df	P
Pretest	370.5	58.5	-65.75	-5.23	35	0
Posttest	426.7	75.4				

Interpretation

The experimental group's collaborative writing fluency improved significantly from pretest (M = 370.5) to posttest (M = 426.7). The improvement of about +56 units was statistically significant ($t(35) = -5.23$, $p < 0.001$). Although the scores became more varied after the intervention (higher SD), the results demonstrate that the treatment led to consistent and meaningful gains in writing fluency across participants.

Table 5

Independent samples t-test comparing pre-test total scores of control and experimental groups of Narrative Essay

		Descriptive Statistics	
Group	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Control group	30	56.77	10.05
Experimental group	30	59.30	10.30

Interpretation

The independent samples t-test indicates that there was no significant difference in narrative essay writing fluency between the control and experimental groups at the pretest stage. Both groups started at comparable levels, with only a small numerical difference (control = 56.77 vs. experimental = 59.30). The nearly identical standard deviations (10.05 vs. 10.30) further support the equivalence of the groups in terms of score variability. The t-test ($t_{58} = 0.96, p = .27$) confirms that this difference is not statistically meaningful.

Table 6

Comparison of Students' Narrative Essay writing Between the Pretest Versus Posttest of the control Group

Variable	M	SD	Mean Difference	t	df	p
Pre-test	390.8	120.8	-26.37	- 1.25	26	0.22
Post -test	417.2	149.5				

Interpretation

The means score of the control group in narrative and test writing was 390.8 (SD = 120.8), and maintenance 417.2 (SD = 149.5). This interprets to an improvement of 26.4 points in average following the period of testing. Yet the variability of scores also increased--the standard deviation went to 149.5, Paired samples t-test showed that the mean difference between the pretest and posttest is -26.37 two tailed -1.25. The negative value denotes a higher posttest mean as compared to pretest mean. The p-value was however increased at 0.22, which exceeded the traditional significance level (0.05).

Table 7

Comparison of the Narrative Essay Writing skills in the pre-test Versus Posttest of the Experimental Group

Variable	M	SD	Mean difference	t	df	P
Pretest	359.8	72.5	-57.35	-4.42	35	0
Posttest	417.2	80.4				

Interpretation

In this table, the impacts of the intervention on the narrative essay writing skills of students in the experimental group from the pretest and posttest pairs were evaluated using a paired samples t-

test, and the findings have been presented and discussed. The findings demonstrate that students have improved their skills post intervention compared to pretest results of the skills. The students in the pretest scored ($M = 359.8$, $SD = 72.5$), and in the posttest scored ($M = 417.2$, $SD = 80.4$), which indicates a mean difference of -57.35 . The t -value of -4.42 , with 35 degrees of freedom, ensures that the students improved their skills post intervention; this difference is statistically significant ($p < .001$). Hence, the students who participated in the collaborative writing intervention gained advancements, as it positively and significantly impacted their narrative essay writing skills. The results also show, as per Cohen (1988), the extreme difference of the means indicates a large effect size, and this further indicates that the intervention results are of substantial importance and greatly benefited students in writing.

Discussion

The findings from this study highlight the value of the collaborative writing pedagogy model in improving ESL learners' writing proficiency and fluency in writing narrative essays. In comparing the experimental group and the control group, the extent of the impact of collaboration on the writing outcome was evident.

As evidenced in the control group, individual writing did not result in the progress of writing fluency. On the other hand, the experimental group participated in the collaborative writing activities. It was this group that demonstrated the progression of writing fluency. The experimental group which undertook the collaborative writing became the beneficiary of peer collaboration through the writing process that levelled up the writing to greater sophistication and cohesion in fluency. More fluency in writing was accomplished through the collaboration. This collaboration led to more streamlined content discourse than that of the control group.

The experimental group of the study showed a greater improvement concerning the writing of narrative essays than the control group. Students in the experimental group not only developed the writing skills of organization and language refinement, but also the writing depth and coherence. The collaborative writing activity provided the opportunity for the participants to engage in critical narrative writing reflection. Learners of the experimental group were able to articulate their narrative themes, and construct and provide feedback to focus on contouring their essays. This appears to explain the more developed and refined narratives in the experimental group than in the control group, who did not engage in any collaborative interaction. A similar study done by Nawaz et al. (2025) in which the students of the experimental group improved their narrative essay writing skills as compare to the control group. Furtherly, they stated that working in the group activities students not only improved their learning skills but also gain confidence.

The participants' division into experimental and control groups enabled the former to benefit from the strategy that involves co-authoring texts, whereas the latter were isolated to the independent writing activity. Peer collaboration in the experimental group provided the students opportunities to assist each other throughout the writing process, which distributed the different writing tasks, thereby accelerating the process. The social interaction in the groups facilitated the sharing of ideas, and problem-solving, as well as the elaboration of complex, diverse language. Beyond the essays' technical qualities, the students enhanced their critical thinking skills. Constructive peer interactions allowed the participants to challenge their perspectives, and refine the articulation of

their positions, which culminated in the adoption of more advanced writing techniques. The control group did not benefit from the same interactions.

Since peer interaction in collaborative writing improves student engagement in the classroom, and as research on the writing fluency and quality of second language (L2) students indicates, collaborative writing in L2 instruction should be considered. Students often struggle with the writing process when it involves individual work. Furthermore, the collaborative writing process encourages them to move beyond an emphasis on the final outcome and develop better organizational skills and fluency in the articulation of their ideas. The writing process in L2 students will improve as teachers use integrated collaborative writing tasks in their classes. Students will develop their language as well as vital social competencies.

The findings of this study can be closely aligned with Vygotsky's Socio-Cultural Theory of learning with respect to the social interaction and the involvement of other people in the writing process. The collaborative writing tasks were opportunities for social interaction with the students and for social engagement, as they were able to scaffold each other's learning to the gap between their writing skills and more proficient writing. The results were also consistent with principles of constructivism in the learning process, as students worked with their peers to be involved in the creation of knowledge through their written work. The utilization of the feedback peer mechanism in learning helped the students reflect on their writing and to subsequently develop more effective revisions to their documents in the improvement of their writing fluency and the quality of the narratives written.

Conclusion

As evidenced by the findings of the current study, students learning English as a second language improved their narrative writing skills as well as their overall writing fluency when writing with partners. Students in the experimental group reported a marked change in their essay writing skills and in their fluency when compared with the control group. The results indicate the necessity of including peers in the writing process to facilitate greater structure and refinement of students' writing so that final products are improved and more cohesive. The positive results support the use of collaborative writing as an instructional practice and a pedagogy aimed at the development of critical higher order thinking skills and other academic competencies. Educators now have the opportunity to employ collaborative writing to support their students' writing competency and other competencies.

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