

**Enhancing Students' Writing Skill by Using Collaborative Writing  
At The Third Semester Students of The English Study Program  
Of The Muhammadiyah University Of Bengkulu**

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Received: June, 28, 2024

Revised: July, 29, 2024

Accepted: July, 30, 2024

**ABSTRACT**

This study was aimed to investigate how collaborative writing improved students' writing skill. The research subject was class A of third semester students at Muhammadiyah University of Bengkulu. This research was qualitative research which focused on classroom action research (CAR). The data were collected from field note, observation checklist, students' final draft analysis and by recording the whole process of classroom action research, either before or during the implementation of the actions. The finding of the research indicated: (1) The collaborative writing had been effectively improved students' writing skill particularly in writing an essay. (2) The collaborative writing is very feasible to be implemented in teaching writing. Finally, the researcher suggested that there should be some other researchers conducting some researches about the collaborative technique to enhance students' other language skills.

**Keywords:** Collaborative Writing, Writing Skills

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## Introduction

Writing is undoubtedly regarded as an academically important language skill. There are at least three reasons that make it significant. First, writing reflects one's ability in mastering language elements such as vocabulary and structure. Second, it is believed that writing is beneficial for the long-term education process because it helps students to learn by writing. Finally, it is very possible for students, in the future, to encounter circumstances where they are demanded to write. Therefore, it would not be exaggerating to say that writing skill is one of the important language skills that should be mastered by the students.

Students' inability to write is mostly caused by the unsuccessful teaching and learning process in writing class. Some researches show that teaching writing in most schools or

universities only emphasizes on grammatical aspects of language rather than gives some exposures and practices to students to write. As a result, even though students have already spent many years learning writing, they still cannot write appropriately, what they master only theoretically and the underlying principles of writing, not the skill of writing itself.

Moreover, in the teaching and learning context in English study program at university, writing skill is absolutely needed to be mastered by students including by those who study at Bengkulu Muhammadiyah University, where students have to write their research paper at the end of their study as a requirement to end up the study. Therefore, writing skill in writing subject must be learned successfully by students.

Based on the researcher's preliminary research at the third semester students of the English study program shows that the students' writing ability is still very poor. The researcher finds that only six out of fifty-five students write an appropriate essay. It indicates that most students from the third semester of the English study program of the Bengkulu Muhammadiyah University do not understand essay writing. Moreover, the researcher also investigates that most of the third semester students of the English study program have grammatical problems in composing an English text. These problems, in researcher's opinion was caused by the teaching writing to the semester three students at English study program of Bengkulu Muhammadiyah University still emphasizes on the conventional technique (lecturing) of theories of writing rather than gives students some exposures and practices to write. Of course, these problems should be taken into a proper consideration. The students of the English study program are expected to master writing as well as to teach writing, for they are trained to be professional English teachers in the future. Due to this fact, it is necessary to improve their writing skills

Therefore, the researcher plans to implement collaborative writing technique to enhance students' writing skill. In collaborative writing, students are guided to learn together in small group where they will discuss their writing. After discussing, they have to write individually. Then, they are guided to exchange their writing and the lecturer asks one of them to do proofreading. After reading the writing, they have to give comments and suggestions in order to improve the quality of their writing. After the writing being corrected many times, it is the time for them to hand in their writing to their lecturer to be checked and corrected. Those processes become the substantial processes in collaborative writing.

The implementation of collaborative writing technique in teaching writing is significantly needed because through this technique students will help each other improve their writing quality. For instance, they can do peer editing or peer correcting to edit their thesis statement, grammatical aspects of language, writing aspects, and to develop and organize the idea.

Since the researcher thinks that the problems of students' writing ability need to be solved immediately, the researcher believes that it is important to conduct research to know how collaborative writing improves students' writing skill. It is hoped that by conducting a research, useful information can be shared for the purpose to enhance students' writing skill.

## Literature Review

Writing skill is one of the language skills that must be mastered by the students. For mastering writing, the students must know the rules and put them on the correct language at the different form of writing. According to Kneffel, writing is a practical skill. Therefore, it can be mastered through practices, studying the rules, and learning how to execute certain forms; personal essays, research papers, and critical argument. Manchon states that writing skill is a skill that can be learned and mastered seriously through enough practice. Moreover, Langan adds that writing is skill like driving, typing, or even preparing a good meal. Thus, it can be learned with enough practice, for it is not an automatic process.

According to Kneffel, writing is done to fulfill several general purposes, which are:

1) To inform

The purpose of the writer writes a composition is for communicating information clearly, accurately, simply, and directly. The examples for this kind of writing are news, business report, case studies, newsletters, magazines, articles, informative essays, etc.

2) To analyze or to explain

Analytical writing addresses the question 'why' and 'how'. In addition to the informative prose when the writer writes for analyzing information, the writer does something to it or with it; the writer tries to answer the question and solve the problems. Examples of the explanatory writing are commonly found in media, analytical essays, product comparison, etc.

3) To convince

Writing to convince the readers means to influence them to change their opinions or actions. The writing that tries to affect the belief or behavior of its audience is usually classified either as arguments or persuasion. This kind of writing can be found in newspaper editorial, speeches, argumentative essays, critical reviews, proposal advertising, and propaganda that aim to move us to the same ground as where the writer stands.

4) To express

When the writer writes because they want to say something, it means the writer is writing expressively. Expressive writing is the most difficult to do well, but it may also be the most satisfying. It does not only expose the writer's feeling, but also ask his honesty, intelligence, and sensitivity. To write expressively, the writer must be willing to encounter himself. Personal essays, autobiographies, human interest stories, columns, and humor essays can be called writing for this sake.

Generally, there are many techniques which can be implemented in writing, one of them is collaborative writing. Collaborative writing concept is actually derived from collaborative learning concept. Gokhale defines collaborative writing as a process of writing which involves students in small group of writing activities to achieve certain purpose of writing. Nordquist adds that collaborative writing is a process of making any piece of writing, published or unpublished, ascribed or anonymous, to which more than one person has contributed. Moreover, Farkas offers four possible definitions useful in approaching collaboration through an analysis of processes. For his purposes, collaboration is: (1) two or more people jointly composing and contributing the complete text of a document; (2) one or more person modifying, by editing and/or reviewing, the document of one or more persons; and (3) one person working interactively with one or more persons and drafting a document based on the ideas of the person or persons. Moreillon also confirms his idea about collaborative writing, he states that collaborative writing as a process of writing something which involved more than one person who work together in creating one product of writing.

Furthermore, Viggiano also states his opinion about collaborative writing, he says:

collaborative pedagogy is a term used to describe classroom activities in which students work and learn together. Muslim, Jawari say that Collaborative narrative

writing is an appropriate technique to be used in improving the students' writing ability.

The term can describe activities as diverse as peer tutoring/response/discussion (in which students comment on each others' work) and group papers (in which several students or the entire class work together to create one finished product). Its uses include distribution of information, the creation of collaborative class artifacts, and a space for discussion and review outside of the classroom.

From these definitions, it is clear that collaborative writing is an activity of writing where people can discuss and exchange their ideas which exactly involves more than one person in the process of writing.

### **b. The Procedures of Collaborative Writing**

Before implementing collaborative writing, there are some procedures that should be considered. Viggiano proposes that in collaborative writing, there must be a leader who will lead the collaboration activities. Nurquois adds, in collaborative technique, students are expected to be actively participated in the discussion and give responses toward either other students' ideas or opinions. In other word, the lecturers are expected to prepare the writing topic that will be discussed by students and they facilitate the class while the students are discussing the topic collaboratively.

Moreover, Viggiano also confirms his ideas about the procedures of collaborative writing. According to him, the procedures can be described as the activities as diverse as peer tutoring/response/discussion (in which students comment on each others' work) and group papers (in which several students or the entire class work together to create one finished product).

In short, collaborative writing is naturally a process of writing involves more than one person where the writer looks for the same understanding and opinion each other. In collaborative writing, every member plays his/her own role through discussions and interactions. These members build the same objective; they correct each other; they exchange and share ideas and opinions; they have different background knowledge and skills; but they work together for one goal of creating good writing.

### **c. The Advantages of Collaborative Writing**

Collaborative writing becomes an appropriate technique to be implemented in enhancing students' writing skill because it has some advantages. According to Alwasilah, collaborative writing has some advantages, they are:

1. It builds cooperation concept and tolerance to other people in terms of opinions and increase the ability of formulating and stating ideas.
2. It helps students learn that writing is a process.
3. It motivates students to learn in a group, and gives the real work situation which will be faced by them in the future.

4. It helps students do self-evaluation and write the writing draft many times. Here, students as a writer will be the most often reader in reading their own writing.

Furthermore, Viggiano also investigates his opinion about the advantages of collaborative writing, he argues that;

1. The process of writing collaboratively forces the writer to put “tacit” decisions about his/her writing process into words. This, according to Elbow, “forces students to become more conscious and articulate about rhetorical decision making”.
2. Collaboration allows students to learn from each other, as confident students will model successful writing practices for struggling students.
3. The process of working in a group fosters relationships among a community of writers. Elbow describes this as taking away the “loneliness” of the writing act.
4. Collaboration focuses on the generation of many possible points of view/solutions to a problem, which ultimately leads to more complex conclusions.
5. Collaborative writing gives students practice at a kind of writing that will benefit them in their chosen careers, as much professional/business writing is co-authored.

## Methods

This research was qualitative research which focused on classroom action research (CAR), was aimed to find out the implementation of collaborative writing to improve students’ writing skill at the third semester students of the English study program. To carry out the action research, the researcher used the following action research procedures as suggested by Kemmis quoted by Winter. The first was *reconnaissance*, identifying some problems occurring in the target community and choosing some manageable problems to solve. The second was *planning*, rooting the identified problems chosen to solve. Here, the researcher planned some actions to implement collaborative writing in order to improve the condition in which the problems occur. The third was *implementing* and *observing* the actions, conducting the actions plan and observing the implementation as well as recording the whole process. The last one was *reflection*, which was, analyzing and discussing the results of observation during the implementation actions. Reflection was done to identify the success and further problems occurred as the basis of actions in the next cycles.

## Result and Discussion

Based on the students’ writing analysis in the preliminary research, students exactly did not know how to write an essay appropriately. It could be seen from the result, none of them were categorized into very good or good level in the level of interpretation based on the writing rubric. The researcher found that the students only wrote what they wanted to write without thinking about the rules how to write an essay academically. It means that before collaborative writing had been being implemented, the students did not understand about essay writing particularly in writing an essay appropriately.

After the researcher implemented the collaborative writing and explained what essay was, there was a significant progress achieved by the students in writing an essay. It was proven by the increasing number of the students who were able to write an essay. Even though, the researcher also found that the students did not feel confident when they were writing their essay. It was seen in the treatment process; the students were discussing their writing while they were writing their draft. For the information, in the preliminary research,

none of them were categorized into very good or good level of writing ability. On the other hand, based on the students' writing analysis of the final draft of cycle I, there were 4 students who achieved good level ability and 16 of them were achieved above average in the level of interpretation based on the writing rubric. Based on this significant advancement, the researcher assumed that the implementation of collaborative writing had significantly improved students' writing skill particularly in writing an essay.

In the collaborative writing processes, such as correction and suggestion made by their peers (peer correcting collaboratively) totally helped them in generating the essay. The students worked actively and collaboratively in the collaboration process. They conducted peer tutoring, peer editing, discussion, etc. This process exactly matched the collaborative writing procedures proposed by Viggiano, he said that the procedures of collaborative writing described as the activities as diverse as peer tutoring/response/discussion (in which students comment on each other's work) and group papers (in which several students or the entire class work together to create one finished product).

However, this advancement still indicated that students were not able yet writing an essay appropriately. They needed more practice because writing was not an automatic process (Langan), it could be mastered through some practices (Kneffel). This inability happened because the students still felt unfamiliar with the collaborative writing technique which was implemented by the researcher. It was seen, when the students tried to give some corrections or suggestions, they sometime felt nervous. They doubted, whether their corrections and suggestions were correct or not. Here, the researcher reminded the students to practice writing more and more because in CAR like stated by Burns students need to more practice rather than theory. The researcher also reminded to the students to focus to the rules of how to make an essay to avoid the mistakes in making corrections and suggestions to their peers.

When the collaborative writing had been implemented in the second cycle, the researcher tried to review about the concept of how to make the essay collaboratively. It was aimed, to avoid the same mistake made by the students in writing the thesis statement. Here, the researcher also re-emphasized to the students about the procedures of collaborative writing. Moreover, the researcher kept on monitoring students while they were implementing collaborative writing. Together with the research collaborator, the researcher helped students when they found some difficulties especially in implementing the collaborative writing, for example, evaluated the process whether or not the leader did his/her job like stated by Viggiano who claimed that in the collaborative writing process, there must be a leader who led the collaboration activities. As a result, in their group, a group leader led the group member work seriously. He/she guided his/her group collaboratively in order to achieve the maximum result of writing. The researcher assumed that the collaborative writing process worked nicely. It was seen from the students' writing ability particularly in writing an essay had improved significantly in the final draft of cycle II. It was seen from 22 students, 19 of them had achieved very good or good level ability in writing an essay. It means that 86,4 % of students are able to write an essay appropriately. These findings had become the reason for the researcher to stop the cycle of the research. In CAR as mentioned by Supardi and Suhardjono, the researcher might stop the process of action research when he/she had found the adequate result. From the findings above, the researcher thought that the problem of the research had been solved. As stated in the criterion of success, the research was considered successful if 75 % students were able to achieve very good or good level of writing ability. Based on these findings, the researcher assumed that the research participants had already been able to write an essay appropriately.

These findings also matched the observation checklist filled by the collaborator. From the observation checklist, it was found that students were very active in following the implementation of collaborative writing. The students were also active in presenting peer conferencing. They were also very active in conducting peer correcting and peer editing while the collaborative writing implemented. They were also highly motivated to learn in group particularly in learning every topic in the treatment process like stated by Alwasilah in his opinion about the advantages of collaborative writing.

Moreover, based on the findings of this research, the researcher argued that collaborative writing had significantly improved students' writing skill particularly to the third semester students of English study program in writing an essay. It was true that when Alwasilah conducted research about collaborative writing, the result showed that students are highly motivated to write, they are motivated to learn how to write appropriately and they are motivated to read more references. Another research conducted by Alhaidari for his thesis in Educational Psychology of the Pennsylvania State University. He measured the students' grammar mastery in writing, which designed grammar test involved in students' writing. The result showed that the students who participated in collaborative writing had positive development in mastering grammar in their writing. Dale also implemented collaborative writing, the result suggested that collaborative writing helped significantly to enhance students' writing skill especially students' writing skill in making their writing to be unity and coherence. And, when the researcher implemented this collaborative writing technique to enhance students' writing skill, the result also showed that the students' ability in writing was significantly improved.

By analyzing the findings from the previous research, the researcher proposed that the findings of this research got along very well with the findings of the previous researchers who were conducting the research about collaborative writing. In other words, the researcher assumed that the result of the previous researches perfectly supports each other.

## Conclusion

Based on the research finding and discussion, the researcher concluded that the implementation of collaborative writing was successfully improved students' writing skill particularly in writing an essay. The researcher found, in collaborative writing, students learned together in small group where they discussed their writing. After discussing, they wrote their writing individually. Then, they exchanged their writing and did proofreading. After reading the writing, they gave comments and suggestions in order to improve the quality of their writing. After writing being corrected many times, they handed in their writing to their lecturer to be checked and corrected.

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