The Impact of Collaborative Writing Strategy on EFL Students' Writing Skills Through Adopting a Process-Based Approach

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Abstract

Writing is one of the productive skills that involves communicating a message in the form of letters, words, and sentences. It is a mental effort of creating and inventing ideas, thinking about how to express them, and organizing them into paragraphs that a reader can understand. Effective writing requires effective writing strategies, such as the collaborative writing technique. The latter supports collaboration, critical thinking, and active participation towards producing a good piece of writing. The implementation of collaborative writing in the classroom requires students to be more active in all the processes of writing, such as brainstorming ideas, gathering and organizing information, drafting, revising, and editing. The main purpose of the present study is to examine teachers' perceptions about the extent to which this writing technique can improve learners' writing skills to produce an argumentative text. The findings indicate that the participants have a positive standpoint toward such a strategy because it develops students' writing skills and increases their interaction. It also helps students stay focused on their goals by collaborating to create high-quality argumentative essays.

1. INTRODUCTION

In today's globalization age, the interdependence of nations and countries creates a need for an international language, and no language qualifies for this better than English. The status of English on the global level is a significant factor that has contributed to increasing the importance of English language teaching in non-English-speaking countries (Benzehaf, 2018). In teaching the four language skills, writing is one of the productive skills that should be given great importance so that the writer can be able to produce a clear and grammatically correct message that the reader can enjoy reading. Teaching writing is about helping students learn the skills that can aid them in writing efficaciously in the target language. This requires teachers to rely on different writing strategies that can help students write a good piece of work to catch the readers' attention and interest. Based on the review of the literature, collaborative writing is a writing strategy that can encourage collaboration, critical thinking, peer learning, and active participation toward creating an argumentative text of high quality to convey meaning that can have a positive impact on the reader. However, to the researchers' best knowledge, it seems that there is no study about the effect of collaborative writing strategy on students' writing skills in the Moroccan context. Therefore, the main purpose of the present study is to examine teachers' perceptions about the extent to which this writing technique can improve learners' writing skills to produce an argumentative text. The current research addresses the following research questions:

a. What are teachers' perceptions of the impact of collaborative writing strategy on students' writing skills?

b. Does the collaborative writing strategy encourage students' interaction for writing an argumentative text?

1.1. Writing Definitions

The four language skills are divided into receptive skills and productive skills. Listening and reading involve receiving information. Speaking and writing involve producing words, phrases, sentences, and paragraphs. Many experts and researchers define the writing skill. For example, Pulverness et al. (2005) define writing as one of the productive skills that involves communicating a message in the form of letters and symbols. Communicating means sending certain information to the reader. Nunan (2003) considers writing as the mental effort of creating and inventing ideas, thinking about how to express them, and organizing them into paragraphs that a reader can understand. Brown (2000) states that writing is a process that consists of thinking, brainstorming, drafting, revising, and publishing. This requires writers to be skillful in how to generate ideas, how to organize them coherently, how to use discourse markers and rhetorical conventions to put them cohesively into a written text, and how to revise the text in terms of cohesion and coherence to produce a final product. Based on these definitions, it is concluded that writing is a productive skill that communicates a message in the form of letters and symbols to the reader by following some steps, such as thinking, brainstorming, drafting, and revising the written product.

1.2. Teaching Writing

Writing is a productive skill through which learners invest what they have learned in the classroom to produce an effective piece of work. Therefore, teaching writing is about helping students learn the skills that can help them write efficaciously in the target language. Harmer (2014) states that before teaching writing, teachers should know how to build both fluency and accuracy, how to focus on linguistic communication goals, and how to raise students' motivation to learn. He also adds that teachers should not focus only on the end product but also on the writing process.

Writing is considered one of the main language skills that learners should master because it is a tool for conveying meaning that can affect the reader. Students should know how to write all types of writing, such as letters, reports, advertisements, etc. They also need to learn some writing conventions like punctuation, paragraph and essay development, linking words, etc., just as they learn pronunciation to develop their speaking skills (Afrezah et al., 2024). As specified by Harmer (2004), teaching writing has a variety of goals, including written language strengthening, language development, and writing style improvement. Put differently, written language strengthening is about helping students learn how to put words together and how to link sentences in a meaningful way to construct a grammatically correct paragraph. Besides, in the writing process, students' language development can be positively influenced because, during the editing process, students can check the language in terms of grammar, punctuation, and spelling. In addition, teaching students writing can help in developing their writing styles because they will learn how to write narrative texts, descriptive texts, expository texts, persuasive texts, comparing and contrasting texts, and reflective texts.

1.3. Approaches of Teaching Writing

According to Harmer (2004), there are two main approaches to teaching writing: the process-based approach and the product-based approach. The former is about the stages a student should follow to produce a good piece of writing. These stages are pre-writing, drafting, revising, editing, and publishing. Each stage plays a significant role in the process of writing. Therefore, the teacher should introduce such stages to his students in an effective way so that they can have a good understanding of the importance of each stage.

Regarding the product-based approach, it does not need any stages or steps. Instead, students are given a model text, such as emails, formal letters, CVs, postcards, and recipes, that they have to imitate in terms of language, structure, and organization to produce an end product. If, for example, a teacher wants to teach his students how to write an email, he gives them an email model. After reading it, he studies the email model with his students in terms of structure, organization, and components. Then, he asks them to write an email depending on the email model they have studied.

1.4. Types of Writing

There are three main forms of writing. This includes informative text, argumentative text, and descriptive text. The informative text is about narrating a story. The main aim of this type of text is to entertain, gain, and captivate the reader's attention. It consists of a variety of narrative types, such as fairy tales, mysteries, science fiction, romance, horror stories, adventure stories, myths and legends, historical narratives, ballads, slices of life, personal experiences, and fantasy stories.

Regarding the argumentative text, it concerns evaluating and judging a problem based on personal views and attitudes. It refers to the reasons put forward for or against an issue. It consists of a variety of genres, such as reports, explanations, analytical expositions, hortatory expositions, procedures, discussions, reviews, anecdotes, spoofs, news items, and narrating. Concerning the descriptive text, it gives illustrations of places, events, people, emotions, situations, and ideas. Descriptions of presenting sensory information bring life to writing because they convey an experience through which the reader actively uses his imagination (Afrezah et al., 2024).

1.5. The Process of Writing

Based on the process-based approach, writing is a process that consists of five main steps, which are prewriting, drafting, revising, editing, and publishing (Harmer, 2014). The prewriting is about collecting as much information as possible about the topic through reading, discussing, and brainstorming. Then, the writer organizes his ideas and develops an outline on which he relies while writing. Drafting is about the first draft the writer produces. At this stage, he starts transforming his ideas into sentences and paragraphs without worrying about the grammar, spelling, or quality of his ideas. This stage helps the writer expand upon, clarify, and modify his initial plans and ideas and aids him in organizing the content in a meaningful flow. As the writing process proceeds into editing, several drafting and redrafting attempts may be carried out on the way to the final version. Regarding revising, it is where the writer and peers revise the written work. It involves looking at each sentence carefully to make sure it is related to the topic and serves its purpose. In the editing stage, the writer proofreads his written work to check for grammatical and punctuation errors, spelling mistakes, etc. The final stage is about

publishing. When the writer edits his draft and makes any possible changes, he produces the final version and sends it to its intended audience.

1.6. Characteristics of Good Writing

The purpose of writing is to come up with a good piece of work that can catch the audience's attention. Harmer (2014) states that good writing should be interesting. In other words, the end product should amuse, inform, or persuade the reader. This means that the writer should stimulate interest by presenting some information that is new to the reader. Therefore, he should avoid telling readers what is obvious or already known. Besides, clarity is one of the main qualities of writing. To explain, the ideas should be organized logically. Words should be selected carefully, and sentences should be structured correctly so that the reader will not face difficulties in understanding what the writer intends to say. Conciseness is another quality that the writer should respect. Put differently, good writing should not include unnecessary expressions, idioms, words, or phrases so that the reader's understanding will not be negatively affected. Moreover, writing should be effective. To clarify, it should transmit the message to the reader in an effective way. This can be effectively done by wisely selecting the words, the sentences, and the paragraph structures that will best communicate to the reader. Finally, good writing should reflect the authentic voice of the writer. This means that the piece of writing should display the writer's personality, beliefs, and life experience. Consequently, the reader can feel the sound of the author in the text (Brown, 2000).

1.7. Teacher's Role in Teaching Writing

The teacher plays a crucial role in the process of teaching writing. Harmer (2014) confirms that the teacher should motivate his students while conducting a writing assignment. He should work on creating a suitable atmosphere that can help learners generate and develop ideas. He should provide his students with all the teaching materials that can aid students in collecting data about the topic they are going to write about. Before giving his students a writing task to conduct, he should make sure that all students have a clear understanding of the approaches of writing, namely the process-based approach and the product-based approach. Besides, the teacher should provide help during the process of writing. That is to say, he should be available and be prepared to give feedback and suggestions in constructive and thoughtful ways. Moreover, since group work modifies the dynamics of classroom interactions and raises students' involvement in a given task, the teacher should possess the skills that can help him create more diverse groups in terms of level, background, and learning styles. This intentional grouping assignment can make students work with peers they might not have interacted with before. It also minimizes the chance that high-ability students will flock together, leaving others out (Afrezah et al., 2024).

2. GROUP WORK AND COLLABORATIVE WRITING

As an alternative to the traditional methods of teaching and learning a foreign language, which placed a greater emphasis on grammatical explanation, memorization, and repetition, a new trend has emerged that is characterized by the following: (1) learning is individualized; (2) learning is a natural part of growth and maturation; and (3) teachers who no longer dominate the classroom play a variety of roles determined by the needs of the students in learning a

language (Kusnierek, 2015). The patterns of interaction and self-reliance in the classroom are pair work and group work, regardless of the number of learners participating. Scrivener (1994) defines pair work as a type of classroom interaction where students work with one another. This may be to discuss something, practice writing, or do communicative activities. Working in pairs significantly increases the amount of time that each student can spend interacting with each other in class. Additionally, it fosters learners' autonomy by enabling independent work and interaction without the need for teacher assistance. Through pair work, a teacher can also work with one pair of students while the other students carry on doing a task. Furthermore, this type of classroom interaction encourages teamwork, which makes the classroom a more pleasant place where students share responsibility (Kusnierek, 2015).

According to Brown (2001), group work is defined as a generic term covering a multiplicity of techniques in which two or more students are assigned a task that involves collaboration and self-initiated language. Richards et al. (1985) define group work as a learning activity that involves a small group of learners working together. It modifies the dynamics of classroom interactions and raises students' involvement in a given task (Harmer, 2014). Changing the way students interact in the classroom is crucial because it keeps them from becoming disinterested when working alone. There is also more possibility for a wider range of viewpoints and involvements, and it promotes learners' autonomy by letting students choose within the group without being controlled. Besides, it encourages learners to collaborate and help each other construct knowledge, and thus, all students can be involved in the writing task (Kusnierek, 2015).

Collaborative writing is a writing strategy that supports collaboration, critical thinking, and active participation toward coming up with a good piece of writing. It involves students writing in groups, reading different references to generate ideas, discussing the stages of writing, and evaluating their writing (Afrezah et al., 2024). Therefore, the application of collaborative writing requires students to be more active and participate in all the processes of writing, such as brainstorming ideas, gathering and organizing information, drafting, revising, and editing the writing. Working together can support learners to perform the stages of writing effectively because they benefit from each other's evaluation. In this writing strategy, all the group participants have the right to give comments, ask questions, and give suggestions and feedback on the process of writing, which develops the quality of the final product (Kusnierek, 2015).

2.1. Stages of Implementing Collaborative Writing

There are several stages that a teacher should respect to implement the collaborative writing strategy for teaching writing. The first stage is about introducing students to the steps of writing a good paragraph. Based on the process-based approach, there are five steps that students should be aware of, which are pre-writing, drafting, revising, editing, and publishing. The second stage is about dividing students into several groups. Each group consists of at least two students. The third stage is about determining a topic for the group. The topic should be interesting, related to the subject matter, and meet students' needs. It should not be too complicated so that students will not face difficulties while working on it. The fourth stage is about planning (Afrezah et al., 2024). In other words, each group begins to outline a plan for conducting research and gathering information to support their work. The fifth stage is about

the teacher encouraging his students to collaborate. This means that each student should work actively with others and compose a paper based on their ideas. The result of this process is the first draft. In the sixth stage, students read their work to determine whether they wrote it appropriately or not. Next, students come up with the final version of the corrected draft that will be collected by the teacher. In the last stage, the teacher corrects the group's work and gives them feedback with comments and suggestions (Barkley, 2014).

2.2. Objectives of Using the Collaborative Writing Strategy

Using this teaching technique to teach students writing can encourage collaboration, critical thinking, peer learning, and active participation toward successfully implementing the writing strategies. According to Afrezah et al. (2024), these strategies consist of talking, researching, brainstorming, listening, clustering, and free writing. Each strategy has its importance. For example, in the talking strategy, students talk through their ideas with each other to collect more information about the topic. In the research strategy, the groups read different references, such as books and articles that can help them understand their topic clearly and gather more data about it. In the brainstorming strategy, the members of the group generate ideas and write them on paper. They do not care about focusing on high-quality ideas or connecting, censoring, developing, or defending them during the brainstorming process because what is important at this stage is to come up with as many ideas as possible depending on their prior knowledge about the topic. In the listing strategy, the members of the group start organizing and selecting the ideas that are relevant to their topic and cross out the ones that are out of topic. Concerning the clustering strategy, it tries to find the extent to which the generated ideas and the topic are related (Supiani, 2017). In the free writing strategy, the members of the group start writing whatever comes to their mind without worrying about the grammar, the spelling, or the quality of their ideas. Therefore, collaborative learning can help learners develop their writing strategies and stay focused on their goals through working together to produce good work (Barkley, 2014).

2.3. Related Studies

Based on the review of the literature, collaborative writing is a writing strategy that can encourage collaboration, critical thinking, peer learning, and active participation toward successfully implementing the writing processes. Different studies have been conducted to find out the extent to which this strategy develops students' writing skills. For example, in their study, Afrezah et al. (2024) find that collaborative writing participates in developing students' writing skills because students help each other when they are given a writing task to perform in groups. The findings also designate that this strategy develops learners' interest in writing tasks because the group members interact with each other, which increases their motivation for learning. Supiani (2017), in her study about teaching writing skills through collaborative writing, finds that the collaborative writing strategy enables EFL students to master functional and monologue in the form of genres, such as descriptive, narrative, and report. Another study is conducted by Nurhidayah et al. (2021) to explore the effects of collaborative writing strategy on students' writing skills and self-efficacy. The findings indicate that collaborative writing improves students' writing skills and self-efficacy. Consequently, the findings of the three studies mentioned above confirm the review of the literature about the importance of implementing the collaborative writing strategy to develop students' writing skills. However,

in the Moroccan context, the researcher could not find any study about the implementation of the collaborative writing strategy for teaching writing. Rakrak (2020), in his systematic review, concludes that further research on the teaching methodology of writing should be conducted because some teachers of English still conceive of writing as a drilling exercise for learners to practice previously learned structures.

3. METHODOLOGY

The methodology is the specific procedures and techniques used to identify, select, process, and analyze data about a certain problem (Kothari, 1990). The present study is based on a qualitative research method to explore teachers' perceptions about the impact of collaborative writing strategy on students' writing skills to develop an argumentative text.

3.1. Participants

The participants in the current study are twenty teachers teaching English in different high schools in Morocco. They belong to two WhatsApp groups of high school teachers. The groups vary in terms of the participant's age, experience of teaching, and academic background because some participants are TEF master's degree holders, and some of them are doctorate candidates.

3.2. Data Collection Tool

The research tool used in the present research is an online qualitative questionnaire. It contained some open-ended questions and statements about teachers' views and perceptions about the impact of collaborative writing strategy on students' writing skills.

3.3. Data Collection Procedure

The researcher joined two groups of high school teachers in the WhatsApp application. He informed the members of the groups about the reason behind researching teachers' views and perceptions about the impact of the collaborative writing strategy on students' writing skills. Most of them were eager to answer the questionnaire questions. After sharing the online questionnaire in the two groups, the researcher got teachers' answers back in no more than one week.

3.4. The Online Questionnaire Questions

Here are the online questionnaire questions for exploring high school teachers' perceptions about the impact of collaborative writing strategy on students' writing skill :

a. How familiar are you with the collaborative writing strategy?
b. How could you define collaborative writing in the context of your teaching?
c. How could you perceive the role of collaborative writing in developing students' writing skills?
d. Could you describe how you implement the collaborative writing strategy in your teaching to help students develop argumentative writing?
e. What type of writing processes do you find most effective in the collaborative writing strategy?
f. What challenges do you face when incorporating collaborative writing in the classroom?
g. What recommendations would you give to other teachers who want to implement such a strategy in their classroom?

4. FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS

As stated above, the online questionnaire contains nine questions. All of them range around high school teachers' perceptions and opinions about the impact of collaborative writing strategy on students' writing skills. Each question's findings are described below :

a. How familiar are you with the collaborative writing strategy ?

Thirteen participants out of twenty (N = 13, 65%) state that they are familiar with the collaborative writing strategy. They confess that they use it from time to time while teaching writing because of the time constraints and large classes. Therefore, they prefer to give students some writing tasks to perform individually.

b. How could you define collaborative writing in the context of your teaching ?

The participants (N = 20, 100%) gave different definitions of the collaborative writing strategy. All the definitions range around the idea that collaborative writing is a writing strategy that fosters collaboration and active participation toward producing a good piece of writing. It involves students in groups to help each other generate ideas, discuss the writing process, and evaluate their final product.

c. How could you perceive the role of collaborative writing in developing students' writing skills ?

All the participants (N = 20, 100%) divulge that collaborative writing is an important strategy for developing students' writing skills and increasing their interaction with each other. They state that when students are given the chance to perform a writing task in groups, they can help and motivate each other in the processes of brainstorming ideas, gathering and organizing information, drafting, revising, and editing the writing. Such a strategy can support learners to implement the stages of writing effectively because they benefit from each other's feedback. They also confirm that all the group participants have the right to give comments, to evaluate, to ask questions, and to give suggestions, which develops the quality of the final product.

d. Could you describe how you implement the collaborative writing strategy in your teaching to help students develop argumentative writing?

Most of the participants (N = 18, 80%) agree that there are some stages that teachers should follow to implement the collaborative writing strategy successfully while teaching writing. The first stage is about introducing students to the steps of writing a good paragraph. The second stage is about dividing students into several groups. The third stage is about determining an interesting topic that is related to the subject matter. The fourth stage is about implementing the writing processes, such as brainstorming, drafting, revising, editing, and publishing, that can help in producing a good text. The fifth stage is about the teacher

encouraging his students to collaborate and helping them whenever they need it, and the last stage is about presentation and evaluation.

e. What type of writing processes do you find most effective in the collaborative writing strategy ?

All the participants (N = 20, 100%) agree that the brainstorming stage is very crucial in the writing process because students actively interact with each other to discuss the topic and generate more information about it. At this stage, the group members generate many ideas to develop an argumentative text. They do not care about focusing on high-quality ideas because what is important at this stage is to come up with as many ideas as possible depending on their prior knowledge about the topic, but they did not deny the importance of other writing processes, such as drafting, editing, and revising, because they help students organize their ideas and revise their language to come up with a cohesive and coherent piece of writing.

f. What challenges do you face when incorporating collaborative writing in the classroom ?

Regarding the above question, all the participants (N = 20, 100%) confirm that the collaborative writing strategy encourages collaboration, autonomous learning, critical thinking, peer learning, and active participation toward successfully writing a good text. However, implementing such an activity requires a lot of effort, especially with large classes because, according to their answers, it is very difficult to rely on group work activities with a class consisting of more than forty students. They also add that time constraints are another barrier to using collaborative writing strategies in the classroom. Therefore, they rarely use it for teaching writing.

g. What recommendations would you give to other teachers who want to implement such a strategy in their classroom ?

All the participants (N = 20, 100%) recommend that teachers should incorporate the collaborative writing strategy while teaching writing despite its challenges. This is because it fosters collaboration, active participation, and peer learning.

Writing is one of the four language skills that involves communicating a message through letters and symbols. It is a mental effort to create ideas, think about how to express them, and organize them into a text that can be understood by a reader. To effectively teach this skill, teachers should adopt activities that encourage students' collaboration and creativity. The collaborative writing strategy is believed to be one of the teaching techniques that fosters students' cooperation and productivity to develop an argumentative text. It involves students writing in groups, reading different references to generate ideas, discussing the stages of writing, and evaluating their writing. The main purpose of the present study is to examine teachers' perceptions about the extent to which this writing technique can improve learners' writing skills to develop argumentative writing. The findings indicate that the participants have a positive standpoint toward incorporating the collaborative writing strategy in the classroom.

Based on their answers, all of them confirm that such an activity develops students' writing skills and increases their interaction with each other. To explain, when learners are given the chance to perform a writing task in groups, they can benefit from each other by giving comments, suggestions, and evaluations. They can also motivate each other in the processes of brainstorming ideas, gathering and organizing information, drafting, revising, and editing the writing task, which develops the quality of the final product. Therefore, the collaborative writing technique is based on the principles of the process-based approach, which views that developing argumentative writing can be carried out in several stages, and each one plays a significant role in the process of writing. The findings also stipulate that brainstorming is the foundational stage in which students collaborate to conduct research about the topic, generate and discuss ideas, develop an outline for the topic, and select and organize ideas. However, even though the collaborative writing strategy participates in improving students' writing skills and instills in the members of the group an attitude of cooperation, scaffolding, and tolerance between opinions to develop an argumentative text, it has some drawbacks. According to the findings of the present study, implementing such an activity requires a lot of effort, especially with large classes because it is very challenging to rely on group work activities with a class consisting of more than forty students. Besides, time constraints are another problem that teachers face when using the collaborative writing strategy in the classroom. Therefore, the researcher suggests that implementing the collaborative writing strategy in classrooms with a small number of students can be an effective way to create a motivating learning environment where students can collaborate to discuss the topic and generate more information about it. With large classes, however, the teacher can still implement such an activity to improve students' argumentative writing by giving them some writing tasks to perform in groups outside the classroom. To explain, in the classroom, the teacher and his students should work on dividing students into several groups. Then, the teacher should assign a topic for the groups. The topic should be interesting, related to the subject matter, and meet students' needs. Finally, both the teacher and his students should agree on the timeline for completing the writing task. This can motivate students to perform the task because they will not work under their teacher's control. It can allow them enough time to read different references, such as books and articles that can help them understand their topic clearly, gather more data about it, discuss it freely, and benefit from each other's feedback.

In a nutshell, developing students' writing skills requires teachers to rely on different writing techniques, among which there is the collaborative writing strategy. The latter motivates and encourages students to write more effectively because they can help each other in the processes of brainstorming ideas, gathering and organizing information, drafting, revising, and editing the writing. Based on the findings of the present study, when this writing strategy is implemented efficaciously, students can develop their writing skills and produce an argumentative text of high quality. However, the study recommends that an experimental study should be conducted to find out the impact of the collaborative writing strategy on students' writing skills.

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