



Chinese-speaking ESL pre-university students' perceptions of the effectiveness of collaborative planning in an academic writing course

Christine Jalleh^{1a} , Omer Hassan Ali Mahfoodh^b 

^a *Universiti Sains Malaysia, Penang, Malaysia*

^b *Universiti Sains Malaysia, Penang, Malaysia*

APA Citation:

Jalleh, C., & Mahfoodh, O.H.A. (2021). Chinese-speaking ESL pre-university students' perceptions of the effectiveness of collaborative planning in an academic writing course. *Journal of Language and Linguistic Studies*, 17(Special Issue 2), 1174-1189.

Submission Date: 24/09/2020

Acceptance Date: 13/01/2021

Abstract

Previous studies examined benefits of collaborative writing, but the effectiveness of collaborative planning in academic writing courses has not been adequately addressed. Thus, this study examined Chinese-speaking ESL pre-university students' perceptions of the effectiveness of collaborative planning in an academic writing course in the Malaysian ESL context. This study is a qualitative research study in which data were collected using journal writing. The students in an academic writing course were requested to keep journals throughout the course. Specifically, they were requested to write about collaborative planning in terms of its effectiveness, challenges they faced, and suggestions for its improvement. Data were coded and analysed thematically. The analysis of the data revealed that Chinese-speaking ESL pre-university students perceived collaborative planning as an important instructional approach in which they could share ideas, develop their writing skills, and build their self-confidence. The study also showed that the students encountered some challenges, which resulted from their unfamiliarity with this approach. Suggestions for the improvement of collaborative planning given by the participants reveal that they enjoyed working collaboratively in groups at the planning stage of writing.

© 2021 JLLS and the Authors - Published by JLLS.

Keywords: Academic writing; collaborative writing; collaborative planning; Chinese-speaking; ESL

1. Introduction

As a form of communication, writing is used to express ideas such as plans, recommendations, values and commitment (Sparks, Song, Brantley, & Liu, 2014). In many disciplines, writing ability is considered to be a professional necessity (Flaherty & Choi, 2013). For example, in academic, technical, scientific, administrative and commercial professions, writing is crucial for the dissemination of knowledge and for the expression of new thoughts and ideas (Graham, Gillespie, & McKeown, 2013; Lea & Stierer, 2009; O'Halloran & Deale, 2004). In ESL and EFL contexts, students' academic success,

¹ Corresponding author.

E-mail address: christine@usm.my

achievement and evaluation of their thinking ability and learning depend on their command of writing skills (Han & Hiver, 2018; Hyland, 2019). Further, students can demonstrate their understanding and interpretation of concepts and theories in their courses through writing. Student-writers need to recognize that mastering the complexities of the writing process does not only help them attain their immediate goals of composing well-written essays, reports and research papers but also serves them far beyond the confines of the English classroom. The ability to write good texts is one of the requirements that ESL students should have in the Malaysian schools and at tertiary levels (Aluemalai & Maniam, 2020). The ability to write is required at tertiary levels in the Malaysian ESL context because assessment of students is based on the written form, obtained either through coursework or written examination (Abidin & Fong, 2012; Akhtar, Hassan, & Saidalvi, 2020; Mahfoodh, 2014).

After the introduction of the process approach for teaching writing in 1980s, most of the teachers of writing all over the world, including the Malaysian ESL context, have adopted this approach in which students are required to be engaged in cycles of planning, translating and reviewing (Zamel, 1982). In this approach, writing is viewed as a recursive process where student-writers are encouraged to use invention strategies to generate ideas, which are then organized into a logical plan for the production of a final written text. In writing, task planning is an implementation variable that has resulted in several research since the pioneering study by Ellis (1987). In the planning stage, students are instructed on the steps/process of setting goals and generating and organizing ideas (Graham & Sandmel, 2011). This writing plan would then be transformed into written drafts that are revised and edited. Ultimately, students are given the time and opportunity to discover their own writing processes. However, the employment of any approach in teaching writing cannot be easy, especially for ESL/EFL students who have been reported to have some difficulties in writing (Ariyanti & Fitriana, 2017; Belkhir & Benyelles, 2017; Bian & Wang, 2016).

The literature has shown that ESL/EFL students encounter a wide range of difficulties in writing (Fareed, Ashraf, & Bilal, 2016; Maznun, Monsefi, & Nimehchisalem, 2017). To help ESL/EFL students overcome difficulties in academic writing, researchers have examined the effectiveness of various pedagogical frameworks such as formative assessment, peer feedback and collaborative writing (Mohamadi, 2018; Saidon, Said, Soh, & Husnin, 2018; Yang, Badger, & Yu, 2006; Yüce & Ataç, 2019). Although collaborative writing has received noticeable attention from researchers, previous studies lack the focus on understanding ESL students' perceptions of the effectiveness of collaborative planning. Further, previous studies have not examined Chinese-speaking ESL students' experience in collaborative planning. These are the two gaps this study sought to fill. The contributions of this study lie in its focus on Chinese-speaking students because in the Confucian philosophy on education, students are required to sit and listen quietly to the teacher; group discussions are not common in such settings as "Chinese tend to communicate mainly with people whom they know, and within their circles of acquaintances" (Bond, 1991, p. 52). Thus, it is interesting to know how these students perceive working collaboratively in a learning environment where they have to talk with their classmates and discuss ideas that can be used for the production of academic texts.

1.1. Literature review

Various studies examined collaborative writing in terms of benefits, challenges and effect on various aspects of a written text. Further, collaborative writing, which has been practiced in various educational settings (Speck, Johnson, Dice, & Heaton, 1999), has gained momentum and popularity in ESL/EFL writing contexts (Shehadeh, 2011; Storch, 2005). The benefits of collaborative writing have been reported by various scholars. For example, Storch (2005) investigated collaborative writing and reported that collaboration enabled the students to have opportunities to gather ideas and exchange feedback in order to improve the text. Further, Kessler (2013) argued that learners write the content and learn from

their co-authors when they collaborate on a shared document. The pedagogical value of collaborative writing is grounded in social constructivist theories of learning. Based on the work of Vygotsky and Bruner, the social constructivism theory, cognitive development is perceived as a socially situated process (Kim, 2001). Building on their knowledge and skill through social interaction with more capable others, who provide them with scaffolding, a metaphor introduced by Wood, Bruner, and Ross (1976), therefore learners are able to advance their current levels of development. In teaching writing, planning has been reported to be an important stage where students can be scaffolded to plan effectively (Johnson, Mercado, & Acevedo, 2012; Ong, 2014). In classrooms, teachers and fellow students can both provide the scaffolding. Previous research reported that students in pair work or group work settings are able to support one another in learning processes such as knowledge building (Lai & Law, 2006), critical thinking (Sharma & Hannafin, 2005), problem-solving (Garton & Fawcett, 2005), and language acquisition (Donato, 1994).

Very few studies have examined collaborative planning in ESL/EFL contexts. However, early studies in the Chinese context have examined peer work and how it can help students in learning. For example, Carson and Nelson (1996) were motivated to undertake a study on peer response groups, which looked into Chinese students' perceptions of its use. In accordance with their hypotheses, their research revealed that Chinese students were hesitant in critiquing their friends' drafts. They also refrained from disagreeing with their peers or claiming authority for writing. Incidentally, the peer response group experience left them with feelings of vulnerability. Further, three studies on collaborative planning were carried out in the EFL Iranian context: Amiryousefi (2017), Ameri-Golestan and Dousti (2015), and Tavakoli and Rezazadeh (2014). Ameri-Golestan and Dousti (2015) and Tavakoli and Rezazadeh (2014) had a similar purpose as they intended to measure the pre-task planning effects on Iranian EFL students. Specifically, these two studies compared the effect of individual and collaborative pre-task planning and revealed that collaborative planning resulted in better writing performance compared to the writing performance of students who completed their tasks using individual planning. Tavakoli and Rezazadeh (2014) reported that collaborative planning helped students to produce accurate textual output, while individual planning resulted in greater fluency. In another study in the Iranian EFL context, Amiryousefi (2017) focused on the effects of three approaches on a computer-mediated complex L2 writing task. These three approaches are individual planning, student-led collaborative planning and teacher-monitored collaborative planning. He reported that the three approaches promoted students' writing performance. However, he highlighted that the teacher's role is important in the employment of these approaches. Recently, Kang and Lee (2019) examined the effects of individual compared with collaborative pre-task planning on the writing of Korean EFL students. Although they reported that collaborative planning and individual planning were useful, they highlighted that collaborative planning was better than individual planning in improving fluency and syntactic complexity. However, collaborative planning was not useful for the development of accuracy in students' writing.

Previous researchers have pointed out that "more research is required to shed light on different aspects of collaboration in second language writing" (Ameri-Golestan & Dousti, 2015, p. 26). Despite the interesting findings reported in previous studies, there is still a dearth of in-depth knowledge about the effects collaborative planning on writing apprehension levels and how learners perceive the effectiveness of collaborative planning. For example, Tavakoli and Rezazadeh (2014) have clearly identified that "collaborative planning has received scant attention" (p. 85). Thus, this study addressed this gap.

1.2. Research questions

This study addressed the following three research questions:

RQ 1: How do Chinese-speaking ESL pre-university students perceive the effectiveness of collaborative planning?

RQ2: What are the challenges faced by Chinese-speaking ESL pre-university students in using collaborative planning in their academic writing course?

RQ3: What are Chinese-speaking ESL pre-university students' suggestions for the improvement of collaborative planning?

2. Method

2.1. Research design

This study is a qualitative enquiry in which students' journals were used for data collection. This research design helped the researchers to collect in-depth data with authentic responses from Chinese-speaking ESL students who were given time to respond to the journal entries, which focused on students' experience about collaborative learning (Creswell, 2007; Patton, 2002). In a qualitative inquiry, researchers aim at acquiring rich information through working with small samples of participants (Miles & Huberman, 1994; Williams, 2019). Thus, the design of this study is an exploratory research design which was used to gain an in-depth understanding of students' experience (Williams, 2019). Specifically, this study sought to identify how Chinese-speaking ESL students perceived the effectiveness of collaborative planning in their academic writing course.

2.2. Participants

The context of this study is a private college offering courses at certificate, diploma and degree programmes in Penang, Malaysia. Most of the students in this private college are Malaysian Chinese. Most of the students enrolled at the college after their Sijil Peperiksaan Malaysia (SPM) or equivalent secondary school certificates. These students had the choice of enrolling in American, Australian or British twinning programmes, depending on the scores they obtained in the placement tests on English and Mathematics. Students who score 50% and above in the placement tests are eligible to enrol in these programs. The American credit transfer programme requires students to enrol in general education courses for two semesters before majoring in fields of study in the third semester. The English Composition 1 course is compulsory to all students. The objective of this course is to introduce students to academic English composition besides helping them to develop various skills required for academic writing purposes. Through a series of writing assignments comprised of various patterns of rhetoric (illustration, descriptive, comparison and contrast, and argumentative), the students learn to develop and support a thesis statement and demonstrate logical thinking.

Thirty-two participants were selected purposively from the American credit transfer program for two reasons. The American credit transfer programme requires students to enrol in general education courses for two semesters before embarking on their major fields of studies in the third semester, which are typical of pre-university programmes in many private institutions of higher learning in Malaysia. The General Education component requires students to enrol in at least five courses including anthropology, introductory English composition, critical thinking, Computer Studies, Mathematics, psychology or sociology. Therefore, these students were in an immediate need of the ability to acquire academic writing skills – synthesis, organization of ideas, writing for various purposes – common in undergraduate programs. For these students, the ability to synthesize from multiple sources of information, organize their ideas and write for various purposes was expected to promote the critical thinking and communication of ideas encouraged in higher education. Second, the ability to write in English is expected to be a formidable challenge for these students due to the direct switch from students who

come from a Chinese language medium of instruction (during primary school) or a Malay language (Bahasa Malaysia) medium of instruction to English. For these reasons, these students might be more receptive to writing instruction that enables them to synthesize information, organize ideas and write for different contexts in English for American university programmes.

2.3. Data collection and analysis

Data were collected through journals as the students were requested to keep weekly journals. To obtain students' perception of the effect of collaborative planning, the instruction in English Composition 1 focused on the use of the process approach with emphasis on collaborative planning. Students were exposed to group brainstorming, planning, drafting and revising. Each unit in the course was taught in five stages: (1) set induction, (2) task evaluation, (3) brainstorming and planning, (4) drafting, and (5) revision and editing. In the brainstorming and planning phase, the students were involved in collaborative planning. They were also encouraged to disregard grammatical correctness and focus on generating and organizing ideas instead. The instructor circulated the room and was ready to offer suggestions when needed, but she did not intervene without invitation. To maintain a product-oriented balance and meet the demands of academic contexts, the students were required to have a rough outline of ideas ready by the end of the session. To begin the drafting phase, the rough outline was allocated to all members of the group – requiring each member to draft a portion of the final document at home. The students were asked to bring a rough draft to class the following session. This was followed by the revising and editing phase which was based on the revision guides in their class references. The students were encouraged to note down their impressions about collaborative planning in their weekly journals. They were asked to submit their journals to the researcher at the end of the course.

The data were analysed thematically. First, we read the journals in order to identify the major themes. Second, we coded the data based on the research questions of the study. We identified six codes and connected them to the three themes of the study. As shown in Table 1, there are three themes; each one answers one research question. Theme One has three codes Theme Two has only code but Theme Three has two codes.

Table 1. Themes and codes for analysing the data

	Themes	Codes	Description
1	Perception of the effectiveness of collaborative planning	Sharing ideas	Students' description of collaborative planning as a way of sharing ideas
		Improvement of writing skills	Students' description of collaborative planning as a good instructional approach for improving writing skills
		Building self-confidence	Students' perception of collaborative writing as a way of building self-confidence
2	Challenges in collaborative planning	Students' challenges in collaborative planning	Students' expression of the challenges they faced in the employment of collaborative planning
3	Improvement of collaborative planning	Drawbacks of collaborative planning	Students' description of the drawbacks of collaborative planning
		Suggestions for improvement collaborative planning	Suggestions given by the students for the improvement of collaborative planning

3. Results

This section reports the results of the study, which are supported by excerpts from the students' dialogue journals. A total of 32 dialogue journals containing entries were examined. The following three sub-sections report the answers to the three research questions addressed in this study.

3.1. Perception of the effectiveness of collaborative planning

3.1.1. Sharing ideas

The analysis of the journals showed that the students perceived collaborative planning as a beneficial instructional framework because it helped them to share ideas with each other. The students expressed in their journals that collaborative planning helped them to discuss their plans for the writing task in a relaxing situation, as shown in Excerpts 1-5. Sharing ideas helped the students to put ideas together in order to plan for effective writing products. The students also wrote that through this approach, they could negotiate what they wanted to include in their writing products by adding, deleting or modifying their ideas.

Excerpt 1

"I like this...We can share our opinion with each other. I can see it as a very relaxing environment because we can talk while we are doing our assignment. Somehow, when I'm in wrong decision, they will correct my mistake so that I won't repeat again". (Participant 1)

Excerpt 2

"This is the most interesting part. Everyone can share their opinion... Actually, H. is a nice leader too, but he will do better if he is a member because "a good member not equal to good leader". I learnt a lot from them and feel joyful, happy and un-pressure to mixed with them". (Participant 2)

Excerpt 3

"Doing in group is cool because many mouths take part in the discussion hours. And at the end come out an output which makes everyone feel happy. And did learn a lot not just for the part of friendship and cooperating with friendship (communicating)". (Participant 13)

Excerpt 4

"I also like doing assignment in groups because we could share our ideas together and made discussion with each other. I thought it was better than doing assignment alone". (Participant 21)

Excerpt 5

"Doing class assignments in groups is great because we can share our opinion together. Besides, it is not so stressful to me". (Participant 14)

3.1.2. Improvement of writing skills

The analysis of journals written by the participants also revealed that they found collaborative planning useful because it helped them to learn how to improve their writing and develop an effective text. Excerpt 4-6 clearly show students' justifications for the usefulness of collaborative planning. The students pointed out that collaborative planning helped them to develop writing skills such as writing the thesis statement. Further, the students reported that collaborative planning was effective for the idea generation and idea organization stages of the writing process.

Excerpt 6

"Today English class we learn the editing. In this topic, we know that an essay needs to check the subject-verb agreement, consistency, parallelism which we had learn it before but never apply to the essay. We had to do the exercise". (Participant 14)

Excerpt 7

"Today no more paragraph. We were given an essay to read and find out the thesis statement, topic sentences from each paragraph and supporting sentences also. It not a big different from what we learn only the thesis statement is new thing". (Participant 19)

Excerpt 8

"We continued to discuss the descriptive essay – 'Disney's Perfect World'. We needed to read through the essay to look for the thesis statement, topic sentences, main point and conclusion. Besides that, we have to find out the words or sentences that according to the sight, hearing, touch, taste and smell. It was quite difficult to find for taste, touch and smell in this essay". (Participant 17)

3.1.3. Building confidence

The students reported that collaborative planning encouraged them to build self-confidence. As shown in the Excerpts 9-11, the students revealed that collaborative planning helped them to trust their abilities and to learn how to manage the writing tasks. This reflect the impact of working in groups because this can help students to meet and exchange opinions. Through this, the impact of working with others can be effective in enhancement of self-confidence.

Excerpt 9

"It is a good way for classmate to meet and know each other. Opinions are exchanged while discussion is going on. From this way, I learn many things and trust my abilities...etc". (Participant 15)

Excerpt 10

"When I write alone, I feel stupid because I have no ideas...when I write in a group, my ideas are not so 'stupid'. I can laugh if other people feel funny about my 'stupid ideas'. When I have a group members, I can go home and think of more ideas for our essay". (Participant 18)

Excerpt 11

"Group work is not boring...I do not feel sleepy. I don't know many English words so chatting and laughing with my buddies in the group work...I can think and remember the new words we find from Google...My English-speaking friends also say many new words or correct my grammar...I can write for my essay exam next time". (Participant 7)

3.2. Students' challenges in collaborative planning

The students were also asked to write on the challenges and problems they encountered in the employment of collaborative planning. The excerpts given below reveal that the challenges encountered by the students in collaborative planning include limitation of time and students' concerns about grammatical accuracy. The analysis of journals showed that some students tended to be more apprehensive, focusing on the difficulties they faced with approaching the writing assignments individually. In some of the entries, the students expressed their fears, doubts and insecurities about their writing assignments, relating the apprehension they felt to similar apprehension felt in a formal examination setting. In general, these entries included rationalizations for the need of individual writing environments, which were preparation for examination settings. The excerpts below reflect that collaborative planning made the students anxious. This feeling can be attributed to the fact that Chinese-speaking ESL students in this study did not have prior experience in terms of working collaboratively in writing classes. Although the students were encouraged to ignore grammatical correctness at the planning stage, some of the students expressed in their journals that they were very concerned about grammatical mistakes (refer to Excerpt 14). Excerpt 15 and Excerpt 18 reflect students' fear of problems and mistakes in their writing because they had been used to dependence on their teacher for scaffolding not their peers.

Excerpt 12

“It’s bad. I don’t know why. I just feel that it just very lonely on doing this assignment. I’m afraid I’ll do the wrong assignment. Somehow, it is hard to find people to discuss doing. So, I won’t really interested (sic) in doing assignment alone”. (Participant 5)

Excerpt 13

“I have to think how to plan, write an essay. Take me a lot of time to do that assignment and cannot do well on my own”. (Participant 8)

Excerpt 14

“I’m not prefer this way because ideas and fact are not enough. Maybe got grammar mistake, more people can correct right sentence”. (Participant 12)

Excerpt 15

“This is quite difficult because there is no one that I can ask for advice on the topic but if class I can ask Miss. This has helped me to read a lot of materials on my own to get ideas. Helped me develop more faster (sic) and in the time given. It gave me practice to think faster in pressure. This is good for exams”. (Participant 12)

Excerpt 16

“The weakness in vocabulary and grammar make me feel very hard to express my opinion and feeling when doing class assignments on my own. So, I need more assistant and the help from my friends and lecturers”. (Participant 21)

Excerpt 17

“This can help us be more prepared for the final exam paper because we only have three hours to write two essays. Luckily, our assignments are done in groups and not individually. I find it hard but at least this can help me to improve my essay writing for the finals. It also makes my brain to think more efficiently for ideas”. (Participant 11)

Excerpt 18

“I can’t learn much from it. It seems like doing exam paper, giving me practise to write without any helps”. (Participant 18)

3.3. Suggestions for the improvement of collaborative planning

The third research question focused on understanding students’ perceptions of drawbacks of the collaborative planning and their suggestions for improvement of this domain in teaching writing for ESL students. Before asking students to write on their suggestions for improvement, we asked them to identify the drawbacks of collaborative planning based on their experience they had in the writing course.

3.3.1. Drawbacks of collaborative planning

The students in their journals provided interesting information about things that they did not like in collaborative planning. Further, they revealed their own concerns regarding their participation in collaborative planning in the writing course. As reflected in Excerpt 19, Participant 20 expressed that working in groups is not fair due to the existence of students from different writing abilities in one group. She also pointed out that being in a group with students with good abilities in writing would be better. A similar perception can be observed in Excerpt 20. Further, Participant 15 in Excerpt 21 expressed the same worry about collaborative planning because she felt that students did not have much to do when they worked in groups. In Excerpt 22, Participant 29 had a similar perception. Some students expressed that some students were not cooperative when they worked in groups. This shows that the students considered this as one of the drawbacks of collaborative writing (refer to Excerpt 24). Few students expressed that doing planning in groups restricted their ideas (refer to Excerpt 25).

Excerpt 19

“I don’t like group assignments. Actually, it is not fair to do assignments in groups. If you are in the same group with good writers, you feel relieved and not worry about the final marks”. (Participant 20)

Excerpt 20

“I do not like this because it is not fair to the other students. The good students will probably do the work and the weaker ones will just meditate”. (Participant 26)

Excerpt 21

“Hmm actually this is a bit different...in one group, it felt more like I was doing it on my own (I just didn’t have to write that much) and the second one I was grouped with someone who was the one with all the good ideas and so nobody wanted to contribute any...”. (Participant 15)

Excerpt 22

“I really find it helpful to work alone because I really put in effort to make my essay looked greater like check out the unknown words”. (Participant 29)

Excerpt 23

“I thought that was good for me to work alone. It was because we had limited time. So, we just wrote down what ideas that came to mind and we also didn’t have much time to think about it. Besides that, it was fun to see what ideas I could get on my own without the discussion with other friends”. (Participant 8)

Excerpt 24

“They are quite uncooperative and irresponsible ... Finally, we finished our brainstorm for the assignment for the assignment for three persons”. (Participant 10)

Excerpt 25

“Last time when I wrote an essay, I just simply draft an idea on a paper and then start writing my essays, I don’t know what I write about. Now, we were required to write out an outline before starting write the essay, the outline may be helpful to use to make our essays more systematic but sometimes I feel it restricted our ideas...I learned a lot during this topic and I enjoyed learning that”. (Participant 21)

3.3.2. Students’ suggestions for the improvement of collaborative planning

As the Chinese-speaking students in this study had not experienced collaborative writing, they were asked to give their suggestions in their journals for the improvement of this approach. The qualitative analysis of the data obtained from students’ journals revealed that the students gave some interesting and useful suggestions for the improvement of collaborative writing. For example, some of the students suggested that it would better to give different topics to different collaborative groups (refer to Excerpt 26). This suggestion is interesting for the improvement of collaborative planning because when each group has a different topic, the members in each group may be encouraged to focus on their topic and do not intend to get ideas from other groups in the class. Some of the students found that working collaboratively is not fair due to the mixed abilities within each group. Other students expressed that time was not enough to finish the planning stage. Taking this into account, some students suggested that the students should be given enough time to do the planning stage of writing (refer to Excerpt 27 and Excerpt 28).

However, these suggestions given by the students for the improvement of collaborative planning reflect their worries, which can be attributed to the students’ lack of understanding the significance of collaborative planning. More practice in this instructional approach may be essential in order to help students embrace this approach and find it useful.

Excerpt 26

“As my opinion, this is the one I prefer because I am a friendly student, a lot of my friends like to invite me to join their group, but I hope you can give different topic in the assignment for each student and do in a group because every people in a group will not lazy”. (Participant 4)

Excerpt 27

“Regarding in class group work, I think time is not enough to produce a decent writing with everybody contributes the assignment. Basically, in this case, you’re going to get a lead writer and several helpers”.

Excerpt 28

“In doing our group assignment, there are a lot of difficulties. The time we got are very limited, we were very rushed. Another difficulty is our vocabulary was not good, even we had an idea, we can’t use the right word to describe it. At last, we manage to finish it by splitting the essay out, each people wrote one paragraph because we had different opinion and ideas. Then we mixed it together to form an essay”. (Participant 7)

4. Discussion

This study revealed that ESL students praised the value of collaborative planning as a stage before writing. This qualitative study was conducted to examine how Chinese-speaking ESL pre-university students perceived the effectiveness of collaborative planning in an academic writing course. Interestingly, this study showed that Chinese-speaking ESL pre-university students pointed out that collaborative planning was useful in terms of sharing ideas, building self-confidence and improvement of writing skills. When in collaborative writing situations, the students were collectively involved in the various stages of the writing process, from idea generation, to organization of ideas to drafting to revising and editing, which allowed them more time on task and an environment conducive to engagement in the writing process. Cheng, Chang, Chen, and Liao (2010) observed that most ESL students joining colleges and universities in the United States or Canada have learnt English in skill-based courses through rote memorization, and grammar-based instruction which focused on language accuracy. Compared to this collaborative environment, students from traditional writing instruction backgrounds were not given the opportunity to progress through the writing process, in many cases, having to rush through or skip altogether the idea generation stage straight to the drafting stage, with expectations to produce flawless writing in the specified time, which impedes the development of fluency in writing. In earlier studies, Braine (1996) supports this as he found that students in the collaborative atmosphere of ESL classes were less anxious and inhibited, an element he feels, is the reason why these students could share their knowledge and practise the language, leading to better performance in writing. Rogers and Horton (1992) found that collaborative writing allows the group to examine rhetorical situations and their language choices while it encouraged the use of a more recursive, sophisticated writing process like that of expert writers.

In approaching the writing task as a group, students had the opportunity to observe different composing processes at work and the writing strategies employed by other students. This enabled them to reflect on their own writing process, adopt the writing strategies demonstrated and apply them, which resulted in a marked improvement in their overall writing skills. This finding supports the study by Schweiker-Marra and Marra (2000) that examined the effects of group prewriting activities on writing apprehension levels, where students who participated in group writing activities felt less anxious about writing. The presence of peers in a collaborative writing environment creates a supportive environment as the students share the joint responsibility of composing a written product. Neumann and McDonough (2014) reported that collaborative prewriting helped English L2 university students write paragraphs that received higher analytic ratings compared to those who did prewriting individually. Recently, McDonough, De Vleeschauwer, and Crawford (2019) found that collaborative prewriting helped Thai

EFL students write problem/solution paragraphs that received higher analytic ratings and more accurate paragraphs than those written by students who planned individually. This study revealed that students could build self-confidence and improve their writing skills because collaboration means that students must have joint responsibility over the production of texts. This joint responsibility promoted the importance of co-ownership and encouraged them to be responsible in making decisions while planning for the writing output. This study showed that collaborative planning helped Chinese-speaking students to build self-confidence which is important because it can force them to believe in their abilities and to know how to manage the challenges in collaborative planning.

The findings of this study are consistent with some of the previous studies that have shown that discussion in a collaborative manner creates a meaningful learning environment for teachers and students to interact, and for students to learn (Rabow, Charness, Kippermann, & Radcliffe-Vasile, 2000). Similar to the findings of previous studies (e.g., Ameri-Golestan & Dousti, 2015; Amiryousefi, 2017; Tavakoli & Rezazadeh, 2014), our study revealed the effectiveness of collaborative planning in teaching writing. In this study, Chinese-speaking students have shown their positive perceptions of the effectiveness of collaborative planning because it helped them to interact with the members in the group. This study showed that in collaborative planning, “students are usually exposed to more unplanned and unstructured nature of classroom discourse”, which helped them engage in real learning and develop the acquisition of knowledge, analytical and critical thinking skills (Lee, 1999, p. 255). The participation structure in collaborative planning, to a large extent, helped students to share ideas that can help them to produce effective written assignments. At the same time, the groups noted problems associated with collaborative writing environments such as time constraints, lack of tolerance for other members’ ideas/perspectives, time management, and lack of vocabulary for written expression of the groups’ collective ideas. Action research by Yüce and Aksu Ataç (2019) reported similar findings where prospective foreign language teachers studying at an English Language Teaching (ELT) department of a public university in Turkey were also not in favour of their peers’ evaluations and behaviours in dealing with mistakes without checking correct usages. These findings support the recommendations by McDonough et al. (2019) that scaffolding the collaborative writing task by providing explicit instruction and visual tools to assist with the generation and organization of ideas into a writing plan may enhance collaboration.

Consistent with previous studies, this study has shown that sharing ideas in a collaborative manner can be useful for ESL students. For example, this study showed that ESL students learnt more about writing when they were given opportunities to share ideas and plan their writing with others. In sharing ideas collaboratively, our study showed that ESL students could learn about the writing process and showed that they developed their writing ability.

5. Conclusions

Thus, it can be concluded that collaborative planning in ESL writing classes can be a feasible and important approach for the development of writing skills. The findings of this study showed that Chinese-speaking ESL students enjoyed the planning stage in writing through the use of collaborative planning where they had to share ideas and be responsible over their texts. Although this study was confined to a pre-university ESL writing class in a private college in the Malaysian ESL context, its findings may be applicable to other ESL writing classes of a similar setting elsewhere such as matriculation, pre-university programmes and university writing centres. Accordingly, instructional design should include the development of learning environments where ESL students can engage in activities that encourage social interaction. Curriculum planners and teachers can include collaborative planning with the aims to prepare ESL students with post-secondary skills.

Collaborative writing also plays an important role in the preparation of students for future professional roles. In this study, students expressed that they experienced negotiation skills, learnt how to challenge each other's thinking, worked with ambiguity, and dealt with trust, responsibility and logistics issues that simulate situations in the workplace. In this way, the collaborative planning process can provide students with social interaction and problem solving with others in meaningful situations.

5.1. Suggestions for future research

This study has some limitations in terms of the sample of the study and the nature of the research design. The sample of this study included only Chinese-speaking ESL students in a pre-university context. Future researchers may consider other ESL samples such as undergraduate and postgraduate students to examine their perceptions of collaborative planning. This study is a qualitative inquiry in which we explored Chinese-speaking ESL students' perceptions of the effectiveness of collaborative planning. In other words, we did not measure the effect of this approach on students' writing products. Thus, future research may consider examining the effect of using collaborative planning on the quality of writing through the assessment of students' texts in collaborative planning and individual planning. Further investigations may be carried out and use experimental research designs in order to see the effect of collaborative planning on the fluency, accuracy and complexity of writing among Chinese-speaking ESL students. Additionally, since the Chinese-speaking ESL students in this study were provided with only 12 sessions of collaborative writing, the results should be interpreted within this framework. Future research may replicate this study in order to validate the results and provide further insights in relation to the effect of collaborative planning on ESL/EFL students' writing apprehension.

6. Ethics Committee Approval

The authors confirm that the study does not need ethics committee approval according to the research integrity rules in their country (Date of confirmation: 24/09/2020).

References

- Abidin, M. J. Z., & Fong, C. L. (2012). The effect of process writing practice on the writing quality of form one students: A case study. *Asian Social Science*, 8(3), 88-99. doi:10.5539/ass.v8n3p88.
- Akhtar, R., Hassan, H., & Saidalvi, A. (2020). The effects of ESL student's attitude on academic writing apprehensions and academic writing challenges. *International Journal of Psychosocial Rehabilitation*, 24(05), 5404-5412. doi:10.37200/IJPR/V24I5/PR2020247.
- Aluemalai, K., & Maniam, M. (2020). Writing strategies utilized by successful and unsuccessful ESL undergraduate students in writing classroom. *Journal of English Language and Culture*, 10(2), 100-110. doi:dx.doi.org/xxx/xxxxxxxx.
- Ameri-Golestan, A., & Dousti, E. (2015). Collaborative vs. individual task planning and Iranian EFL learners' writing performance. *International Journal of Foreign Language Teaching and Research*, 3(12), 25-40. Retrieved from http://jfl.iaun.ac.ir/article_560101_353d140e0c0025953437817267df77c2.pdf
- Amiryousefi, M. (2017). The differential effects of collaborative vs. individual prewriting planning on computer-mediated L2 writing: transferability of task-based linguistic skills in focus. *Computer Assisted Language Learning*, 30(8), 766-786. doi:10.1080/09588221.2017.1360361.

- Ariyanti, A., & Fitriana, R. (2017). EFL students' difficulties and needs in essay writing. *International Conference on Teacher Training and Education 2017 (ICTTE 2017)*. Retrieved from <https://download.atlantispress.com/article/25885710.pdf>
- Belkhir, A., & Benyelles, R. (2017). Identifying EFL learners essay writing difficulties and sources: a move towards solution the case of second year EFL learners at Tlemcen University. *International Journal of Learning, Teaching and Educational Research*, 16(6), 80-88. Retrieved from <https://www.ijlter.org/index.php/ijlter/article/view/915/pdf>.
- Bian, X., & Wang, X. (2016). Chinese EFL undergraduates' academic writing: Rhetorical difficulties and suggestions. *Indonesian Journal of Applied Linguistics*, 6(1), 20-29. doi:10.17509/ijal.v6i1.2645.
- Bond, M. H. (1991). *Beyond the Chinese face: Insights from psychology*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Carson, J. G., & Nelson, G. L. (1996). Chinese students' perceptions of ESL peer response group interaction. *Journal of Second Language Writing*, 5(1), 1-19. doi:10.1016/S1060-3743(96)90012-0.
- Cheng, M.C., Chang, J., Chen, Y., & Liao, Y. (2010). "Do they want the same thing?" Learner perspectives on two content-based course designs in the context of English as a Foreign Language. *Asian EFL Journal*, 12(4), 67-84. Retrieved from <http://asian-efl-journal.com/PDF/Volume-12-Issue-4-Cheng.pdf>.
- Creswell, J. W. (2007). *Qualitative inquiry & research design: choosing among five approaches*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.
- DeWaelche, S. A. (2015). Critical thinking, questioning and student engagement in Korean university English courses. *Linguistics and Education*, 32, 131-147. doi:10.1016/j.linged.2015.10.003.
- Donato, R. (1994). Collective scaffolding in second language learning. In J. P. Lantolf & G. Appel (Eds.), *Vygotskian approaches to second language research* (Vol. 33-56). Norwood, NJ: Ablex
- Ellis, R. (1987). Interlanguage variability in narrative discourse: Style shifting in the use of the past tense. *Studies in second language acquisition*, 1-19. doi:10.2307/44487383.
- Fareed, M., Ashraf, A., & Bilal, M. (2016). ESL learners' writing skills: Problems, factors and suggestions. *Journal of Education and Social Sciences*, 4(2), 81-92. Retrieved from http://lcwu.edu.pk/ocd/cfiles/Professional%20Studies/PGDT/ELT-507/Handout1ESLLearnerswritingskills_2.pdf.
- Flaherty, J., & Choi, H.-S. C. (2013). Is writing important for graduate success? A preliminary investigation into the communication skills required of Hospitality and Tourism graduates. *Teaching and Learning Innovations*, 16. Retrieved from <https://journal.lib.uoguelph.ca/index.php/tli/article/view/2793>.
- Garton, A., & Fawcett, L. (2005). The effect of peer collaboration on children's problem-solving ability. *British journal of educational psychology* (2), 157-170. doi:10.1348/000709904X23411.
- Graham, S., Gillespie, A., & McKeown, D. (2013). Writing: Importance, development, and instruction. *Reading and writing*, 26(1), 1-15. doi:10.1007/s11145-012-9395-2.
- Graham, S., & Sandmel, K. (2011). The process writing approach: A meta-analysis. *The Journal of Educational Research*, 104(6), 396-407. doi:10.1080/00220671.2010.488703.

- Han, J., & Hiver, P. (2018). Genre-based L2 writing instruction and writing-specific psychological factors: The dynamics of change. *Journal of Second Language Writing*, 40, 44-59. doi:10.1016/j.jslw.2018.03.001.
- Hyland, K. (2019). *Second language writing*: Cambridge University Press.
- Johnson, M. D., Mercado, L., & Acevedo, A. (2012). The effect of planning sub-processes on L2 writing fluency, grammatical complexity, and lexical complexity. *Journal of Second Language Writing*, 21(3), 264-282. doi:10.1016/j.jslw.2012.05.011.
- Kang, S., & Lee, J.-H. (2019). Are two heads always better than one? The effects of collaborative planning on L2 writing in relation to task complexity. *Journal of Second Language Writing*, 45, 61-72. doi:10.1016/j.jslw.2019.08.001.
- Kessler, G. (2013). Collaborative language learning in co-constructed participatory culture. *Calico Journal*, 30(3), 307-322. doi:10.2307/calicojournal.30.3.307.
- Kim, B. (2001). Social constructivism. In M. Orey (Ed.), *Emerging perspectives on learning, teaching, and technology* (Vol. 1, pp. 16). Athens, Georgia: Department of Educational Psychology and Instructional Technology, University of Georgia
- Lai, M., & Law, N. (2006). Peer scaffolding of knowledge building through collaborative groups with differential learning experiences. *Journal of Educational Computing Research*, 35(2), 123-144. doi:10.2190/GW42-575W-Q301-1765.
- Lea, M. R., & Stierer, B. (2009). Lecturers' everyday writing as professional practice in the university as workplace: new insights into academic identities. *Studies in Higher Education*, 34(4), 417-428. doi:10.1080/03075070902771952.
- Lee, C. (1999). Learning through tutorial discussion and learners' culture: Some preliminary observations from the views of Hong Kong Chinese tertiary students. *Language Culture and Curriculum*, 12(3), 255-264. doi: 10.1080/07908319908666582
- Mahfoodh, O. H. A. (2014). Oral academic discourse socialisation: Challenges faced by international undergraduate students in a Malaysian public university. *International Education Studies*, 7(2), 10-17. doi:10.5539/ies.v7n2p10.
- Maznun, M. D. B., Monsefi, R., & Nimehchisalem, V. (2017). Undergraduate ESL students' difficulties in writing the introduction for research reports. *Advances in Language and Literary Studies*, 8(1), 9-16. doi:10.7575/aiac.all.v.8n.1p.9.
- McDonough, K., De Vleeschauwer, J., & Crawford, W. (2019). Exploring the benefits of collaborative prewriting in a Thai EFL context. *Language Teaching Research*, 23(6), 685-701.. doi:10.1177/1362168818773525.
- Miles, M. B., & Huberman, A. M. (1994). *Qualitative data analysis: An expanded sourcebook*. Thousand Oaks: Sage.
- Mohamadi, Z. (2018). Comparative effect of online summative and formative assessment on EFL student writing ability. *Studies in Educational Evaluation*, 59, 29-40. doi:10.1016/j.stueduc.2018.02.003.
- Neumann, H., & McDonough, K. (2014). Exploring the relationships among student preferences, prewriting tasks, and text quality in an EAP context. *Journal of English for Academic Purposes*, 15, 14-26. doi: 10.1016/j.jeap.2014.05.002.

- O'Halloran, R. M., & Deale, C. S. (2004). The importance of writing across the hospitality and tourism curriculum. *Journal of teaching in travel & tourism*, 4(2), 61-78. doi:10.1300/J172v04n02_04.
- Ong, J. (2014). How do planning time and task conditions affect metacognitive processes of L2 writers? *Journal of Second Language Writing*, 23, 17-30. doi:10.1016/j.jslw.2013.10.002.
- Patton, M. (2002). *Qualitative research and evaluation methods* (3rd Ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Rabow, J., Charness, M. A., Kippermann, J., & Radcliffe-Vasile, S. (2000). *Learning through discussion*: Waveland Press.
- Saidon, M. A., Said, N. E. M., Soh, T. M. T., & Husnin, H. (2018). ESL Students' perception of teacher's written feedback practice in Malaysian classrooms. *Creative Education*, 9(14), 2300-2310. doi:10.4236/ce.2018.914170.
- Schweikker-Marra, K.E. & Mara, W.T. (2000). Investigating the effects of prewriting activities on writing performance and anxiety of at-risk students. *Reading Psychology*, 21(2), 99-114. doi: 10.1080/02702710050084437.
- Sharma, P., & Hannafin, M. (2005). Learner perceptions of scaffolding in supporting critical thinking. *Journal of Computing in Higher Education*, 17(1), 17. Retrieved from <https://link.springer.com/content/pdf/10.1007/BF02960225.pdf>.
- Shehadeh, A. (2011). Effects and student perceptions of collaborative writing in L2. *Journal of Second Language Writing*, 20(4), 286-305. doi:10.1016/j.jslw.2011.05.010.
- Sparks, J. R., Song, Y., Brantley, W., & Liu, O. L. (2014). Assessing written communication in higher education: Review and recommendations for next-generation assessment. *ETS Research Report Series*, 2014(2), 1-52. Retrieved from <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/pdf/10.1002/ets2.12035>.
- Speck, B. W., Johnson, T. R., Dice, C. I., & Heaton, L. B. (1999). *Collaborative writing: An annotated bibliography*. Westport, CT: Greenwood Press.
- Storch, N. (2005). Collaborative writing: Product, process, and students' reflections. *Journal of Second Language Writing*, 14(3), 153-173. doi:10.1016/j.jslw.2005.05.002.
- Tavakoli, M., & Rezazadeh, M. (2014). Individual and collaborative planning conditions: Effects on fluency, complexity and accuracy in L2 argumentative writing. *Journal of Teaching Language Skills*, 32(4), 85-110. doi:10.22099/jtls.2014.1857.
- Williams, G. (2019). *Applied Qualitative Research Design*: Scientific e-Resources.
- Wood, D., Bruner, J. S., & Ross, G. (1976). The role of tutoring in problem solving. *Journal of child psychology and psychiatry*, 17(2), 89-100. doi:10.1111/j.1469-7610.1976.tb00381.x.
- Wu, M.H. (2017). Examining Mandarin Chinese teachers' cultural knowledge in relation to their capacity as successful teachers in the United States. *Asian-Pacific Journal of Second and Foreign Language Education*, 2(1), 1-19. doi:10.1016/j.linged.2015.10.003.
- Yang, M., Badger, R., & Yu, Z. (2006). A comparative study of peer and teacher feedback in a Chinese EFL writing class. *Journal of Second Language Writing*, 15(3), 179-200. doi:10.1016/j.jslw.2006.09.004.
- Yüce, E., & Aksu Ataç, B. (2019). Peer editing as a way of developing ELT students' writing skills: An action research. *Journal of Language and Linguistic Studies*, 15(4), 1226-1235. doi:10.17263/jlls.668377.

Zamel, V. (1982). Writing: The process of discovering meaning. *TESOL Quarterly*, 16(2), 195-209. doi:10.2307/3586792.

Çince konuşan ESL üniversite öncesi öğrencilerinin akademik bir yazma kursunda işbirliğine dayalı planlamanın etkililiğine ilişkin algıları

Öz

Önceki çalışmalar işbirlikçi yazmanın faydalarını incelemiştir, ancak akademik yazma derslerinde işbirliğine dayalı planlamanın etkinliği yeterince ele alınmamıştır. Bu nedenle bu çalışma, Çince konuşan ESL üniversite öncesi öğrencilerinin Malezya ESL bağlamında bir akademik yazma kursunda işbirliğine dayalı planlamanın etkililiğine ilişkin algılarını incelemiştir. Bu çalışma, verilerin günlük yazımı kullanılarak toplandığı nitel bir araştırma çalışmasıdır. Akademik yazı kursundaki öğrencilerden ders boyunca günlük tutmaları istenmiştir. Özellikle, etkinliği, karşılaştıkları zorluklar ve iyileştirilmesi için öneriler açısından işbirlikçi planlama hakkında yazmaları istendi. Veriler kodlandı ve tematik olarak analiz edildi. Verilerin analizi, Çince konuşan ESL üniversite öncesi öğrencilerinin işbirlikçi planlamayı fikirlerini paylaşabilecekleri, yazma becerilerini geliştirebilecekleri ve özgüvenlerini inşa edebilecekleri önemli bir öğretim yaklaşımı olarak algıladıklarını ortaya koydu. Çalışma ayrıca öğrencilerin bu yaklaşıma aşina olmamalarından kaynaklanan bazı zorluklarla karşılaştıklarını da gösterdi. Katılımcılar tarafından verilen işbirlikçi planlamanın iyileştirilmesine yönelik öneriler, yazmanın planlama aşamasında gruplar halinde işbirliği içinde çalışmaktan zevk aldıklarını ortaya koymaktadır.

Anahtar sözcükler: Akademik yazı; işbirlikçi yazma; işbirlikçi planlama; Çince konuşan; ESL

AUTHOR BIODATA

Christine Jalleh has a Masters in Applied Linguistics from Universiti Sains Malaysia (USM). Formerly a communications and media professional, she now teaches academic English and scientific and medical English at USM. Her research interests include second/foreign language acquisition, academic writing, intercultural communication, and applied linguistics.

Omer Hassan Ali Mahfoodh (Ph.D) is a senior lecturer at the School of Languages, Literacies and Translation at Universiti Sains Malaysia (USM). His research interests include second language writing, EAP, applied linguistics, discourse studies, and language education.