The Immediate Effects of Collaborative Writing on Omani University Students

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ABSTRACT

Collaborative writing is considered to be one of the most important approaches in the second language classroom. This paper explored the effects of practicing collaborative writing in Omani classrooms for eight teaching hours, analyzed six pairs' dialogues and, interviewed four students and their teacher. Significant immediate effects were established and an insight into students' attitudes and problems was identified. From the research, two main findings emerge; first, the immediate effects included signs of noticing and transfer of knowledge; an increase in motivation; critical reading and sharing knowledge through discussion; and second, positive attitudes of students towards collaborative writing were found. Therefore, this research recommends that Omani students require collaborative writing in the classroom and they need to be trained in it.

Key words: Collaborative Writing, Immediate Effects, Students' Perceptions

INTRODUCTION

Investigating the role of pairs and groups in language learning is a continuing concern within the applied linguistics field and has been an area of research since the 1970s. It has received this attention due to its considerable value which is supported theoretically and pedagogically. From a theoretical point of view, Vygotsky (1978) argued that society is manifested with several activities through which a child can learn and that learning occurs in a social, meaningful and collective situation and that this generates the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) (Lantolf, 2000). It is defined as the "distance between what individuals can do with assistance from another individual" (Loewen and Reinders, 2011, p.181). It is also associated with the term scaffolding (Wood et al., 1976) which refers to the "help that an expert language user provides to a novice and this scaffolding helps L2 learner gain further control over the language" (Loewen and Reinders, 2011, p.152). An example of scaffolding is that a teacher can make the task easier for the learner (Wood et al., 1976). In the language classroom, the teacher encourages students to learn by providing information and explaining and clarifying language rules. This is not the only type of support received; there should also be the provision of a comfortable and motivational atmosphere and the praising of students to encourage their achievement.

It has also been proven to have a similar effect in a second language situation using group and pair work where students had the competency to guide each other in learning akin to proficient scaffolding (Alegrı´a de la Colina, & Garcı´a Mayo, 2007; Donato, 1994; Storch, 2002; Swain, 1998; Swain, 2000). Through grammar workshops, discussions with groups provided me with a comprehensible understanding of some language rules. It has conclusively been posited that group work is an "extremely powerful force in bringing about not only the conditions for effective learning but learning itself" (Macaro, 1997, p.153). The students in a group work situation are not only collaborating to accomplish the assigned task but they have to think about it and discuss it by providing their understanding of the task. Through this discussion, students can learn from each other through repetition and adjusting each other's speech (Youniss, 1980). However, there are limits to how far the concept of pair/group work can be taken. Some students do not always collaborate with each other even if they are organized in pairs (Johnson and Johnson, 2002). In addition, if students are not given guidelines on how to collaborate, they are not likely to collaborate (Ormrod and Davis, 2008). For example, giving roles to students in the grammar workshops organizes the work and ensures collaboration between group members. Therefore, to promote the value of pair work, the teacher should assign students roles. It is also essential to train students to collaborate in pair work through a set of guidelines that can facilitate the process of collaboration and help them understand the collaboration. Chen and Hapgood's (2019) research demonstrates that students' understanding of collaborative writing influenced their participation and learning throughout the collaborative writing process.

Although Nelson and Murphy (1993) claim that encouraging students to collaborate will not essentially build conditions conducive to learning, pedagogical research strongly supports the use of pair and group work. For example, McDonough (2004) established that pair and small

group activities afford students more opportunities and time to use the target language in speaking or writing than within teacher-centered activities.

Moreover, writing is a fundamental skill that requires "multiplicative, deep thinking and action" (Daiute and Dalton, 1993, p.293). Furthermore, Silva et al., (1997) insist that students do not practice writing solely in the classroom but indeed they will be using it in their life for several purposes. Additionally, writing tasks seem to result in learners' production of new structures more than speaking tasks (Weissberg, 2000). The work of Kenneth Bruffee (1984) has created interest in collaborative writing. He proved that students write more accurate text in pairs compared to writing alone (Bruffee, 1984). Therefore, his work has led to a proliferation of studies that investigate collaborative writing from several angles.

The study aims to shine a new light on these debates through an examination of the process of collaborative writing in an Omani EFL context. Therefore, this study aims to address the following research questions:

1. What are the potential immediate effects of collaborative writing on Omani University students?
2. What are students' perceptions about collaborative writing after experiencing it?

The reason for investigating the specified topic is that collaborative writing does not seem to be a priority in the language class in Oman. As revealed by classroom observation, students are often accustomed to a teacher-fronted approach; thus, students almost certainly have limited opportunities to interact with their peers in the writing class (Balida & Alhabsi, 2024). Students have highlighted the necessity for more interactive and practical classroom activities to improve their writing skills, as emphasized in interviews and focus groups (Balida & Alhabsi, 2024). Accordingly, one would be curious to explore the effects of applying a collaborative writing approach in an Omani classroom. One would also want to ascertain whether students' attitudes toward collaborative writing are different from their teacher as well as the researcher.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Theories of Second Language Acquisition

Modified interaction (Long, 1983)

Traditionally, it has been argued that the opportunities to participate in dialogue and the interaction between learners in the dialogues can be a fundamental source of second language acquisition (Long, 1983, 1996; Pica, 1994). Through a comparison between the dialogues of native and non-native speakers, it has been noted that non-native speaker talk is distinguished by the use of conversational moves (for example, a clarification request) which prompts Long (1983) to claim that when students modify their speech during interaction, they receive comprehensible input. Modified interaction is not limited to language elaboration; indeed other elaboration techniques can include comprehension checks, clarification requests, and self-repetition and paraphrase (Long, 1983).

Collective scaffolding (Donato, 1994)

Donato (1994) proposes the Collective Scaffolding theory which suggests that "learners have the capability to guide and support each other during interaction in similar ways to experts" (p. 51). This support happens regularly when students work collaboratively and it is likely to develop the learner's language (Donato, 1994). Long and Porter (1985) have investigated the role of group work in second language learning. They revealed that collaborative work provides more opportunities to use language; hence, the students' discourse is not only developed in quantity but also in quality (Long and Porter, 1985). Furthermore, it has been found that collaboration between students results in the performance of production that is at a higher level than their individual performance (Ohta, 2000).

Several scholars have challenged Long's claim on the grounds that comprehensible input is not always sufficient for second language learning. Swain (1985) confirms that providing students with comprehensible input did not help them in mastering grammatical accuracy. Hence, she theorizes that the production of an accurate and comprehensible output requires 'pushed output' (Swain, 1985). "The output hypothesis argues that encouraging learners to produce language that is syntactically slightly more advanced than their actual ability can be beneficial to learners; therefore the utterance that learners produce in such context is called pushed output" (Loewen and Reinders, 2011, p.144). Supporting Swain's claim, Izumi (2002) analyses the effectiveness of the output in learning and establishes that learners who received input after the production of written output outperformed students who were only exposed to the input. Negotiation, which is an example of pushed output, is when a speaker fails to convey a message; therefore, the other repeats or adjusts the former message (Pica, 1996).

Furthermore, collaborative dialogue delineates "the dialogue in which speakers are engaged in problem-solving and knowledge building" (p. 102) and Swain (2001) claims that learners build knowledge as they speak and reciprocate to others' speech. The language they construct in the collaborative dialogue mediates the learning (Swain, 2001). There are four procedures of guided support provided by a more expert learner to the less expert through interaction which are "giving their peers sufficient waiting time, encouraging their peers through repeating their utterance which allows them to continue speaking, repeating what the peer has said while adding some contribution in forms and the use of first language to demonstrate peers' mistakes" (Ohta, 2001, p. 89).

The Role of Feedback

The role of collaborative writing and feedback formed the central focus of a study by Wigglesworth and Storch (2012) in which the researchers proved that the process of joint writing and receiving immediate feedback is a resourceful way in which students are engaged in a mental process; thus this leads to language learning. Students can give and receive feedback when negotiating language choices (Wigglesworth and Storch, 2012). This view is supported by Brooks and

Swain (2009) who suggest that immediate peer feedback was acknowledged to be more effective than the feedback received by the teacher after the task. This feedback is useful because it is targeted as a result of students' needs that occur during interaction (Hanoaka, 2007). Moreover, the findings of Fernández Dobao's (2012) study suggest that students engaged in collaborative work in constructing a written text both allow the negotiation over the language choice and the opportunity to receive feedback about their production, error correction, and advice on how to correct these errors.

Noticing and Noticing the Gap

Moreover, the significance of negative feedback in encouraging learners to be aware of the gap in their knowledge has been demonstrated by Long (2007); Long and Robinson (1989). Furthermore, Schmidt (1990) suggests that noticing is a preliminary point of learning and students are not likely to learn language items before noticing them. They notice gaps in their knowledge and use the new knowledge to fill in these gaps (Gass, 1988). When students face a problem while producing language, their peers provide them with feedback (Swain and Lapkin, 1995). This feedback can allow them to notice the gap in their knowledge of which they are unaware (Wigglesworth and Storch, 2012). Kuiken and Vedder (2002) examined the effect of collaboration on the acquisition of the passive form. The experimental and control groups completed two dictogloss tasks. A pre-and post-test was used. The qualitative comparison showed that interaction did not lead to a better use of the passive form (Kuiken and Vedder, 2002). However, the audiotaped interaction between students in this study confirms that they noticed the structure of passives in written text (Kuiken and Vedder, 2002). However, the extent of noticing differs because some students' noticing was simple and limited to restating the structure (simple noticing) while others had a more complex explanation of the passive form (elaborate noticing) (Kuiken and Vedder, 2002). However, their argument was not based on an empirical analysis of the differences in learning development between students who noticed briefly and those who had noticed and elaborated (Storch, 2013). On the other hand, Leow (1997) highlighted that those students who notice by explaining and discussing performed better than students who notice simply. It seems that the process of elaborated noticing stimulates students' thinking and makes them understand deeply (Leow, 1997).

Learning Opportunities

Preliminary work on the variances in terms of grammatical accuracy was undertaken by Storch (1999) who compared the writing of eleven intermediate students in three types of tasks: cloze exercise, text reconstruction and composition for two sessions. In the first session, the participants completed a text reconstruction task in pairs while in the second session; they accomplished the text reconstruction individually whereas the cloze exercise and the composition were completed in pairs in the second session (Storch, 1999). There was no pre- or post-test; however, the researcher compared the grammatical accuracy of the two tasks completed by individuals and pairs (Storch, 1999). There was a development in the grammatical accuracy of the text in both exercises, which could be attributed to the long period spent on writing it collaboratively (Storch, 1999). Another factor that enhanced the accuracy of the text was the process of receiving verbal feedback from their peers while writing (Storch, 1999). Furthermore, the analysis revealed that essays written collaboratively were shorter and simpler compared to text written by individuals (Storch, 1999). A probable explanation is that students aimed for accuracy; hence, they spent their time constructing sentences. Nevertheless, the main weakness of the study is the failure to trace how learners' grammatical accuracy can develop over a longer period of time. However, Storch (2005) provides an in-depth analysis and comparison between collaboration and the writing of individual learners and obtained similar results to the study of 1999. Furthermore, Reinders (2009) compared individual and collaborative writing in terms of the use of negative adverbs reporting that joint writers produce more grammatically correct texts. Similar results were indicated when learners composed a text focusing on phrasal verbs (Nassaji and Tian, 2010). A small-scale study by Malmqvist (2005) drew the conclusion that the group's composition was characterized by complete sentences compared to text written individually. Nonetheless, this study was limited in terms of its impreciseness in quantifying the accuracy. Convincing evidence was reported by two recent studies (Storch and Wigglesworth, 2007; Wigglesworth and Storch, 2009) adding that there are no significant differences in terms of fluency and complexity but there is a difference in terms of accuracy. However, a more comprehensive study could include the learning opportunities gained from collaborative writing which has not been determined in this study. These opportunities can include the factors that broaden learners' accuracy and the quality of the feedback that can improve the accuracy. In a broader study, Fernández Dobao (2012) compared group, pair and individual writing in a Spanish second language classroom of six intermediate classes in terms of accuracy, fluency and complexity. Although longer texts were written by learners who wrote individually, texts written in groups and pairs were recognized to be more grammatically correct (Fernández Dobao, 2012). Hence, the accuracy of a written text may be due to the willingness to share ideas and cooperate to solve problems. This conclusion would be more useful if the same participants writing individually once and writing collaboratively at another time were assessed. Otherwise, the results might be attributed to students' differences in ability because some high-achieving students seem to prefer to write individually and this can cause some variances in the comparison. An arguable weakness in the body of research is the inadequate length of these studies. However, it is worth mentioning that a longitudinal study was carried out by Shehadeh (2011) to investigate the outcomes of collaborative writing on the quality of second language learning. In contrast with the previous studies, it has been postulated that students' mechanics and grammar showed less improvement as a result of collaborative writing

(Shehadeh, 2011). Nonetheless, content and organization had developed. This also accords with an earlier observation, which showed that learners' writing had improved as a result of writing collaboratively in their L1 (Yarrow and Topping, 2001). A key study measuring the effects of collaborative writing on the quality of students' writing is that of Pham (2023), in which 62 students participated in the study. The study reveals that the students who wrote papers collaboratively performed better than those authored individually; indicating that collaborative writing notably influenced each student's writing quality. Similarly, Mozaffari (2023) investigates the attitudes of EFL learners towards collaborative writing that affect how they interact and learn, as evidenced by the opportunities for language use during the writing process. The study shows that the pairs with positive attitudes significantly outperformed those with negative attitudes in terms of both fluency and accuracy. Moreover, they generated noticeably superior texts concerning content, structure, grammar, and vocabulary.

Conflict

Veniati et al. (2023) investigate the types of conflict in collaborative writing among Indonesian graduate students. They identify three types: cognitive conflict, socio-emotional conflict, and process conflict, and conclude that conflict impacts the quality of writing. One factor found to influence the success of collaborative writing is the 'cognitive conflict' (Yarrow and Topping, 2001). It is defined as "an intellectual conflict, it is an issue-oriented and it enhances learning as it usually leads to discussion of different points of view" (Tocalli-Beller and Swain 2005, pp. 5-6) Students experiencing cognitive conflict are more likely to learn and expand their ideas through various viewpoints compared to groups who do not experience any conflict (Johnson and Johnson, 1979). It has been asserted that disagreement stimulates students' re-evaluation of their knowledge and widens their views (Tocalli-Beller and Swain, 2005). Similarly, it has been noted that students facing conflict should be willing to reflect on the variations between their own knowledge and the knowledge offered (Limón, 2001). Students are more likely to resolve conflict if they use reasoning skills (Limón, 2001). Hence, the teacher should select a task that is slightly higher than their students' current level. This can encourage students to think deeply and face cognitive conflict. Negotiation with peers can solve this conflict and result in learning. Other effects of collaborative learning that have been acknowledged by Johnson and Johnson (1979) include the use of cognitive, critical thinking and collaborative strategies. Weissberg (2006) supports this claim by establishing that collaborative writing can provide learners with diverse roles such as tutors and critical readers.

Students' Attitudes

Students' way of thinking about writing in English has an impact on their writing and the effort they put into it (Bruning and Horn, 2000). Hence, several studies were conducted to investigate learners' attitudes to collaborative writing and showed that students' attitudes were positive (Storch, 2005; Lin and Maarof, 2013; Shehadeh, 2011; Fernández Dobao, 2012, Roskams, 1999, Yesuf and Anshu 2022). Azzura et al. (2023) state that students' attitudes to collaborative writing were positive as they think it is quicker, straightforward, and pleasant. Although the study of Shehadeh (2011) established a vast amount of advantages, some students established that they preferred to write individually. One issue of the study is the use of a questionnaire in the second language (English) which could have been replaced or integrated with an interview in the participant's first language which may have elicited more in-depth views and extensive reflections.

Motivation

A number of studies advocate that collaborative writing improves motivation and attitudes toward writing in a second language (Shehadeh, 2011; Littlejohn, 1982; Long and Porter, 1985; Li, 2023; Chen, 2021). Likewise, the opportunity to share the experience of writing a text with other students encourages them to work effectively and seriously (Hindley, 1996 cited in Hashemian and Heidari, 2013). However, no attempt seems to quantify the association between students' motivation and their collaborative writing achievements. It can be argued that students' motivation is not only attributed to the collaborative work itself but that other factors affect their motivation such as the enthusiasm of the group in which they work. They also fail to identify whether the motivation is long-term motivation or temporary, such as task motivation. Furthermore, a more comprehensive study would include an evaluation of the student's motivation both before and after the collaborative writing task.

Confidence and decreasing anxiety

Several benefits of collaborative interaction between students were indicated including a decrease in their anxiety levels when writing a text together which reinforces the belief that writing is a shared activity, therefore; the learners become aware that they can be guided (Bruffee, 1984). Similarly, Fernández Dobao and Blum (2013) posited that in their study a comfortable and motivational atmosphere was created by students during group work. In addition, Strauss and U (2007) suggest that working collaboratively can help students who feel shy to speak as it enables them to use the target language in a comfortable atmosphere. Students in the studies of Lin and Maarof (2013), Brown (2001), and Willis, (1996) established that collaborative writing was useful because it had increased students' general confidence in writing.

Sharing expertise

When writing collaboratively, students are not only discovering their strengths, but they are also observing the skills and abilities of others (Dale, 1994a). Moreover, students must listen to various views to reach an agreement that can increase their awareness of their audience (Dale, 1994a).

Furthermore, Daiute and Dalton (1993) emphasize the significance of diversity in the student's abilities in writing. However, Daiute and Dalton's paper would appear to be over-ambitious in its claims. The differences between students' abilities can be one advantage but it is surrounded by other issues such as students' willingness to share these abilities in collaborative work.

It has been claimed that collaborative writing helps students pool their ideas and discuss their language usage and offers them chances to observe different resources and knowledge and learn from each other (Lin and Maarof, 2013 and Storch, 2005). Other scholars including Ens et al. (2011) explore the usefulness of such an approach by drawing on the participants' reflections and conclude that receiving feedback from others enabled the participants to consider the purpose of the writing task. It allowed the participants to learn from others and observe how others think (Ens et al., 2011). However, only four participants took part in their study and the participants were the researchers themselves which could have influenced the data.

Limitations of Collaborative Writing and Students' Problems

Several main concerns that may make teachers and students reluctant to engage in collaborative writing. Firstly, it is hard to satisfy students' favorite learning styles, such as writing individually, making them willing to accept changes (Kinsella, 1996), and preparing them for a future that may require them to write collaboratively (Ede and Lunsford, 1990).The second concern can be the unwarranted use of L1 (Garrett and Shortal, 2002; Riely, 2009). However, several studies have shown that participants' use of L1 in collaborative writing tasks was limited (Storch and Wigglesworth, 2003), and some students in Léger and Storch's study (2009) point out that using the target language when talking with their peers is unusual. Nonetheless, it has been established that the first language simplifies the task, enables students to scaffold each other and explains incomprehensible language or content (Antón, and Dicamilla, 1999; Yang, 2014) Zhang (2021) shows that in collaborative writing tasks, participants utilized both their native language (L1) and second language (L2). L1 was primarily used for negotiation, while L2 was more commonly employed for composing and revising text; thus, L1 is important in enhancing effective communication and collaboration. Other problems are not accepting suggestions from peers (Thabran et al., 2021) and the differences in opinion when using collaborative techniques for writing (Azzura et al., 2023).

Compared with the teacher utterances, students' L2 discourse in dialogues is likely to be less accurate; therefore, it may expose peers to erroneous spoken discourse, which may lead to fossilization (Pica and Doughty, 1985; Mishra and Oliver, 1998). Conversely, in some teaching contexts, if the students believe that the teacher is the only source of knowledge in the class, and then students may feel their peers' feedback is unreliable (Hofstede, 1986). Therefore, the students may not consider it as a source of learning (Carson and Nelson, 1996; Williams, 1999). In contrast, students in a study by Kim and McDonough (2008) showed some willingness and confidence to work with more proficient peers to get reliable information and to be exposed to new knowledge. Similarly, the participants mentioned that the similar level of proficiency hindered them from learning new structures and vocabulary. However, there are some boundaries of the study; for example; not investigating learners' views over a long period (Fernández Dobao and Blum, 2013).

Although group work is a beneficial tool in language learning, students might not have a positive experience (Leki, 2001). For example, the lack of proficiency in English is one of the problems that they encountered (Lin and Maarof, 2013; Storch, 2005). However, the weakness of these two studies is the failure to address how low language ability hindered their collaboration. Other issues that hinder collaboration are an insufficient time to finish the written work, refusal of some students to offer their viewpoints and being apprehensive of upsetting others (Lin and Maarof, 2013; Storch, 2005). Fernández Dobao and Blum (2013) add that the participants were unwilling to correct their peers' mistakes.

METHODOLOGY

To date, various methods have been developed and introduced to measure the effect of collaborative writing. This study uses qualitative and simple quantitative analysis to gain insight into the immediate effects of collaborative writing as well as students' perceptions about it. There are three methods used at various stages of the research: a questionnaire, interviews and audiotaped transcripts of students' interaction when writing collaboratively.

Participants

Thirty-two students studying the Foundation Program in English Language (FPEL) at a public university in Oman were recruited for this study. Twenty-four males and eight females were enrolled in two different classes (16 students in each class). Their age range is 18-20 years old. They have been studying English for thirteen years with a teacher-centered approach. Their current level is low-intermediate (IELTS: 4-4.5). They are in the third and final semester of their foundation program.

Pedagogical Setting

The course is called "Writing Skills". They will major in Commerce and political studies and the participants are taught by the same teacher. The target is to prepare students to take an exam to start their undergraduate studies. Furthermore, it aims to prepare students to write an essay of a minimum of 250 words, showing control of layout, organization, punctuation, spelling, sentence structure, grammar and vocabulary. According to the teacher's description of the course, the first lesson usually starts with the introduction of the structure of one genre of writing; for example, a problem-solution essay. In the coming lessons, students are given a topic to write about and they start with planning at which stage the teacher elicits some ideas and writes them all on the

board. The drafting is the second stage, which is where students use the plan that the teacher prepared to write the first draft. After that, students revise their work using a checklist. On some occasions, the teacher asks students to exchange their work for peer revision in class. Students edit their essays and make the changes needed to submit the second draft to the teacher. The course lasts for eight weeks (four teaching hours per week). However, the research study was conducted in normal class time in the third week in two separate classes and lasted eight teaching hours (four hours in each class). The students were required to compose a problem-solving essay (first class) and a comparison and contrast essay (second class).

Design of the Study

The study utilizes qualitative and simple quantitative methods to explore the immediate impacts of collaborative writing and how students perceive it. Three specific methods are employed at different stages of the research: a questionnaire, interviews to delve deeply into participants' perspectives, and audiotaped transcripts to analyze students' interactions during collaborative writing sessions. The methods have been piloted with students of similar levels. The modifications made included the wording and format of the questionnaire and the interview with the students. First, the questionnaire was changed to be completely written in their mother tongue (Arabic) because it took students time to read the English and Arabic translations as they thought they might be different. Other changes included clarifying the meaning of sentences. The interview guide was modified after the pilot to include some expansion on learners' responses including reasoning and giving examples, changing the words of some questions and deleting other questions. The audio recording devices have also been tested.

Data Collection & Analysis

Before undertaking the investigation, ethical clearance was obtained from the institution and a schedule was agreed for the period of the study. To evaluate the current situation before applying the collaborative writing approach, the subjects were asked to complete a questionnaire. Once they finished, they were notified in English that this study aimed to study interaction.

The three-page questionnaire consists of two parts; the first has six multiple-choice questions aimed at evaluating and measuring the participants' teaching approach preference and discovering whether collaborative work exists in their classes. The second part has twelve Likert-scale items where the participants evaluate the current situation "with these items by marking one of the responses ranging from "strongly agree" to "strongly disagree" (Dörnyei, 2010 p.27). The items were chosen to measure some effects before and after collaborative writing such as motivation, anxiety and writing skills. The questionnaire was written in Arabic Thirty-two copies of this questionnaire were distributed and collected. Participants were given twenty minutes to complete the task.

The Procedure

When the study started, the teacher asked the participants to divide themselves into pairs. The reason for choosing pair work is that it is considered to be the most appropriate grouping for the second language classroom (Duff, 1986; Doughty and Pica, 1986). Also, the possibility of dependence on others and not sharing their work among all group members can increase in the case of grouping learners with more than two students in each group (Kowal and Swain, 1994). Moreover, they were asked to voluntarily choose their partner and were instructed to work as a team to discuss the text and to write one text together. It has been argued that the familiarity between pairs encourages them to share their knowledge (Lei et al., 2010). There is an inconsistency with Lei et al.'s (2010) argument because familiarity might give the students a comfortable atmosphere to work in; however, if students work with familiar peers, they might not have different ideas. Hence, participants in this study were informed that they would be writing in pairs and the decision of choosing their peer was left to them. The intention is that knowing the type of task can, to some extent, shape their decision because knowing what to do can allow them to think about their skills and abilities.

A consent form was given to the students once they started writing to indicate their agreement Digital voice recorders were used to record the interaction of six pairs in the first lesson. The students in the first class wrote a problem-solving essay while the second group wrote a comparison and contrast essay. Each pair was asked to write on one sheet. They wrote for forty minutes. In the first lesson, they planned and wrote the introduction and the first body paragraph and revised them. The second lesson incorporated writing the remaining two paragraphs, the conclusion and then revising them.

The Interviews

In the follow-up phase of the study, four semi-structured interviews, which collected "high-quality data using prompts, probes and follow-up questions to get the interviewee to clarify or expand on the answers", were conducted (Munn and Drever, 1995, p.2). The interviews were conducted with two students from each class (two males and two females). Each lasted for a maximum of twenty minutes and was recorded after the interviewees' permission was gained. The interview guide was arranged to elicit students' reflections on and attitudes toward collaborative writing. The interviews were then transcribed. As the variation in view between teachers and students can occur, the teacher was interviewed for her reflection, experiences and willingness to use collaborative writing.

RESULTS/FINDINGS

Participants' Preference in Learning

Collaborative writing was not previously used in the participants' classrooms. Before applying collaborative writing, 85% of the participants preferred to learn through group/pair work in their writing classes. However, strong evidence of individual writing was found when the participants showed

that the teacher asked them to write individually (97%). Only a small number of respondents indicated that they wrote in groups (3%) while no use of pairs was indicated. All participants strongly agreed that group work could be used in peer revisions (Figure 1).

After applying collaborative writing in the classroom, there were variations between interviewees' perceptions of it. The interviewees were asked whether they liked collaborative writing or not. A variety of perspectives were expressed. Some of these perspectives were positive. Fahad (a male interviewee) and Narjis (a female interviewee) showed the effectiveness of observing different ways of thinking and knowledge in collaborative writing. A recurrent theme in the interviews was a sense amongst interviewees that the discussion was the means of getting different ideas and was expressed by Narjis:

> It has a discussion and interaction. We brought up various ideas while discussing them together. More than one idea is mentioned. More than one mind. You can discover more ideas and information and the decision is made by more than one person. I think it was useful.

Although two interviewees alluded to the notion of their preference to write individually; talking about this issue, Saif said: *"I just want to depend on myself"*, collaborative writing overall was enjoyable from the interviewees' point of view. It enabled Saif to *"speak English"* which seemed not to be done frequently in class and not used outside the classroom. It has also allowed Narjis to "*learn some new vocabulary my friend used which I didn't know before*" and wrote a text that integrates her and her partner's ideas. Furthermore, Fahad felt comfortable and not worried about mistakes because he was able to discuss the task with his partner in Arabic.

Participants' Evaluation of their Writing Skills

In response to the students' evaluation of their writing skills, the majority believed that their writing skills were good. Only 4% of the participants thought that their writing skills were excellent. On the other hand, 18% of the students indicated that their writing skills were poor. Further analysis showed that the majority of the participants attributed their development of writing skills to their effort and the input they received from the lectures. A small number of those surveyed (3%) suggested that the help they received from others improved their writing.
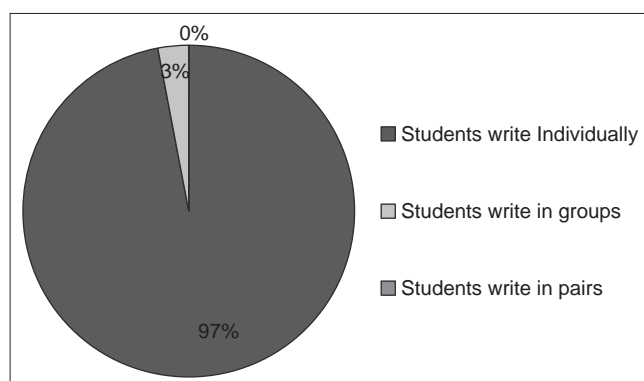

Figure 1. The writing situation in the participants' classes

After applying collaborative writing, students scaffold each other in the areas of their difficulties; Saif (a male interviewee) mentioned that: *"I had difficulty in using past tense-so I used it incorrectly--Then my friend pointed at it- he taught me-so I correct it-therefore I still remember it so I would write it in the correct way next time"*.

Planning and Editing

Although planning was usually completed by the teacher, participants welcomed the planning with others in collaborative writing. Respondents were asked to indicate whether they prepared a plan before they started writing. 82% of them strongly agreed that they use a plan to write, 12% were neutral and 6% disagreed. Almost two-thirds of the participants (64%) said that they did want to prepare a plan with other students (Table 1). One individual stated that '*I like to use my ideas in my writing*' and another said that '*I don't like to use the teacher's plan because all students write similar ideas*'. After applying collaborative writing, one theme that emerged from the analysis is that this approach enabled them to prepare a good plan. As Muna (a female interviewee) put it, *"I learned how to plan. Prepare a good plan so we could write an organized text. Sometimes I can't do it alone"*.

Even though the 32 participants who responded to whether they liked to listen to their peers' comments on their writing, 20 reported that they liked to listen to their peers' revisions. On the other hand, 12 strongly disagreed (Table 2). After experiencing collaborative writing, Saif expressed his satisfaction and attributed it to his partner's efforts in *"looking for my mistakes and correcting them."*

Motivation and Anxiety

The next section of the survey was concerned with measuring students' motivation. Half of the respondents felt that they liked their writing class, 43% of them were neutral while 7 % of them disliked the writing class. Interestingly, all the participants strongly agreed that they wanted to improve their writing skills. Further analysis revealed that 66 % of the respondents spent a lot of time and effort to write in English; whereas an equal number of participants were neutral and disagreed (Table 3). The most striking result to emerge from the data is that half of the subjects do not feel anxious when working in groups.

After applying collaborative writing, students were motivated to write. This theme came up in discussions with Fahad who established that: *"When you see your classmates writing and everyone is working, you feel motivated and want to be like them"*. Narjis argued that the discussion encouraged her to participate in the task: *"Each one wanted to convince her viewpoint and each one participated so you feel you want to learn and participate as much as you can to finish the mission"*.

Issues Faced by the Participants

However, several issues were identified. Saif (a male interviewee) confirmed his doubts regarding his experience of

Table 1. Planning

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
1. I plan before I start writing.	2	0	4	0	26
2. I used the plan prepared by the teacher.	0	2	2	3	25
3. I used other resources to plan (internet, books, etc.).	24	2	3	3	0
4. I want to plan with other students.	0	8	4	0	20

Table 2. Editing

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
1. I edit my writing before I submit it to the teacher.	8	9	1	12	2
2. I like to listen to my peers' comments on my writing,	12	0	0	18	2
3. I apply my peers' corrections.	3	13	5	11	0

Table 3. Participants' Motivation to Writing

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
9. I like the writing class.	0	2	14	7	9
10. I want to improve my writing skills.	0	0	0	0	32
11. I spend a lot of time and effort to write in English.	0	5	5	1	21
12. I feel anxious when working in groups.	6	10	5	4	7

working with another student saying that *"I made a mistake and I didn't know-my friend also didn't know- maybe he writes incorrectly"*. Therefore he realizes that *"If I am writing alone, I won't learn incorrect things."* He considered their abilities to be still in the process of learning and the teacher to be the only source of knowledge. Therefore, he thought that working in pairs without teacher contribution poses a danger of learning incorrect knowledge.

Issues related to the differences in viewpoints between pairs were particularly prominent in the interview data and as Muna acknowledged, she did not like the conflicts in opinion because her partner *"tried to influence her of ideas although she was wrong"* hence, she tended to accept the other students' opinion: *"I don't like disagreeing with others--then I agree just to finish the task"* However, the conflict was not an issue from Narjis' point of view when she identified that having different opinions is natural and allows her to see the issue from a wider view. However, this presents another problem which is the difficulty to choose the best ideas to use when she has many ideas; therefore she felt nervous. Furthermore, Saif claims the poor contribution of his partner reduced the opportunity to write a good text. He thought that collaboration would be easier but *"sometimes the dependence on one person makes the work slower and harder"*.

Summary of the Teacher Interview

The teacher argued that although it was a positive experience, it was difficult in three ways. First, the students were not used to writing in pairs as they had been used to writing individually. Second, students were of mixed ability; hence, it was challenging for high achievers to manage writing with low

achievers. Third, the students did not have the necessary skills such as negotiation and the ability to reach; therefore making the discussion difficult. She added that the class became noisy as a result of the discussion and some students complained that they could not focus on writing. Moreover, she faced difficulty in assessing the pair work writing because she could not decide which students had made the errors. Thus, she said she preferred to give students individual attention based on their errors. She added that when giving feedback to pairs, it was hard to decide on which aspect of feedback to cover because some error corrections were unnecessary for some students while they were needed for others. Although she found several issues, she showed that students who were good at one skill became confident as a result of working in pairs. She also thinks that students learn from each other. She was willing to use collaborative writing only if the students' level was of a similar level which would enable the writing to be managed well. Otherwise, she believed that collaborative writing could harm students who have difficulties in writing.

The Transcript of Students' Dialogues

The students' dialogues were transcribed and will be examined in four areas namely how the interaction helped them to learn, how much time they spent on planning, writing, revising, the conflict and the use of L1 (Arabic).

Signs of noticing through interaction

Grammatical Structures

The theme of noticing as a result of peers' feedback recurred throughout the analysis of the data. The participants tended

to correct each other's mistakes while discussing the writing task; usually by providing correct alternatives. However, these corrections may have led to some noticing. Excerpt 1 shows an interaction between two males (Abdullah and Salim). The sign of noticing is reflected in lines 19-12 where Abdullah omitted the plural –s "*two country*" (line, 19). Therefore, Salim corrected it and used a question tag to draw Abdullah's attention to his mistake (line 21). Abdullah's use of question tags aimed to elicit the correct form. Accordingly, the feedback made Abdullah notice and repeat the correct form of plural (line 23).

Excerpt 1:

(16) Abdullah: [writing] This essay.

(17) Salim: will-will-will take - will take a comparison.

(18) Abdullah: [writing] will take a comparison between-*tqareen bayn* (compare between).

(19) Salim: two-famous.

(20) Abdullah: [writing] two famous-country.

(21) Salim: Two countries *wa moo?* (aren't they?)-Countries.

(22) Abdullah: *aywah* (yes)-countries-such as.

Lexis:

The assistance was apparent in providing the correct lexis on several occasions. One of these examples revealed that Maryam was trying to enrich the essay by using a variety of linking words by replacing 'but' with 'otherwise' (line 118). However, Huda was doubtful about the use of 'otherwise' (line 119); hence, Maryam provided her understanding of the meaning of 'but' in Arabic (line 120). With her partner's assistance, Maryam noticed then that 'otherwise' is not a synonym of 'but' as she could notice the differences in meaning between the two linking words through Huda's explanation (line 112). Maryam could notice the differences in meaning between 'otherwise' and 'on the other hand'; still, she does not seem to learn the structure of the word. Maryam used the adverb 'on the other hand' incorrectly (line 124); thus, Huda corrected and repeated it (line 125). As a result, Maryam finally used it correctly (line 126).

Excerpt 2:

(117) Huda: but.

(118) Maryam: but-in America-*but wala* (or) otherwise.

(119) Huda: otherwise?

(120) Maryam: otherwise-*lakin* (but).

(121) Huda: la la (No) otherwise-*manata bada thalik* (means then)-*takseedi* (Do you mean?) on the other hand?

(122) Maryam: *aywah*(yes)-On the other hand-America.

(123) Huda: In America-disagreeing with.

(124) Maryam: in the other hand-in America-disagreeing with decisions-is.

(125) Huda: on the other hand-on-on the other hand.

(126) Maryam: on the other hand- in America-disagreeing with decisions-is healthy. *Sah*?(Correct?)

Signs of transfer of knowledge

There seem to be some signs of transfer of knowledge in excerpt 3 (34-50). Although the sentence constructed is not completely accurate as the subject is omitted, the learners

seemed to notice the structure of the third personal singular. Khalid realized the need for the third personal singular –s and asked for a choice from his partner (line 34). Therefore, Nawaf agreed and chose the verb 'likes' (line 35). Khalid repeated and wrote the verb (line 36). While revising the sentence they had written, Khalid noticed the need for the –ing form; hence he questioned Nawaf again to choose the correct form (line, 38). Then, Nawaf advocated the use of 'likes working'.

Excerpt 3:

(34) Khalid: in Japan-aa-in Japan-it-like *wala*(or) likes?

(35) Nawaf: likes. It-*wahed tsai -s* (Singular-add -s).

(36) Khalid: likes- [writing] In Japan-it likes work in group.

(37) Nawaf: uh.

(39) Khalid: [reading] in Japan, likes work *wala* (or) working.

(40) Nawaf: working-likes working.

(41) Khalid: likes working in group -*ma almjamooa* (in group)-in anything.

Later in the dialogue, a sign of the transfer of knowledge can be identified. First, Khalid was able to use the third personal singular –s correctly (line 47) although he was not at the beginning (line 35). Second, Khalid was capable of using the structure like+ing correctly in line (49) which suggests his noticing the structure earlier in the dialogue.

Excerpt 4:

(47) Khalid: in America-However-in America it likes.

(48) Nawaf: however-it likes.

(49) Khalid: it likes-it likes-working.

(50) Nawaf: working individually.

Signs of critical reading

The participants criticized their work to ensure a variety of vocabulary was used in their essays. For that reason, they spotted each other's repetition of linking words as it is shown in excerpt 5 between Sultan and Nasser (two males). Sultan has used the adverb 'but' to form a comparison (line 55). However, Nasser observed his partner's overuse of the word 'but' in the comparison and requested his partner change it and provided him with an alternative (line 56). In contrast, Sultan did not seem to accept his partner's suggestion (line 57). Thus, Nasser drew his attention to it (58). Then, he accepted it and requested the spelling (lines 59-62). It can be seen that Sultan was not aware of the need for diversity in the use of words but also was not conscious of the use of 'on the other hand' including its spelling.

Excerpt 5:

(55) Sultan: But.

(56) Nasser: But? Ghaier (Change) but-on the other hand-*oktub* (Write)-on the other hand.

(57) Sultan: *ya'ni lazim aghaierha* (So do I have to change it?)-But they

(58) Nasser: *kolo* (everything) but.

(59) Sultan: [writing] *O-kaif* (How) other?

(60) Nasser: O-other-o-t-h-e-r.

(62) Sultan: On the other hand.

Signs of the need for expert guidance

Similarly, Excerpt 6 shows that the absence of an expert hindered the pair's (Ahmed and Omar- two males) ability to find the mistake in the sentence they constructed. Omar showed critical thinking towards Ahmed's phrase (line 90) and asked for clarification (lines 91-92). Later, while Omar was writing the sentence (line 93), Ahmed was uncertain about the accuracy of the sentence (line, 94). Although the sentence had two mistakes, Ahmed was getting closer to finding one mistake. The low proficiency of Omar could not help him in finding the mistakes. Therefore, they left the mistakes uncorrected (line, 100).

Excerpt 6:
(88) Ahmed: However-it has some disadvantages.
(89) Omar: yes-[writing] it has some disadvantages.
(90) Ahmed: if it not able to understand the movie.
(91) Omar: who not understand?
(92) Ahmed: people.
(93) Omar: yes-[Writing] such as-if not people understand the movie--able-to understand-the movie.
(94) Ahmed: something wrong in the sentence.
(95) Omar: what?
(96) Ahmed: I don't know-I feel something wrong.
(97) Omar: [reading] However-it has some disadvantages such as if not people able to understand the movie.
(98) Ahmed: not?
(99) Omar: why?
(100) Ahmed: okay-write next sentence.

Conflict

The first conflict that occurred between a student pair (Fatima and Muna) was caused by a disagreement over whether to write a topic sentence. Though Muna suggested writing a topic sentence providing explicit explanations, Fatima refused her suggestion which made Muna unwilling to contribute with her and follow her.

Excerpt 7:
(47) Muna: term of- business style-*ba'dayn naqul* (after that, we say) include *wa nathkr alnukat athalath*(and mention the other points).
(48) Fatima: *la ma naqul* (No, we shouldn't say) include.
(49) Muna: including three points, *illi hina anukat illi bn'nakish hina* (which are the three points that we are going to discuss here).
(50) Fatima: *y'ani 'atool nibda fi Japan kitha wa kitha-wa America kitha wa kitha* (therefore, we have to start straightforwardly talking about Japan and America separately).
(51) Muna: [with a tone of anger] Nzain badyi seri (Okay, go ahead).

Another conflict that occurred between the pair was caused by the differences in writing styles between the pair. Fatima wanted to make a comparison in a certain way and she believed that it was the only correct way. However, she listened to her partner's view which was supported by explanations. Even so, although she followed Muna's suggestion, she was doubtful about it.

Excerpt 8:
(52) Fatma: [Reading] There are many difference between Japan and America in term of business style-In Japan-they work in group-However in America they focus on individual achievement-*Ahiso khat li'anu fi alreboort ili katbtuno rbeeati.yaktobu awal shay an Japan kul a differences wa badayn tantaqli ella alnukta althanya.* (I think it is incorrect because I have got my friend's report and she discussed each country separately, like mentioning all the information about Japan and then moving to talk about America).
(53) Muna: *bia'la'ks afdal innk takhdi kul nukta wa tnaksheeha wa tnweei-ma takuni munhaza ala shai.* (It is better if you compare each difference separately and have diverse ideas instead of focusing on country).

The use of L1 (Arabic)

Three out of six pairs rely on the use of L1 (Arabic) to accomplish the collaborative writing task. Arabic was used for several functions. The effectiveness of using L1 has been exemplified in the following excerpt where Abdullah was using Arabic to check his partner understands the word 'style':

Excerpt 9:
(27) Abdullah: *faheem hathi ma'natha* [Do you understand the meaning of] discussion. *unaqeeshoo fi majmooa'* (discussion in the group) *unaqeesh ma' majmooa* (to discuss in the group).
(28) Salim: umm-*sah* (correct).

On other occasions, a student seeks an explanation of the meaning of a word just uttered by his partner. Henceforth, the partner provided the Arabic translation. It seems the new vocabulary could be added to his knowledge:
(41) Ahmed: and it has some advantages.
(42) Omar: such as
(43) Ahmed: get rid of bad language
(44) Omar: What this mean? Color?
(45) Ahmed: *yatakhalas* (get rid of).

The Time Spent on Writing Stages

The results obtained from the preliminary analysis of the time spent on the writing stage are set out in Table 1 below. Although participants spent some of the time planning, it is apparent that it was a short period for both types of tasks. The comparison and contrast essay had the shortest period of planning which lasted for a maximum of six minutes and thirty seconds (Maryam and Huda). On the other hand, in the problem-solving essay, participants took a longer time to plan, taking an average of nine minutes. During the planning stage, participants read the task, decided on how to approach it and brainstormed ideas.

It can be seen that by far the greatest demand is for the writing stage. All six pairs devoted the majority of their time to writing the essay. The longest time spent on planning was thirty-three minutes and sixteen seconds (Ahmed and Omar) whereas the least time spent was twenty minutes and forty-five seconds (Nasser and Sultan). The participants

discussed the structure, organization and lexis. An off-topic discussion was excluded from the analysis.

Although they spent long time writing, the revision stage did not appear to be of consideration. Out of six pairs, only two pairs revised their writing, a stage which lasted for a maximum of three minutes (Table 4). It could be that due to the effort they made in writing they did not think that they needed to revise their work. Another possibility is the shortage of time given to them.

DISCUSSION

The Immediate Effects of Collaborative Writing

The fact is that students liked collaborative writing despite being accustomed to a teacher-centered approach. There are similarities between the attitudes expressed by students in this study and those described by Storch, 2005; Lin and Maarof, 2013; Shehadeh 2011; Fernández Dobao, 2012, Roskams, 1999 and Li 2023. It can be proved that the students enjoyed having various activities in the classroom and they are accepting of the changes in the teaching approach to the extent that one interviewee suggested applying this approach in the classroom and training students on how to use it. Shehadeh (2011) postulated that writing should not be a self-contained activity and it is an opportunity for EFL students to use English where they do not use it outside the classroom (Storch and Aldosari, 2012). Thus, collaborative writing can sometimes be used where the teacher sees it as useful and where a comfortable atmosphere can be created. Another implication is integrating collaborative writing tasks into the Omani curriculum. It should include some communicative collaborative tasks.

The teacher preferred to use individual writing tasks because she is likely to be able to deal with individual difficulties. Nevertheless, some evidence from this study suggests that students were able to offer some guidance to each other. The first immediate effect of collaborative writing was that students were scaffolding each other. This study confirms that collaborative writing is associated with the Collective Scaffolding theory which emphasizes that the learners can support each other in learning (Donato, 1994). In many cases in the dialogues, students guided each other by correcting their peer's production of grammatical and lexical production. Therefore, McDonough (2004) emphasizes that

students should be made aware of the advantages of collaborative tasks used in the writing classroom. The teacher should make use of students' diverse abilities and skills and allow them to help each other. For example, the teacher can encourage a student who is good at spelling to work with those who need help in spelling.

The second effect was noticing the gap in their knowledge. For instance, when they faced an issue in constructing a sentence, they received feedback from their peer which allowed them to notice the gap. They are not likely to notice these gaps if they are not guided by a peer or a teacher. In accordance with the present results, previous studies have demonstrated that when encountering a problem in producing language, students received peer feedback that made them aware of the gap in their knowledge (Swain and Lapkin, 1995). Therefore, the teacher should allow students to work in pairs but should give them a task that is slightly above their current level to ensure that the task raises their awareness of the gaps in their knowledge.

The third effect seemed to be the transfer of knowledge. It appears that peers provided each other with feedback which allowed them to produce some language items correctly. This also accords with our earlier observations, which showed that when students become aware of the gap in their knowledge, they fill the gaps by applying the knowledge (Gass, 1988). However, it seems that students who are high achievers can provide each other with the type of feedback that suggests some transfer of knowledge only if the other students are willing to apply this feedback. However, the data must be interpreted with caution because there is a possibility of transferring incorrect knowledge. Macaro (1997) and Jaques (2000) affirm that the teacher should monitor collaborative work to check that students are doing the task appropriately and spot any problems. An implication of this is the possibility that the teacher can give students some feedback based on their writing to avoid incorrect transfer of knowledge.

The fourth effect is the discussion which is another factor that has probably encouraged students in collaborative writing. Although some participants complained about the noise during the discussion, it can be argued that others enjoyed the discussion. A possible explanation for this might be that discussing their ideas with their peers allowed them to discover different ideas. This finding is in agreement with Lin and Maarof (2013) and Storch (2005) findings which

Table 4. Time spent in the writing stages

Pairs	Total Time spent on the task (minutes)	Planning (minutes)	Writing (minutes)	Revision (minutes)
Comparison and Contrast Essay				
Fatma and Muna	40:00	5:10	32:01	01:09
Khalid and Nawaf	36:08	4:07	32:01	00.00
Nasser and Sultan	29:45	3:00	20:45	3:00
Maryam and Huda	39:03	6:30	29:14	3:59
Problem solving essay				
Abdullah and Salim	39:07	13:00	26.07	00.00
Ahmed and Omar	39:56	5:40	33:16	00:00

showed that collaborative writing help students to discuss diverse ideas and deliberate on language use. Another possible explanation is that the decision-making was divided between the pair. Therefore, for the students to agree, they needed to have a discussion. It can be argued that students should be allowed on some occasions to discuss collaborative writing and a suitable amount of time should be devoted to the discussion.

The fifth effect was on developing a good plan. Participants seemed to spend more time on writing rather than planning or editing. Although they used to use the plan prepared by the teacher as a whole class activity, the interviewees felt that planning in collaborative writing was useful as it integrated their ideas. A possible explanation can be that the students enjoyed planning with each other because it did not only focus their attention on the content but also the organization of the writing text. It can be argued that Omani students should be allowed to plan with others to feel ownership over the text and the uniqueness of their ideas.

The sixth effect was critical reading. The result showed that students criticized their work. The findings observed in this study mirror those of the previous studies that have examined the role of collaborative writing in enabling students to be critical readers of their writing text (Weissberg, 2006). It may be that these students benefitted from having two viewpoints which allowed them to see the text from different dimensions. They seemed to be motivated to produce an enhanced piece of writing; therefore, they worked hard to reach their goal. The teacher should motivate students to produce an excellent piece of writing through competition between pairs.

Motivation was the seventh effect of collaborative writing. In terms of motivation, some participants showed that they were motivated to write in English. However, others were not motivated. Two interviewees emphasized that collaborative writing motivated them to write. Increased student motivation in this study corroborates with earlier findings (Shehadeh, 2011; Littlejohn, 1982; Long and Porter, 1985) who found that students' motivation had increased. This finding suggests that working with others increased their interest in carrying out the task. This study has been unable to demonstrate that anxiety decreased. The possibility that students are used to working in pairs on other skills cannot be ruled out.

The eighth effect is cognitive conflict. Students seemed to be involved in disagreement. They responded to it in two different ways. Firstly, some students did not provide reasoning to each other; therefore, the conflict was not resolved. Another group of students supported their conflict with reasoning which resulted in learning. It can be postulated that if students face disagreement, they are likely to learn from different viewpoints (Johnson and Johnson, 1979). Hence, the teacher should accentuate the idea that conflict can help them to learn and ask them to use reasoning to solve this conflict. It has been posited that using reasoning ability in conflict is a vital prerequisite for reaching a resolution for the conflict and evaluating contradiction (Tocalli-Beller and Swain, 2005). They should be surrounded by a helpful environment to help them feel comfortable with the conflict (Dale, 1994b). The most likely cause of conflict was the difference between students' writing styles. As they were used to writing individually, it was hard for them to accomplish the task of collaborative writing. If students were not willing to accept and negotiate with their peers until they agreed on one decision, consequently, it became difficult for them to accomplish the task. The teacher should train students on how to negotiate when writing collaboratively. Significantly, the teacher should explain how conflicts can help students to learn and the students should not regard it as an issue. Flower (1994) emphasizes the necessity of training students in collaboration skills such as active listening, asking for collaboration, and raising inquiries.

The use of L1 (Arabic) was the ninth effect. The most prominent use of Arabic was in providing vocabulary explanations. Although this result differs from some published studies (Storch and Wigglesworth, 2003), they are consistent with those of Antón and DiCamilla, (1999) and Yang (2014) who found that the use of L1 in collaborative work enabled students to explain unintelligible vocabulary. Although the teacher thought that she insisted on using English in the class, the dialogues demonstrated that the use of L1 was effective and allowed students to learn new vocabulary. The students' use of L1 might support their learning of English. The teacher should not restrict students from using Arabic but could explain that they should rely on it only when they cannot explain something in English.

The Difficulties Faced by Students in Collaborative Writing

The first difficulty appeared in the students' interaction; in some cases, they needed an expert to guide them. The results showed that the students' skills might not always be sufficient to guide each other. An example has been shown in the previous chapter where a pair could not find the mistake in the sentence although they felt it was wrong. The reason for this is not clear but it may have something to do with the students' lack of grammatical knowledge. It could also be attributed to a discrepancy between the pair's level of proficiency because one student was getting closer to the answer while his partner was not. These two students were not willing to seek help from the teacher; thereby they ignored the mistakes. This finding has important implications for applying pair work in classrooms.

Another issue is that some students depend on each other. Although the teacher instructed them to write collaboratively, some students depended on their partner to do all the work. This result may be explained by the fact that some students might not be motivated to work collaboratively. They seemed not to understand the purpose of paired writing. One interviewee showed his willingness to work collaboratively in the future only if there was agreement and collaboration. Hence, one implication is that the teacher should assign a role for each participant such as a scribe and spelling checker. Students are more likely to feel responsible and contribute more if they are given a role.

CONCLUSION

This project was undertaken to explore the immediate effects of collaborative writing on Omani university students who were enrolled in an English language foundation program. The situation in the writing class was evaluated before applying a collaborative writing approach and several effects were explored after collaborative writing was tried. The study lasted for eight sessions in two classes. The students wrote in pairs. Six pairs' discussions were recorded and transcribed. Four participants were interviewed.

The investigation of students' dialogues has shown that students were scaffolding each other with elements of English, such as grammar and vocabulary. Another major finding suggested that students were able to notice the gap in their knowledge through peer feedback. In addition, there were some conflicts and the use of L1 in students' dialogues. The analysis also revealed that students spent more time on writing rather than planning or editing. This suggests that collaborative writing is more useful than collaborative planning or peer editing. In terms of students' attitudes, students enjoyed collaborative writing and showed that it motivated them. They felt that the discussion and planning were useful aspects of collaborative writing. However, the research showed some pitfalls such as conflicts and non-cooperative peers. Taken together, these results suggest that teachers in Omani classrooms should make use of collaborative writing.

However, the findings in this study are subject to at least three limitations. The most important limitation lies in the fact that some effects, such as motivation, were measured by relying on the participants' viewpoints. However, their point of view might be unreliable because what they think about themselves might be different from the real situation. A second limitation of this study is that the sample size was relatively small. This means that study results need to be interpreted cautiously. Third, one source of weakness in this study which could have affected the observation of the effects is the method of the evaluation of the situation before applying a collaborative writing approach. The evaluation relied on the questionnaire distributed to the students. It did not include the teacher's opinion or any materials evaluation. Another caveat that needs to be noted regarding the present study is the short length because it lasted for a short period.

If the debate is to be moved forward, a better understanding of the efficiency of collaborative writing in the Omani context needs to be developed. More research is required to determine the efficacy of collaborative writing on the transfer of knowledge in the long run. It is recommended that further research should be undertaken in the following areas: the quality and quantity of peer feedback that leads to noticing the gap, students' focus during language episodes, and the role of conflict in learning through collaborative writing.

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