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EFL Teachers' Perception and Challenges in Implementing Collaborative Writing

Nurul Hakimah Hafid*[1], Isti Siti Saleha Gandana[2]
nurulhakimahkim@upi.edu
Universitas Pendidikan Indonesia

Abstract

Writing skill, compared to the other three language skills, namely listening, reading and speaking, tends to be more difficult and time-consuming to teach, and has not enough attention to teach and practice. Collaborative writing therefore can become one of the ways to help students develop their writing skills which reinforcesthem to produce a proper text. Hence, this study aims to investigate teachers' perception and challenges in implementing collaborative writing in the EFL classroom. The study employed phenomenology research design with five senior high school teachers who have experienced to applying collaborative writing in their teaching process. This study was conducted by using interview section as a single data collection technique. In term of teacher' perception in utilizing collaborative writing, the findings revealed that teachers mentioned some positive perception towardthe implementation of collaborative writing seen from four aspects; social, psychological, academic, and assessment. Meanwhile, in term of challenges, it classified into three segments; learners, instruction, and classroom management.

Keywords: challenges, collaborative writing, teachers' perception

Introduction

Realizing the importance of English as an international language in the globalization era, people tend to perceive mastering English writing skill as a pivotal expertise in the world of communication. Through the mastery of writing in English, people will be able to convey messages for readers across places and time (Brown, 2007). For that reason, writing as a productive skill should be mastered by students for written communication and academic writing purposes, such as essays, papers, articles, project reports, theses, and so on (Toba, Noor, &Sanu, 2019). The goal of teaching writing is to help students acquire the capabilities and skills in order to compose various types of written texts properly (Ur, 2003).

To develop their writing skill, students need to be given several opportunities to practice and obtain some feedback on their writing. Additionally, Lorena (2015) state that scaffolding in teaching writing will effectively help students to improve

their ability. Furthermore, teachers need to be aware of these requirements and prepare several ways to scaffold students where it can be relized in a number technique. Collaborative writing as the strategy would become a way to help students in writing. Collaborative writing refers to an activity that involves joint and negotiated decision-making process and shared responsibility for the text production (Storch, 2013). It based on Vygotsky's (1978) sociocultural theory, which suggests that learning devolves from the sociocultural to individual level via collaboration. And then, the aim of collaborative writing is foremost, especially in the academic context in which it improves the students' writing skills (Mulligan &Garofalo, 2011), interactional skills (Ramirez, 2013), and their sense of ownership toward their writing (Storch, 2011). Collaborative writing tasks are consequently often viewed as a useful instructional activity as it increases the learning opportunities in language classroom (Li & Zhu, 2017).

Previous studies related to the implementation of collaborative writing have shown some effects and benefits on the students' writing practice. Aminloo (2013) has researched the effect of collaborative writing on EFL learners' ability by using experimental study as the research method. The study showed that the students in the treatment group have a better topic development, most probably due to the collaboration in brainstorming and outline writing. Additionally, the paragraphs of the text were written longer and more complex than the students' text written individually. Even when the learners used simple sentences, they could connect them together and more logically with using variety of connectors. In term of accuracy, the students' texts were more noticeable due to the teamwork on the revising and editing process in collaborative writing. Another study was conducted by Swain (2000, 2006, 2010) who showed other benefits in implementing collaborative writing.The two advantages of collaborative writing are seen from dialogue and language where dialogue refers to the talk when students engage to solve the problems, meanwhile, language means the process of using language to make meaning. When engaged in collaborative writing activities, students confer about how best to express their intended meaning that can be easily understood by others even though language actually can occur individually, as is usually sub vocal (thinking), which is self-directed speech. The benefit of collaborative writing is it encourages another directed conversation, namely voiced conversation. Once thoughts are voiced, they are turned into artifacts. These artifacts, together with written texts that can be explored further, i.e. further language.

Despite some benefits in implementing collaborative writing in the EFL classroom, the challenges surely faced by both native and non-native teachers in some context. Kruck and Reif (2001) reported three inherent challenges faced by the teachers in teaching writing through collaborative writing. First, assigning a course-related group project is whether the group is selected based on teacher-assigned or self-selected. This problem comes when teacher-assigned group has to deal with diverse personalities and discover the underlying skills of each member, they cannot agree on anything, most of their time is spent debating points rather than on completing writing task. Meanwhile, in self-selected groups, many students choose to group with others whom they already know and have worked before, thus students insulate themselves from achieving some of the pedagogical goals of group work assignments. Another challenge occurs when members either not able

or not willing to equally contribute to the writing project. When one or several students may dominate the group, they may inhibit other group members from participating. Lastly, conflict resolution, which refers to when the teacher wants to motivate all students to jointly contribute and provide methods for conflict resolution. The teacher may be required to mediate or handle any conflicts within the group. However, it is the best method to encourage students to solve problems without teacher's intervention. Allowing students to solve problems without interference will enhance students' teamwork and problem resolution skills. Conversely, at the same time, teacher must be conscious of situations that acquire teachers to participate in order to avoid problems and misunderstanding.

In the Indonesian context, Widiana and As-Sabiq (2021) have investigated the teachers' challenges in using collaborative writing and scaffolding teaching writing. The findings showed that the teachers encountered several challenges related to various levels of student's academic achievements, lack of interest among students in engaging classroom activities, student's lack of vocabulary, and difficulty motivating students. The teachers faced difficulty in motivating students because of the limited learning time. In the context of a country that does not use English as L1, teachers need a lot of time to explain the material to students slowly. Students need teachers' encouragement to learn English and need to know the goals, rewards, and how to learn English appropriately.

The implementation of collaborative writing in the EFL classroom draws enormous attention among language researchers. Most of those studies focus on the students' views, and not many scholars focus on the perception and challenges confronted by the teachers in teaching collaborative writing. Investigating teachers' perception and challenges in this area thus becomes important, as it can be a way to enhance teaching and learning processes, fulfilling the current and future demands for the development of students' writing skills (Hidayati, 2018). Therefore, this study will investigate how areteachers'perception and the challenges encountered in the implementation of collaborative writing.

Method

This study was conducted by using phenomenology research designthat is a firm mode of qualitative research with respect to its methods that involves participant selection, data gathering, anddata analysis (Moustakas, 1994).Phenomenology is one of the qualitative research designs which based on the assumption each individual's experience and the meaning they attribute to it (Bakanay & Cakir, 2016). In additon, Creswell (1998) states that phenomenology research design is the best design when the research problem requires a profound understanding human experiences common to a group of people. In order to understand and describe the teachers' perception, and their challenges in implementing collaborative writing in the EFL classroom, I have design this phenomenological study. The meaning of this study is to construct the perspectives of participants gathered through in-depth interviews.

The main participants of this research were five teachers who have been currently having experience and teaching writing through collaborative writing in the classroom for about 3 years. The respondents were purposively selected from different senior high schools in Wajo regency, South Sulawesi, Indonesia. The

participants in phenomenological research mostly chosen according to purposive sampling in which it based on specific criteria (Padilla-Diaz, 2015), in this case should be the teachers who have experienced collaborative writing in their teaching process.

In term of data collection technique, Kvale and Brinkman, 2009; Marshall and Rossman, 2010; Padilla-Diaz, 2015 sate that the most useful data collection technique in this research design is the profound interview, in this term is semi-structured interview. Therefore, in-depth interview sessionwas conducted with the teachers to gain more insight into the perception and challenges they face in implementing collaborative writing by using *Bahasa Indonesia* to avoid misunderstanding and misinterpretation. McIntosh and Morse (2015) state that the interview has the purpose to ensure subjective responses from the participants concerning to their experiences of the situation or phenomenon. The interview has an important role in this study since I could not observe the feeling, behavior, and how the people define the world around them (Merriam, 2009), where I cannot directly interpret the teachers' point of view related to their challenges in implementing collaborative writing in teaching process. In addition, the semi-structured interview recording would be first translated into English. Then, it transcribed and analyzed by involving data coding and memoing, additionally, interpretation also involved in this study.

Results
Teachers' Perception in Implementing Collaborative Writing

Among five teachers, they have different way in applying collaborative writing in the classroom. Based on interview section in term of dividing students in a group, participant 1 and 4did it by counting, therefore, there is a mixture capability in a group. Meanwhile, participant 5 divided students based on proficiency level in learning English. And the rest conducted collaborative writing by asking students to choose their own group. The stages of writing (i.e pre-writing stage, writing stage, and post-writing stage) in collaborative writing is clearly implemented by all teachers although not all teachers involving students' feedback. As mentioned by participant 2;

> "I did not involve students' feedback because I think it is not students' job, and not all of the students are believe in others' ability. Similarly, students also feel disinclined to judge their friends' writing. They may say that I do not have heart to give negative judgement on my classmate's writing".

Meanwhile, participant 3 who implemented collaborative writing by pairs state that students' feedback is important, it guides them to think critically. The perception in this research divided into four main aspects, namely social, academic, psychological, and assessment. Based on semi-structured interview, it can be concluded the teachers have different experienced in implementing collaborative writing which clearly elaborated in follows;

Social Aspect

Based on the teachers' interview, most of them perceived collaborative writing as positive strategy which could be implemented in teaching writing. Since the students have a different capability and proficiency level in writing, in

collaborative writing they can support each other (Mentioned by participant 3). By the same token, participant 5 also states that "the students can develop their social interaction through collaborative writing, because sometimes some students are too independent". Therefore, by practicing collaborative writing, students can build their interaction, share diverse understanding among others. In addition, helping each other also could be gained in learning writing through collaborative writing as stated by participant 1;

> "Generally students cannot learn writing independently, there are some aspects in writing are difficult to understand, by collaborative writing therefore they can share knowledge, and most important is the students may correct each other's writing task".

Psychological Aspect

This aspect refers to students' anxiety in writing skill. Dividing students by mixture of proficiency level; combining higher and lower achiever in a group helps lower achiever to jointly learning. As answered by participant 2 in interview section;

> "Some students feel uncomfortable and embarassed to directly ask teacher, sometimes they just choose to keep their question. In view of this, by collaborating with others, the students' anxiety could be diminished since they will not feel shy anymore in discussing with others".

Academic Aspect

In academic aspect, collaborative writing emphasizes on students-centered, therefore the students will be more active in learning process (mentioned by participant 4). Teaching writing has a lot of stage that should be involved, such as pre-writing, writing, and post-writing stage. Participant 1 explained that;

> "In pre-writing stage, before going to write, the students need to do some preparation, such as brainstorming. In this case, it helps the students to increase their creativity and critical thinking on how to collect and select as much as idea".

Additionally, through collaborative writing, the students will produce a proper text because the students have a long discussed with group members and do a revision before submit it (stated by participant 5). In writing skill, there are important aspects should be considered, not only how to build the ideas, but also how to deal with grammar, vocabulary, and punctuation. Furthermore, participant 2 commented that "in a group, some students may be creative in building idea, while the rest is expert on correcting grammar". Thus, teaching writing through collaborative writing can help the students to solve some problems in writing task.

Assessment Aspect

There are some aspects could be assessed in writing task, such as idea, grammar, punctuation, mechanic, vocabulary, spelling, and so on. In collaborative writing, some teachers may grade the students' task equally, but some of them grade it based on students' involvement in producing a text. Based on the data from interview, participant 1 stated that;

> "I follow the collaborative writing process in the classroom, therefore I

know student who has a big contribution and who just keeps silent in a group, but I give them a grade equally in one group to avoid heartburning among students. This case may become one consideration in giving a grade at the end of semester".

Additionally, it would be one of the dilemmas in implementing collaborative writing, because not all of students have the same contribution and engagement in producing a text (mentioned by participant 5). Aside from this, participant 3 stated that "the students can earn a high grade since it has many aspects could be assessed, not only writing task (i.e generic structures and linguistics features), but also the students' engagement, honesty, and discipline in a group".

Teachers' Challenges in Implementing Collaborative Writing

The implementation of collaborative writing in the classroom surely challenging for both students and teacher as it has been also criticized by some experts.These criticisms, according to Speck (2002), focuses on faults or mistakes in the teaching writing process, particularly in terms of forming groups, training students to be effective collaborators, and managing the collaborative writing process itself. In this case, teachers' challenges are categorized into three themes, those are learner, instruction, and management that will be elaborated below according to participants' interview.

Learner

When the respondents were interviewed regarding to the problems in implementing collaborative writing related to learners' performance and attitude, it has been perceived by some teachers in term of struggling to divided students in a group since they have different capabilities. Participant 1 stated that "actually, the students are difficult to divided into some groups because they have much diverse ability, especially in writing skill". Similarly, participant 5 and 4 also clarrified that;

"I divided the students into some groups based on my preference where I know students' level in writing, therefore the high and low students will collaborate in a group, but the problem is sometimes the high achiever will handle the whole task without involving others"

"It is quite hard to implement collaborative writing since a member in some groups will work hard and the other may not where they are embarrassed and lazy".

Instruction

Instruction in utilizing collaborative writing hereis due to time constraint and group assessment. When asking the respondents' constraints in implementing collaborative writing, participant 3 commented that;

"One of the main problems is time management, where collaborative writing needs more time to have a fruitful outcome, because it involves brainstorming, students' and teacher's feedback, revising and editing.

"Besides, grading students fairly is such a problem because not all of the group members have the same contribution of the task".

Additionally, participant 2 answered the question as "collaborative writing in

term of assigning grade for students is difficult, it is a dilemma to give them grade equally". "I feel hard to finish this strategy properly because of limited time, therefore, two or more stages are not well-executed" stated by participant 4.

Management

Classroom management related to control group where teachers cannot fully control over the group. There are several constraints encountered by them. Participant 5 mentioned that "I feel difficult to control the group when two or three members of each group do not participate, I have no words to ask them to be active in their groups". Similarly, participant 1 also answered that "not all of them students are enjoy to learn in group, some of them are confident to write individually, therefore, it cannot be forced to make them participate well". Moreover, participant 2 also revealed that;

> "The main problem for me is when students are divided into group based on their need, they may feel comfortable to work with their close friend, but they just spend their time by debate and discuss other topics".

Furthermore, participant 3 mentioned that "learning in a group actually has a conflict where the students in group argue some opinion or ideas which is different with others, then they just debate and get nothing".

Discussion
Teachers' Perception in Implementing Collaborative Writing

Based on the data gathered from interview, five teachers perceived positive perception toward the implementation of collaborative writing, although there still many challenges encountered by them.The teachers' perception here focuses on four aspects (i.e social, psychological, academic, and assessment). These points also have been researched by some scholars and found any similarities and differences. In term of social aspect,the teachers perceived that students can support each other and develop their social interaction in learning through collaborative writing. It aligns with Shea (1995) who states that the students in a group can help each other where low-achieving students can be supported by high-achieving students where the high achievers would encourage the others to be active and develop ideas to complete the writing task. Additionally, Widodo (2013) on his study found that in a drafting process, the students could be easily to share both knowledge and linguistic resources, and more importantly, they were able to share responsibility for completing the writing task. Next, the feedback and response stage directly involved the students to respond to each other's writing.

Seen from psychological perspective, teachers perceived collaborative writing as strategy to diminish students' anxiety in writing skill. The students can interact with their mates in a group where they will not feel uncomfortable and shy to ask some questions, since some students are embarassed to ask teacher. Collaborative writing is thus used to build a supportive learning atmosphere for the students in reducing writing anxiety and provide them with an opportunity to experience the process of producing a text (Gaith, 2002).

Secondly,based on the result of interview section that viewed in academic aspect, the teachers mostly argued that the students would be more active in writing and produce a proper text. In addition, it is also increase the students'

ability in building the ideasand dealing with grammar, vocabulary, and punctuation. This is related with Shehadeh's (2011) study who assessed students' writing based on five aspects of writing: content, organization, grammar, vocabulary, and mechanics.Specifically, the effect in implementing collaborative writing was significant in the aspects of content, organization, and vocabulary.By the same token, Dobao (2013) also investigates the accuracy (grammatical and lexical errors, spelling, and punctuation)fluency(the length of the text), and complexity (the number of words per clause, number of words per T-unit, and number of clauses per T-unit) of students' tasks in collaborative writing in the L2 classroom. The study showed that the fluency of text written individually is better than those texts written by pairs and groups. However, in terms of accuracy and complexity, the texts written through pairs and groups were greater than produced individually.

Lastly, the issue of assessment relates to grading students. Some of the teachers feel dilemma in giving grade to students. Based on the data from interview section, some teachers give grade for the students' task equally, and some of them also grade it based on students' involvement in producing a textbecause they have not the same contribution and engagement in the group.There are some issues considering on grading students in which some of them do not try to ask what they need to do in a group, either by not attending group meetings and not participating in writing assignments, or being late in submitting assignments.Therefore, fair assessment for each group member will be a dilemma for teachers in collaborative writing in which the grades are seen as rewards and often the team's primary motivation to finish the writing task (Chisholm, 1990). The same grade of all the members when there are some members who are viewed as free-riders will cause resentfulness of other working students.

Teachers' Challenges in Implementing Collaborative Writing
Based on the result of interview section, the teachers faced several challenges in implementing collaborative writing in term of learners, instruction, and management. Theproblems of the collaborative writing process rely on a number of factors, one of them is individual student differences, for example, a student proficiency level in language and writing would influence motivation to write collaboratively (Widodo, 2013). By the same token, ensuring groups to have a mixture of students with different writing abilities can sometimes also be found, the less-experienced writers are not gathered in one group. Futher, better student writers might easily usurp the writing and do the bulk of the writing; meanwhile, less-experienced students have little involvement in the group (Speck, 2002). In addition, students in a class definitely have various ability, they may be categorized as low, medium, and high achiever, consequently, guiding them to learn collaboratively could be more struggling.Fareh (2010) states that students' various ability, aptitude, preparedness, and motivation often become a bottleneck for implementation of collaborative writing where most of them are uneducable, incapacitated, unable to think, unteachable, impolite, and cannot learn.

Another problem is related to classroom instruction of the writing processwhere some students considered being conflicting, the preparation of written task which relates to the time allocation required, the utilization of human resources, especially the domination of higher-team members, conflicting

personalities, and satisfaction of all team members (Wray, 1992). Widiana and As-Sabiq (2021) have investigated the teachers' challenges in using collaborative writing and scaffolding teaching writing. The teachers faced difficulty in motivating students because of the limited learning time. In the context of a country that does not use English as L1, teachers need a lot of time to explain the material to students slowly. Students need teachers' encouragement to learn English and need to know the goals, rewards, and how to learn English appropriately.

In terms of grades, giving the same grade for all the group members when some of them are seen as free-riders (Chisholm, 1990) will cause resentfulness of other working students, grades are seen as rewards and often become the student's primary motivation to complete the task. Furthermore, teachers have to consider specific learning outcomes before implementing collaborative writing in the classroom. The fairness problem in collaborative writing comes when more highly motivated students are thrown together with less-motivated students. The less-motivated students here are willing to have the go-getter do the task, but more highly motivated students much contribute to doing the task. In some groups, a student will work hard and the other may not, and since the grade is seen as a reward, it is impossible to reward the students equally.

The last challenges faced by teachers is classroom management.This case relates tothe potential barriers to students' willingness to collaborate with other, such as: those who are individualistic may refrain from working with others, weaker (low-students) may be overpowered by (high-students) and one member of the group may take too much responsibility, leaving others with little to responsibility over the task (Shea, 1995). Therefore, forming a group becomes a challenge for teachers by considered many things. According to Forman (1989), Leverenz (1994), and Meyers (1986), forming groups come with the consideration of the size of group, the role of gender, and cultural differences. The literature discusses that the group members can consist of two to twelve, and the ideals group size is three members (Jacobs, 1992). In forming groups, students can have a sense of how well they might work with others. The invariable issue is whether students can share the work equally. Another issue of forming group is the role of gender, whether it is homogeneous group based on gender or gender-balanced group. Male and female have different communication style thus, problems can arise where female's communication patterns are more focused on maintaining the group, and male is on completing the task.Futhermore, Shea (2012) states that the major challenge for teachers in conducting collaborative writing is having fair and effective systematic classroom management. That is, problems can emerge due to unequal distribution and contributions to the collaborative task.

Conclusion

This study revealed two main findings; teacher' perception and challenges. Implementing collaborative writing based on the teachers' interview section, show that they have positive perception of collaborative writing seen from four aspects, namely social, psychological, academic, and assessment. In term of social aspect, the teachers perceived that students can support each other and develop their social interaction in learning through collaborative writing. Related to psychological aspect, collaborative writing according to the teachers could be used

as strategy to diminish students' anxiety in writing skill. Additionally, the students would be more active in writing and produce a proper text in academic aspect. On the contrary, some teachers feel dilemma in giving grade to students. Based on the data from interview section, some teachers give grade for the students' task equally, and some of them also grade it based on students' involvement in producing a text because they have not the same contribution and engagement in the group.

Furthermore, teachers still faced some challenges in implementing collaborative writing (e.g. learners, instruction, management). Firstly, individual student differences with various proficiency level in language and writing would becomes a struggle in implementing collaborative writing. In term of challenges in instruction segment, some students considered being conflicting of the preparation of written task which relates to the time allocation, the utilization of human resources, especially the domination of higher-team members, conflicting personalities, and satisfaction of all team members. Lastly, this case of classroom management relates to the potential barriers to students' willingness to collaborate with other, in which some of them may refrain from working with others, one member of the group may take too much responsibility and leaving others with little to responsibility over the task.

As the suggestion for future research related to this topic, it is going to be much better to collected the data with various instruments, such as questionnaire, classroom observation, or document analysis. Besides, in term of participants, it also recommends to involve a number of students and teachers for gaining a proper data.

Acknowledgement

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