



The Effect of Collaborative Writing on Iranian EFL Learners' L2 Writing Anxiety and Attitudes

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Abstract

The study investigated the effects of Individual and collaborative teaching on the writing anxiety of Iranian EFL learners. Moreover, the participants' attitudes towards collaborative writing were explored. To this end, sixty were divided into two groups. The participants in both groups were asked to compose a story based on the provided picture sheet. One group worked individually, and the other group worked in pairs. Additionally, the Second Language Writing Anxiety Inventory (SLWAI) and the Collaborative Writing Questionnaire (CWQ) were administered after the treatment. The results disclosed that collaboration led to the reduction of learners' writing anxiety rates. Furthermore, it was found that the participants had a positive attitude towards collaborative writing. The findings developed the understanding of social and affective factors involved in L2 writing.

Keywords: individual and collaborative writing, writing anxiety, EFL learners' attitude

INTRODUCTION

The term collaborative writing is differently defined in the literature. Both Lunsford and Ede (1992) and Henry (2000) identified numerous ways that various groups and writers defined collaborative writing. In an attempt to standardize terms used when writing collaboratively, Lowry et al. (2004) attempted to create a common name that could be used by researchers studying group writing processes. The issues that were common between all of these authors defining collaborative writing were: (a) what constitutes writing when the product is the result of a collective effort, (b) who owns a collaboratively written product, (c) what types of products are considered writing, and (d) what is the difference in intention, agency, and inter-subjectivity between a collaboration and a single author.

Often the difference in defining collaborative writing was based on how writing was being used in the workplace. Studies in the fields of knowledge and organizational management look at the collaborative writing process as a means to create institutional

memory and capture information that might be lost if it is not written down (Martin et al., 2003; Mason & Lefrere, 2003; Yakhlef, 2002). The collaborative process helps to sort and prioritize information, filtering out redundant or unimportant data.

Researchers in the field of composition often equated collaborative writing with the academic essay, a process for developing concepts or organizing thoughts and communicating those thoughts, with input from classmates or coworkers, through the written word (Henry, 2000). Ultimately, even with input from others, the essay (or piece of writing) was owned by the author or authors. However, this definition excludes the many types of writing that might not be in the form of a formal alphabetic structure, such as webpages, diagrams, notes, models, and other symbolic representations (Brandt, 2005; Henry, 2000; Lunsford & Ede, 1992; Swarts, 2000). In addition, it does not recognize the level of collaboration and contribution that would distinguish collaborative writing from single author writing. For example, if there is a single author-writer who collects data, meets with groups, gets approval from group members at each step of the writing process, and must receive final approval from the group, is this considered collaborative writing or single-author writing?

Lunsford and Ede (1992) were dissatisfied with their definition of collaborative writing as "any writing done in collaboration with one or more persons" (p. 15). While this is broad enough to capture all types of writing and collaboration, it does not address the more intentional collaboration expected in developing a common document. Therefore, this paper will use the definition developed by Lowry et al. (2004):

An interactive and social process that involves a team focused on a common objective that negotiates, coordinates, and communicates during the creation of a common document. The potential scope of [Collaborative Writing] goes beyond the more basic act of joint composition to include the likelihood of pre- and post-task activities, team formation, and planning. Furthermore, based on the desired writing task, [Collaborative Writing] includes the possibility of many different control approaches, team roles, and work modes. (p. 72-74)

This definition includes the non-writing processes that contribute to the final shared document, allowing for different configurations of collaboration and contribution. At the same time, unlike Lunsford and Ede's definition, it limits collaborative writing to intentional group input, with the final product a document that is authored by multiple parties. Based on the definitions of collaborative writing discussed above, it is proposed that collaborative writing could be generally divided into three types:

1. Group members write separate sections of a text. They work independently and have little discussion during the process of writing (i.e., co-publishing).
2. Group members exchange ideas during the writing process, but create individual written products (i.e., co-responding, peer editing or peer feedback).

3. Group members write together and exchange ideas during the writing process, and they create one written product (i.e., co-writing).

In the present study, participants worked interactively with one person or more people throughout the writing process and jointly create one written product. Therefore, the collaborative writing in this study means co-writing.

LEARNERS' ATTITUDES TOWARD COLLABORATIVE WRITING

Another issue is L2 learners' perception of and attitudes toward peer response and collaboration. Learners have reported mixed feelings about the social aspects of writing with their peers. In some peer-response studies there are instances in which learners have expressed frustration over the fact that some of the members in their writing groups did not adequately fulfill their designated function (Jacobs, 1987). In other cases, learners have seen peer-response as an opportunity to socialize and position themselves within the social hierarchy of the class (Amores, 1997).

WRITING ANXIETY

Foreign language anxiety is a special kind of anxiety related to foreign language classes. It can be considered as a kind of 'situation-specific anxiety' just like 'stage anxiety', 'maths anxiety' and 'test anxiety' (Batumlu & Erden, 2007). Horwitz, Horwitz and Cope (1986) were the first to approach foreign language anxiety as a separate phenomenon specific to foreign language experience and they outlined the theoretical framework of foreign language anxiety. They argue that although general anxiety plays an important role in the development of foreign language anxiety, foreign language anxiety is different from all kinds of anxiety because it is a distinct complex of self-perceptions, feelings and behaviors related to classroom language learning process (Batumlu & Erden, 2007). Horwitz, Horwitz and Cope (1986) argue that foreign language anxiety can be related to three different forms of anxieties that are related to academic and social evaluation situations: Communication apprehension, fear of negative evaluation and test anxiety.

The concept of writing anxiety, also called writing apprehension is defined in a variety of ways. It can be defined as a language-skill-specific form of anxiety, unique to the language-particular skill of writing (Bline et al. 2001). It encompasses a fear of the writing process that prevails over the expected gain from the ability to write, which may eventually lead to relatively enduring predispositions to dislike, evade or fear writing.

Writing anxiety is used generally to mean the negative and anxious feelings that disrupt part of the writing process (McLeod, 1987). It also relates to the tendency of people to approach or to avoid writing (Daly & Miller, 1975). Thus, low apprehensive writers tend to enjoy writing frequently, and are more confident in their abilities to write (Daly, Faigley, & Witte, 1981). As for the people with high writing anxiety, they view writing as an unrewarding and even punishing event, and, therefore, they avoid the situations in which they need to write. Their writing anxiety is reflected in the behaviors they demonstrate as they write, in the attitudes they express about their writing, and, above

all, in their written products (Daly & Miller, 1975). In fact, L2 writing anxiety is associated with the tendency to avoid the writing situation, because it causes elevated anxiety levels. It is also found to lead to difficulties in producing effective and coherent written pieces, as well as with problems in writing simple letters or complex reports (Schweiker-Marra & Marra, 2000). This is the reason why L2 writers produce shorter compositions and use less intense words (Daly & Miller, 1975; Steinberg & Horwitz 1986). Other behaviors frequently observed are procrastination, apprehension, tension, low self-esteem, and lack of motivation (Leki, 1999). According to Tsui (1996), writing is predominantly product-oriented, and enquires individual works, which are treated as a significant stressor because FL learners are deprived of help, support and encouragement. In effect, students are threatened by serious negative consequences of their poor work, such as a limitation of their career choices. Lee (2010) suggests that, similar to L1 writing, the difficulty of L2 writing also originates from the affective aspect such as writing anxiety. However, because L2 writers think and write in the second language with which they are less familiar, L2 writing seems to produce writing anxiety more easily than L1 writing.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM AND OBJECTIVES

According to Johnson, Johnson and Smith (1991) collaborative learning can produce less anxiety. Since collaborative learning is able to enhance students' cognition and decrease students' anxiety in the area of content learning, it might be possible that similar findings can be expected in the area of L2 learning. For example, in the aspect of L2 writing, collaboration and interaction during writing might facilitate students' development in L2 writing ability and reduce students' anxious feelings about L2 writing. The present investigation might help indicate whether collaborative writing helps decrease students' writing anxiety. In the present study, students' writing anxiety was measured through the Second Language Writing Anxiety Inventory (SLWAI) designed by Cheng (2004).

Moreover, the other issue that needs further investigation is learners' attitudes concerning collaborative writing. Results of studies on students' attitudes to group/pair work in general are mixed (Storch, 2005). Some studies report that learners have predominantly positive attitudes to pair and group work (e.g., Mishra & Oliver, 1998; Roskams, 1999, Storch, 2005), while others report that learners have reservations about pair and group work (e.g., Hyde, 1993; Kinsella, 1996). However, it should be noted that most of these studies (except Storch, 2005) have examined learners' attitudes to group/pair work in general, rather than to the activity of collaborative writing. Hence, research needs to scrutinize the effect of collaborative writing with careful attention to the writers' attitudes.

Considering previous studies as a whole (e.g., Johnson, et. al., 1991; Storch, 2005; Storch & Wigglesworth, 2009; Shehadeh, 2011), comparison between the writing conditions need to be tested when study designs include potentially mediating variables. For instance, we do not know which condition is potentially more helpful for lower or

higher anxiety learners. Equally, we do not know if these factors might be further dependent on individual learner differences (e.g., learners' attitude).

Looking through this lens, the present study was designed to investigate the effect of collaboration on L2 writing anxiety as well as how this effect is associated with learners' attitudes towards collaborative writing activity.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND HYPOTHESES

The following research questions were investigated in the current study.

RQ₁. Is there any significant difference between the writing anxiety of individual and collaborative writers?

RQ₂. Do Iranian intermediate EFL learners have positive attitudes towards collaborative writing?

Based on the aforementioned issues, the following hypotheses were formulated.

HO₁. There is not any significant difference between the writing anxiety of individual and collaborative writers.

HO₂. Iranian intermediate EFL learners do not have positive attitudes towards collaborative writing.

METHOD

Participants

Sixty female intermediate EFL learners with the age ranges from 16 to 28, were selected in the current research based on the results of an Oxford Placement Test (OPT) administered before carrying out the treatment. One class was selected as the collaborative group (N = 29) and one class was chosen as the individual group (N = 31).

Instruments

Oxford Placement Test (OPT)

As an indicator to identify intermediate level learners, the results of an OPT was used. The test contained 60 multiple choice items of grammar (20 items), vocabulary (20 items), reading comprehension (20 items). A multiple-choice test format was considered to be appropriate for Iranian learners who had much experience taking tests in a similar format during formal schooling. To determine the participants' level of proficiency, the OPT was administered and intermediate-level learners were selected according to their scores (30-47) on this test. According to the OPT manual the students who can obtain the score range of 30-47 can be considered as intermediate-level.

Second Language Writing Anxiety Inventory (SLWAI)

In the present study, students' writing anxiety was measured through the SLWAI designed by Cheng (2004). The items that require reverse scoring are 1, 4, 7, 17, 18, 21,

and 22. The theoretical ranges of the scale are from 22 to 110. Lower scores indicate lower writing anxiety and higher scores indicate higher writing anxiety. The participants responded to a 5-point Likert scale for each item with 1, 2, 3, 4, and 5 signifying strongly disagree, disagree, neither agree nor disagree, agree, and strongly agree respectively. Furthermore, this instrument has been used in the studies of Atay and Kurt (2006), Donahoe (2010), and Wu (2015). All of these studies reported that the SLWAI had a good reliability index of more than .84. In this study, the calculated Cronbach's alpha for the SLWAI was an acceptable reliability value of 0.81

Collaborative Writing Questionnaire (CWQ)

This study adopted the Collaborative Writing Questionnaire (CWQ) designed by Wu (2015). The CWQ was administered after the treatment (see appendix D). The questionnaire contains 12 questions, and it gauges participants' perceptions of collaborative writing. A 5-point Likert scale is used in this questionnaire and the participants had 10 minutes to complete it in the classroom.

In order to investigate the reliability of the questionnaire Cronbach's coefficient alpha was calculated in the current study. The results of Cronbach's coefficient indicated the reliability value of 0.76. This value is acceptable for a measure with 12 number of items.

Procedure

All the data was collected over a 2-week period in two classes at Donya e Zaban language institute during the spring semester of 1395. Before the experiment participants were informed that all details of the procedures would be confidential and their essays would not be graded as part of their academic achievement. Based on the results of an OPT which was administered among the sample of the present study, a class was selected as the collaborative group ($N = 29$) and one class was chosen as the Individual group ($N = 31$). In the individual writing condition, a picture sheet was given to the students and then were asked to write an essay based on the six pictures on the sheet. In the collaborative writing condition, the pairs were asked to work with each other and then co-write an essay based on the picture sheet given to them. As a result of previous research which has shown that pairs take longer to complete tasks than individuals (Storch, 2005), the pairs and individuals were allocated a different amount of time. The pairs were given 45 minutes to complete the essay and the individuals were given 30 minutes. In the next step, the SLWAI was administered to both groups and the participants had ten minutes to complete it. Afterwards, pairs were asked to complete the CWQ.

Data analysis

SPSS Version 22 was used to perform all the statistical analyses in this study. In order to determine if there was any significant difference between the writing anxiety of individual and collaborative writers, Independent samples t-tests were used on the SLWAI scores. Finally, in order to investigate the learners' attitudes towards collaborative writing, students' responses to the CWQ were analyzed using descriptive

statistics, which helped identify the number of students responding to each item (i.e., frequencies) and the percent of students responding to each item (i.e., percentages).

RESULTS

The difference between the writing anxiety of individual and collaborative writers

The first research question sought to examine the difference between the writing anxiety of individual and collaborative writers.

An independent samples t-test was computed to investigate this research hypothesis. The descriptive statistics of the writing anxiety scores across the experimental and control groups are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Descriptive statistics of the writing anxiety scores

	Group	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Writing Anxiety	Individual	31	65.74	20.624	3.704
	Collaborative	29	55.38	17.438	3.238

Table 1 depicts that the anxiety mean score of the collaborative writers ($M = 55.38$) is smaller than the anxiety rate of the individual writers ($M = 65.74$). That is, producing texts in pairs reduced the anxiety of learners in performing the writing task. However, to check the significance of this difference, an independent samples t-test was run. The result of this test is presented in Table 2 below.

Table 2. Independent samples t-tests of the writing anxiety scores

		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means						
		F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
Writing Anxiety	Equal variances assumed	3.103	.083	2.094	58	.041	10.363	4.948	.458	20.267
	Equal variances not assumed			2.106	57.435	.040	10.363	4.920	.512	20.213

The results of the t-test, demonstrated in Table 2, indicates that there is a significant difference between the anxiety scores of the two groups ($t(58) = 2.094$, $p = .041$). Therefore, the findings manifested that the collaborative group had significantly lower writing anxiety rates than the individual group. Based on the observed results, it can be concluded that collaboration led to the reduction of learners' writing anxiety rates.

Consequently, the fourth null hypothesis as there is not any significant difference between the writing anxiety of individual and collaborative writers was rejected.

EFL learners' attitudes towards collaborative writing

The fifth research question tried to investigate the Iranian EFL learners' attitudes towards collaborative writing. In order to investigate the last research question, the percentage frequency of the students' answers to each question and also the means were calculated. In what follows, Table 3 presents the descriptive statistics for the scores of each item of the questionnaire.

Table 3. Learners' responses to the CWQ

Item	1 (%)	2 (%)	3 (%)	4 (%)	5 (%)	Mean
1. I can write a better essay when I work with a partner than when I work alone.	2.6	5.1	10.3	33.3	48.7	4.21
2. I like the process of planning, writing, and revising my essay better when I work with a partner than when I work alone.	2.6	23.1	48.7	12.8	12.8	3.10
3. I like planning my essay better when I work with a partner than when I work alone.	2.6	12.8	48.7	33.3	2.6	3.21
4. I like writing my essay better when I work with a partner than when I work alone.	0	7.7	30.8	48.7	12.8	3.67
5. I like revising my essay better when I work with a partner than when I work alone.	10.3	12.8	20.5	43.6	12.8	3.36
6. I prefer that my teachers use more group activities/assignments like collaborative writing.	5.1	17.9	30.8	43.6	2.6	3.21
7. I prefer to write an essay with a partner than writing alone.	0	7.7	51.3	35.9	5.1	3.38
8. Collaborative writing is beneficial for my English writing.	0	2.6	10.3	59	28.2	4.13
9. Collaborative writing has helped me to write faster in English.	2.6	17.9	53.8	25.6	0	3.03
10. Collaborative writing has helped me to know how to revise my writing better.	2.6	15.4	48.7	28.2	5.1	3.18
11. Collaborative writing can help improve my English writing.	0	7.7	23.1	43.6	25.6	3.87
12. Collaborative writing has helped me to express myself in English better.	5.1	12.8	17.9	43.6	20.5	3.62
Total						3.49

As shown in Table 3, the first 5 items of the questionnaire asked the learners' attitudes about collaborative writing in comparison with individual writing. Results indicated that 33.3 % of the students stated that they were 'agree' and 48.7 % stated that they were 'strongly agree' with item 1. That is most of the students (82%) mentioned that they can write a better essay when they work with a partner than when they work alone. Results with regard to the second question revealed that 12.8% were 'agree' and 12.8% were 'strongly agree' that they like the process of planning, writing, and revising their essay better when they work with a partner.

Moreover, Table 3 demonstrated that 33.3% chose 'agree' and 2.6% chose 'strongly agree' for the third item as "I like planning my essay better when I work with a partner than when I work alone". In response to the fourth item, 61.5% of the students (48.7% agree, 12.8% strongly agree) mentioned that they like writing their essay better when they work with a partner than when they work alone. For item 5 as "I like revising my essay better when I work with a partner than when I work alone" 43.6% of the students chose "agree" and 12.8% stated "strongly agree".

Results with regard to the second part of the questionnaire showed that most of the participants were agree with the items since the mean scores of all the items are greater than 3. Among these items, the respondents mostly agreed with item 8 as "Collaborative writing is beneficial for my English writing" ($M = 4.13$). In addition, the finding with regard to the last item revealed that 43.6% were agree and 20.5% were strongly agree that collaborative writing has helped them to express themselves in English better. As can be seen in Table 3, the mean score of all items were above 3. Besides, Table 9 presented that the total mean score of all responses ($N = 58$) was above 3.4 ($M = 3.49$). Overall, these findings suggested that Iranian EFL learners had a positive attitude towards collaborative writing. Based on the obtained findings, deductions could be made that the participants had a positive attitude towards collaborative writing. As a result, the research hypothesis as Iranian intermediate EFL learners do not have positive attitudes towards collaborative writing was rejected.

DISCUSSION

The first research question sought to examine the difference between the writing anxiety of individual and collaborative writers. The findings demonstrated that collaboration led to the reduction of learners' writing anxiety rates. Consequently, the fourth null hypothesis was rejected. Given that the measurement tool for some studies on writing anxiety was the SLWAI (e.g., Kurt & Atay, 2007; Jahin, 2012; Wu, 2015), which was also used in this study, it could be concluded that the findings of this study supports the findings of other researchers to a great extent. Jahin (2012) aimed to assess the impact of peer reviewing on their writing apprehension level and essay writing ability. The study sample consisted of 40 EFL major prospective teachers at Taibah University, KSA. Results of data analysis showed positive impacts of peer reviewing on experimental group participants' writing apprehension and essay writing ability. In addition, Wu (2015) found that traditional collaborative writing seems to be more effective than blog-supported collaborative writing in decreasing the writing anxiety of the EFL college students.

Likewise, Kurt and Atay (2007) found out the positive impact of peer reviewing on lowering writing anxiety of EFL major student teachers who became more aware of their mistakes. Moreover, Leki (1999), Nystrand and Brandt (1989) emphasized that peer feedback lessens the writing anxiety of students and increases their confidence in writing. In relation to their findings, the present study shows that all the positive things about collaboration makes the learning environment less anxious and stressful for the students, which results in an increase in their confidence.

Results of the last research question indicated that the participants had a positive attitude towards collaborative writing. Similar findings were found by Wu (2015), Beseler and Qi (2014), Shehadel (2011), Li, Chu, Ki and Woo (2010), and Storch (2005) studies, in which most of the participants displayed positive attitudes towards collaborative writing. The results of the questionnaire used by Wu (2015) suggested that the students feeling comfortable with writing collaboratively in the traditional and blog environment were more than those who did not. They did not reject collaborative writing and would like to continue collaborative writing in the future. In addition, the 18 students who participated in Shehadel's (2011) study were surveyed immediately after the posttest for their views and perceptions of the collaborative writing experience. Students' responses to the eight survey questions clearly show that most students were quite supportive of the activity and found it useful in multiple ways.

These results confirm Storch's (2005) earlier finding that most students who participated in her study (16 of 18) were generally positive of the CW experience. Similar to the students in these studies, most of the students (82%) in the current study mentioned that they can write a better essay when they work with a partner than when they work alone. Similarly, Beseler and Qi (2014) found that collaborative writing had a positive effect upon learners individually and as team members. Furthermore, participants in Li et al. (2010) showed improvement in writing attitudes after engaging in collaborative writing.

CONCLUSION

Based on the results reported and the discussion conducted in the previous sections, several conclusions can be drawn. First, based on the findings with regard to the writing anxiety, it can be concluded that collaboration led to the reduction of learners' writing anxiety rates which supports the findings of other researchers to a great extent. It seems that collaboration provides a friendly environment which often motivates students to participate more actively without stress and as a result lower the affective filter. In addition, findings indicated that the participants had a positive attitude towards collaborative writing. Most of the students in the current study mentioned that they can write a better essay when they work with a partner than when they work alone.

All in all, from the obtained findings regarding the CAF measures, it can be concluded that collaborative writing is an effective and suitable technique to be used teach writing. CW can be used as a pedagogical tool to encourage student collaboration and create a positive social atmosphere in the classroom. Writing does not need to be a solitary act. Additionally, one obvious implication of the collaborative writing technique used in the present study for teaching and teachers in L2 classrooms is the resulting reduction of anxiety. Collaborative writing helps to alleviate the apprehension the students might have about writing.

The present study has certain limitations that offer opportunities for further research. All participants in the present study were female students. However, based on the

findings of previous research in the EFL context (e.g., Jafari & Ansari, 2012), female students tended to perform better in writing than male students. More research is suggested to examine whether there is gender effect in writing performance in the context of EFL collaborative writing. Different results might have been obtained if male students were also participated in the present study.

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