



UNIVERSITI PUTRA MALAYSIA

***INFLUENCE OF COLLABORATION ON ESL LEARNER'S
FLUENCY AND ACCURACY IN WRITING***

NASHATUL AZWA BINTI WAHAB

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FLUENCY AND ACCURACY IN WRITING**

By

NASHATUL AZWA BINTI WAHAB

**Thesis Submitted to the School of Graduate Studies, Universiti Putra
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Degree of Master of Arts**

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Abstract of thesis presented to the Senate of Universiti Putra Malaysia in fulfillment of the requirement for the Degree of Master of Arts

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October 2016

Chairman : Ilyana binti Jalaluddin, PhD
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This quasi-experimental study investigated the effect of collaborative writing on the tertiary level students' fluency and accuracy in ESL writing. This study also looked at how students communicate their ideas during the collaborative process and through this the nature of interaction during collaborative writing were identified. This study utilised a mixed-methods design that was a combination of quantitative and qualitative approaches. The researcher used Mann Whitney U-test to compare the performance of the students in terms of fluency and accuracy measures. Content analysis was conducted on the interaction transcriptions to investigate how the students communicate their ideas and the nature of the interaction during the collaborative process. The participants were 69 first year students of mixed ability level in Universiti Sultan Zainal Abidin, Kuala Terengganu and they have to attend English Language Proficiency course that focused more on their writing skill. The objectives of this study were to find out the differences in terms of fluency and accuracy in the students' writing when they wrote individually and collaboratively. Secondly, this study aimed to investigate how the students communicate their ideas during their collaboration process with their peers. Using stratified random sampling, the participants were separated into two groups: the control group and the experimental group. Both groups underwent the same learning process but at the end of the process, the control group produced their essay individually and the experimental group had to produce their essay collaboratively. They were observed by the researcher and their discussions were recorded. Findings showed that there were significant differences in terms of the students' accuracy in their writing especially in terms of grammatical accuracy and lexical choice. However, no difference was found in terms of their fluency of writing. The recorded transcriptions indicated that the most frequently discussed topic by the students was lexical items, followed by grammatical issues and mechanics of writing. From the

recorded conversation, five features of interaction were identified during the students' collaborative writing activity namely mutual interaction, negotiation, cognitive conflict, shared expertise and use of L1. It could be concluded that collaborative writing could provide much assistance for the students in producing an accurate text. Besides that, this type of learning could open up opportunities for the students to be engaged in a productive academic discussion with their friends in their L2 writing classroom.



Abstrak tesis yang dikemukakan kepada Senat Universiti Putra Malaysia sebagai memenuhi keperluan untuk Ijazah Master Sastera

PENGARUH KOLABORATIF DI DALAM KELANCARAN DAN KETEPATAN PENULISAN PELAJAR BAHASA INGGERIS SEBAGAI BAHASA KEDUA

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Kajian kuasi-eksperimen ini meneliti kesan penulisan kolaboratif terhadap kelancaran dan ketepatan dalam penulisan Bahasa Inggeris di kalangan pelajar-pelajar peringkat pengajian tinggi. Selain itu, kajian ini juga meneliti bagaimana pelajar menyampaikan idea mereka semasa proses kolaboratif dan melalui proses inilah sifat interaksi semasa penulisan kolaboratif dikenal pasti. Kajian ini menggunakan kaedah campuran iaitu gabungan pendekatan kuantitatif dan kualitatif. Penyelidik menggunakan ujian Mann Whitney U untuk menentukan perbezaan signifikan dari aspek kelancaran dan ketepatan penulisan pelajar. Berikutnya, untuk data kualitatif, analisis kandungan daripada transkripsi interaksi digunakan untuk mengkaji bagaimana mereka menyampaikan idea, dan juga sifat interaksi semasa berlakunya proses penulisan kolaboratif. Para peserta terdiri daripada 69 pelajar tahun pertama di Universiti Sultan Zainal Abidin, Kuala Terengganu dan mereka wajib menghadiri kursus Kemahiran Bahasa Inggeris yang memberi tumpuan lebih kepada kemahiran penulisan mereka. Objektif pertama kajian ini adalah untuk mengetahui perbezaan dari segi kelancaran dan ketepatan penulisan pelajar apabila mereka menulis secara individu dan secara kolaboratif. Kedua, kajian ini bertujuan untuk mengkaji bagaimana pelajar menyampaikan idea mereka semasa proses penulisan kolaboratif berlangsung. Pelajar telah dibahagikan kepada dua kumpulan, iaitu kumpulan eksperimen dan kumpulan kawalan, melalui kaedah persampelan rawak berstrata. Kedua-dua kumpulan telah menjalani proses pembelajaran yang sama tetapi pada akhir proses, kumpulan kawalan dikehendaki menghasilkan esei secara individu dan kumpulan eksperimen pula perlu menghasilkan karangan secara kolaboratif. Mereka diperhatikan oleh pengkaji dan perbincangan mereka direkodkan secara audio. Dapatan kajian menunjukkan bahawa terdapat perbezaan yang signifikan dari segi ketepatan pelajar, terutama dari segi tatabahasa dan leksikal. Walau

bagaimanapun, tiada perbezaan ditunjukkan dari segi kelancaran penulisan. Transkripsi yang dihasilkan berdasarkan rekod audio menunjukkan bahawa item leksikal mencatatkan item paling kerap digunakan oleh pelajar, diikuti dengan aspek tatabahasa dan akhir sekali mekanikal penulisan. Selain itu, daripada perbualan yang dirakam, lima ciri interaksi dapat dikenal pasti semasa pelajar menjalani aktiviti penulisan secara kolaboratif iaitu interaksi bersama, perundingan, konflik kognitif, kepakaran yang dikongsi dan penggunaan bahasa ibunda. Secara kesimpulannya, penulisan secara kolaboratif didapati lebih membantu pelajar dalam menghasilkan teks yang tepat. Selain itu, jenis pembelajaran ini juga akan membuka peluang kepada para pelajar untuk mengadakan perbincangan akademik yang lebih produktif dengan rakan-rakan mereka bagi pembelajaran penulisan Bahasa Inggeris sebagai bahasa kedua.



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I certify that a Thesis Examination Committee has met on 18 October 2016 to conduct the final examination of Nashatul Azwa Wahab on her thesis entitled "Influence of Collaboration on ESL Learners' Fluency and Accuracy in Writing" in accordance with the Universities and University Colleges Act 1971 and the Constitution of the Universiti Putra Malaysia [P.U.(A) 106] 15 March 1998. The Committee recommends that the student be awarded the Master of Arts.

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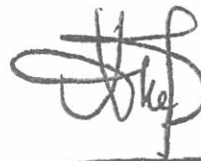
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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction

This chapter discusses the background of the study, statement of the problem, research questions, purpose of the study and significance of the study. Besides that, it presents and discusses the theoretical framework, limitations of the study and also definitions of key terms relevant to the study.

1.2 Background of Study

1.2.1 Writing in ESL classroom

'Writing is not just a hobby, it is also considered as a profession.'

Nadzrah, Norsimah & Hashimah (2011)

From the above statement, it could be said that writing is a big responsibility for a writer. It needs to be seen as an important skill that needs to be acquired by all people. It is important not only for professional writers, but also for students and this skill should be nurtured from young. Writing is one of the four essential skills besides listening, speaking and reading, which a student should acquire in learning a language. It is a medium of communication (Nadzrah et al., 2011) that consists of various sub-processes which occur regularly and in different styles of writing (Wong, Chen, Chai, Chin & Gao, 2011).

Some teachers and students think that writing is a subject that is less attractive and challenging to be taught and learned particularly among non-native students (Azizah, 2002) but writing is also difficult for native students (Abu Rass, 2001). This is because, ESL students face many problems when it comes to writing, such as to generate and develop the ideas that are relevant to the given topic, in choosing appropriate and accurate words or vocabularies and building a good sentence structure to express their ideas effectively (Lee 2007; Kim & Kim, 2005). According to Mariam (2004), even after eleven years of learning English, most Malaysian students still could not produce a piece of good written text. Incompetence in developing interesting and thoughtful ideas, inability to present ideas clearly and accurately and having problems in planning paragraphs and essays consistently are three major weaknesses in students' writing that had been recognized by The Ministry of Education in the year 2009. Nalini Arumugam & Faiz Sathi Abdullah (2011) stated that, those weaknesses are usually noticed when the students enter tertiary level institutions and when they are required to write for academic purposes independently.

It is not easy to be an effective L2 writer as the differences between L1 and L2 may cause difficulties and challenges for English as a foreign language students. Jiang (2011) identified a few challenges in English academic writing faced by Chinese college students which includes cultural origins, educational values, rhetorical strategies and reader awareness. These four barriers had been identified to affect the students' writing which later contributed to the poor performance of students in their writing class. In another local study conducted by Mah, Irfan & Thomas (2013), they identified several complications in L2 writing where they represented it in a chain diagram called 'SIL' with each letter representing a different factor: system (S), instructor (I) and learners (L). These three perspectives are interrelated with each other. If the challenges of the system can be overcome by the authorities, the problems with the instructors also will be conquered and the difficulties of the students could be fixed gradually.

The problem that they highlighted in system is that the contact hours per week in class required to teach all the four skills to diploma level students are insufficient. Thus, the students do not have enough time to have face-to-face discussions with their lecturer to receive enough assistance and feedback on their writing. This has been supported by Chao & Huang (2007) where they said, poor language achievement is due to the limited teaching time for different stages of the writing process. And this will lead to a group of passive and insipid students in essay writing. As for instructor, even though the government encourages the use of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) in classroom, and the university promotes student-centered learning, most of the lecturers still use the traditional teacher-centric practice (Liu, Qiao & Liu, n.d). They prefer to use directed instruction with their students and neglect the use of ICT in their teaching. This will lead to demotivation of the students as they may feel bored with the teacher's teaching style. The problem with the students is, they tend to transfer from their first language (L1) when they write in the second language (L2). According to Chittra, Faizah, Siti and Angelina (2010), because of their mother tongue interference, they are lacking in imagination and creativity when they write L2 essay. Their essays are dry, not attractive enough to be read as they consist of boring chronological events and demonstrate a lacking in proficiency of the language.

However, there are ways for teachers to assist their students to be an effective L2 writer. According to several studies by Graham (2008); Graham & Perin (2007a; 2007b); Rogers & Graham (2008), there are several recommendations that could be applied by students in the classroom. First, the teacher should be aware of the importance of frequent and continual writing in classroom (Graham & Perin, 2007b). Thus, they should encourage their students to spend at least one hour in the process of writing such as planning, revising, authoring or publishing text every day.

The second recommendation is that the teachers should increase their students' knowledge on writing (Graham, 2008). One way to improve students' knowledge in writing is through reading. Reading could actually provide the students with different characteristics of a good written text. The third recommendation would be to foster the students' interest, enjoyment and motivation in writing (Graham & Perin, 2007a, 2007b). Many students see writing as one of the classroom chores or assignments, and because of it, most of them do not enjoy their writing activity (De La Colina & Garcia Mayo, 2007). Thus, to encourage them to write, teacher should create a supportive and pleasant classroom environment. Other than that, collaborative writing activity should be highly promoted among them so that they could work, discuss and help each other to produce one good written text.

In addition, in order to help the students to become a strategic writer, students need to be taught the process of writing such as planning, drafting, revising and editing (Graham & Perin, 2007a; 2007b). When they are able to acquire these basic writing skills, they could use it independently while they write. Later, the teacher could form a writing routine in the classroom where the students can be involved in this process and provided with sufficient guidance and assistance. The next recommendation is, when the students have mastered the basic writing skills, the teacher can expose them to a higher level of writing skill (Graham & Perin, 2007a; 2007b). The teachers can encourage them to write and produce more complex sentences in their writing, use accurate punctuation and utilize more complex words to replace common words that they use. With this, it will take them to a new level of writing that will make them more fluent and better writers.

Last but not least, when the teachers ask the students to practice writing in the classroom, without measuring their progress using any assessment, it will give no benefits to them. With assessment, teacher could gauge students' achievement and progress in writing and they could identify whether the students' writing progress is good or they need extra guidance and supervision (Graham, 2008). Students' writing could be assessed using several marking schemes such as the holistic marking scheme and analytical marking scheme.

Thus, instead of just focusing on the students' outcome on their writing and giving negative comments when their students did not do well, teachers should try hard to foster their students' interest to write especially among English as foreign language students. They should think of a way on how to improve the students' performance in writing and help their students to improve their writing skills to a higher level.

Apart from some of the recommendations given to overcome the obstacles and problems faced by L2 students, there is a need to find a suitable

approach that could suit all levels of proficiency to aid the difficulties faced by the students. Previously, according to Graham et. al. (2007), collaborative writing in classroom should be nurtured among ESL students and this type of writing activity is seen as one medium that could assist the students in their writing. Lockhart & Ng (1995) mentioned that negotiation and collaboration between peers will actually aid the internalization of cognitive and linguistic skills and thus lead to improve writing abilities. This is because as the students discuss, they will have to explain their responses. Logically, the more they explain, the easier it should be for them to articulate their own understanding of what constitutes good writing.

Thus, given some of the benefits of collaboration in learning, it is necessary to try out collaborative learning in writing so as to improve L2 writing. The next section will discuss in detail the benefits of collaborative writing task in classroom to support the statement of the problem of this research.

1.2.2 Collaborative writing in classroom

In order to implement high level of interaction among students, and to increase both the quality of students' learning experience and the efficiency of learning, collaborative learning should be implemented in classroom (Curtis & Lawson, 2001). Rather than doing conventional writing activity with students, collaborative writing task is one method that should be considered by teachers in the classroom as it could improve students' writing and they learn more about writing (McAllister, 2005).

Group work and pair activities are commonly practiced by teachers and educators in a communicative classroom, whether in second language (L2) or first language (L1) classroom. It is also used in university classroom as a form of assessment in university context as stated by Storch and Wigglesworth (2009). In writing classes, by working in a group, students will be able to brainstorm, discuss with their friends and do peer review activities.

From various studies conducted by Storch (2005); Storch and Wigglesworth (2007) and, Wigglesworth and Storch (2009), many benefits could be obtained when students work together throughout a writing process. Some of the benefits are, collaborative writing allows students to produce a more accurate text compared to individual text, more learning opportunities could be offered through collaborative task (Storch & Wigglesworth, 2007), students could interact with one another regarding to different aspects of writing (Storch, 2005), encourage students to generate more creative ideas, and give awareness to educators about their students' achievement in writing (Wigglesworth & Storch, 2009). Dobao (2012) mentioned that this writing task has been supported both by psycholinguistic and sociocultural perspectives theoretically, as one medium that has been widely used in communicative classroom.

From a research in sociocultural perspectives done by Swain (2001), students' language use could be improved through collaborative task as they are able to work together to solve their language related problems that occurred. Ohta (2001) claimed that when two students who have different level of proficiency working together and discussing on the language issues that they faced, they could provide scaffolded assistance to each other and achieve a higher level of performance that is beyond their own competence. In collaborative writing activity, when students socialize among them by discussing the given task, the communication that happened in the discussion will link the writing process with speech (Cope & Kalantzis, 1993).

Based on the perspectives argued above, it can be seen that collaborative writing would benefit students in terms of ideas expansion and language development. Thus, given the positive side of collaborative practice in a classroom, it is necessary to look into how collaborative writing is able to improve L2 students' writing skills especially in Malaysian context. This study however will put more emphasis on the technical side that is the improvement in terms of accuracy and fluency in writing.

1.3 Statement of Problem

Based on previous research discussed earlier in section 1.1.2, it can be seen that collaborative writing task is very beneficial in helping students to improve their language use in learning a language and encourage critical thinking among them. In Malaysia, collaborative writing perhaps will be of beneficial as many Malaysian students have difficulties when it comes to speaking and writing in English.

There are several researches done in Malaysia to show that collaborative task provides many benefits to local students and helps them in their writing. Using questionnaire, Fung (2011) found that through collaborative task, students could possess their ideas creatively and share their opinions when they interact and discuss with their friends in solving a language problem. Meanwhile, according to Lin (2012), when students collaborate to complete a particular task, students are able to increase their sense of responsibility towards the given task, stimulate and share new ideas, promote the students' expertise, help to narrow down new information and negotiate while discussing. In another study among undergraduate students, Anis, Mahani, Latisha and Surina (2009) found that most of the undergraduate students enjoyed and more preferable to join collaborative learning activities in their English class.

Based on the previous findings above, it showed that collaborative activity encourages the students to have tolerance between them in accepting and

rejecting their friends' ideas while discussing. It teaches the students to adjust to their environment in order to achieve one good piece of written work. In the way, sharing of ideas has become fundamental here in producing one coherent idea.

Apart from the studies on the benefits above, there are also studies which investigate this type of task in different aspect. For instance, a study done by Fung (2006) where she examined the nature and dynamics of collaborative task in Malaysian tertiary in ESL setting. In her study, the nature of collaboration task was influenced by the group composition, role flexibility and task complexity. It was found that group composition was important as it would provide a comfortable working environment among the group members if they were familiar with each other, and role flexibility would help the students to collaborate effectively as they interchangeably play their roles as a team leader and group members in completing the task. In this study, it was also found that as the complexity of a task increased, the conflict would also increase. Thus, the task complexity would encourage the students to cope with one another sensitivity in order to achieve group harmony.

Pathinathan (2012) investigated the types of conflicts that occur during collaborative writing namely substantive conflict and affective conflict. From the study, it was found that substantive conflict could encourage the students to argue and defend their ideas to produce a good written text. It also helped in widen the students' vocabulary and provide good supporting details for their writing. Another similar study had also been done by Neda Ghabool, Mariann Edwina and Seyyed Hossein (2012) via respondents' questionnaires and examined their essays. Neda Ghabool et. al. (2012) investigated the challenges in three aspects of writing development namely conventions, punctuation and language use using collaborative task.

Even though implementing collaborative task in the classroom at higher institution is common nowadays and many studies have been done by looking at different aspects of it, a few studies explored the effectiveness of this task by focussing specifically on fluency and accuracy of ESL writers among low proficiency students at tertiary institution in Malaysia. Majority of the studies (Fung, 2011; Anis et al., 2009; Pathinathan, 2012 & Neda et al., 2012) were using quantitative approach where the data obtained derived from overall result of test and questionnaires. Meanwhile, other researches (Storch, 2011; Lin, 2012; Fung, 2006) are all looking at different aspect of collaborative learning such as benefits and the nature of collaborative writing through interviews and questionnaire measurement.

Thus, this current study tried to look from different angle and to fill in the gap in this field. Firstly, this study specifically focused on the students' improvement in writing by measuring and analysing the data quantitatively and qualitatively namely the accuracy and fluency in writing. Secondly, rather

than looking at one group of learners, this study focused on students with different level of proficiency or in other words, mixed ability. This study was a replication from previous study by Ana Fernandez Dobao in the year 2012 which was done only among the students at intermediate level in Spanish as a foreign language classroom. In contrast to previous studies such as Dobao (2012) and Fung (2006, 2012), modification had been made in this current research where the students involved in this study were mixed ability students ranging from low to high proficiency learners. To expand further of Dobao's (2012) study, this study tried to look at the nature and dynamic of collaborative writing like Fung (2006, 2012) as well. Inspired by the nature and dynamic of collaborative writing among low/intermediate students (by Fung 2006, 2012), it was hoped that the data on the dynamic of collaborative writing among mixed ability group would emerge. Finally, though Dobao's study was in Spanish context, the researcher wanted to investigate whether the same findings could be applied in Malaysian context.

1.4 Purpose of Study

The purpose of this study was to investigate the effectiveness of collaborative writing among low proficiency students in helping them to improve their accuracy and fluency in ESL writing. More specifically, this study attempted to:

1. study the differences in students' level of fluency in ESL writing when they write individually and collaboratively.
2. study the differences in students' level of accuracy in ESL writing when they write individually and collaboratively.
3. investigate on how the mixed ability students communicate their ideas about the text during collaborative activity.

Overall, the aim of this study was to investigate the influence of collaborative task on the students' writing and to determine whether this task could help to improve the quality of students' writing.

1.5 Research Questions

This study attempted to answer the following research questions:

1. What were the differences in terms of students' level of fluency when they write individually and collaboratively?
2. What were the differences in terms of students' level of accuracy when they write individually and collaboratively?
3. How do mixed ability L2 students communicate their ideas about the text during the collaborative learning?

1.6 Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework that underpinned this study was Vygotsky's sociocultural theory. This theory was important for this study in order to see the extent to which collaborative learning manage to develop writing skills as opposed to individual learning. This theory suggests that a person could learn, gain knowledge and achieve high development in their learning process if they interact and create interaction with more capable individuals. From the sociocultural perspective, learning is a socially situated activity (Dobao, 2012) and language is not only used as a communicative tool but it also acts as a psychological tool that helps to achieve linguistic goal and assist in the development of relevant cognitive processes, (Lantolf & Appe, 1994; Anton, 1999; Swain & Lapkin, 1998; Lantolf, 2006; Donato & McCormick, 1994; Appel & Lantolf, 1994).

Indirectly, this portrays the importance of mutual relationship between social environment and students as the main factor in learning and development. In Vygotskian (1978) term, cognitive processes are required on an intermental or social plane as the expert and novice jointly combine their mental resources to perform a process (Englert, Mariage & Dunsmore, 2008:209). Overall, learning based on this theory involves particular kinds of people, institutions and cultures. One important effect of this theoretical view is the recognition that writing activities should be recognized as collaborative and students should cooperatively take up many roles in the authorship function. This includes functions such as structuring the writing process, deciding to write and specifying content and topic.

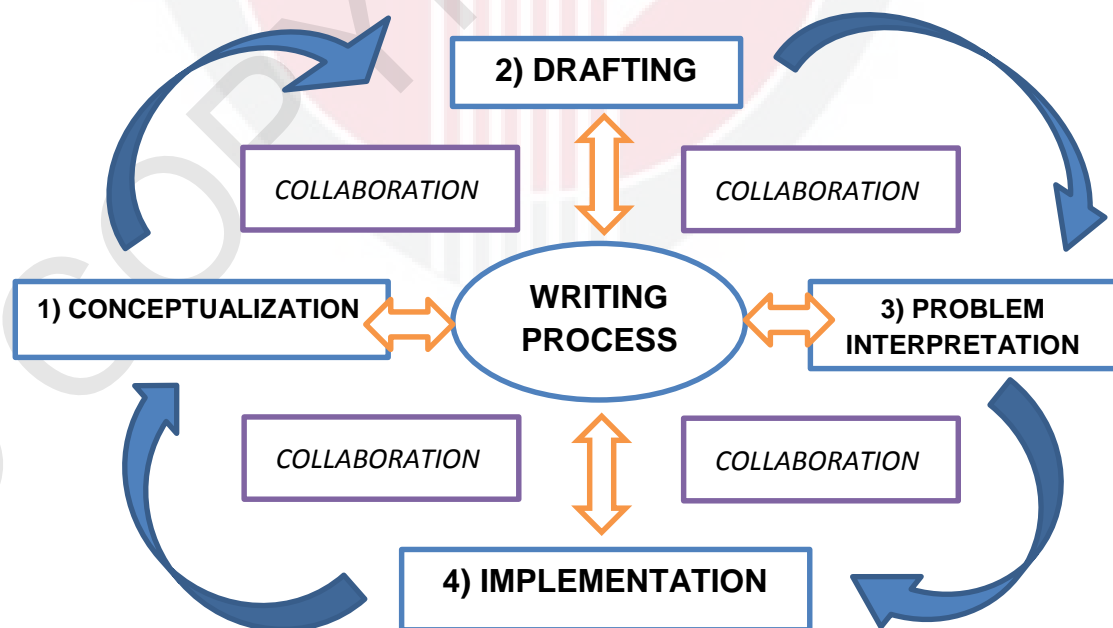


Diagram 1.1 : Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework presented in Diagram 1.1 captures the interaction of various stages involved in the collaborative writing process. There are several stages involved in the process which are conceptualization, drafting, problem interpretation and implementation.

In the conceptualization stage, the students start to build the concept of their writing and generate the ideas related to the topic given. In this stage, they will brainstorm and share their views, opinions and show their interest in order for them to construct and form the framework of their writing. By constructing their ideas collaboratively, this will open the opportunity for the unskilled students to listen and accept the different ideas from their friends that later will help to improve their creativity in writing. Students also will discuss to identify the audience and the purpose of their writing and organize the information gathered before moving on to the next stage.

Next, they will go into the process of drafting where in this stage, they have to apply their ideas in a written form. What they have shared in the first stage will be presented in a sentence and paragraph form to see the flow of their story in this first draft. All ideas are gathered and throughout the writing activity, new ideas might be explored and added to their writing. Drafting process is closely related with the third stage which is the problem interpretation stage. In this third stage, the students will start to revise and edit their essay. This is the stage where they revise their first draft, having a critical discussion and edit their essay. Any problems occurred during the discussion, they have to overcome it by reaching mutual agreement among them. While discussing, the less capable students will be exposed to and learn many new things from the more capable students. Scaffolding process and peer correction might take place in this stage as the skilled student will scaffold the unskilled student during the collaborative activity. This stage allows the students to be more independent on their learning and help them to develop a higher stage of writing skills.

After the students have finished with discussion session and they have achieved mutual agreement upon their writing, they will move to the fourth stage of the writing process. In this stage, the final draft of writing will be done and presented in a correct form and presented for final submission. In this final stage, students will realize that by collaborating in order to produce an essay will provide them with many benefits and advantages for their writing skills.

1.7 Significance of Study

Vygotsky's social culture theory overall predicts that a child's social interaction with more capable individuals will enable the individual to acquire knowledge effectively. Thus, understanding how a student comes to understand and develop their skills in writing through interaction or

collaborative learning will give evidence to understanding how to correct writing problems. This study is significant because it is designed to investigate the effectiveness of collaborative learning in helping the students to produce fluent and accurate text when they work in group. The purpose of assigning the students to collaborate when writing is to give them the opportunity to express their ideas in a group instead of working individually.

The finding of this research will be able to assist teachers to modify current classroom learning environment to address the need in learning to write. Apart from that, the strategies proposed may provide a basis for further research and direction for a larger study in this field. It is hoped that more studies in the future will generate more insights, knowledge and information that will lead to a broader understanding of the importance of collaborative task in ESL classroom.

1.8 Limitations of Study

There were several limitations in this study. Since this study was based on the findings obtained from selected respondents from Universiti Sultan Zainal Abidin, Kuala Terengganu (UniSZA), it may not be sufficient to generalize the overall result from other students from other universities. It was also carried out with the undergraduate university diploma students and the result may be different if it is carried out among school children, degree students or postgraduate university students. Other than that, students who were involved in this study were mixed ability students, therefore the results may not be the same if the study was carried out with students from a specific level of proficiency.

1.9 Definition of Key Terms

The following section discussed the definition of the key terms relevant to this study. The key terms included were: accuracy, fluency, low proficiency students and collaborative writing task. These key terms will be elaborated briefly in the below description:

1.9.1 Accuracy

According to MacMillan English Dictionary for advanced students, accuracy is defined as the quality of being accurate or precision. As this definition is wide and could be applied in any context, Wolfe-Quintero, Inagaki & Kim (1998) narrowed down this definition in writing context as 'the ability to be free from errors while using language to communicate in either writing or speech'. According to Ana (2012), accuracy in writing could be measured in these three aspects, which are lexical, mechanical and grammatical. Thus, the students' accuracy in writing will be measured based from these three

components which later, will be graded using Holistic Measures of Linguistics Accuracy adopted from Hedgcock & Lefkowitz (1992).

1.9.2 Fluency

According to Brand and Brand (2006), the general meaning of fluency is to complete an activity or task 'automatically, rapidly, fluidly and accurately' (p.2). In terms of fluency in writing, Lannin (2007) defined it as "cohesiveness and coherence of ideas in the writing aided by syntactic structures that enable the reader to easily move through the text" (p.4). In order to measure fluency in writing, number of words, number of T-units produced in each text and number of clauses embedded in each T-unit were counted, (Polio, 2001).

1.9.3 Collaborative writing

Storch (2011) defined collaborative writing as to produce one written text by joining the production of a text by two or more writers. In a study conducted by Swain (2001), collaborative writing task is a communicative task as the students involve in the process of comprehending, manipulating, producing and interacting to achieve the aim in the target language.

1.9.4 Mixed ability students

Mixed ability students are students who are randomly chosen to be gathered in one class regardless of their grade and achievement (Regina, 2008). Because this study specifically focuses on English subject, thus, in one class there are students who got A-, B+, B-, C+, C, C-, D, D-, E and F for their SPM English subject. According to Ministry of Education (2013), A+, A and A- considered as advanced students, B+, B, B- considered as intermediate students, C, C-, D, D- considered as elementary students and E and F considered as incompetent students. Later, they are divided homogenously into several groups.

1.10 Organization of the Thesis

This thesis consisted of five chapters. Chapter one provided an introduction to the collaborative writing task, previous research in different aspects and different levels of proficiency and argues that there are limited studies which explored this task among low proficiency students in the Malaysian context.

Chapter two discussed about the theoretical framework underpinned in this study, past studies on collaborative task in L2 classroom, the connection between collaborative and writing and the importance and benefits of collaborative writing task to students.

Chapter three described the research method used in this study. The context and participants involved in this study were explained in detail. Then the approaches used in this study which were quantitative and qualitative were briefly described in detail. This chapter also included an in-depth explanation of the research tools and the data analysis procedure to enhance the credibility of this study.

Chapter four presented the findings and results of this study. It showed the differences in students' level of fluency and accuracy when they write in group and individually. Tables and charts were used to represent the data so that it will be more clear and easy to understand. Examples from students' transcription also were included to support the findings.

Chapter five was the discussion and summary for the research findings. It indicated the effect of collaborative writing task on the students' performance in writing and the importance and benefits of this task were also highlighted. Pedagogical implications and recommendations for future research were also included in this last chapter.

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