PUPILS' PERCEPTIONS ON COLLABORATIVE WRITING INTERVENTION

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Abstract

Purpose of the study: The purpose of this study is to identify students' perceptions of the effect of collaborative writing intervention on Form 1 pupils' writing skills.

Methodology: A quasi-experimental design was employed involving 30 Form 1 pupil from a secondary school in Pasir Gudang, Johor, Malaysia. All participants responded to a survey prior to the collaborative writing intervention and after the intervention.

Main Findings: The findings showed an increase in the scores for perception on the effectiveness of collaborative writing intervention; indicating that through collaborative writing practices, students' writing could be improved.

Implications of this study: The study implies that teachers should incorporate collaborative writing in teaching students to write as students perceived it positively. It implies that it may be an effective way to improve students' writing.

Novelty/Originality of this study: Most studies have focused on the use of technology in collaborative writing. This study, however, focuses on the collaborative intervention cycle in the classroom that supports the process of learning to write.

Keywords: Collaborative Writing Intervention, Collaborative, ESL Learners, Writing Skills, Writing Strategy, Perceptions.

INTRODUCTION

Writing is considered a challenging task for pupils due to its complexity. It is regarded as an intellectually challenging task as it requires the writer to have mastery of several factors simultaneously (Bell & Burnaby, 1984; Nunan, 1989, p.36). Its complexity has discouraged pupils from writing with some of them possessing low to intermediate level of proficiency and ending up submitting blank pages of their written assessments. Ghabool, Mariadass, &Kashef, (2012)in their study, revealed that a high number of Malaysian English as a Second Language (ESL) learners are confronted with challenges in performing written tasks (p. 132). According to Nesamalar, Saratha,&The (2001), the least proficient ability for most learners to master during new language acquisition in writing.

For some educators who are experiencing the circumstances mentioned, it is vital to find an alternative way of teaching writing in the ESL classroom. According to Sahin et al. (2002), teachers should use the right pedagogy in teaching writing skills because it has a tremendous impact on students' interest in writing which will have an impact on their performance in writing. In the context of this research, collaborative writing denotes a writing strategy that the researcher employed in order to improve pupils' perceptions of writing. (Storch, 2011) stated that collaborative writing involves two or more individuals producing a written text. It is used to help pupils to explore, discuss, and obtain learning capabilities by sharing ideas with their peers. Research has shown that learning experiences are enhanced in classrooms that promote collaborative writing (Dobao, 2012; Elola&Oskoz, 2010; Wu, 2015). The current study involved a suburban school in Pasir Gudang, Johor where most of the pupils are at the intermediate level, who have mostly scored low marks in their writing assignments. This is evident in the school's English language assessment results for the past few years. Most of the pupils in the school tend to either leave the writing task blank or copy the instructions rather than answering them according to the instructions given. Most of them claimed that they do not know how to expand their ideas in writing and that writing is difficult. Hence, the study discussed in this paper attempted to intervene through collaborative writing. It aimed to then ascertain the perceptions among pupils on their writing skills after the collaborative writing intervention. The study, therefore, hoped that the students' writing performance could be improved through a collaborative writing intervention.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Collaborative Writing

Collaborative writing typically refers to a combined creation of a text or the co-writing of a text by the authors (Storch, 2011). Many scholars described it as a socially interactive rather than cognitive process. They emphasized the social nature of collaborative writing (Aminloo, 2013; Galegher& Kraut, 1994; Lowry et al., 2004; Snow et al., 1987; Storch, 2005). They defined collaborative writing as an act of processing a document where learners produce a shared written material based on particular social concerns. These social concerns involve negotiations about the meaning of facts

related to the topic, fair and equal division of roles during writing, coordination of individual contributions, seeking one another's points of view about their writing, and resolution of questions about co-authorship (Galegher& Kraut, 1994).

This social view of collaborative writing is reflected in the definitions by other scholars such as Lowry et al. (2004). They defined collaborative writing as a joint and social technique that requires the group to concentrate on a common goal by discussing, organizing, and linking the members in the formation of a standard report. Such scholars highly advocated socialism in collaborative writing.

However, scholars who actively support the social view of collaborative writing are incapable of reaching a consensus about the nature of socialism in collaborative writing. There is no clear and interdisciplinary definition as to whether collaborative writing is a social interaction process, a social action process, a social binary process, or a social activity.

The social interaction notion for collaborative writing receives support from scholars such as Colen&Petelin (2004), who stated that collaborative writing is inherently a social interaction where learners can reach a consensus. The proposed collaborative writing as a "… production of a shared document, substantive interaction among members, and shared decision-making power over the document" (p. 137). Sucha view of social interaction is also reflected in other scholars' definitions of collaborative writing as a social process. For example, Henderson & Silva (2006) stated that collaborative writing is a social process that comprises more than two authors writing together in producing a single text by seeking one another's points of view about their written text.

Furthermore, the social interactional view of collaborative writing is mainly seen as a platform where learners can create and develop their knowledge-pooling for writing. It allows them to gain more understanding about social networking in writing. Based on this understanding, Rex et al. (2002) and Ritchie, Stephen&Donna (2007) argued that collaborative writing is an interactive knowledge process of self and the thoughts of others within social relationships. Interpreting these thoughts collaboratively into a written document has the potential to reflect our self-understanding and the understanding of others in this writing partnership.

Sociocultural Theory of Learning

To claim that all learning experiences are merely social is an over-simplification of the sociocultural theory of learning. However, as Smagorinsky (2007) noted, Vygotsky's theory implies that all thinking, and by extension learning, has social origins (p. 62). The thinking and learning that individuals do are influenced by social dialogues. Whether that dialogue occurs in real-time and physical space, or an inner dialogue mediated by personal experiences, the social nature of learning is undeniable.

Meanwhile, Prior (2006) pointed out that sociocultural theory is a theory involving communication that is continuously locally spontaneous and facilitated by assembled, factually specified instruments and executions. It is within the social activity that individuals socialize in accordance with others, but as they follow the "appropriate cultural resources" they are "individuated as their particular appropriations historically accumulate to form a particular individual" (ibid, p. 55). This theory supports Vygotsky's assertion that human consciousness is "socio-historically produced" and that "learning/development is a confluence of histories (polygenesis, cultural genesis, and ontogenesis)" (p. 55). The research by Vygotsky (1978) led him to postulate that language and perception are inextricably linked and that there is interdependence between language and thought (p. 33).

On the other hand, he maintained that children use language, primarily, as a method to initiate social contact, and the communicative and cognitive roles of language turn out to be the source for original and superior forms of tasks and understanding (Vygostky, 1978, p. 29). Language is transformed from a tool for labelling and identifying into a means of synthesizing and eventually internalizing complex forms of cognitive perception. In terms of sociocultural theory, he asserted that children acquire information through their personal, socio-cultural experiences and "are capable of reconstructing their perception" (p. 36) to "synthesize past [and] present visual fields" (p. 37) to suit their purposes.

Mostly, children develop knowledge and cognition as a result of their interactions with others situated within specific social and cultural contexts. Furthermore, Vygotsky (1978) emphasized that the development of higher psychological functioning originates from social interactions between people and is ultimately the outcome of an extensive series of transformations and evolving procedures that occur over a protracted period creating a shift from interpersonal processes to intrapersonal processes. He further explained that this "internalization of socially rooted and historically developed activities is the distinguishing feature of human psychology and the basis of the qualitative leap from animal to human psychology" (p. 57). Central to this sociocultural theory is the concept of Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) which denotes the "distance between the definite progressive level as resolute by independent problem solving and the level of potential development as resolute by problem-solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers" (p. 86).

Likewise, Barton &Hamilton (2000); Bomer (2007) and Laman (2011), suggested that an individual's comprehension of learning forms the social circumstances in which one has been involved with; the understanding of literacy is also formed by the same personal background(Laman, 2011, p. 134). Magorinsky (2013) then elaborated Moll's idea of cultural "funds of knowledge" (p. 197) and pointed out that children develop "culturally learned ways of knowing –

those that people learn through their interactions with those who surround them" (p. 197) which inherently situate them as significantly different from other groups in society.

The work by Gee (1989) on Primary Discourse suggested that this initial home-based sense of identity is the foundation for all other learning experiences. Meanwhile, Smagorinsky (2013) indicated that it could also be a source of dysphoria in the school context which can create tension between what one knows culturally and what one is expected to know socially (p. 195). In addition, students bring personal experiences to their reading and writing that are impacted by the "cultural, social, and personal history" (Pantaleo, 2010, p. 267) in which they are exposed. In sociocultural terms, He acknowledged writing as a "social practice that recognizes the connection between the reading and writing of pupils and their membership in a particular classroom community" (p. 276). By extension, pupils' membership within a higher social and cultural community and the social context they are working within affect their linguistic behaviors and literacy achievement.

Pupils' Perceptions

Forgus& Melamed (1976) referred to perception as the process of information extraction. They specified that perceptions are the procedures that regulate how humans understand their environment. Tubbs &Mors (1983) defined perception as a dynamic process as one selectively observes, manages, and construes what one experiences. Interpretations are made based on the perceivers' past experiences, expectations of human behavior, knowledge of other situations, attitudes, needs, and outlooks.

In their book, Warr &Knapper (1968) categorized perceptions into individual and general. They opined that people's behaviors are influenced by each other's perceptions, and these behaviors can potentially be influenced by public perceptions, which may be direct or indirect.

Benjamin, Hopkins, & Nation (1994) elaborated that perception comprises not only the stimulus that builds our perceptual environment such as colors, sounds, textures, and shapes but also other variables that are present within the perceiver and are typically categorized as organismic variables. Therefore, perception is the outcome of organismic and stimulus variables.

Hence, a student's perception refers to the understanding of stimuli that are created by connecting to previous perceptual sets that are formed from experience, exposure, or other communication methods.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

The present study is fundamentally a quantitative study. Specifically, a quasi-experimental design was employed where an intervention; namely the collaborative writing.

Participants

The population of Form 1 pupils in the selected school is198 from seven classes. However, in this study, the researcher only chose one class where the pupils are at the intermediate level. The sample of the study comprised a total of 30 pupils from the suburban school located in Pasir Gudang, Johor. All the respondents selected are intermediate English language users, as the students were streamed during the enrolment to Form 1 at the beginning of the year. The sample was chosen using purposive sampling, which is a form of non-probability sampling. The study uses such a procedure to avoid researcher or experimenter bias.

Data Analysis

The researcher used descriptive analysis to analyze the survey data. A comparison of the percentages between pre-survey and post-survey was made to identify the pupils' perceptions of writing before and after the collaborative writing intervention. The percentage represents the number of pupils who responded to the items in the survey.

Instruments

The instrument utilized for the pre and post-survey in this study was a Google Forms' questionnaire. The questionnaire consists of 46 items that were modified from several prior studies. It is straightforward and short that it can be completed in less than 10 minutes, or at most 20 minutes. Although it had replicated several prior studies, the research procedures, especially those regarding sample selection and data collection, were done differently to increase data reliability and validity. Nevertheless, the data analysis was somewhat similar to those adopted by prior studies.

An online survey form powered by Google was utilized for the pre-survey and the post-survey to identify the perceptions of the respondents. The online version is similar to the written form, though the layouts differ slightly. The post-survey was done eight weeks after the pre-survey.

Google Forms, the website which hosts the survey, is beneficial because it can analyze data and provide the average for each item, and their results can be obtained in the same manner. This study used descriptive statistics consisting of only frequency, percentage, proportion, and average. Although this might seem too basic and straightforward, it suits the

requirements of the study. This study applied Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) to compare the percentages between the pre-survey and the post-survey results, as well as the pre-test and the post-test scores.

Validity and Reliability

For the purpose of gauging the content validity, the first version of the questionnaire was given to the lecturer and the senior teachers to evaluate the relevance of each item in measuring the perceptions of the pupils on writing skills. Furthermore, they were requested to evaluate the test items holistically in terms of accuracy and suitability for Form 1 pupils at the school.

Face Validity

Oluwatayo (2012) stated in his study that face validity is the appearance and the significance of the determining device, to test for the items' relevance, realism, explicitness, and clarity based on researchers' subjective valuations. It helps to evaluate the technical display of the questionnaire in the aspects of practicability, readability, reliability of style, and intelligibility of the vernacular employed. In this study, this was done through expert validation where three experienced English teachers in the school for face validity, whether the sample involved in the study was well-suited to the items listed in the questionnaire.

Content Validity

Jackson (2009) claimed that validity refers to whether a measure is genuine when the researcher measures what it claims to measure. In order to establish validity, the survey form was given to an expert reviewer (a senior teacher in the domain of teaching and learning, who is also the Head of English Panel in the school and an experienced lecturer in the domain of teaching and learning)to assess its content validity.

The expert reviewer advised the researcher to rephrase some of the items listed in the questionnaire since she believed it contains words that some pupils will have difficulty to understand. Hence, some words were changed and rephrased. For instance, the word 'essential' was rephrased to 'important'.

Reliability

The reliability test is vital in confirming the uniformity across the portions of the gauging instruments (Huck, 2007). According to (Carmines & Zeller, 1979), reliability comprehends the range to which a magnitude of an occurrence offers constant and consistent outcome.

(Huck, 2007; Robinson, 2009) stated in their study that the scale is considered to possess high internal consistency reliability should it be able to measure the same construct. The Cronbach Alpha coefficient is the most commonly used in measuring internal consistency. According to (Whitley, 2002&Robinson, 2009), it is regarded as the most suitable assessment of reliability upon utilizing Likert scales. However, (Whitley, 2002&Robinson, 2009) stated in their study that most have agreed on a minimum internal consistency coefficient of .70, even though there appears to be no conclusive guideline for determining internal consistencies. A value of .70 or higher is generally accepted as an indicator of good internal consistency.

The reliability analysis was carried out, comprising 46 items. The questionnaire reached the acceptable reliability, as the Cronbach's alpha showed $\alpha = 0.88$ (pre-survey) and $\alpha = 0.97$ (post-survey). Most items proved to be worthy of retention, resulting in a decrease in the alpha if deleted. In terms of reliability of both surveys, α is more than .70, which shows that the questionnaire is reliable.

Further details are explained in Table1: Reliability Statistics of Items and Table 2: Scale Statistics of Items. Both statistics confirmed the reliability of the items listed in the questionnaire of this study. Thus, there was no requirement to remove or add any items.

Table 1: Reliability Statistics of Items

Reliability Statistics			
Description	Cronbach's Alpha	Cronbach's Alpha Based on Standardized Items	N of Items
Pre-Survey	0.882	0.89	46
Post-Survey	0.965	0.966	46

Table 2: Scale Statistics of Items

Scale Statistics				
Description	Mean	Variance	Std. Deviation	N of Items

Pre-Survey	154.03	374.999	19.365	46
Post-Survey	151.5	1089.707	33.011	46

Data Collection Procedure

The participants were required to participate and be involved in collaborative writing in the next phase. During the collaborative writing phase, the participants were divided into five groups to correlate with a writing assignment consisting of five paragraphs (introduction, first content, second content, third content, and conclusion). Each group was assigned one paragraph. The cycle was repeated five times until all groups had experienced developing all five paragraphs. After each cycle, each group was required to present their paragraph to the class to obtain feedback from the teacher and peers. During the feedback session, the researcher asked the participants to find errors in their friends' writing and try to correct the errors before she commented. The researcher also gave tokens of appreciation to those who were able to correct their friends' writing and to the best group to encourage participation in the collaborative writing phase.

In the final phase, they were each required to answer the post-survey questionnaire to record their perceptions of writing after being involved in collaborative writing. The analysis from the survey's results was presented in percentages. Then, the percentages of the surveys were compared to identify any improvement.

DISCUSSION / ANALYSIS

Analysis of Findings

Table 3 shows a detailed report on the responses given by the participants in both the pre-survey and the post-survey sessions. "Strongly disagree" and "Disagree" in the survey form indicate negative perceptions of the participants on writing based on the items listed in the questionnaire, while "Strongly agree" and "Agree" indicate positive perceptions.

According to the results, 54.2% (Strongly disagree= 33.4% and Disagree = 20.8%) of the participants had negative perceptions of writing before the collaborative writing phase while only 31.8% (Strongly Agree = 9.8% and Agree = 22.0%) of the participants had positive perceptions. The results had shown that more than half of the participants in this study had negative perceptions of writing before the researcher conducted the collaborative writing intervention.

However, after the participants had experienced collaborative writing for eight weeks, their perceptions improved. Looking at the results, only 24.4% (Strongly disagree= 7.9% and Disagree= 16.5%) of the participants had negative perceptions on writing while 59.3% (Strongly agree= 30.1% and Agree= 29.2%) of the participants had positive perceptions.

Thus, it is concluded that collaborative writing intervention helps to improve participants' perceptions of writing. Further details are explained in Table 3: Statistics for Pupils' Perceptions (Scores) on Writing.

Table 3: Statistics for Pupils' Perceptions (Scores) on Writing

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
Pre-survey	33.4%	20.8%	14.0%	22.0%	9.8%
Post-survey	7.9%	16.5%	16.2%	29.2%	30.1%

DISCUSSION

Collaborative writing intervention allows pupils to brainstorm ideas together and share them during the intervention phase. Thus, pupils, who lack ideas, can gain information from their group members. Inline with mulligan &Garofalo (2011), pupils can learn the various language and writing skills more effectively through collaborative writing. Based on the findings, pupils noted that through the initial brainstorming tasks, their arguments became deeper and stronger because it allows other pupils to challenge the other to think more carefully about the topic. Other than that, pupils noted that the collaborative approach allowed them to develop the topic from different points of view, thus strengthening the quality of the content. By sharing ideas, other pupils remarked, they had a more depth understanding of the topic. This is supported by Jafari &Ansari (2012). They claimed that pupils who work collaboratively in groups can also produce better-written composition than those who write individually. It is because, during the activity, they can do peer reviews before presenting it to the class. As for social skills development, pupil's remark indicated that they developed a greater sense of responsibility through the collaborative effort and that it helped them to get along with others and allowed them to get to know their classmates better.

CONCLUSION

Collaborative writing intervention helps to improve pupils' perceptions of writing.

LIMITATIONS AND FURTHER STUDY

The focus of this study is circumscribed to examining the writing achievements of Form 1 pupils in SMK Taman Desa Jaya, Johor Bahru, Johor. Thus, the findings cannot be generalized to all Form 1 pupils in Johor or Malaysia. Apart from that, the sample consisted of only 30 Form 1 intermediate pupils in that school. The findings may differ if the study was applied to basic-level pupils in the same school.

The duration of the collaborative writing intervention phase was about eight weeks. The findings of the study might be affected if the pupils were given less than eight weeks during the intervention phase.

It is suggested that future study should involve both survey and interview of the participants as well as their motivational factors in collaborative writing to identify any external factors that might influence the findings.

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