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# THE EFFECTIVENESS OF COLLABORATIVE WRITING IN IMPROVING ESL STUDENTS' ESSAY WRITING

S.VIJAYALACHEMY A/P R.SUBRAMANIAM



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## ABSTRAK

Tujuan kajian ini adalah untuk mengkaji keberkesanan kaedah kolaboratif dalam membantu untuk meningkatkan kemahiran menulis esei pelajar ESL. Seterusnya kajian ini adalah untuk menentukan sama ada pembelajaran kolaboratif membantu meningkatkan kualiti esei pelajar dalam aspek-aspek seperti organisasi, perkembangan, struktur, perbendaharaan kata, kepaduan dan mekanik penulisan. Kesan kaedah penulisan kolaboratif dengan sikap dan persepsi pelajar juga telah dikaji. Kaedah penyelidikan 'quasi' telah digunakan untuk mengumpul data yang diperlukan. Sampel kajian adalah 40 orang pelajar tingkatan empat dari sebuah sekolah menengah di Ipoh yang telah dipilih secara rawak. Pelajar-pelajar telah dibahagikan kepada dua kumpulan iaitu 20 pelajar dalam 'experimental group' yang diajar menggunakan kaedah kolaboratif dan 20 pelajar dalam kumpulan terkawal yang telah dilatih untuk menulis esei secara individu. Kedua-dua kumpulan mempunyai tajuk yang sama untuk melengkapkan ujian pra dan ujian pasca di mana mereka terpaksa menulis esei. Topik esei kedua-dua kumpulan 'adalah sama. Semua 40 pelajar juga telah mengisi boring soal selidik. Pada akhir kajian lima orang pelajar dari kumpulan 'experimental group' telah dipilih secara rawak untuk ditemuduga. Kajian ini berlangsung untuk tempoh sepuluh minggu di mana pelajar didedahkan kepada kaedah 'collaborative writing', kemahiran menulis dan empat latihan penulisan esei. Skor daripada ujian pos dan soal selidik jawapan daripada 'experimental group' dibandingkan dengan skor ujian pra mereka sendiri dan juga dengan skor dari kumpulan terkawal. Pelajar-pelajar dapat menjana idea dan menunjukkan perubahan sikap terhadap penulisan esei selepas melalui pembelajaran menggunakan kaedah kolaboratif. Dapatan dari kajian adalah signifikan kerana telah membuktikan bahawa lebih daripada 50% sampel yang terlibat dalam kumpulan eksperimental telah menulis dengan esei mereka dengan lebih baik.





## THE EFFECTIVENESS OF COLLABORATIVE WRITING IN IMPROVING ESL STUDENTS ESSAY WRITING

### ABSTRACT






The purpose of this research was to determine the effectiveness of collaborative writing in improving ESL students' essay writing skills. The main aim of the study was to investigate if collaborative writing helped to improve students' essays in aspects like organisation, development, structure, vocabulary, coherence and mechanics of writing. This study aims to determine if students who were engaged in collaborative writing showed a greater improvement in essay writing compared to students who wrote using the traditional writing method. Quasi experimental research method was conducted to collect data for the study. A sample of 40 form four students from a secondary school in Ipoh was selected randomly. The students were equally divided into two groups. The 20 students in the experimental group were trained in essay writing using the collaborative method and the 20 students in the control group were trained to write essays individually. Both groups had to complete a pre-test and a post-test where they had to write an essay. Essay topics were the same for both groups. All 40 students had to fill in a questionnaire. At the end of the study five students from the experimental group were selected randomly for an interview. The study lasted for a duration of ten weeks where the students were exposed to the collaborative writing method, writing skills and four practices of writing essays. Scores from the post test and questionnaire responses from the experimental group were compared to their own pre-test scores and responses as well as with the scores from the control group. The experimental groups were able to generate ideas and develop a change in attitude towards writing after going through the collaborative writing treatment. The findings have established that Collaborative writing is a strategic tool to help students write better in ESL classes as more than 50% of students in the experimental group have shown significant improvement in their writing.



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## CHAPTER ONE

### INTRODUCTION



#### 1.1 Background of study

The Malaysia Ministry of Education has gone forward to increase its recognition in the global world through Vision 2020, and through improving the Malaysian Education Curriculum by creating a preliminary report on the “Malaysia Education Blueprint 2013-2025” (Malaysia Ministry of Education, 2012). This report clearly emphasizes on the importance of bilingual proficiency in Bahasa Malaysia (Malay Language) and English (Malaysia Ministry of Education, 2012). Subsequently this makes the English language an important factor to moving the nation forward, shifting all schools to embrace English as an “international language of





communication” instead of a colonial language (Malaysia Ministry of Education, 2012, p.10).

According to Arkoudis and Tran (2007), writing as a form of thinking is fundamental for academic success of students. Hyland (2011) maintains that the ability to be able to sustain an argument and synthesize ideas to write in proper English sentence for the purpose of academic success is a tedious chore for students. Richards (2008) notes that being able to write in either first or second language is one of the most challenging tasks for students and not many can fully master it. Writing requires lexical and syntactic knowledge along with principles of organization in L2. This is because language errors tend to create a negative impression (Loewy, D., & Vogt, G.,2000). These non-native English-speaking students face various obstacles when they encounter the rigors of writing (Bronson, 2004). According to Leki (2007) writing is known to be a burden due to its extensive writing regulations.

According to many researchers, (Harklau ,2002, Hyland 2004, Santoso 2010 Ferris & Hedgcock 2014 and Dawn & Ramyadarshanie 2016) writing is defined as a straight forward act of stating what is in the writer’s mind and the possible interpretations made by the readers. Furthermore, writing is an ability to integrate every skill and it’s a productive and complete learning process (Abdullah 2011). It is a productive learning process whereby ideas and data required are gathered before finalizing a text. Writing is the most important skill compared to the other skills (Kellogg 2001, Ratcliffe 2007). Writing is a major challenge to cognitive skills and thinking process because when a person starts his own writing process, the thinking process and writing skills coincide with one another (Kellogg 2001). It is also a





known fact that writing enforces a powerful type of learning to occur and when someone is writing about an idea, he should understand and repeat it several times for it to result in learning (Ratcliffe, 2007). In the past writing was assumed as an individual work but today many researchers have agreed to the idea of collaboration among learners (Hennequin & Knowles, 2004).

Most of the students identify writing as a difficult and heavy task. In to a study administered by Kara (2013), the major causes of for anxiety in writing is “writing itself, writing as a skill” and the “teacher.” Kara (2013, p. 108) explains the reasons. Up until form 3, students haven’t had the writing experience because of their test- based system. They usually had to choose options already given or write short sentences. Therefore, when they come to form 4, they have writing anxiety because of the lack in writing habits This can create a generation that lacks critical thinking ability and cannot put their thoughts in writing and will not be able to produce what is expected. When forced to do so, they will have many difficulties during the process, which will finally make them feel anxious. Kara (2013) then explains the second reason “writing as a skill.” Learners, who already see writing as a complex productive skill, believe that they lack skills such as finding ideas, collecting information, organizing and combining that information and those ideas, as they have not practiced those skills enough. In addition, students’ limited linguistic capacity also hinders them from producing a good piece of writing.

Collaborative learning (CL) is done in a situation where students exchange their ideas, experiences and information based on the requirement that serves as a foundation for a common understanding and a solution for a problem done





collectively (Veldhuis-Diermanse, 2002). Furthermore, collaborative learning is more widely accepted to encourage active participation from students (Hennequin & Knowles, 2004, p. 95).

One form of collaborative learning is collaborative writing (CW). A few writers would pen their views, thoughts in all aspects of the writing, content, sentence structures and language (Storch, 2005). Collaborative writing encourages collaborative learning by facilitating writer's strengths and weaknesses (Tsui & Ng, 2000). Barkley, Cross, and Major (2005, p.256) define that in collaborative writing, students write an essay in pairs or groups. Every member of the group contributes at every stage of the writing process. This means that in pairs or groups, students will produce a better piece than when they work alone. The quality of the end product will be improved by combined efforts and strengths of all the students in the group through the Collaborative writing strategy. Ultimately the prospect of working in groups along with the prospect of learning from peers will serve as a motivation for students.

Collaborative writing is different from other forms of group work in the writing class as it encompasses every group member's effort and participation at every stage of the writing process, from planning through composing to revision. It is a sharing of responsibility over the production of a single piece of work through the pooling of resources, negotiation and lastly decision-making. Everyone has a part to play in the whole process of writing. So, a collaborative writing method would be used to enhance the ability of writing among students and to make the process an easier task as they are allowed to have a discussion in a group to generate ideas, check





organization, assess the language used and come up with a piece of writing. In other words, collaborative writing focuses on the whole process of writing a single document through shared endeavor.

According to Noor Hanim Rahmat (2011) an ideal writing classroom should make space for students to be able to brainstorm and generate ideas in class and prepare the first draft of an essay in class. Students should go through the whole writing process and be given an opportunity to contribute ideas for the content. Discussions should be open to generate ideas amongst students. After this, the next step would be to sit down and plan the draft. All this should be done under guidance. Most teachers would agree that this is not quite possible because of time factor. However, this may be possible after all, by using the Collaborative Writing strategy because Collaborative Writing allows students the time to work together to produce an essay in class.

### 1.1.1 The collaborative approach in teaching and learning

For the past three decades, the education community has recognized the value of learning collaboratively. Educators have come to terms that students do not learn well when they are isolated "receivers" of knowledge. In fact, students must overcome isolation in order to learn to write. Collaborative learning exercises are important components of our writing classrooms because they encourage [active learning](#), giving students the opportunity to become more deeply engaged with their writing, and with one another. In this strategy, young learners are taught the skills that aid in successful collaborative learning.





The effectiveness of both pair and group work is based on the theoretical and pedagogical point of view. Theoretically Vygotsky argued that human development happens in social settings. Group interaction has always been a research topic for both social psychologists and educationists. Based on a pedagogical perspective, learners of L2 use the communicative approach to L2 instruction when learning is done in small groups (Storch, 2011). According to Storch (2011, p. 275), collaborative writing is the ‘joint production or the co-authoring of a text by two or more writers’. He also points out that ‘the defining trait of collaborative writing is the joint ownership of the document produced’ (p. 275). This defining trait implies that peer-review activities alone are not considered collaborative writing. Likewise, brainstorming activities by themselves are not regarded as collaborative writing unless final written product belongs to all the participants.



The benefits of collaborative writing include students producing more grammatically accurate pieces (Dobao, 2012). Vygotsky’s sociocultural theory of learning suggests that collaborative writing allows group members to provide and receive peer support. According to Dillenbourg (2000), collaboration is a situation that has two or more people attempting to learn something in a group or solving problems as a team. Learning isn’t just about memorizing and regurgitating the information.

On the contrary, it needs a challenging environment that helps to create a situation in which information is processed and synthesized. This helps the learner to retain new information better and fulfill his given task. It is believed that learning occurs through interaction in a group. Therefore, the idea of collaborative writing is





derived from this notion that people learn through the type of social interaction where participants of a group discuss among themselves. Collaborative learning is a strategy using this educational approach to teach and learn in which a group of learners work together to fulfill a task. Apart from that, this strategy is also based on the belief that learners assimilate new information that is acquired through active discussion and relate it to the schemata that is already in them. The new information meant here is the information gained through the group discussion.

Graham (2005) defines Collaborative Learning as a situation where a small group of learners work together as a team in order to solve problems achieve a common goal or finish a task. In a Collaborative Learning setting, each individual is given a specific role to play in their groups. When this structural opportunity is provided, it helps learners to collaborate to reach a common objective. This is where the Collaborative approach differs from traditional approach. A traditional classroom setting is more confined to a competitive environment (Kessler, 2003). Individual performances do not necessarily affect each other since learners learn on their own. How an individual performs depends on how much effort is put in by him/her. Therefore, there is no positive or negative effects on one person because of the other's performance. This strategy requires learners to work as groups or pairs to achieve a learning task. Group assignments are considered a well-established strategy to help students develop teamwork skills (Campbell and Ellingson, 2010) and have been documented as enhancing student learning.

In the collaborative writing class, students work together to achieve a common goal. Although students are of different learning abilities each one is responsible for





his /her own learning as well as for the other members of the group. Each individual should be accountable for the success of the entire group. Other important elements are positive interdependence, ability to use collaborative skills and also interaction skills. During a collaborative writing process, students are able to hone their interactive skills, leadership skills as well as develop their leadership skills (Bean, 2001). In a collaborative setting, students will be able to interact with peers, give opinions and argue as well as challenge ideas of other members.

According to Johnson.D, Johnson.R and Smith (1991), the Collaborative strategy is a medium which is used to actively involve students as a team, to accomplish a learning objective. In this condition, team members have an obligation towards the other group members to contribute towards the task. Should one of the members slack, the entire team would suffer the consequences. Therefore, the group has to work as one because every individual in the group is responsible towards the success of the group as a whole.

In an active environment where collaborative writing takes place, students are exposed to social and emotional challenges (Brock, L. L., Nishida, T. K., Chiong, C., Grimm, K. J., & Rimm-Kaufman, S. E., 2008). They are presented with views from different perspective and do not just take in everything that is put forth. They argue, defend their ideas and give their own opinions. This enables them to come up with original ideas and concepts and not just copy or depend on a pre-set framework.

Collaborative groups also teach students to work together as a team. These students learn that working well together without conflicts will help garner better





teamwork. Conflicts are bound to happen but are usually resolved, bearing in mind the more important objectives that need to be attained. In fact, students learn to integrate their strengths to develop and improve on the various abilities that each one has.

### **1.1.2 Benefits of Collaborative writing.**

Being exposed to ideas from various view points and backgrounds helps students to analyze these ideas and later form their own ideas. According to Hyler (2014), this encourages them to be more confident with their own viewpoints. As a result, in a collaborative environment, learners get a chance to interact with peers, put forth and argue over their ideas as well as form their own opinions based on ideas presented by others and play an active role in learning. Students gain skills like decision making, leadership and many other management skills as well. In the end, students will be able to set targets, evaluate their individual and group performance and identify weaknesses. This will automatically help improve their skills and produce better work in future.

Collaboration leads to greater retention, improved student achievement, and increased self-esteem and metacognition, and it can be used to facilitate active learning and to promote inclusion by increasing contact among diverse groups (Bowman, Frame, and Kennette 2013). A collaborative writing class creates an environment that celebrates diversity. Students are given an opportunity to work with different types of people. When students discuss a topic for writing, they are able to listen to ideas from different perspectives. In a multi-racial country like Malaysia,





where students of different race study in the same class, an issue can be seen from different angles based on cultural differences. The exchanges in a group, on a given issue, will help participants to better understand other cultures. In its broadest sense, collaboration refers to the act of labour-sharing and thus collaborative writing (CW) is a collective cognitive process where multiple writers negotiate and share co-authority and responsibility for the production of a text (Storch, 2013). Various students will have a range of responses to a given topic. Each student will have his/her own mindset and hence a different approach to the topic. All these will help the group produce a complete piece of information that reflects a comprehensive and variety of perspectives.

In a writing lesson, collaborative approach helps group members gain enriched information as a product of group discussion. According to Graham (2005)

Collaborative Learning strategy, when applied in a writing lesson, helped learners to come up with new ideas and exposed them to a variety of opinions. Learners will be able to discuss disagree, debate and share views with one another simultaneously getting practice in process writing aspects especially generating and organizing ideas. In a group discussion, members do not just listen and accept every idea or concept that is thrown to them. There will be active debates and arguments. Through, these arguments, issues will be analyzed and discussed to the case. This helps students develop higher level thinking skills.

During a discussion, debates and arguments increase familiarity to the topic discussed. This in turn helps participants remember and retain new information. This





retention helps students recall facts when it's needed especially when writing essays during exams.

In a language class, interaction in the target language is of utmost importance. This is in line with a study done by Levine (2003, p 342-364)) where he suggests that “instructors may perceive higher levels of Target language-use anxiety among students (in general) than students themselves report.” According to Levine, students who frequently conversed in the target language, English in an ESL class, would feel more comfortable with its use. This would provide them with ample of practice in the said language and therefore they would be able to communicate with ease in order to exchange opinions, convey their thoughts, or share knowledge with others who speak the same language. However, these skills are acquired only through much practice in the usage of the language, both speaking and listening. Collaborative writing provides the students with the necessary means of interaction because the need to produce ideas and the process of putting all the different ideas in one piece of writing requires a lot of interaction. (Camps et al., 2000). According to Abdul Gafoor & Remia (2013), children will be more confident in speaking and writing in the target language if they have a wide range of vocabulary. Being unable to express their own thinking in a target language effectively will demotivate the learners to use it in their daily life. As asserted by Embi & Mohd Amin (2010), it is essential for language learners to have a wide range of vocabulary as it helps them communicate effectively in the language. Hence, an enhanced vocabulary improves the learner's confidence and their motivation to practise and learn more about the language.





Active learning involves providing opportunities for students to meaningfully talk and listen, write, read, and reflect on the content, ideas, issues, and concerns of an academic subject. Wilkinson et al. (2010) contend “talk offers students a means to combine their intellectual resources to collectively make sense of experience and to solve problems” (p. 143). Collaborative writing tends to involve active participation of all students. This is especially possible if the groups are small in size. Each student is given an opportunity to contribute towards achieving the goal of the given writing task. Therefore, students use the language more often. Students are bound to take ownership of sources needed to complete the writing assignment as they work as a group.

Using the collaborative style to complete a writing task is very practical because a piece of writing requires content points. In a collaborative writing, group discussion pupils are able to present their ideas and be challenged. Other participants can challenge ideas with appropriate reasoning and give feedback. The positive and constructive debate can actually teach and encourage every participant.

In schools, most of the classes have 30 to 40 students. The teacher only has half an hour to one hour in an English class. So, it would be a difficult task for the teacher to listen to and get feedback from every individual. But when collaborative writing is introduced, the chances of being able to get feedback from every group is possible. Furthermore, from the responses, the teacher will be able to predict the contribution from the members in each group, especially when the objective is achieved. When divided into groups, students have better opportunities to speak. Since there will be more exchanges among the members in a small group, students





can expect more personalized feedback concerning their output. This is very different from a large-group instruction, where only a small number of students participate actively while the rest only listen passively.

When a group is formed of mixed ability, there will be both weak and strong students. CL will help the weaker students to learn more effectively when they have stronger partners to work with. Gabriele (2007) and Winskel (2008) found that when weaker learners are paired with stronger ones, it motivates them to contribute more and effective learning takes place. When students work in a group to complete a piece of collaborative writing, they go through many stages to produce a finished text. A complete cycle in Collaborative Writing would mean collecting, planning and idea organization, making drafts, revising the text and finally editing it. All this will promote interaction and use of the language. Co-construction of knowledge and social interactions help promote social and cognitive skills.

## 1.2 Statement of the Problem

In Malaysia, English is taught as a second language (L2) in primary and secondary schools. Much attention is paid by the Malaysian government towards the low language skills among Malaysian students (Normazidah, Koo, and Hazita, 2012). Researchers have indicated many reasons for this situation. English, as a secondary language in Malaysia, has caused major problems to students in understanding the use of language, and also has made writing, a difficult task for the students in the secondary school classrooms (Hiew, 2012). For example, Malaysian students are





found to have writing skill deficiencies (Nesamalar, Saratha, and Teh, 2001). This situation has created concerns among both academicians and parents. At school level, writing component is given much credit (marks) for evaluation. However, teachers find teaching of writing more difficult than teaching other language skills such as speaking, listening and reading (Akinwamide, 2012). According to scholars, writing skills help students at later stages of education especially at the higher level as well as in professional life (Dovey, 2010).

It is a known fact that most students have not had the opportunity to use the second language due to unavoidable factors such as background knowledge and high level of vocabulary. Cromley & Azexedo, 2007), discovered that background knowledge and the level of vast vocabulary influenced the student's understanding of



Besides that, most (ESL) students have negative attitude to writing. They often view writing, especially in the form of essay composition, is a difficult task. Ismail et. al (2010) found out that most ESL students are apprehensive of the writing activity and have negative attitude towards writing. Usually, the students who perceive writing as difficult, would dislike the activity (Ismail et al., 2012). There were some factors why the students have a negative perception towards writing, namely the lack of time to practice in the class and the ineffective guidance and resources to write critically (Ismail et al., 2012). One important factors which is often neglected is the students' involvement to writing activities. Students' engagement and interest toward writing are important factors that teachers should be aware of as these factors lead to successful writing (Ismail et al., 2010).





In the article ‘Writing – The Forgotten Skill’, Bowen and Cali (2004) has indicated that writing is definitely not a favorite among both teachers and students. He further confers that many English literature lessons carried out around the world devote less time to teaching the writing skills to students. More attention is spent on the reading, listening and speaking components. Teachers attribute this to the lack of time. Teachers only have five periods a week within which reading, writing, listening, speaking, grammar and literature need to be taught. At least a double period is needed to carry out a writing lesson. Apart from this, the fact that teachers have to spend a good deal of time on correcting students’ essays also seems to deter teachers from indulging too much in this component.

Next is the school environment which includes teachers’ and peers’ behavior towards a student. According to Blum (2005), students might feel disinterested to go to school when there is a lack of socializing and if they feel isolated by others. In the Malaysian context, classrooms have a diverse range of students from different races. These students come from various walks of life and have language barriers. However, in the collaborative writing activity, the students are indirectly forced to mingle with each other to complete the task given in a required time frame which encourages positive involvement among students.

There is also cultural environment that can be overcome with using the Collaborative Writing strategy. Here, students from different cultural environment would be put into groups and they will be able to exchange their traditions from their ethnic group and vice versa to complete the task. For example, if the students are required to write about ‘wau’ (kite), the Malay students in the group will be able to





enlighten the other ethnic group students on the facts. This type of information sharing would lead to more content knowledge being achieved by the entire group.

Apart from that, there is the social environment issue whereby intelligent students of the same level of competence tend to group together and the students of lower level of competence, are isolated. CW students will be put into groups with mixed ability and this would create an opportunity for all the students to participate and self-esteem of weaker students would be enhanced indirectly. According to Ediger (2002), there is always a possibility that weaker students are ignored by other students but under CW this problem can be addressed. This approach to writing is supported by research that highlights collaborative work as an effective tool to support language development especially when students are paired with their fluent English-speaking peers (Faltis, Arias, & Ramirez-Marín, 2010). In a process termed as comprehensive input, English language learners' language skills are further polished when they use the language with their English speaking friends (Haynes, 2010). This researcher asserts that both comprehensible input and output are equally important in acquiring the language. Collaborative writing is one strategy that allows this to take place because students work in small groups, and therefore are able to adapt the knowledge obtained according to their needs. These small groups also make it possible for the students to put forth their ideas and opinions confidently in the target language without fear of being ridiculed (Haynes, 2010).

Writing is deemed the most challenging part of learning second language. It is based on appropriate use of language with and communicative and structural potentials (Dar & Khan, 2015). A proficient composition of a text indicates successful





learning of a second language (Nickerson, Perkins, & Smith, 2014). The major language issues in students' writings are of grammar and syntax. These errors included incorrect use of prepositions, articles, tenses, singular/plural, verbs, sentence structure, and the use of informal and spoken expressions. On the other hand, vocabulary also poses a problem for learners. Haider (2012) also found similar problems of vocabulary in their studies. Corresponding to the finding of Megaiah (2014), spelling and punctuations errors were also found to be a major issue in writing.

Collaborative Writing has long been deemed important in the learning and teaching of the second language. According to Shehadeh (2011), the popularity of Collaborative Writing has been well established in the past two decades. Researchers and educators have shown a lot of interest in the Collaborative Writing strategy. They find the idea of allowing students to write as a group not only effective but also time-saving (Li & Zhu, 2013). The ability to write a good piece of essay is not the only benefit students reap from this (Collaborative Writing) strategy. In fact, according to Wigglesworth and Storch (2009), Collaborative Writing can equip learners with skills required beyond the classroom needs. Students will be provided with the necessary requirements that will prepare them for higher education institutions or even when they join the workforce. Collaborative Writing has also been recognized as a tool to construct linguistic knowledge (Swain, 2010). Various learners in one group will be able to impart different forms of linguistic knowledge. Collaborative Writing triggers reflective thinking (Bruffee, 1998). During a collaborative writing session, learners are able to talk and listen to various input which in turn develops reflective thinking. This reflective thinking ability helps students to become aware of their intended



audience's level of understanding. However, despite its importance being well-attested, the Collaborative Writing tasks must be carefully planned and closely-monitored. This will certainly ensure the success of Collaborative Writing in an English Language Classroom.

### 1.3 Objectives of the Study

The main aim of this paper is to analyze the functions of a effective writing strategy, especially the collaborative method in teaching writing skills to students. This study is important because it reflects on how a certain writing strategy is taught in the classrooms as well as raising questions about the prevailing low writing skills among

The researcher intends to embark on this research to identify the efficiency of the collaborative writing strategy used to complete a writing task. CW is introduced to cultivate the interest in writing. This method is used to enhance the writing skills and to encourage students to write more in class in the English Language.

Therefore, it is the interest of this research to gain more insights into the strategy in upgrading the writing abilities of students in Malaysian schools. The objective of this research is to examine the effectiveness of the collaborative writing process and also look at the change in attitude towards writing after being exposed to collaborative writing sessions.



Collaboration involves students of various beliefs, past experiences, cultural backgrounds and personal behaviors working together. Therefore, this study give insights on how these students collaborate to present a piece of writing that is of a very high standard content-wise and also in the target language.

#### 1.4 Research Questions

The study is guided by the below stated research questions which seek the answer on the effectiveness of collaborative learning strategy on students' writing. The main aim of this study is to find answers for the two major questions below:

- How effective is the collaborative writing method in helping students to develop their writing skills?
- What are the changes in the students' attitude towards writing essay after being exposed to the CW method?

#### 1.5 Significance of the Study

It is hoped that the findings of this study would be relevant in assisting English language teachers to adopt teaching strategies will enhance essay writing skills among students. Secondly, the study would make it possible for curriculum developers and textbook writers to come up with materials that solve the challenges faced by students





in essay writing. Finally, the study could contribute towards the needs of classroom research in second language writing and form a basis for further studies and prompt other researchers to do similar research at different levels of learning.

## 1.6 Research Hypothesis

Based on the research Question number 1, it concerns with the hypothesis that should be investigated. The research hypothesis for this research problem is essay writing using the collaborative writing strategy empowers the students' writing abilities.

A significant difference will be seen in the test scores of the Experimental collaborative writing group compared to the traditional writing group. Students who have gone through the collaborative writing method will show a significant difference in the organisational structure, development of ideas and coherence in their essays. The attitude of students in the experimental group will show a more positive and significant change towards essay writing after the treatment.

## 1.7 Definition of Terms

### Collaborative Writing

This refers to the writing method used for the experimental group. Collaborative Writing is a method of instruction in which students of various abilities work together in small groups to accomplish a common task (Gokhale, 1995). According to Linda





Karell (2002) 'Collaborative Writing is a form of 'writing together' or 'multiple authorship' and 'refers to acts of writing in which two or more individuals consciously work together to produce a common text...'. Andrea Greenbaum defines collaborative writing as a writing activity that involves two or more persons working together to produce a written document. In this study, collaborative writing refers to an essay prepared by an group of students with different capabilities.

### **Traditional writing (common practice of classroom teachers)**

This refers to the writing method used for the controlled group. In the Traditional writing method, writing is a silent and solitary activity. Writing is taught rather than learned through experience. Writing must be taught in small, incremental parts, where small parts and sub skills must be mastered before attempting whole pieces of writing.

Process writing does not exist in this method. Students are required to write regularly but without much guidance from teacher.

### **The process approach to writing**

This refers to the writing strategy used for the experimental group. This approach to writing is based on linguistic skills and involves many stages in the completion of a writing task. The stages are planning, revising, drafting and editing. This approach is not concerned with the linguistic writing knowledge such as the structural aspect and the mechanics of writing (Badger & White, 2000). This approach teaches writing as a process (Belinda, 2006).





## **Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD)**

Vygotsky defines the Zone of Proximal Development concept as ‘The distance between the actual development level as determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers’ (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 86). Zone of Proximal Development is the basic concept that acts as the theoretical foundation for this study.

## **Peer interaction**

According to Brown (1987) the definition of Peer Interaction is a situation where a group of people who share similar age, background, and social status join together and communicate. During this process, students allow their identity to surface and build a strong character based on their positive and negative self-awareness.

## **Positive interdependence**

This term refers to the effective collaboration among group members to achieve success (Kagan 1994). This interdependence helps to create a sense of togetherness and responsibility for each other and brings about a lot of benefits to all the group members. It helps create a positive social setting which instils confidence, support and motivation and an excellent learning environment (Nunan, 1992, Kohonen, 1992).



## 1.8 Limitations to the Study.

Like all other studies, this study too has its limitations. Firstly, the study is limited to a sample of 40 form four students in a school in Perak. This is a sub urban band 5 school and the students here are considered to be of an average level in English. Therefore, the result of the study could not be said to reflect the abilities of an entire population of students.

Another limitation is time factor. The study is carried out for about 10 weeks. Within these weeks several lessons are interrupted by the school activities, such as ad hoc assemblies and monthly examinations. Due to these constraints, respondents did not get sufficient practices in the collaborative groups. Furthermore, actual time planned for these activities had to be shortened due to the time-constraint. All this could affect the reliability of the results.

## 1.9 Theoretical framework

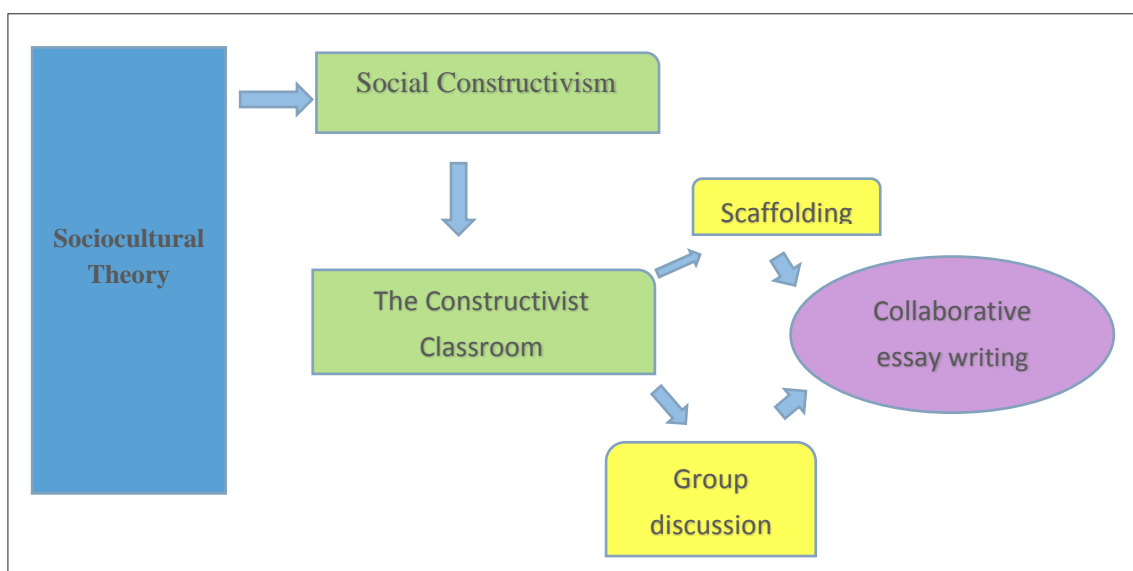


Figure 1.1 Theoretical framework for Sociocultural Theory



## 1.10 Conclusion

The chapter has discussed the background of the study, research questions, the statement of problem, objectives of the study, significance of the study, the definition of terms and limitations to the study. The literature review of the theories that the study is based on, the importance of collaborative writing, factors that hinder the use of this strategy, and previous studies on collaborative writing are all discussed in the following chapter. This literature review is planned in order to put forth literature that will consolidate the objective of my study and further fortify researchers' stand on collaborative writing. The following literature that is included has given an in-depth look at the matters mentioned above.

