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IMPLEMENTING COLLABORATIVE WRITING TO EHNHANCE STUDENTS' WRITING

AZURA BINTI JANUDIN

DISERTASI DIKEMUKAKAN BAGI
MEMENUHI SYARAT UNTUK MEMPEROLEHI
IJAZAH SARJANA PENDIDIKAN

FAKULTI BAHASA
UNIVERSITI PENDIDIKAN SULTAN IDRIS

2006

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PENGAKUAN

Saya mengaku disertasi ini adalah hasil kerja saya sendiri kecuali nukilan dan ringkasan yang setiap satunya saya jelaskan sumbernya.

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DECLARATION

I hereby declare that the work in this dissertation is my own except for quotations and summarize which have been duly acknowledged.

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DEDICATION :

To the jewels of my heart

Who always give me strength and courage…

My beloved husband, Mohd. Rodzi bin Selamat

My lovely children,

Nur Hazirah Hanani binti Mohd. Rodzi

Nur Firzanah binti Mohd. Rodzi

Nur Afiqah binti Mohd. Rodzi

Mohammad. Aiman bin. Mohd. Rodzi

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I would like to express my gratitude to my respective family members for their patience and moral support. My deepest appreciation and everlasting love especially for my beloved husband and children for their sacrifice, continuous encouragement and unlimited understanding which they had given me throughout the duration of my study, and for being my pillar of inspiration and my source of ultimate joy.

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ABSTRAK

Masalah pencapaian bahasa Inggeris yang rendah di kalangan pelajar telah wujud sebagai satu isu yang besar dalam bidang pendidikan sehingga digelar sebagai 'matapelajaran pembunuh' dalam peperiksaan UPSR, PMR dan SPM. Jika tidak diberi perhatian, masalah ini boleh memberi kesan dalam mencapai Falsafah Pendidikan Negara dan Wawasan 2020. Oleh itu usaha yang gigih perlu bagi mengatasi masalah ini.Tujuan utama kajian ini adalah untuk mengenalpasti samada pengaplikasian menulis secara kolaboratif di dalam kelas dapat membantu pelajar meningkatkan kemahiran menulis. Kajian ini dilakukan keatas 60 orang pelajar tingkatan tiga di Sekolah Menengah Kebangsaan Gedangsa, Kuala Kubu Bharu, Selangor Darul Ehsan. Teori yang menjadi tulang belakang kajian ini adalah teori Sosial Kognitif Vygotsky, teori perkembangan kognitif Piaget dan teori hipotesis pengeluaran Swain. Kaedah yang digunakan dalam menjalankan kajian ini adalah quasi experimental. Kajian mendapati pelajar yang menulis secara kolaboratif mencapai min skor yang lebih tinggi dalam ujian post iaitu 7.47 berbanding pelajar yang menulis berseorangan min skornya hanya menunjukkan peningkatan 4.30. Essei yang ditulis oleh penulis dalam kumpulan focus juga menunjukkan peningkatan dari segi panjang esei dan pengembangan idea. Ia membuktikan bahawa penulis-penulis itu dapat mengaplikasikan apa yang dipelajari dan didapati sewaktu perbincangan koloborasi sewaktu mereka menulis sendirian pada ujian post. Selain itu kajian ini juga mendapati perkembangan idea yang paling kerap sewaktu berinteraksi dalam kumpulan adalah mengemukakan idea, memberi alternatif, mendapatkan maklumat, menyemak kembali, memberi respons dan merujuk sumber. Pada akhir kajian, beberapa cadangan diberikan bagi guru-guru ESL melaksanakan penulisan kolaboratif dalam pengajaran.

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ABSTRACT

The problem of low achievement in English among students is an issue in the educational issue in the *UPSR*, *PMR* and *SPM* examinations. If more attention is not given to this problem, it could affect the attainment of the National Philosophy of Education and Vision 2020. Therefore great effort should be made to overcome this problem. The main purpose of this study was to find out whether the implementation of collaborative writing in the classroom would enhance students' writing skill. This study was carried out on 60 form three students of Sekolah Menengah Kebangsaan Gedangsa, Kuala Kubu Bharu, Selangor Darul Ehsan. The theories underlying this study were Vygtosky's Social-Cognitive theory, Piaget's theory on Cognitive Conflict and Swain's Output hypothesis. The method used was quasi-experimental. The findings of this study indicated that the subjects in the experimental group who wrote collaboratively improved in their mean scores for post-test by 7.47 as compared to the control group that scored only 4.30. The essays of the coauthors of the focal group also showed some improvement in the length and the generating of idea. It proved that the coauthors applied what they learned and gained during the collaborative discussion when writing alone in the post-test. The finding also revealed a pattern in coauthors' interactive idea development namely idea generating, giving alternatives, eliciting, monitoring, responding and resourcing.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

CDC	-	Curriculum Development Center
CW	-	Collaborative Writing
ESL	-	English As A Second Language
PMR	-	*Peniliaian Menengah Rendah*
SPM	-	*Sijil Pelajaran Malaysia*
STPM	-	*Sijil Tinggi Persekolahan Malaysia*
ZPD	-	Zone of Proximal Development

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CHAPTER ONE

BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

1.1 Introduction

The issue of the declining standard of English among Malaysian students is a topic of concern especially after the announcement of each public examination results. This research will try to examine this issue by focusing on the learning and teaching of writing. In addressing this issue, teachers need to try to find a suitable method as an alternative to the conventional method of teaching writing.

The use of collaborative and group activities in the ESL writing classroom has been an influential composition teaching strategy (Reid, 1992). Writing which was formerly seen as a solitary activity with "no community or collaboration" is now acknowledged as a process "enhanced by working in, and with, a group of other writers, who give vital response" (Emig, 1979, pp. 140-141).

Group and collaborative work in the language classroom also provide non-threatening contexts for developing communication skills and fulfill the linguistic need for interaction (Long & Porter, 1985; Pica, Young & Doughty, 1987). In addition, during group work, students work collectively to discover ideas, organize work, revise and give

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feedback in the presence of an authentic audience. The students and readers discover what is known and unknown, and what is understood or not (Gere, 1987). Learners also use each other's resources and work towards a common goal. The objectives of students' independence in learning and students' responsibility for learning are also met through group interaction (Reid, 1993).

Some forms of group work commonly used in writing activities are peer revision, peer response or peer tutoring. These types of group work have been advocated as effective teaching techniques in L1 (Freedman, 1992; Dipardo & Freedman, 1988) and L2 classrooms (Mangelsdrof & Schlumberger, 1992; Lockhart & Ng, 1995;). These forms of group work which were mentioned earlier emphasize the productiom of individual text through the help of a peer tutuor.

Another form of group work is collaborative writing (CW). CW implies significant interaction and shared decision-making and responsibility between members in the writing of a shared document (Morgan, Allen, More, Atkinson & Snow, 1987 cited in Dale, 1993).

CW requires the effort of every member in the group from the onset of the writing process. All the members share ownership of a single piece of work. Every member in the group collaborates in brainstorming plans, generating ideas, making decisions, and revising drafts to produce a joint text.

There are several benefits of CW. By actually writing together, not just brainstorming or editing, students can learn a great deal (Ede & Lunsford, 1985). Coauthors are found to share creative input, evaluative perspectives, composing strategies, and ideas about good writing, which are internalized and employed in subsequent independent writing (Daiute, 1986).

Collaboration can also affect both the quantity and quality of work. The articulation of the efforts of partners enables all to accomplish more as a group than as individuals. Partners who are genuinely helpful also make work easier and more meaningful (Erickson, 1989).

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Collaborative writing is grounded in social constructivism. The social constructivist theory emphasizes student discourse as a means of learning, and writing is the manifestation of internalized social interactions. Vygotsky (1978; 1986) held the notion that humans are social beings. Therefore, human learning is a social process which is mediated through interaction with others. A person moves from his actual level to his potential level of learning in his zone of proximal development through social interaction.

Vygotsky (1978, p. 89) defines the zone of proximal development as "the distance between the actual development as determined by individual problem solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem solving under the adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers."

Within a collaborative writing group, individual students are at different stages of development in their writing abilities. Each person brings with him certain knowledge and expertise. Through collaboration, students help one another to develop writing ability by learning from the strengths of other members.

Since writing is seen as a socially constructed act as well as a cognitive one, the interactive nature of collaboration provides the learner opportunity to verbalize the inner thoughts on the topic of discussion and subsequently to produce the text. In addition, collaborative writing enables learners to observe alternative cognitive processes and strategies (Daiute, 1986; Dale, 1993) and allows for productive cognitive conflict (Daiute & Dalton, 1988; Dale, 1993).

Cognitive conflict is essential because it allows the learner to restructure thoughts during collaborative writing (Webb, 1982). Learners have to support their arguments. This will lead to language development. Hence, learners are able to extend their language ability to a greater degree. Based on the theoretical background that supports collaborative writing, this study aims to explore the dynamics of collaborative writing in a secondary school. This study therefore investigated coauthors' interaction while developing ideas and composing written texts.

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1.2 Statement of The Problems

Prior to 2004, Paper Two of the *"PMR"* format comprised three essays, namely two essays in the form of either letter writing, descriptive wrting, narrative, picture composition or note expansion. The third essay was on literature. The 2005 *"PMR*" Paper Two format differs as students are required to write an essay, a summary and an essay on literature. (*Kementerian Pelajaran Malaysia, Lembaga Peperiksaan Malaysia, 2004*). Therefore the teaching of writing is important to prepare students for the examination. The focus of this study is on implementing CW to teach essay writing. The research questions are listed below.

1.3 Research Questions

This study specifically aimed at seeking answers to the following research questions :

1. Is there a significant difference in the mean scores for the post-test in writing compositions between the experimental group and the control group?
2. Is there a significant difference between the scores of the pre and post-test results of essay writing by four students in the experimental group after collaborative writing discussion?
3. How is collaborative writing an effective method in teaching writing?

1.4 Significance of the Study

Writing is a skill most students are least proficient in, yields the least reward and has few social uses for students' school lives. It is also the least used of the four skills for the average foreign language user (Chitravelu N., Sithamparam S., & Teh, Soo Choon 1995). Few foreign language school leavers will ever again write the language. In contrast, when it comes to the examination especially in the *Penilaian Menengah Rendah* (*PMR*), the

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percentage for Paper Two (writing), is 70%, and in the *Sijil Pelajaran Malaysia* (*SPM*) the weightage is 60% (Malaysian Examination Syndicate, 2004). Therefore students must master the writing skill well in order to get a good grade in English.

The findings of this study provide insight to educators who might want to employ this method in language teaching. The study might also contribute to the existing body of research on collaborative writing in the classroom.

1.5 Objectives of the Study

This exploratory study was an attempt to find out whether collaborative writing could help students to develop ideas and write longer with less error. The tasks assigned were focused on descriptive and argumentative writing. In descriptive and argumentative writing, content and elaboration are vital aspects. Hence, this study investigated how students interacted to develop and to organize ideas for the text. Besides that, the researcher focused on the moral value of responsibility as the theme for the three treatments to educate the students to be more responsible person and citizens.

1.6 Research Hypothesis

McMillan (2000) says that hypotheses can be classified either as a research or a statistical term. A research hypothesis is a declarative statement of the results the investigator expects to find. A statistical hypothesis is a statement of a relationship or difference that can be tested statistically, usually stated in the "null" form.

In order to gain probable answers to the above research questions, the following hypotheses were tested.

1. Null hypothesis : There is no significant difference between writing collaboratively and writing individually.

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2. Alternative hypothesis : There is a significant change in the scores when students write collaboratively.

1.7 Definition of Terms

1.7.1 Collaborative writing: In collaborative writing, a text is composed jointly by authors. There are no primary or secondary writers. All the members are potentially equal partners during the writing process, though one person is selected to write out the text-in-process.

1.7.2 Coauthors: This term refers to students who are placed in a writing group and involved in the process of composing and evaluating a joint piece of written work.

1.7.3 Peer interaction: This term refers to verbal communications or discussions among the coauthors for the purpose of generating ideas, giving alternative suggestions, composing and evaluating written text. Interactions also include agreements and disagreements of ideas and points of view.

1.7.4 Idea development : This term refers to how coauthors generate and use their ideas to construct sentences, especially for the content of the writing tasks assigned to them.

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1.8 Limitation to the Study

Like most studies this study too has its limitations. Firstly, in terms of population and sampling, the study is limited to 60 form three students of Sekolah Menengah Kebangsaan Gedangsa, Kuala Kubu Bharu, Selangor. The result of the study does not represent the abilities of the school population. The study is also limited to a group of Malay students.

Secondly, time factor was a limitation. As it was the beginning of 2005, ad hoc staff meetings sometimes disturbed the English lesson. The study was carried out for four weeks. Thirdly, only interaction by the focal group was audiotaped as the other groups' interaction was mostly carried out in *Bahasa Melayu*. The fourth, limitation is related to the writing task. The tasks assigned were not related to the same topic. Therefore, it was difficult to ascertain the actual idea development and the coauthors' progress over time as the study only examined three collaborative writing tasks. The final limitation is that the study only investigated the coauthors' writing process during CW and compared the essays of pre and post-test essays written by the four coauthors in the focal group.

1.9 Summary

The chapter has discussed the background of the study, the statement of problem, the research questions, significance of the study, objectives of the study, the research hypothesis, the definition of terms and limitation to the study. The literature review of the theories underlying the study, the importance of writing, factors that make writing difficult, advantages of writing collaboratively and several studies on collaborative writing are discussed in the next chapter.

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CHAPTER TWO

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

2.1 Introduction

The first chapter has focused on the importance and limitations of the study. This chapter discusses the theoretical rationale that forms the basis for this study. The importance of writing, factors that make writing difficult and some benefits and advantages of collaborative writing are also presented. This is followed by a review of research on peer interactions in writing instruction to provide insight into collaborative writing. Finally, several empirical studies on collaborative writing in the classroom are reviewed.

2.2 Theoretical Rationale and Research

This study is guided by three theoretical concepts, namely, Vygotsky's (1978) social-cognitive theory, Piaget's (1959), theory on cognitive conflict and Swain's (1995) output hypothesis. Literature pertaining to each is presented separately.

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