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*Teachers' Attitudes Towards Collaborative Writing
in the Algerian EFL Context: Challenges and
Perspectives*

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ABSTRACT

This article explores the attitudes held by Algerian EFL teachers towards collaborative writing. It further probes the challenges that may hinder its effective implementation. In pursuance of this aim, the researchers have collected data through a perception questionnaire sent to 41 EFL teachers at different Algerian universities, namely Bejaia, Setif, and Algiers. The results revealed that Algerian EFL teachers have positive attitudes towards collaborative writing; however, they announced that many reasons limited using collaborative writing, such as time constraints and learners' unfair contribution. Based on these findings, we recommend that teachers should reconsider implementing collaborative writing in their classes.

Keywords: Algerian EFL context, attitudes, challenges, collaborative writing, EFL writing

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1. INTRODUCTION

The significance of writing as a skill has been virtually recognized, mainly with the technological progress and the internet-explosion, which lead to the fact that most of the global communication takes the written form. Moreover, writing is a significant concern for many language teachers because almost every academic endeavor requires writing. Notwithstanding, when it comes to learning English as a foreign language, learners encounter various challenges that stem from the complex nature of writing in general and the linguistic properties of EFL writing in particular. That is why practitioners continuously search for alternative solutions to teach EFL writing effectively and efficiently.

The works of Vygotsky and Piaget have widely influenced foreign language learning. In recent years, learning together or peer-mediated approaches to learning has gained higher education prominence. The interaction that takes place when learners learn with each other can be an impetus to develop the learners' intellectual skills, deepen their understanding and enlarge their knowledge (Falchikov, 2001).

From a general perspective, writing is perceived as a solitary process whereby learners work individually through the writing stages to arrive at the final product. Collaborative writing is, thus, a novel activity that can benefit the learners in different aspects. Nevertheless, it is worthy to note that researchers have made many observations concerning teachers' reluctance to implement such activities, as McDonough (2004) noted. Similarly, in the Algerian context, EFL teachers are reluctant and rarely integrate CW in their classes. There seems to be little research examining the attitudes held by EFL teachers of writing about collaborative writing in the Algerian context. Accordingly, this study aims to shed light on the attitudes held by university EFL teachers of writing towards collaborative writing and the reasons that lay behind their little use of this method in their classes. In particular, this study aims to answer the following research question:

- What are the Algerian EFL teachers' attitudes towards collaborative writing and its implementation in the writing classes?
- What are the challenges that may hinder the effective implementation of collaborative writing?

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Collaborative Learning

Collaborative learning has been a widely researched pedagogical concept, and it has become an essential part of education, as it holds the promise of helping solve a set of pedagogical problems (Silver, Chin, Chann, & O'Donell, 2013). It refers to the instructional methods that have students working together to achieve common goals. In this token, Koehn (2001) defined collaborative learning as an *"intellectual endeavor in which individuals act collaboratively with others to become knowledgeable on some particular subject matter."* (P. 160). That is to say, joint learning involves joint efforts between individuals to acquire new knowledge. Besides, Chandra (2015) added that *"collaborative learning is an educational approach to teaching and learning that involves groups of learners working together to solve a problem, complete a task, or create a product"* (P. 1). Simply, collaborative learning signifies learners working in groups and teams to solve a given problem and acquire new knowledge.

Theoretically, collaborative learning is supported by Vygotsky and Piaget (Gillies & Ashman, 2003). In specific, the social constructivist view of Vygotsky (1962-1978) valued peer learning. Vygotsky's notion of the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) implies that learning occurs through the interaction between learners. It determines the difference between what individuals achieve individually and what they can achieve in collaboration with more capable peers (Vygotsky, 1978). In the L2 context, Ohta (1995) defined ZPD as the difference between L2 learners' level when they use the language individually and their potential level when working in collaboration with a more capable peer. In L2 classes, however, researchers have expanded the notion of ZPD beyond the novice-expert partnership. Several studies (such as Ohta, 1995; Stroch, 2013) concluded that peers with similar L2 proficiency (no identifiable expert) could provide each other with Scaffolding. Besides, Vygotsky (1978) added that what individuals can do in collaboration with others will be able to do individually. It means that when learners learn collaboratively, they internalize what they have learned to use it personally.

Moreover, Scaffolding is another crucial notion that gives credit to collaborative learning. It refers to the encouragement to participate and take greater responsibility in accomplishing the task that a more capable peer provides a novice individual with (Wood, Burner, & Ross, 1976).

Besides, Piagetean's Socio-cognitive conflict theory provided another theoretical basis for peer collaboration. It supports the idea that social interaction leads to more significant learning and higher reasoning (Daniels, 2005). More to

the point, this theory suggested that the cognitive conflict, which is caused by the multiple perspectives that occur in the social exchanges, leads to social disagreement that generates intellectual growth. On this basis, when learners work collaboratively, they are exposed to different and contradicting understanding. Through this exposition, learners experience disequilibrium leading them to re-examine and reconstruct their knowledge (Gillies & Ashman, 2003). In this vein, Piaget (1985, as cited in Palincsar, 1998) explained that “disequilibrium forces the subject to go beyond his current state and strike out in new directions.” (p. 10)

However, it is vital to know that putting learners together and asking them to work does not mean that they collaborate (Johnson & Johnson, 1987). Differently, there are certain conditions under which true collaboration develops. They are positive interdependence, individual accountability, group processing, social skills, and face-to-face promotive interaction. Regarding positive interdependence, it refers to the feeling of ‘we sink or swim together’; it is the feeling that group members need each other to accomplish the joint task successfully and effectively. Kagan (1994) considered positive interdependence as the heart of collaborative learning because it establishes learners’ mutual benefits and a sense of mutual responsibility.

Concerning individual accountability, it refers to the fact that each group member should be accountable. That is, each member has to contribute to accomplishing the activity. Individual accountability is vital because it helps to recognize the team members that need more support and encouragement. It is also essential to avoid students’ unfair contribution to the task and, therefore, unfair assessment and grading. To this end, teachers should ensure that all the group members work collaboratively and each group member contributes to the group’s work (Johnson & Johnson, 1999). As far as group processing is concerned, students must reflect on how well the group functions and evaluate which actions and behaviors are helpful or need to be changed. Thus, group processing is essential for successful collaboration as it determines the group members’ contribution.

Regarding social skills, Johnson, Johnson, and Smith (1991) maintained that learners need to use appropriate skills to collaborate successfully. They need to trust each other, support and help each other, and communicate accurately. Promotive face-to-face interaction occurs when group members encourage and facilitate each other's effort to reach the group's aims (Gillies & Ashman, 2008).

2.2. Collaborative Writing

Recently, recognizing the social nature of writing paved the way to a series of collaborative writing investigations. The use of joint activities in writing classes became popular in the 1970s. In essence, collaborative writing refers to a group of people working together to write a joint text. Scholars failed to reach a consensus about defining CW because of its complex nature dynamic components. While some scholars view collaborative writing as a social activity (e.g., Lowry, Curtis & Lowry, 2004), others consider it a cognitive activity (e.g., Allen, Atkinson, Morgan, Moore, & Snow, 1987). In essence, collaborative writing stands for an activity that involves more than one person to produce a joint text by going through the different stages of planning, drafting, revising, and editing (Storch, 2013).

Chiefly, some of the essential benefits of writing collaboratively, as presented in the literature, involve developing students' writing abilities (Storch, 2019); it helps them be responsible for their learning (Speck, 2002). Besides, CW improves learner' language competence and aids them to gain new knowledge (Tabib & Cheung, 2017), it enhances audience awareness (Wigglesworth & Storch, 2012), it provides a suitable environment of immediate and negotiated feedback (Storch, 2013), and it reduces anxiety (Dornyei, 2001)

However, it is crucial to note that implementing collaborative writing in the classroom is not easy. The challenges that may hinder its practical implementation are: it requires longer time than individual writing, and it requires teachers to consider their lesson plans and to shift their roles from authoritative figures to facilitators (Speck, 2002). Additionally, learners' unfair contribution (Le, Janssen, & Wubbels, 2017) and learners' lack of engagement and experience in collaborative writing (Chisholm, 1990) are other challenges.

So far, most of the research on collaborative writing was conducted in an ESL context, where English is used primarily. Accordingly, scholars called for further investigations on collaborative writing in foreign language contexts, as EFL in the Algerian context. Besides, to unveil and discover new dimensions concerning co-authoring in the Algerian context, where there is an apparent lack of research that thoroughly and rigorously investigates CW, the researchers have sought to tackle this issue with a focus on teachers' perspective, more specifically through exploring their attitudes.

3. RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

The present investigation revolves around exploring the attitudes held by EFL teachers of writing towards CW and figuring out the challenges of its implementation, which are reasons for their reluctance to its implementation.

3.1. Participants

This study was conducted in the Algerian higher education context during 2019/2020. 41 EFL teachers of writing from the University of Algiers, Bejaia, and Setif were randomly selected to participate in this study. Random sampling is important because random samples are unbiased and they tend to be representative of the population (Johnson & Christensen, 2012).

3.2. Instruments

In this research, an exploratory design based on a survey methodology was used. Exploratory research seeks to investigate a problem that lacks a thorough study. It is generally conducted to gain a better understanding of a current issue. To this end, we have employed, in this study, a perception questionnaire to collect the necessary data. A questionnaire has become one of the most popular instruments. Its popularity is linked to the ease of construction and efficiency in terms of the researcher's time, effort, and financial resources (Dornyei, 2003). The questionnaire of the present study involved an introductory paragraph, which explains the purpose of the investigation to the participants; it also included four main sections, each with a set of questions with different kinds, mainly close-ended, open-ended, multiple-choice, and scaled questions. Section one was devoted to collect general information about the participants. It involves three questions (Q1 what is your gender? Q2, what is your academic degree? Q3, how long have you been teaching EFL? Q3, the participants' years of teaching EFL). Section two was entitled teachers' practices in the teaching of writing, and it involved seven questions (Q1 do you engage your learners in collaborative writing? Q2 If yes, how often? Q3 whatever your answer to question 2 is, please explain Q4, what does collaborative writing mean to you? Q5, in your opinion, do students prefer to work individually or collaboratively? Q6 why? Q7, in your opinion, what are the reasons behind teachers' reluctance to implement CW?) Section three is entitled teachers' attitudes towards collaborative writing, and it comprised eight main statements answered on a three point-Likert scale (agree, uncertain, disagree). Section four was devoted to further suggestions.

3.3. Research Procedures

Because of the COVID-19 pandemic, it was not likely to meet the participants face-to-face to hand them the questionnaire. The researchers relied

on digital means, including social media (specifically Facebook and WhatsApp) and e-mail, to contact the participants and ask them to respond to the questions voluntarily. Data were analyzed using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS 25.0).

3.4. Results

This section is devoted to reporting the main findings of the present investigation.

Section one: general information

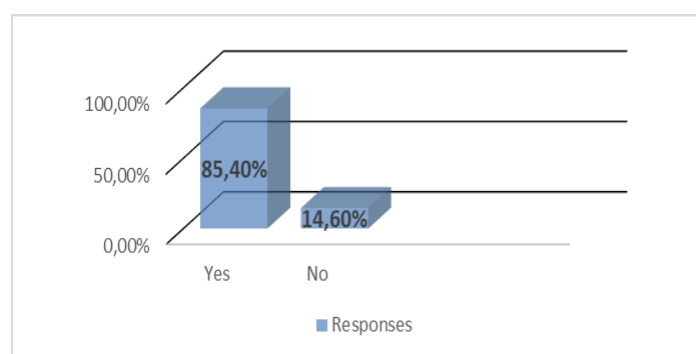
The first section of the questionnaire was devoted to collect general information about the participant. As far as gender is concerned, most of the informants are females; they represent 75.6% of the whole sample, whereas males represent only 24.4%. Regarding their academic degree, 53.7% of the participants have a master's degree, 43.9% are doctors, and 2.4% are professors. Concerning the participants' years of teaching EFL, it ranges between one year and 30 years.

Section two: Teachers' Practices in the Teaching of Writing

Question one: Teachers' Use of Collaborative Writing

As far as the second section is concerned, it is devoted to teachers' instructional practices. The first question concerns whether our participants engage their learners in collaborative writing. As shown in figure one below, most of the participants (85.4%) reported that they engage learners in collaborative writing; this implies that Algerian teachers of writing value CW, whereas the remaining 14.6% said that they do not engage their learners in CW who, maybe, do not recognize its importance or because they perceive writing as purely individual.

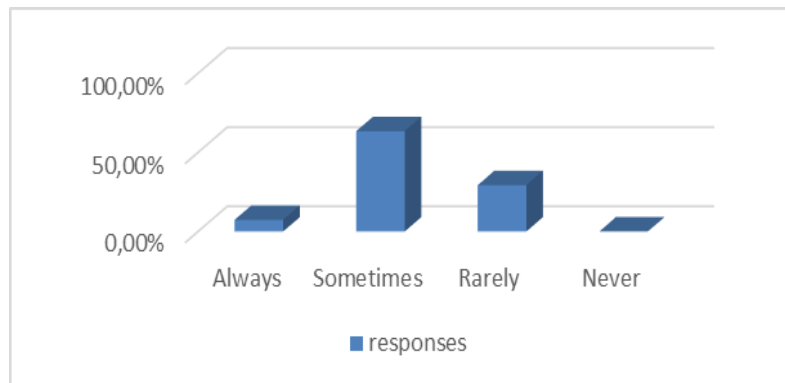
Fig.1. Teachers' use of collaborative writing



Question two: Teachers' Frequency of Using Collaborative Writing

Concerning the second question, the frequency of learners' engagement in collaborative writing, more than half of the participants (63.4%) revealed that they sometimes engage learners in collaborative writing. 29.3% always and 7.3% rarely (see figure two below). It means that teachers do not consider collaborative writing an integral part of the writing course.

Fig.2. Teachers' frequency of using collaborative writing



Question three: Explanation of the Frequency of Using Collaborative Writing

In question three of the second section, the participants were asked to explain their answers to the second question. Our participants contended their little use of collaborative writing is linked to various reasons such as time constraints, discipline problems, priority goes to the individual writing, collaborative writing is not easy to supervise, students are not acquainted with such tasks, the domination of one student over others, and students' unfair contribution.

Question four: the meaning of collaborative writing

Regarding what does collaborative writing mean, the researchers summarized the most critical points reported by the respondents as follows:

- Group work
- To give a chance to a group of the students to write a piece of writing together.
- It helps them to produce better papers.
- A collective work (writing) in which each participant brings his/her knowledge or approach about a particular topic.

- Working in groups or pairs.

Section three: Teachers' Attitudes towards Collaborative Writing

Section three of the designed questionnaire concerns teachers' attitudes towards collaborative writing.

Question one: the degree to which the participants agree or disagree with the statements.

Table 1. Teachers' attitudes towards collaborative writing

Items	Agree	Uncertain	Disagree
1.Students write better essays in terms of grammar, mechanics, cohesion, coherence, and other writing aspects when they work collaboratively	68.3%	22%	9.5%
2. The processes of planning, revising, and editing become easier when students write collaboratively.	78%	9.5%	12.2%
3.Collaborative writing is useful in the planning phase	63.4%	26.8%	9.8%
4.Collaborative writing is useful in the editing phase.	65.9%	19.5%	16.4%
5. Collaborative writing makes students more motivated to write.	70.7%	26.8%	2.4%
6. Collaborative writing raises students' self-confidence.	58.5%	34.1%	7.3%
7. Collaborative writing reduces students' anxiety and procrastination.	82.7%	12.2%	4.9%
8. Collaborative writing is challenging to implement.	53.7%	17.1%	00%

This study aims to determine whether Algerian EFL teachers of writing

have positive attitudes towards collaborative writing or not. The results obtained from the respondents answering eight items on a three-point Likert scale indicated that most of the participants have positive attitudes towards collaborative writing. This was shown in the respondents' agreement in most of the items. As seen in Table two above, nearly all the participants (82.9%) agreed that CW reduces students' anxiety and procrastination in writing, whereas 22% of them were uncertain and 3.5% disagreed. Besides, 78% of the participants agreed that the planning, revising, and editing stages become easier when students collaborate, while 9.5% were uncertain and 12.2 disagreed. As the writing stage in which teachers think that collaborative writing is useful, 63.4% of the respondents agreed that collaborative writing is more valuable in the planning phase, 65.9% agreed that collaborative writing is useful in the editing phase. Besides, 70.7% of the participants agreed that collaborative writing makes students more motivated to write, 26.8% of them were uncertain, and 9.8% disagreed. As for aspects of writing, while 68.3% of the respondents agreed that students write better essays in terms of grammar, mechanics, cohesion, coherence, and other writing aspects when they write collaboratively, 26.8% of them were uncertain, and 9.8% disagreed. Concerning whether teachers find collaborative writing difficult or easy to implement, 53.7% of the participants agreed that it is difficult, 17.1% were uncertain, and 29.3% disagreed. Overall, we notice that the immense majority of the participants agreed upon the items, whereas few of them were uncertain, and a minority of them disagreed.

Question two: The Reasons behind Teachers' Reluctance to Use Collaborative Writing

Table 2. The participants' opinions of the reasons behind teachers' reluctance to implement collaborative writing

Items	Number	Percentage
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1. Time constraints.	17	41.46%
2. Learners' unfair contribution.	21	51.21%
3. The difficulty of assessing collaboratively written texts.	17	41.46%
4. Teachers' unawareness of how to implement collaborative writing.	5	12.19%
5. Learners' lack of necessary social and group skills.	12	29.26%
6. The difficulty of designing collaborative activities.	3	7.31%
7. All of them.	13	31.70%

Table two shows that more than half of the participants (51.21%) think learners' unfair contribution is the reason for teachers' reluctance to use collaborative writing. This may be true because some learners rely heavily on others when writing collaboratively. 41.46% of them believe that time constraints and difficulty of assessing collaboratively written texts are other reasons. 29.26% of our participants think learners lack the necessary social and group processing skills. It may be related to the fact that they are not acquainted with collaborative activities in written expression classes. 12.19% of the participants have chosen the teacher's unawareness of implementing collaborative writing. This unawareness may be related to the teachers' attachment to the individual writing. 7.31% attested that designing collaborative writing activities is difficult. In effect, creating joint writing activities is more difficult teachers need to consider a wide range of elements such as their roles, time, syllabus content, and learners' roles, to name just a few. As for 31.70% of the participants, all of the suggested reasons (time constraint, learners' unfair contribution, and the issue of assessing collaboratively written texts, teachers' lack of expertise concerning how to implement collaborative writing, learner's lack of social and group skills and difficulty of designing joint writing activities), are behind teachers' reluctance to use collaborative writing in their classes.

Section four: Further Suggestions

The final section was devoted to further suggestions; some of the participants' tips concerning collaborative writing were summarized as follows:

- "As a productive skill, it is imperative to motivate the students to work together to exchange ideas and feel free while writing."
- "Collaborative writing is one of the teaching methods that can be useful for teaching mixed-ability classes and boost their motivation for writing."

4. DISCUSSION

Primarily, the present study sheds light on collaborative writing as an alternative to traditional and individualistic writing in the Algerian EFL context. It has been noticed found that researchers have reviewed that most of the previous studies on collaborative writing have focused on learners' attitudes. Yet, in the present investigation, we focused on teachers' perspectives to find out whether Algerian EFL teachers are reluctant to implement collaborative writing. And if so, is it because they have negative attitudes .

Based on the findings, Algerian EFL teachers of writing perceive collaborative writing as an effective instructional method. This is in line with previous investigations, which concluded that CW is beneficial (e.g., Dobao, 2012; Shehadeh, 2011; Storch & Wigglesworth, 2007). Concerning the pedagogical effects of CW on different aspects of students' writing, namely grammar, coherence, cohesion and organization, and students' emotional state, most of our participants agreed when learners write collaboratively; they write good quality texts in terms of grammar, coherence, cohesion, and other aspects. Besides, they decided that CW reduces students' anxiety and procrastination. These benefits have widely been reported in previous studies (e.g., Abrams, 2019; Dobao, 2011; Dornyei, 2001; Storch, 2005, 2013; Storch & Wigglesworth, 2007; Wigglesworth & Storch, 2012 Tabib & Cheung, 2017). Accordingly, the researchers concluded that participants have positive towards collaborative writing, and they tend to implement it from time to time.

However, the participants have asserted that teachers' little use of CW is linked to the intervention of several factors. Notably, learners' unfair contribution and time constraints were the most cited factors. Indeed some students are depended on their peers when they write collaboratively; this leads to unequal contribution among the group members. Additionally, the time constraint is another challenge faced by teachers willing to implement CW. Collaborative writing is time-consuming, and researchers found that it takes a longer time than individual writing because of its emphasis on negotiation and cognitive conflict. To this end, teachers are confronted by the challenge of wisely managing their time to cover the syllabus's content, prepare students to be effective

collaborators, and provide them with the necessary time to accomplish a joint written task. Besides, our participants agreed that assessing collective texts is challenging. Generally, in the assessment of collaborative writing, how to give individual students the grades that they deserve is confusing. Because individualism is prioritized and prized and competition is the norm, teachers perceive writing as a solitary process.

Nevertheless, evaluating only the joint text is not sufficient because learners will not be motivated to contribute significantly. Accordingly, fair assessment of co-authored texts is difficult. These findings are consistent with what other researchers have found (e.g., Chisholm, 1990; Le et al., 2017). Moreover, there is agreement among the participants that EFL learners lack the required social and group work skills. Johnson et al. (1991) mentioned that for successful peer collaboration, learners have to use the necessary social skills to collaborate successfully unsuccessful. This is why teachers need to prepare students to work collaboratively.

Finally, teachers suggested that to use CW as a part of the EFL writing course, it might be essential to consider the types of collaborative writing before considering its implementation. Collaborative writing tasks require planning by the teacher to determine task elements in terms of input material, expected outcomes, teachers' and learners' roles, and activity times within some contextual constraints. Furthermore, they suggested that teachers have to be trained on implementing CW.

5. CONCLUSION

Although being recommended as an effective strategy to develop EFL learners writing skills, CW is restricted in use. In the Algerian context, particularly, collaborative writing activities as rarely used in the classroom. To this end, the researchers of the present investigation explored the gap between research aspiration and practice through shedding light on Algerian EFL teachers' attitudes towards CW as well as the reasons and the challenges that caused their reluctance. Throughout the current investigation, the researchers have reached some critical conclusions. Algerian EFL teachers of writing in higher education have positive attitudes towards collaborative writing and recognize its benefits on students' performance. However, they have maintained that implementing collaborative writing is not easy. This method requires reconsidering several elements related to the learners, the teacher, the classroom management, and the content. Based on the results of this study and the previous research, the researchers highly recommend the integration of collaborative

writing into the EFL classroom. Thus, the researchers suggest that EFL teachers of writing should give students more opportunities to collaborate. Besides, for a successful implementation of collaborative writing, we recommend that teachers make sure to apply the five elements of collaborative learning. These elements tend to eliminate many of the problems that teachers face, such as learners' negative interdependence and unequal contribution.

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