

## **Effectiveness of Collaborative Writing Strategy in Improving EFL Students' Writing Skill**

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### **Abstract**

The ability to write efficiently and effectively in English is significant for academic success. The academic achievement of students who are proficient in writing skills tends to be better than that of students who are less proficient. So, the teachers have to choose effective teaching writing strategies which can assist in enhancing students' writing skill. In this perspective, the present quantitative study conducted employing quasi-experimental methodologies attempts to explore the effectiveness of Collaborative Writing (CW) in improving the writing skill of grade or class ten English as Foreign Language (EFL) students. The sample population consisted of 60 students studying in grade 10 at one secondary-level institutional school located in Banke district. I employed convenience sampling to select the school and typical case sampling, a kind of purposive sampling to select the sample population. Selected students were divided into Control Group (CG) and Experimental Group (EG) based on the sections to which they studied or related. CG was taught using the conventional strategy whereas EG was taught by using the CW strategy. I employed test (pre and post-test) technique to collect the data and the collected data were analysed employing the descriptive analysis technique of quantitative data analysis. The result of the study indicated that CW is more effective for developing the writing skill of secondary-level EFL students. Therefore, teachers are suggested to employ CW technique to enhance the writing skill of the students in English.

*Key Words:* conventional strategy, collaborative writing, strategy, writing skill

### **Introduction**

A teacher can use several strategies to enhance the writing skill of the students. CW is one of the popular strategies used in teaching writing. According to Barkley et al. (2005), CW is a strategy that requires students to work in pairs or triads to write a formal paper together. It offers a real learning environment where students do not only develop their writing skills but also their critical thinking and decision-making skills. It encourages students to participate more actively in writing assignments. Additionally, CW helps students to improve their writing skill by encouraging their participation, self-assurance, and responsibility in writing activities. Students of various abilities can collaborate to complete a writing task in CW (Storch, 2005). He further adds that students may work together in all stages of the writing process in CW. Although students write together, McDonough et al. (2015) contend that each student is nonetheless accountable for producing better individual writing. Additionally, students have the chance to produce ideas and provide feedback to one another through CW (Dobao & Blum, 2013). CW helps students enhance their writing in terms of content, structure, and accuracy (Shehadeh, 2011). According to Watanabe et al. (2007), CW strategy can enhance students' motivation in writing, increase vocabulary and change the writing habits of the students.

Despite its benefits, CW is not very common in Nepalese classrooms, particularly at the institution where this study was conducted. The teachers emphasize products rather than providing them opportunities to work in groups. They ask students to complete the written assignments individually rather than involving them to complete the work collaboratively. More focus is given to the mechanical aspects of writing such as mechanics,

spelling, grammar, writing process, teamwork and social skills in writing. If the students are not involved in collaborative writing, critical thinking and values of collaborative work cannot be nurtured among the students. Thus, this current study is aimed to investigate the effectiveness of CW strategy in improving secondary level EFL students' writing skill.

## **Review of Related Literature**

### **Strategies of Teaching Writing**

According to Ur (2003), the aim of teaching writing is to equip students with the skills necessary to correctly create a variety of written documents in their native tongue. Additionally, writing is one of the most crucial skills to develop in second or foreign language. Therefore, teachers must consider the most effective teaching strategy, writing resources, and supplementary materials used in teaching in writing. The teacher should be able to identify commonly used strategies of teaching writing and to select the strategy which is the best suited according to the interests, expectations and level of the students. Khatib and Meihami (2015) also state that teachers must be able to choose to use a specific technique to teach writing according to the classroom context. Moreover, a teacher should select a technique of teaching writing which allows opportunities to work in groups to complete the writing task. Thus, the teacher's task is to select a technique that helps teachers to facilitate their students in developing ideas and organizing them into good writing. The following sections discuss two widely used strategies in teaching writing.

### **Conventional Strategy**

In traditional writing instruction, most of the teachers allocate a certain amount of time and ask students to complete a writing assignment individually without taking the various stages of the writing process (Rollinson, 2005). Teachers rarely encourage students to brainstorm on a given topic (Widodo, 2013). The teacher assigns a topic and asks the students then compose essays in another stereotype without any assistance from the teachers. Students work independently to develop and effectively communicate their thoughts. Additionally, the traditional approach does not encourage students to consider other writing-related factors except organization, content, grammar, mechanics, and vocabulary. Teachers frequently limit their attention to grammar standards when assigning writing assignments to better prepare their students for tests and exams. Students are therefore given the task of learning grammatical rules, vocabulary and translation skill to make them proficient in writing. It does not encourage in-class debate or discussion on the given topic to write. In conclusion, this method of writing instruction frequently produces passive learners who lack imagination and involvement.

### **Collaborative Writing Strategy**

In CW, two or more individuals work together to write, revise, polish and prepare the entire text or a document based on their ideas. Barkley et al. (2005) claim that in CW, the class is divided into groups and members actively participate to write the assigned tasks. Furthermore, each of the members of the groups actively involves themselves in brainstorming ideas, gathering and organizing information to create an outline, drafting the writing, revising, and editing the writing. Thus, in contrast to traditional teacher-dominant classrooms, CW emphasizes participatory teaching and learning (Ong & Maaof, 2013).

Murray (1992) claimed that CW is essentially a social activity in which students seek specific information and points of view to be shared to compose writing. Each member of the team takes ownership of their part in the writing process. Sharing knowledge, making decisions, and resolving issues are all part of CW. According to Dale (1997), it fosters cooperative learning with the goal of producing a quality piece of writing. The teacher conducts CW in the following steps:

- Divide the class into groups of at least three students each;
- Choose a topic for each group;

- Begin by outlining each group's plan to conduct research and gather information for their paper;
- Require the students to consider the purpose of their writing and the structure of the content.
- A first draught of each student's paper is produced because of their collaborative efforts and use of their own ideas.
- After that, the student reads their work to see if it is appropriate or not and makes any necessary adjustments to the organization, skill, grammatical, and lexical accuracy.
- The best version of the revised text is then copied out by the students and sent to the teacher; the final step is teacher evaluation, during which the teacher provides feedback, makes a comment, and edits the students' writing.

There are many benefits to using a CW. Collaborative learning naturally provides feedback and promotes a helpful setting within which to manage conflict resolution. When a student engages in writing individually, he/she may face difficulties in generating idea. But, in CW students continuously interact with peers which gradually leads to feedback. Zhao (2010) asserts that the usage of feedback in writing in a second language is essential for enhancing students' writing abilities. According to Bijami et al. (2013), giving students feedback on their work helps them become proficient writers. They further add that feedback helps students to develop their critical thinking skill which is seen as important in solutions required to solve the difficulties of writing.

CW also gives its participants the chance to socialize. Socialization take place When ideas and opinions are exchanged, and interaction takes place in the classroom. This strategy has the potential to improve peer understanding in each task since through the writing process students continuously participate in dialogue and take and give support from peers which is more helpful than instruction given by the teachers. In line with this, Dale (1997) stated that when co-authoring, students can express writing-related thoughts and communicate with one another to improve their interpersonal skills.

Students engage in a variety of tasks while writing collaboratively, including problem-solving, knowledge sharing, and exchanging opinions. Students, thus, take responsibility for their own learning throughout the writing process. Their confidence grows as a result of this. Self-assurance will eventually increase students' motivation in writing. Motivation is seen as a key element of successful collaborative learning (Farrah ,2011). Additionally, Ong and Maarof (2013) said that when students work collaboratively, they become happier with their work and performance. Collaborative learning reduces anxiety and boosts self-confidence. Moreover, collaborative works provide students more opportunities to speak the target language in low anxiety circumstances. According to Storch (2001), CW decreases anxiety and an increase in motivation in the students.

Collaboration in writing enables students to think more critically. Through the process of solving problems, critical thinking develops. It grows through conversation, peer assessment, and discussion. Mandusic and Blaskovi (2015), argued that integrating cooperation into the classroom help students to develop their creative thinking.

CW has a significant effect in improving students writing skill. Several studies have proved the effectiveness of CW in enhancing students' writing abilities. According to Gousseva (2000), students who are taught to write in groups outperform those who are taught to write alone. According to Storch (2005), CW gives students the chance to share ideas and critiques with one another while also enhancing the quality of their writing. CW fosters respect and teamwork among students despite their varied backgrounds. The students' perceptions of the use of CW are related to other findings. According to a long-term study by Shehadeh (2011), many students have good attitudes toward CW and find the activity enjoyable. Dobao and Blum (2013) also assert that CW gives students additional opportunities to expand their horizons in terms of exchanging knowledge and ideas. According to Khodabakhshzadeh and Samadi (2017), students have positive attitudes toward CW because it helped them become more motivated, use peer feedback while studying, gain a comprehensive understanding of the subject,

change unproductive writing habits, and increase their vocabulary knowledge. CW allows learners to be more critical in their thinking process. Hussain (2004) advocated that the incorporation of collaboration in learning makes students enhance their creative thinking. Mandusic and Blaskovi (2015) also claimed that critical thinking is nurtured through discussion and peer opinion and evaluation.

Therefore, using a collaborative approach helps students produce writing that is of a higher calibre. The process of a pair of students or a group of students creating a piece of writing where cooperation and contribution of the group members plays a vital part is the core of CW. As a result, the writing's final product will be superior to what it was before, and social contact between professors and students will also result. Teachers, acting as a facilitator in the CW process, must demonstrate how a group or pair of students critique each other's work, seek assistance from others, and discuss and negotiate writing-related issues. Murray (2006), Storch (2009), and Mulligan and Garofalo (2011) offer CW guidelines in response to the need for structural guidelines. These guidelines enable students to complete multiple tasks within a single piece of writing while also simultaneously reviewing and editing the work of others. However, while teaching writing in a Nepalese environment, teachers still frequently employ traditional methods of instruction.

## **Methodology**

I adopted quantitative approach and quasi-experimental methodology to examine the effectiveness of CW in enhancing the writing skill of the secondary-level EFL students. The sample population of the study consisted of 60 students who studied in class ten at one of the institutional schools of Banke district in the academic year 2079/80. I employed convenience sampling to select the school and typical case sampling, a type of purposive sampling to select the sample population of the study. Class ten was targeted in the study since I was working as an academic advisor in the same school for last five years and I used to teach them on days when the English teacher was absent. So, I was very much familiar to them. There were two sections in class ten, and they were named section 'A' and 'B'. I assigned section 'A' as CG and section 'B' as EG. The number of students in CG and EG were equal i.e., 30 because the school had policy of not admitting not more than 30 students in each section to maintain the quality of education. So, the total number of sample population became 60. I took two sessions to both groups for clarifying the research process prior to pre-test. After that I took written consent of the students. Then, I administered pre-test to both groups on May 19, 2022. From the day after that intervention started. I taught CG employing conventional technique of teaching writing and EG employing CW technique. Teaching continued for thirty consecutive days (from May 20, 2022, to June 26, 2022) except on public holidays. Thus, the CG was taught for 30 days and the EG also for 30 days. On the 31st day i.e., on June 27, 2022, I administered post-test.

The pre and post tests were prepared based on the textbook prescribed for class 10 by the Curriculum Development Center under the Ministry of Education. The same pre and post tests were administered to both groups. Both tests consisted of ten questions and each question carried 10 full marks. Thus, full mark of pre and post-test was fifty. The time duration of pre and post-test was one hour and 30 minutes. Pre and post tests were presented to a jury of TEFL professionals to ensure face validity of pre and post-test. The time given for responding to the test and reliability has been determined through a pilot administration of both tests. They were administered to the students of class ten students studying another institutional school of Banke district i.e., different from the selected school for study. To get the internal consistency among the components of the test, Alpha Cronbach Formula has also been used. The reliability coefficient was found to be 0.82. The subjects' performance was evaluated by two scorers for both pre and post-tests. To ensure the reliability of the rating process, inter-scorer reliability was calculated. It was 0.81 which appeared as an acceptable value of interrater reliability.

The researcher has employed an analytical scoring rubric proposed by O'Malley and Pierce (1996) for the written answers of the students. This grading rubric is made up of five rated components and a succession of numerically

scored ratings. It has allotted four points to each component. As a result, the student's greatest possible grade is 40, while the lowest possible grade is 10.

The data received from the two groups' pre and post-tests were analysed employing the descriptive analysis technique of quantitative data analysis. The t - test formula was also used to determine whether there is a statistically significant difference in pre-test results between the experimental and control groups.

## Results

### Holistic Comparison Between Pre-test and Post-test Scores in Percentage

The analysis of scores obtained by EG and CG in the pre-test and post-test are presented holistically and item-wise. Holistic comparison of the pre-test and post-test result is as follows:

**Table No. 1**

*Holistic comparison between pre-test and post-test scores in percentage*

Group	Average score in pre-test	Average score in post-test	D	D%
EG	25.13	29.23	4.1	16.31
CG	24.73	25.76	1.03	4.16

The result presented in the above table shows a holistic comparison of average marks which shows that the CG has the average score of 24.73 and 25.76 in pre-test and post-test respectively. In the post-test CG increased its average score by 1.03 or 4.16%. In the same way, the EG has its average score of 25.13 and later in the post test it has increased its average score by 4.1 marks or 16.31%. In other word, EG has increased its average score from 25.13 to 29.23. The result shows that EG has got better improvement than CG after the treatment of CW in teaching writing.

### Holistic Comparison of the Pre-test Scores

For the process of data collection, different test items were administered, and average scores obtained by the students in each item in the pre-test were tabulated and calculated for the analysis. The mean score of both groups in every test item was used in the 't'-test. The calculated value and tabulated value of 't' were compared to see whether there was a significant difference or not in both groups.

**Table No. 2**

*Holistic comparison of the pre-test scores*

Group	N	Mean	SD	Var.	Two tailed tests	Level of Significance	Remarks
EG	30	25.13	7.50	56.34	0.24	Two tailed tests at 0.05	0.24<1.96
CG	30	24.73	5.05	25.52			

In the experimental and CGs, the numbers of students were 30 in each. The calculated value of 't' was too lower than the tabulated value. So, we can say the two population groups were not significantly different. The standard deviations of EG and CG were 7.50 and 5.05 respectively. The mean of the two populations was not significantly different (i.e., 25.13 and 24.73). The two-tailed test was used to find the value of 't' although the mean was similar between the groups, the variance was high (i.e., 56.34>25.52) in the EG. The calculated 't' value (0.24) is too low to the rejected null hypothesis. It was also found that there was no difference between the mean two groups at 0.05 level. So, the experimental and CGs were concluded to have balanced in abilities in writing.

### **Holistic Comparison of Post-test Scores**

The post-test was administered to find out the effectiveness of CW in teaching writing skill. No information was given to the students so that they would be administered the post-test using the same pattern of test items. Finally, the post-test was administered, and answer sheets were collected and checked by the researcher himself.

**Table No. 3**

*Holistic comparison of post-test scores*

Group	N.	Mean	SD	Var.	Two tailed test	Level of Significance	Remarks
EG	30	29.23	6.21	38.64	2.19	Two tailed test at 0.05	
CG	30	25.76	6.09	37.12			2.19>1.96

The calculated value of 't' (i.e., 2.19) is greater than tabulated value (i.e., 1.96). That's why, two mean achievements of both groups were compared statistically using 'two tailed test' and it was found that there was a significant difference between two means. The evidence of the result of significant difference between the two means was certainly due to the treatment 'X' provided to the EG because both the groups were statistically homogeneous before the treatment 'X'. Here the null hypothesis  $H_0: \mu_1 = \mu_2$  is rejected and the alternative hypothesis  $H_0: \mu_1 \neq \mu_2$  was accepted. That is why the study concluded that CW is effective for developing writing.

### **Comparison of Pretest Scores of Both Groups in Formal Writing**

For the process of data collection, formal writing test items were administered, and average scores obtained by the students in each item in pre-test were tabulated and calculated for the analysis. The mean score of both groups in every test item were used in 't' test. The calculated value and tabulated value of 't' were compared to see whether there was significant difference or not in both groups.

**Table No. 4**

*Comparison of pretest scores of both groups in formal writing*

Group	N	Mean	SD	Var.	Two tailed tests	Level of significance	Remarks
EG	30	7.33	1.73	3.01	0.38	Two tailed test at 0.05	0.38 < 1.96
CG	30	7.73	1.09	1.72			

The result shows that the mean score of EG is 7.33 and the mean score of CG is 7.73. The standard deviation of both groups is 1.73 and 1.09 respectively. The variance of two groups is 3.01 and 1.72 respectively. The calculated 't' value with respect to mean difference is 0.38 which is too lower than tabulated value (i.e., 1.96). The result shows that there is no significant difference between the achievements of both groups.

### **Comparison of the Pre-test Scores of Informal Writing**

In this item, five item questions were prepared to complete which together carried out 38 marks in informal writing. The summary of the statistical calculation of both groups (EG and CG) presented in the following table.

**Table No. 5**

*Comparison of the pre-test scores of informal writing*

Group	N	Mean	SD	Var.	Two tailed test	Level of significance	Remarks
EG	30	17.8	6.25	39.09	0.57	Two tailed tests at 0.05	0.57 < 1.96
CG	30	17	4.39	19.33			

The result presented in the above table shows that the average score of EG s is 17.8 and average score of CG is 17. The standard deviation of both groups is 6.25 and 4.39 respectively. Similarly, the variance of EG is 39.09 and 19.33 is of CG, when 't' test was calculated as 0.57, it was clear that there was no significant difference between the achievements of both groups as 't' value was too lower than tabulated value (i.e., 1.96).

### **Comparison of the Post-test Scores of Formal Writing**

For the process of data collection, formal writing test items were administered, and average scores obtained by the students in each item in post-test were tabulated and calculated for the analysis. The mean score of both groups in every test item were used in 't' test. The calculated value and tabulated value of 't' were compared to see whether there was significant difference or not in both groups.

**Table No. 6**

*Comparison of the Post-test Scores of Formal Writing*

Group	N	Mean	SD	Var.	Two tailed test	Level of significance	Remarks
EG	30	8.76	1.01	1.038	2.19	Two tailed test at 0.05	2.19>1.96
CG	30	8.06	1.43	2.06			

As shown in the table, the mean score of EG was 8.76 and the mean score of CG was 8.06. The standard deviation of both groups was 1.01 and 1.43 respectively. The variance between the two groups was 1.038 and 2.06 respectively. The calculated 't' value with respect to mean difference was of 2.19 which is greater than tabulated value which shows that there is a significant difference in post-test.

### **Comparison of the Post-test Scores of Informal Writing**

The questions were prepared from the textbook of grade ten for this item and full marks allocated for this test was 38. The summary of statistical calculation of both groups in informal writing item is given below:

**Table No. 7**

*Comparison of the post-test scores of informal writing*

Group	N	Mean	SD	Var.	Two tailed test	Level of significance	Remarks
EG	30	20.46	5.26	27.68	1.97	Two tailed test at 0.05	1.97>1.96
CG	30	17.7	5.57	31.13			

The information tabulated in the above table shows that the average score of EG s is 20.46 and average score of CG is 17.7. The standard deviation of both groups is 5.26 and 5.57 respectively. Similarly, the variance of EG is 27.68 and 31.13 When 't' test was calculated as 1.97, it was clear that there was significant difference between the achievements of both groups as 't' value was higher than tabulated value (i.e., 1.96).

## **Discussion**

The main aim of this research was to find out the effectiveness of CW in enhancing writing skill of secondary level EFL students. The study has justified the effectiveness of CW in improving writing skill of the students based on the scores average obtained by control and EG. The study's findings support the claim that students who are taught using a CW technique get higher writing skill scores than students who are taught using a conventional strategy. The average score of CG in pre-test in formal and informal writing was 7.73 and it was 17 in writing. Similarly, the result of EG in writing was 17.8 and it was 7.33 in formal writing. But the result became different in post-test the average mean of CG in post-test was 8.06 in formal writing. Likewise, the result of EG in post-test in formal writing was 8.76 and in informal writing 20.46.

There was 0.4 average score difference between experimental and CGs pre-test but there was 3.47 average score between them. In Formal writing comparison between experimental and CG in pre-test obtained 0.4 average score higher than EG whereas in post-test EG got average 0.7 score higher than CG. In informal writing comparison between experimental and CG in pre-test 0.8 averages score different whereas in post-test EG got 2.76 average marks higher than CG.

The results are consistent with a study by Kozar (2006), who found that collaborative learning approaches have an impact on students' learning and likely to improve performance. The idea that students' knowledge is impacted by collaborative learning was also raised. According to the findings, 67% of respondents prefer writing in groups than writing alone. This is consistent with the findings of Jalilie and Shahrokhi's study, which found that students' attitudes toward teamwork were good.

Additionally, the survey shows that 46.9% of participants strongly agreed that problem solving is made easier by collaborative learning. This concurs with Farrah's (2011) research. His research revealed that collaborative learning can improve problem-solving techniques. Collaborative learning has a considerable impact on students' critical thinking. According to Talib and Cheung's (2017) research, CW helps students become better writers. According to a study done by Grief in 2007, CW is a supportive strategy. Highlighting one's assets and weaknesses is beneficial. Therefore, this strategy can change the focus from individual weakness to a group's overall strength. In his learning theory, Vygotsky (1978) also made the argument that students who engage in a cooperative setting have higher levels of thinking than those who operate independently. Additionally, in the current study, the method collaboration gave students a place to get helpful comments.

## **Conclusion and Implication**

The study found that students in the EG made more progress in improving their writing skills than students in the control group. Therefore, CW is more effective than the conventional method of teaching writing. Furthermore, collaborative language learning allows students to build critical and creative thinking skills and maximise their inner potential. With their direct involvement, learners gain teamwork skills by working jointly and sharing ideas. Moreover, CW is a viable and successful strategy for teaching writing. CW can be utilized as an educational tool in the classroom to encourage student collaboration and create a healthy social atmosphere. CW has the potential to be an alternate strategy for individual writing to tackle deficiencies and limitations of the writing process individually. The findings demonstrated that CW is more practical than working alone, particularly when teaching writing skills. As a result, teachers can use the findings of this study to help their students improve their writing skills. Students not only submit their ideas, but they also participate in discussions and learn from their group members. Furthermore, students can receive criticism as well as guide others. As a result, students can practice, and sight writes from a broader perspective as both a writer and a reader. Incorporating CW as a component of training can be extremely beneficial to students who are eager to polish their writing skill.

Future research can examine the influence of CW on text structure as well as the effects of this strategy in composing various types of writing such as reports and projects. Future research should investigate how the collaborative strategy affects other language abilities including reading, listening, and speaking.

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