Collaborative Paper Writing as a Tool to Advance Language Competence

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ABSTRACT

As an effective tool to advance language competence, writing papers collaboratively has the characteristic of improving author language skills, providing authors with opportunities to practice language skills in meaningful contexts. As authors collaborate to yield a paper, they get exposure to grammar genres, structures, and expressions. Concurrently, during the process, language is applied to communicate ideas effectively. This paper aims to investigate whether collaboration is really a beneficial aspect for authors. This qualitative investigation was embedded in case study design to uncover truths experienced in real-life situations. To collect data, semi-structured interviews were administered to five university scholars chosen from a population of authors reported to have successfully written publishable papers. It emerged as major findings that individual comprehension can be improved when authors collaborate on paper writing, and, as authors receive written feedback from each other, language competence advances. Although previous publications on writing collaboratively exist, research is silent on improved language competence acquired through this practice. It is concluded that individual comprehension can be improved by collaborative paper writing as the process provides opportunities for authors to justify and discuss their ideas. As they work collaboratively, authors deepen their understanding of the material and enhance their language skills.

KEYWORDS

Authors; collaboration; language competence; comprehension; language skills.

INTRODUCTION

As declared by Fung (2010), writing a paper collaboratively exposes authors to varying writing styles and approaches. When writing a paper, working in groups or pairs with different perspectives can allow scholars to learn from each other, thereby broadening their understanding of language as they infuse coherence and quality into their texts (Crossley & McNamara, 2016). Additionally, exposure to diverse styles of writing drives authors to augment their personal writing style, quality, and voice (Zabihi & Bayan, 2020). This approach to paper writing is identified for its advantage of permitting exchange of written texts within a certain cohort of authors (Devlin et al., 2018). As these authors work as peers, the exchanged feedback assists in identifying aspects that need improvement such as grammar, vocabulary, and the overall coherence and consistency of the paper. The ultimate result of this exchange is that author feedback helps to identify existing language (Crossley et al., 2014).

It is noted by Soltanpour et al. (2018) that writing a paper collaboratively is indeed a motivation factor. As authors collaborate with each other, there is a sense of engagement and increased investment. This increased motivation also makes those engaged in writing feel more self-assured with regards to personal writing abilities through the exchanged feedback and support from peers (Sarkhosh & Najafi, 2020). As noted by Storch (2019), although research on writing collaboratively has been conducted previously, nothing is mentioned of improving language competence during this process. Hence, when this inquiry was undertaken, embedded in it was the question of whether collaboration is really a beneficial aspect for authors toward advanced language competence.

LITERATURE REVIEW

For enhanced language competence, it is a requirement of collaborative paper writing that the authors analyze information and evaluate resources before they make decisions about presenting information (Abrams, 2019). For authors to have critical thinking skills is indeed valuable not only for language learning but for life in general. When authors have developed critical thinking skills, consistent collaboration can help them become effective and solve problems encountered when writing academic texts (Qiu & Lee, 2020). Álvarez et al. (2012) articulate that writing in a collaborative fashion is a functional tool that helps to advance language competence in paper writing. As authors display their language skills in a meaningful context, their inner sense of becoming better scholars is planted. In line with Aguilar and Solorio (2019), as texts are exchanged by sharing feedback, authors become more confident in the target language.

Arnold et al. (2012) suggest that there are potential disadvantages to collaborative paper writing that can impact language development. Some authors contribute more than others, and this unequal participation hinders the opportunity for reluctant authors to practice and perfect their language skills (Kuiken & Vedder, 2017). To mitigate such challenges, it becomes essential to monitor participation throughout the project and set clear roles,

expectations, and timelines for each group member (Alsubaie & Ashuraidah, 2017). It is also disputed that group members who fail to submit detailed feedback might be denied the opportunity to recognize personal weaknesses and strengths, therefore creating some gaps in remedial strategies toward developing language skills (Huisman et al., 2019; Mdodana-Zide & Mafugu, 2023). This argument is hand-in-glove with limited accountability among group members. When there are feelings of neglect that some contributions are not fully evaluated, this demoralizes and demotivates those with a passion for writing (Klimova, 2014). This is why assigning individual roles for every member involved in paper writing is essential.

Underpinning this inquiry is the Theory of Variation (Tong, 2012). This theory suggests ways in which challenging language aspects like reading, writing, comprehension, and vocabulary could be tackled. Noted in this theory are difficulties comprehending given texts, depriving access to advancing language competence. Propositions by this theory indicate that scholars involved in paper writing should comprehend language skills as they exchange their written texts as feedback (Berninger et al., 2011). Scholars therefore need to go the extra mile to infuse information from other sources likely to improve their language competence. These could be platforms like Grammarly and spell check; when used efficiently, collaborative paper writing would then be regarded a vital instrument toward advancing competence in language (Biber et al., 2020).

METHODOLOGY

To clarify non-numerical data, a qualitative research approach is preferred as it entails some purposes to better understand real-life situations experienced by participants under study (Brinkman, 2013). This qualitative inquiry is embedded within a case study design, which generates in-depth understanding of human nature, thereby outlining concealed factors with regards to collaborative paper writing measured with advancing language competence (Sweetman et al., 2010). If writing collaboratively would yield efficient outcomes of advanced language competence, this would allow authors to obtain necessary language skills like improved vocabulary and enhanced written texts that are functional to comprehend (Polio & Friedman, 2017).

Sampling

Five purposefully nominated university teachers formed this study's sample. This cohort ranged from 40 to 55 years of age, each with more than 10 years as lecturers across various disciplines. Three of the participants had backgrounds in language education and two had a mathematics background. Of the entire population of university teachers, those who fully devoted themselves to the practice of paper writing were identified as relevant personnel to be interviewed for this research study (Guest et al., 2017). Another reason that led to the identification of this group of participants is that they were reported to have published most of their articles through collaboration with their peers, either in pairs or in groups, although

they also published as single authors. For this inquiry to obtain valuable data, this group of five was regarded relevant and valuable.

Research Instruments

Denzin and Lincoln (2018) assert that semi-structured interviews act as a valuable data collection instrument. This instrument allows for robust engagements between the interviewer and the interviewed because questions contained in the interview schedule are open-ended, allowing participants to respond as much as they wish. Due to the emerging shape of such discussions, the researchers had to create follow-up questions that were not primarily reflected in the interview schedule (Frechette et al., 2020). All questions were centered around the logistics of writing papers by collaborating with other authors; at the same time, questions on how this collaboration imparted the advancement of language competence skills were also posed for discussion and clarity. As participants responded, it was ensured that no single responses were taken into consideration; as such, as confirmation that all responses were rendered used and worthwhile, recording was done.

Method of Data Analysis

Data analysis is a process that summarizes collected raw data. Primarily, this is a stage where qualitative, non-numeric, and conceptual information is organized, analyzed, and interpreted. As outlined by Timonen, Foley, and Conlon (2018), data collected by using analytical and logical reasoning to determine relationships, patterns, or trends is interpreted through the use of narratives. The goal of this process is for researchers to make deductions about collected information (Myers, 2008). This was the case for this investigation. All responses bearing an element of similarity and commonality were gathered to formulate codes, leading to the formation of themes. As participants shared their experiences, it was noted that some responses were similar to each other and some were closely related. Henceforth, all such related and similar responses started to form a certain pattern, leading to the formation of codes and categories grouped together to form themes discussed as findings of this investigation.

FINDINGS and DISCUSSION

Discussed in this section are themes that were identified as findings of this investigation. Two themes identified when collaborative paper writing was adhered to by authors working in either pairs or groups were improved individual comprehension and written author feedback.

Improved Individual Comprehension

As participants were required to share their lived experiences on collaborative paper writing, Participant 1 responded, "*As we are a group of three writers, we developed a norm to first share our understandings about the topic that seems to interest us before we engage in the actual investigation. That on its own has since proved a vital exercise because, as we emanate from diverse disciplines, so are our varying schools of thoughts.*"

In line with the above response, Participant 3 said, "*Before I submit my portion of work, remember we subdivide sections to write on, as group authors, I ensure I request any of us to do some proofreading before I submit to the larger group. This strategy seems to work well for me because embarking in this exchange of texts has seemed to greatly improve comprehension, communication, and close collaboration.*"

Success in collaborating with other authors during paper writing was discussed by Participant 5: "*As I fully dedicate myself to writing papers, I just decided not to write alone because I am not a language person, as my text contains lots of grammatical errors. I appreciate opportunities for getting assistance from my co-authors as they identify those huge grammatical errors. This has indeed turned to positively work for the entire group.*"

These findings suggest that collaborative paper writing does improve individual comprehension. As writers work with others in groups or in pairs, they are provided platforms where they engage in robust discussions as they filter their own ideas. This finding is in line with Chen and Hapgood (2021), who propose that engaging in this practice improves comprehension, giving one a better understanding of the underlying content. As scholars have different schools of thought, collaboration also allows authors to be exposed to diverse experiences and perspectives (Laal & Ghodsi, 2012). This normally results in a refined topic where new angles bring greater understanding of the subject matter.

These findings are in line with Bradley et al. (2020), who affirm that writing skills that enhance comprehension of the topic under investigation are improved when authors working together supply written feedback. As one engages with somebody else's submission, grammatical aspects like vocabulary, spelling, fluency, and sentence construction are always at the fore. In addition, when scholars distribute the workload among themselves, this could result in texts in a much better form, leading to producing high quality work (McDonough et al., 2018).

Further, as language competence is referred to as a process where humans acquire the ability to communicate through spoken or written language, it is at the same time regarded as a complex process that molds one throughout. Psychologists regard language competence as a crucial aspect of cognitive and social development because it empowers individuals to communicate their thoughts and ideas with others (Chen et al., 2022). Therefore, being competent in a language has an advantage of driving accomplishments in personal, academic, and professional spheres.

Written Author Feedback

Regarding the question centered on reviewing another author's work, Participant 2 commented, "*After reviewing a certain section from my co-authors, I would arrange a face-to-face meeting to disclose my findings, thereby suggesting areas that need further consideration. Surprisingly, most of colleagues would respond they also preferred that I submit some written comments. As I engage in writing such reports, I have observed that I am gradually attaining*

better language competence because these review reports are not a one-off event but need to be a consistent exercise."

In this regard, Participant 4 echoed, *"As a member of group authors, I used just to comment by writing a statement or two when I review somebody else's research task. Looking at my recent reports, there has been a drastic change and development in language competence because I am now used to submitting a full and comprehensive written report."*

It also emanated from the findings that during exchange of work by collaborative writers, written author feedback can positively impact language competence, especially in academic writing contexts. As authors receive feedback on their writing, there are open doors for one to learn from one's own errors and apply remedial strategies to improve one's writing skills (Douglas, 2013). As authors revise their written work on mechanisms and grammar aspects identified by other group members, their language skills are augmented toward the process. Engaging in this exchange helps to develop an understanding of language structure that is more sophisticated, resulting in improved writing abilities.

It is affirmed by Crossley and McNamara (2010) that written feedback on word choice assists those involved in paper writing to expand their vocabulary and proficiency and use more advanced language. When one's language is advanced, it is possible to communicate ideas effectively with improved writing quality (Coffin, 2020). Additionally, written feedback helps authors develop an effective writing style appropriate for the audience and purpose of the writing, leading to an enhanced ability to transfer ideas distinctly and persuasively through using well-defined, sophisticated, and improved language (Crossley & McNamara, 2012).

Summarily, the findings discussed above are in line with the theory that underpins this investigation. The Theory of Variation (Tong, 2012) argues that some alternative strategies to address problematic language aspects should be put in place. Emphasis on challenging aspects like comprehension, reading, writing, and vocabulary are essential language skills that scholars should attend to when engaging in collaborative paper writing.

Recommendations and Conclusion

For improved individual comprehension, collaborative paper writing is regarded as a strategy that creates opportunities for authors to discuss, explain, and comprehend individual ideas that, when jointly shared, produce a concise paper with merged varying author perspectives and dimensions. As authors write collaboratively, their understanding of the material is deepened, enhancing language skills through the process of writing. Although collaborative paper writing has language development benefits, underlying challenges like group dynamics, inadequate individual feedback, and lack of accountability can hinder collaborative paper writing efficiency as a tool for language development. Therefore, to maintain successful collaborative paper writing, such issues need to be addressed.

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