

# **THE EFFECT OF COLLABORATION ON OMANI STUDENTS' WRITING: A COMPARISON BETWEEN INDIVIDUAL, PAIR AND GROUP WORK**

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## **Abstract**

Recently, there has been a lot of discussion about the integration of collaborative writing in L2 classrooms. Collaboration is likely to have a positive effect on writing. However, none of the studies on collaborative writing have been conducted in an Arabic context where learners seem to be in favour of working individually. The current study investigates the effect of collaboration on L2 Omani students writing and expands the discussion to the attitudes of those learners to such collaboration. The data is collected from 41 students selected from two regional schools in Oman. Learners were firstly asked to complete a questionnaire about their attitudes towards collaborative writing. Then, they were divided into individuals, pairs and groups to work in a writing task followed by self reflections for pairs and groups. The analysis and interpretations of data found that collaborative writing positively affects accuracy, fluency and lexical resources of the texts. Moreover, learners generally perceive collaborative writing positively. It was concluded that collaborative writing tasks, groups rather than pairs, have an advantage over autonomous writing to some extent. The findings suggest that collaborative writing should be introduced gradually in writing classes and integrated in the actual writing process.

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**Keywords:** Collaborative writing; negotiation for meaning; L1 use

Collaborative work means that learners work together in small groups or pairs to draw new conclusions, based on their prior knowledge, in order to achieve their group's goal (Palmer et al., 2006). According to Harmer (2007), the rationale behind collaborative work is that working together increases students' talking time and encourages them to negotiate different views and make decisions about their own learning.

Collaborative work in L2 learning is supported by cognitive and socio-cultural theoretical perspectives. These two theoretical frameworks share a common interest in the impact of social interaction on L2 acquisition (Foster & Ohta, 2005). The general aim of collaboration is to encourage social interaction among learners so that they learn from each other (Elola & Oskoz, 2010, Donato, 1994, Raja, 2012 & Storch, 2007). In addition, Firth and Wagner (1996) argue that 'language acquisition' and 'language use' cannot be separated because learning takes place once language is used (Zuengler and Miller (2006). Slavin (1992) points out that learners engage in a process of 'cognitive restructuring' by interacting with another person so that new information is retained besides previously existing knowledge (p.163). Based on Vygotsky's theory (1978), learning is a social process that requires learners to socially interact with each other. In other words, there is that kind of relationship between a novice and an expert to co-construct knowledge about language (Anton & DiCamilla, 1999, Dobao, 2012, Donato, 1994, Mutwarasibo, 2013, Wigglesworth & Storch, 2012, Storch, 2005).

Further, Foster & Ohta (2005, p.405) state that second language acquisition occurs when learners are exposed to 'comprehensible input' that is 'a little beyond the learner's current L2 knowledge' according to Krashen (1981, 1982, 1985). Long and Porter (1985) assert that interactional adjustments are the most effective way to achieve comprehensible input; Pica (1994) refers to such adjustments as repetition and paraphrasing of input (Lantolf, 2000). Storch (2011) indicates that the use of pair and group work encourages such negotiation for meaning to attain the common goal of developing a native-like language proficiency level.

The use of L1 in L2 classrooms is a vital issue that still concerns language teachers. Brooks and Donato (1994) state that teachers may avoid using group work because it may encourage students to use L1, which is undesirable in communicative language teaching (Storch & Wigglesworth, 2003). Yet, it is believed by some educationalists that L1 has great value in L2 learning because learners can draw on their previous resources of the L1 to develop their knowledge of the L2 (Auerbach, 1993 as cited in Liang et al., 1998). Supporting this point of view, Schweers states that 'starting with the L1 provides a sense of security and validates the learners' lived experiences, allowing them to express themselves. The learner is then willing to experiment and take risks with English' (1999, p.7). Additionally, according to Storch and Aldosari (2012), in L2 small groups or pairs, negotiation of meaning using L1 occurs essentially to discuss L2 grammatical and lexical items, and to achieve task management. Moreover, Villamil and DeGuerrero (1996) state that their students were using L1 mainly for the purposes of 'making meaning of text, retrieving language

from memory, exploring and expanding content, guiding their action through the task, and maintaining dialogue' (Anton & Dicamilla ,1999, p. 236).

Collaborative writing refers to the situation when learners work together with a shared responsibility to produce one written text (Storch, 2011 & Dobao, 2012). Yet, many learners may have had a daunting experience when writing collaboratively because they are concerned about their language proficiency level, their attitude and ability to participate with the rest of the group (Wigglesworth & Storch, 2012). Moreover, Elola & Oskaz (2010) state that extensive research supports the effectiveness of collaborative writing tasks since it encourages collaborative re-creation of discourse to achieve the group's goal. Therefore, it is worthwhile to integrate collaborative writing in L2 classrooms to 'expand the writer's linguistic experience in a holistic manner' (Elola & Oskaz, 2010, p.65).

However, The previous literature gives the impression that collaborative writing tends to be limited to brainstorming and peer review stages rather than collaboration in the whole writing process (Dobao, 2012 & Storch, 2005). Nonetheless, to avoid the drawbacks of previous research, some scholars have been aware of the importance of exploring the benefits of collaborative writing that obliges learners to work collaboratively during the whole writing process (e.g. Dobao, 2012, Wigglesworth & Storch, 2009, Storch, 2002, 2005, 2007, Storch & Wigglesworth, 2007).

In general, research comparing the benefits of collaborative versus individual work supports the use of collaborative writing tasks due to its positive impact on task achievement. Yet, these findings are still inconsistent, so it is sensible to conduct further research.

A recent similar study to the current one was carried out by Dobao (2012) to examine the effect of writing collaboratively in L2 learning by drawing a comparison between individual, pair and group work. This study was conducted in the United States in a public university. The importance of this particular study comes from the fact that most previous research compared only collaborative pair work to individual work, while this study compared individual, pair and group work. The researcher found that group work has a better effect on grammatical accuracy of the written texts than pair work, but there is no difference in accuracy between individual and pair work, which supports previous research (e.g. Wigglesworth & Storch, 2009 and Storch, 2007). However, there seems to be the same significant effect of pairs and groups on lexical and structural complexity compared to those written individually, which is consistent with the findings of the previous research that compared individual and pair work (e.g. Wigglesworth & Storch, 2009 and Storch, 2007). Further, supporting the findings of Storch (2005), in terms of fluency, texts written individually were longer than those written collaboratively. However, it is vitally important to recognize that the

findings of this study cannot be generalized across levels of proficiency or other types of writing tasks since the study focuses on intermediate level learners working on pictures to produce a written text.

In relation to learners' perspectives towards collaborative learning, a number of studies have been conducted but only a few of them, conducted recently, have focused on collaborative writing specifically. Most of these studies show that learners generally have a positive attitude towards collaborative writing tasks (e.g. Dobao & Blum, 2013, Mutwarasibo, 2013 and Storch, 2005). The reasons given by learners for this positive perception are variable. For instance, in Storch (2005), learners seem to be convinced that collaborative writing leads to better accuracy and lexical choice. Nevertheless, according to Dobao and Blum (2013), learners appreciate collaborative writing but they do not perceive its efficiency for learning grammar and vocabulary which opposes what Storch states. On the other hand, learners in a study conducted by Shehada (2011) reported that collaborative writing positively affected their speaking and self-confidence skills as well as their writing skills which support the positive attitudes of learners.

Based on this literature, the current study aims to investigate the effect of collaborative work on the performance of Omani high school students' writing by drawing a comparison between individual, pair and group work. It is expected to bring new insights on collaborative writing for Arabic ESL classes since to the best of my knowledge, no earlier study focused on this particular topic in an Arabic context. It also seeks to examine learners' perspectives towards different task designs since the literature has not given this issue much attention.

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### **The study**

This research was conducted for Arabic native speakers, particularly in the Sultanate of Oman, one of the Arab Gulf Countries. The targeted population for this study was 45 female students studying an elective English course in Grade 11 at school. Unfortunately, no statistics could be found about the population that the target sample represents. Based on the educational system in Oman, the course is designed as an optional course usually taken by high achievers besides the compulsory English course, so students can be assumed to be highly motivated and willing to learn English.

The subjects only represent two schools in the regional area of the researcher that have been chosen because they are reachable. One of the schools has one elective English class and four compulsory English classes, while the other school has two elective classes and eleven compulsory English classes. It is worth mentioning that all students have been studying English as a second language for 11 years at school and their ages range from 16-18. As reported by their teachers, their grades range mostly between A and B according to the proficiency level descriptor used by The Ministry of Education in Oman. The assessment of students' performance includes continuous assessment, 60%, and a final test, 40%. According to the mark gained on both columns, students can get A (90-100), B (80-89), C (65-79), D (50-64) and E (less than 50). Therefore, the sample's level of English explains the rationale behind their choice to study the elective course. Out of those students, 4 of them have been selected by their teachers for interviews. Then they have been asked for permission to be interviewed by the researcher and the four of them agreed to participate.

Generally, the research seeks a better understanding on the effect of collaborative work on writing tasks and the attitudes of learners to such type of learning. A major step to attain this aim is drawing a comparison between individual, pair and group work on a guided writing task specially designed for the purpose of this study.

Qualitative and quantitative methods are used to examine the effect of collaboration on learners' writing. Writing papers are corrected and compared in terms of accuracy, task response, lexical resources, fluency and complexity based on a specified set of criteria approved in the educational institution where the researcher comes from. The aim is to investigate the merits of collaboration on writing by comparing the work done by students who worked individually to those who worked in pairs and groups.

Furthermore, a simple descriptive analysis is used to analyze the research survey through drawing diagrams and tables. The focus is on the attitudes of learners towards collaborative writing. Additionally, interviews and self-reflections were used to show learners' perceptions of their experience on such tasks.

## Data Analysis

### Writing task

The analysis of the writing task (Appendix A) is centred over the first research question which is related to the effect of collaboration on learners' writing. The findings are based on a comparison between 5 individuals, 5 pairs and 10 groups of 3. Learners' papers were investigated in relation to task response (TR), accuracy (GA), fluency (F), coherence and cohesion (CC) and lexical resources (LR). Fluency is judged by the number of words; whereas; the other areas are scored by two markers based on specific writing assessment criteria (Appendix B). Tables 2.1, 2.2 and 2.3 below present a summary of the scores that learners achieved in these areas.

Table 2.1 Summary of individuals' scores

	Individual (5)					AVG
<b>TR</b>	6	7	12	15	18	<b>12</b>
<b>CC</b>	20	15	19	22	22	<b>20</b>
<b>LR</b>	16	15	19	18	21	<b>18</b>
<b>GA</b>	16	17	12	17	20	<b>16</b>
<b>SUM</b>	<b>58</b>	<b>54</b>	<b>62</b>	<b>72</b>	<b>81</b>	
<b>Average overall score for the group = 65</b>						

Table 2.2 Summary of pairs' scores

	Pair (5)					AVG
<b>TR</b>	20	23	16	19	17	<b>15</b>
<b>CC</b>	18	22	19	21	21	<b>20</b>
<b>LR</b>	17	21	19	17	18	<b>18</b>
<b>GA</b>	16	19	17	18	18	<b>17</b>
<b>SUM</b>	<b>71</b>	<b>85</b>	<b>71</b>	<b>75</b>	<b>74</b>	
<b>Average overall score for the group =75</b>						

Table 2.3 Summary of groups' scores

	Group (10)										AVG
<b>TR</b>	22	23	23	25	24	23	24	20	21	18	<b>22</b>
<b>CC</b>	17	24	16	22	22	22	20	22	22	16	<b>20</b>
<b>LR</b>	18	23	18	23	23	23	19	23	20	16	<b>21</b>
<b>GA</b>	13	23	16	19	18	18	18	20	19	16	<b>18</b>
<b>SUM</b>	<b>70</b>	<b>93</b>	<b>73</b>	<b>89</b>	<b>87</b>	<b>86</b>	<b>81</b>	<b>85</b>	<b>82</b>	<b>66</b>	
<b>Average overall score for the group = 81</b>											

The tables show that learners generally achieved better total scores in the whole task when they worked collaboratively. For example, groups (average= 81) got higher total scores than pairs (average= 75) and pairs got higher total scores than individuals (average= 65). Texts written in groups are longer and more fluent than those written individually or in pairs based on the number of words written. The detailed analysis of the other four areas is presented below for each one separately.

### **Task response**

Achievement in terms of task response increases gradually as the number of students working together increases. The average scores of individuals, pairs and groups in this area are 12, 15 & 22 respectively. 4 of those who worked individually and 3 who worked in pairs failed to order the events in the first part of the story. Moreover, all individual learners and 3 pairs showed a lack of understanding of task requirements in which they either paraphrased or copied the first part of the story (ordering events) before adding their own thoughts to complete the story. On the other hand, all 10 groups completed the task as required.

### **Coherence and cohesion**

In terms of coherence and cohesion, they seem not to be affected by the way of learning since most learners got scores in the good level with a minority of them whose scores range somewhere in the satisfactory level. It is interesting to note that the average score for all groups is 20 which suggest that neither individual nor collaborative work has an influence on texts' cohesion and coherence.

### **Lexical resources**

Moving to the lexical resources, the average scores of individuals and pairs are the same, 20; whereas, the average score of groups is 21. However, pairs and groups' scores mostly range between satisfactory and good, while individuals' scores spread out between unsatisfactory, satisfactory and good. Therefore, this suggests that both pairs and groups have a positive effect on lexical resources. Generally, errors of all groups are related to spelling of words.

### **Grammatical accuracy**

Scores of groups' papers provide evidence supporting the positive effect of group work (average=18) on grammatical accuracy against individual work and even pair work. Pairs, whose average score in this area is 17 also did better than individuals whose average is 16. The most common grammatical mistakes of individuals and pairs are the use of verb- to -be +

verb, double negatives, past after 'to' in infinitive and misuse of prepositions.

The importance of analyzing learners' own writing is a major step to answer the first research question about the effect of collaboration on writing. The findings of this analysis show evidence in favor of collaboration in general, and group work in particular especially in task response, grammatical accuracy and fluency.

## **Survey**

To answer this research question, the survey data of 41 learners was analysed. Tables and charts are produced for each theme (Appendix C).

In the first part of the survey, students were asked about their opinions on collaborative and individual writing tasks. When learners were asked generally if they like autonomous writing rather than collaborative, agreements 29% and disagreements 32% seem to be very close, while 38% of the participants shared a neutral attitude. Interestingly, when asked more specific questions in relation to individual writing, it is noticeable that the majority shared a positive attitude to independent writing. To support this, 56% of the participants (n=23) agreed that they achieve better when they work alone compared to 15% (n=6) who disagreed. With regard to individual testing, a large majority (81%, n=33) agreed that they need to write individually to practice for their exams. However, when learners were asked if they understand the task better when they work with others, 85% (n=35) agreed. Surprisingly, all but one student agreed that collaborative writing develops creativity.

Overall, the above figures show that learners prefer to work individually but have a strong belief that collaborative writing has a positive influence on their performance. It is not surprising that most students agree with Q3 as it focuses on individual testing. It's an interesting contrast with Q5, maybe suggesting that students enjoy group work but deal with individual work as a preparation stage for their exams.

In relation to fluency and accuracy of the texts, the figures indicate that the majority of learners (81%, n= 33) agreed that collaborative writing improves their grammatical accuracy. The numbers show that just over half of the participants (52%, n=21) hold a positive belief about the effect of collaboration on the fluency of the texts, while 29% disagreed with them. It could be concluded that most students agreed that collaborative writing improves accuracy of texts more than fluency.

The interpretations of the learners' responses to questions in relation to feedback show that perception towards feedback from each other is inconsistent. When asked if they trust getting feedback from their classmates, they were divided into three groups: 31% agreed, 32% neutral and 37%

disagreed. Moreover, 66% (n= 27) agreed that collaborative writing is less effective since their mistakes cannot be all corrected by the teacher. It could be inferred that the perception towards peers' and teachers' feedback may consequently have a negative impact on their attitudes towards collaborative writing in general.

The investigation of learners' responses to questions related to social interaction and responsibility shows that the majority of learners agree with all of them. Specifically, 61% (n= 25) of learners perceived collaborative writing as an opportunity to express ideas. Further, 76% (n=31) agreed that collaboration leads them to cooperate rather than to compete. In relation to getting sense of responsibility and confidence due to collaborative work, 63% and 66% of learners agreed compared to a minority who disagreed. Additionally, 66% of all participants agreed that collaborative writing improves self-confidence. All of these high percentages indicate that the majority of participants have a positive attitude towards collaborative writing due to its positive effects on these areas.

The last part of the questionnaire, learners were asked about the use of Arabic when working collaboratively. About half of the learners stated that using Arabic helps them write better; whereas, 29% disagreed. From all participants, 68% (n= 28) agreed that using Arabic makes their language learning less successful in contrast to 15% who disagreed. The analysis shows that the majority of learners tend to perceive using Arabic in collaborative work negatively as they need to practice English. Yet, there is still a fair belief among learners that using Arabic helps them in their writing.

### Self-reflection

Having finished the writing task, a sample of 20 learners who worked collaboratively (10 in pairs and 10 in groups) were given a simple self-reflection paper (See Appendix D) to reflect on their experience of the work they did with their pairs or groups. Table 4.4 shows a numerical description of learners' responses to the first part of the reflection which indicates that the majority of students liked working collaboratively in this task.

Table 2.4: Learners' reflection on the writing task

	Pairs	Groups
☺	8	9
☹	2	1
☹	0	0
Total	10	10

To go into more detail, learners' positive attitudes towards collaborative writing, pair and group, have been categorized into three aspects which are shared between the two groups as summarized below along with sample quotes.

1. Pair and group work minimizes the time spent on a given task.
2. Collaboration helps learners to share ideas and to produce more imaginative texts.
3. Collaborative work leads to a more accurate text in terms of grammar and vocabulary.

**[Quotation 1: Student A: Pair work]**

*'I think working in pair is very important and creativity. Because we can share our ideas together and working in short time successfully. It is really a good way to improve our way of thinking and imagination.'*

**[Quotation 2: Student B: Group work]**

*'Because all the members have different ideas and vocabulary and grammar and different imaginations that can make the text better than when work individually.'*

However, the two students who worked in pairs who stated that they did not like the task provided the reason that the task is difficult but this criticism relates to the task itself rather than to the use of pair work. On the other hand, the student who worked in a group did not like the task because the group members were 'not cooperative and they were laughing and playing'. Regarding the second research question about learners' attitudes, the reflections suggest that learners enjoyed collaborative writing because they were able to share ideas and discuss issues on grammar and lexis to produce a text in a short time.

## **Interviews**

Interviews were conducted to collect data qualitatively in order to elaborate findings on the second research question which is related to learners' attitudes towards collaborative writing tasks.

The interviews were conducted as a follow up for the writing task that students worked on as individuals, pairs or groups. Four students were interviewed: S1 and S2 finished the task in pairs and S3 and S4 worked in groups. These interviews have revealed insights on learners' perceptions of the collaborative task. Therefore, the following part presents direct quotes along with the author's interpretations for such perceptions together with the learners' attitudes. See Appendix E for more information with regards to the full interviews.

### **Learners' perceptions on collaborative writing**

When the four interviewees were asked: To what extent did you like working with your classmates? Three of them expressed a position in favour of collaborative work but one learner who worked in a group, stated clearly that she prefers working alone. For instance S1 and S3 said:

*S1: 'I like it so much because my partner was helping me and we; she gives me new words that I didn't know it before. That's it.'*

*S3: ' In general, I like working in groups so much but sometimes I prefer to work alone when the group members don't work.'*

Further, question 7 on their thoughts about if they could do better in the task if they worked alone partially supports their positive response to the first interview question. With this regard, S1 and S2 who worked in pairs expressed their preference to pair work in opposition to individual work; whereas, S3 and S4 who worked in groups declared that they like working alone rather than with others. Following are examples of responses of two students, one from each group, contrasting each other.

#### **[Extract: Interview with S2]**

**Q8: Researcher:** *Do you think you could do better if you worked alone? Please explain.*

**S2:** *No. No. as I told you, to exchange the ideas, sharing how to, for example begin the story, end the story. Maybe she will help me some phrases.*

#### **[Extract: Interview with S4]**

**Q8: Researcher:** *Do you think you could do better if you worked alone? Please explain.*

**S4:** *Yes, I do. Because I'll be able to use my own thoughts and ideas.*

*And I*

*totally depend on myself. Also, I don't like anybody to argue with me at all.*

The two interviewees who worked in pairs shared a positive attitude in opposition to those who experienced group work. Although S3 expressed that she liked working in the writing task in a group in Q2, she stated that she would prefer to work individually if she was given the chance to. Responses to the two interview questions imply reasons for the interviewees' preferences. The two who worked in pairs took the advantage of sharing ideas and helping each other with vocabulary items. On the other hand, those who experienced group work mainly complained about uncooperative group members. This suggests that sometimes it is better to restrict collaborative work to pair work to avoid conflicts between students. Yet, these conflicts could be avoided by asking students to choose their group members, so that they feel satisfied with whom they work. Moreover, uncooperation may result due to different levels of learners within the same group which

suggests using ability grouping in some cases especially if collaborative work has been recently introduced to students.

The first part of the interview focuses on learners' actions in relation to task organization, first language use and prior preparation that learners used when working in pairs or groups and their relation to their performance. It could be clearly noticed from the responses of the four students that they organized and distributed the work between them and mostly got the benefit of working together which creates a good opportunity for sharing ideas to finish the task. Additionally, they all expressed that using Arabic had taken a part in the completion of the task; however, those who worked in pairs think of it positively but the others who worked in groups seem not to be satisfied about doing so. With regards to prior preparation for the task, they are all in favour of it and think that it leads to a better performance.

Question 5 of the interview focuses the attention on the problems that learners may face, which relatively affect their attitudes to collaborative work and consequently answer the second research question. S1 and S2 who worked in pairs highlighted their weakness in using vocabulary and resolving it through discussion. For example S1 stated:

*'We cannot find some phrases and we discuss and use simple words to complete the story. We don't have so much vocabulary.'*

On the other hand, the other two learners, S3 and S4, who worked in groups agreed that the lack of cooperation between group members is a major problem. The following lines quote the response of S3:

*'There are lots of problems that we faced like different opinions but we can deal with it by asking someone to help us to choose the right opinion. Also, the wrong division of the works is a difficult problem and this is a result of the wrong plan. The bad leader, the different personalities and uncooperative members are problems which usually faced us.'*

This suggests that the number of students working together may negatively affect collaboration among group members. With regards to the second research question on the attitudes of learners to collaborative writing, the interviews show that learners are aware of the positive effect of collaboration on their writing through sharing ideas and negotiating about grammar and vocabulary. However, some learners still have a tendency to work individually.

## **Discussion**

Based on the findings of the current research, it could be indicated that collaborative writing is generally perceived positively by some learners who participated in the study. Also, the findings show that there is a positive impact of collaborative writing on learners' performance in a number of

aspects which supports the statement of Elola & Oskaz (2010) that research is in favour of collaborative writing due to its positive influence on L2 learning. This positive perception and impact of collaborative writing support the previous literature to some extent, but there are some considerable differences that are worth discussing. This discussion section is divided into two sub-sections: the effect of collaboration on writing and learners' attitudes to collaborative writing. These sections are related to the focus of the two research questions of the current study.

### **The effect of collaboration on L2 writing**

A major question that the current research is concerned with is the effects of collaboration on writing. Storch (2005), in her study, found that collaboration improves accuracy and complexity of written texts but ends up with shorter texts. On the other hand, a study conducted by Wigglesworth and Storch (2009) found that collaborative writing leads to more accurate texts with no influence on complexity and fluency. The findings of the current research support that collaborative writing enhances accuracy but also found that it also positively affects fluency. Moreover, supporting Storch (2005) and opposing Wigglesworth and Storch (2009), it found that collaborative writing improves complexity of compositions. It is worth noting that the present study combines accuracy with what is referred to as complexity in the literature. Based on the marking criteria, it was also found that neither autonomous nor collaborative work has an effect on coherence and cohesion of the texts.

It is worth noting that these two previous studies are based on a comparison between individual and pair work; therefore, it is reasonable to compare the findings of the current research with the study conducted by Dobao (2012) which was based on a comparison between individual, pair and group work. The results of this study show that group work resulted in more accurate texts than pair and individual work. In terms of lexical resources, both pair and group work showed a more positive effect than individual work. However, individual texts were more fluent, based on the number of words, than jointly written texts. The findings of the current research supports what Dobao (2012) found with respect to lexical resources and accuracy. Yet, it found that group work leads to a higher achievement in terms of task response and fluency. Therefore, the positive effect of collaboration on Omani students' writing is more significant in group work than pair work.

It is clearly noticed that the literature and the current research agree that collaborative writing leads to more accurate texts. Nonetheless, findings with regards to fluency, lexis and task response are inconsistent. The effect on accuracy could be due to negotiation of meaning in relation to the

grammatical rules that learners have already studied but still have difficulties in applying them. To support this claim, one finding that the interviews revealed is that negotiation occurs to discuss about vocabulary and grammar. However, such negotiation does not seem to have the same impact on lexical resources. The variation of findings of the current study and the previous ones could also be affected by the context of the study and the level of learners. Hence, further research is still needed.

### **Learners' attitudes towards collaborative writing**

In this discussion about learners' attitudes, few points should be highlighted in relation to the areas and aspects of collaborative writing as the analysis of learners' attitudes is divided by themes.

The literature shows that learners generally appreciate collaborative writing and perceive it positively to some extent. Nevertheless, there are two contrasting points for the reasons behind this positive attitude. Storch (2005) states that the main reason given by her participants was that collaborative writing improves accuracy and lexical complexity, whereas the learners in Dobao and Blum (2013) did not think that it affects accuracy and lexical choice in any way although they also perceived the collaboration process in a positive manner. Most of the learners in this study agreed with Storch's participants that collaboration helped them produce texts with a higher level of grammar and vocabulary. Two more reasons regarding the effectiveness of collaborative work according to the sample is that it decreases the time and increases their creativity which they believe to be positive for their learning. However, this positive perception seems to be more relevant to pair work rather than group work which shows that the increasing number of students in collaborative work is considered a disadvantage by some students. The interviewees who worked in groups seemed to have a daunting experience which negatively affected their perceptions. Wigglesworth and Storch (2012) state that the major concern of learners when working collaboratively is their ability and level to participate. However, in this study, some learners' complained about uncooperative group members which is against the aim of sharing responsibility that collaborative writing seeks (Storch, 2011 & Dobao, 2012). The lack of cooperation means lack of learning because unless learners collaborate, group work has no value in learning since there is no negotiation. When asked precisely, learners enjoyed working collaboratively. Yet, some of them may prefer to work individually to practice for their exams and to avoid being under the pressure of working with uncooperative classmates. The Omani collective culture may contribute to the positive attitudes of learners towards collaborative writing. A personal interpretation on some learners' preferences to individual

work may be relevant with high achievers who want show their ability and level of English to their teachers.

Regarding first language use, the findings of this study support Dobao (2012) and Foster and Ohta (2005), who are supporters of the socio-cultural theory of mind, that negotiation of meaning when working collaboratively helps learners overcome their weaknesses by each others' strengths. Interviewees expressed that they scaffolded each other with lexical and grammatical items to finish the task. An interesting point to note is that teachers and learners, in the current study, have two contrasting points of view regarding the use of L1. When talking about the students, Schweers (1999) relates L1 use in L2 classrooms to the feeling of security that allows learners to express themselves. The findings of the present study support what Schweers stated that the use of L1 helps students' feel secure to discuss the task. Negotiation of meaning through the use of L1 is essential to discuss grammatical and lexical items according to Storch and Aldosari (2012). Nevertheless, none of the sample learners mentioned using L1 to discuss grammar or vocabulary. Another use of L1 that this study shows is to make sense of the task and expand the content of the text which supports one of the uses resulted from the study conducted by Villamil and DeGuerrero (1996). The interviewees who worked in pairs expressed that using Arabic helped them finish the task due to their level of English. It could be interpreted that collaborative work helps low achievers to feel secure to express themselves in Arabic, so that high achievers working with them get the benefit of their ideas and translate them to English. This sense of security and comfort in collaborative work may be the reason for producing more fluent texts.

With respect to social interaction and personality of learners, the present study shows that learners perceive collaborative writing as a way to increase their confidence and sense of responsibility. It also gives them a chance to express their ideas and cooperate with each other. These results are in line with some previous literature. For example, Shehada (2011) states that collaboration has a positive influence on learners' self-confidence and speaking skills. The findings on responsibility contradict with the problem of uncooperative members. If collaborative writing develops sense of responsibility, it means that learners all cooperate and share the responsibility to finish the task.

## **Conclusion**

As the findings of the current research have been analyzed, discussed and interpreted, there seems to be a positive effect of collaborative writing on texts' accuracy in particular. There are also effects on other aspects which do not correspond with the previous literature such as fluency and lexical resources. Negotiation of meaning to understand the task seems to have a

noticeable impact on jointly written texts even when comparing groups to pairs. The first research question is clearly answered by analysing the data. The data on the second question about learners' attitudes towards collaborative writing seems to reflect a positive attitude in general but still needs further investigation. Based on these findings, some recommendations for teachers and stakeholders of English language teaching are highlighted as following:

- Learners' different learning styles should be taking into considerations and a variety of teaching methods is needed. Some learners are unenthusiastic to work collaboratively which requires the teachers to find a teaching method that suites everyone and leads to better performance.
- Collaborative writing should be integrated in the writing process due to its positive effect on L2 learning in general. A good task management and feedback enable learners to be aware of the advantages of collaborative writing.
- Collaborative writing should be introduced gradually, starting from brainstorming ideas, then pair work and lastly group work to avoid negative attitudes towards grouping students.
- Teachers should be aware of their students' cooperative skills, so that once they decide to have a collaborative writing activity, they come to a decision whether to choose group members or leave the responsibility for students themselves.

It is worth noting that this study is a small scale study that focuses on female students at Grade 11 with a sample of 45 students. It is difficult to represent a very large population, but the findings could assumingly be generalized in other areas in the Arab world which usually have single-sex high school classes with similar educational systems. Since the study is concerned about the effect of collaborative writing and learners attitudes, it is reasonable to include male students which may reflect gender differences, if there are any. Yet, time constraints when the study was conducted in the last week of the semester, were capable to restrict the sample to two reachable female schools in the regional area of the researcher. Another limitation of the present research is that it ignores the years of experiences of teachers which may have an influence on their attitudes. Unfortunately, it was impossible to get such information once the questionnaires were collected. Also, validity of the research might be criticized since there are different numbers of students in each condition (individual, pair, group) due to time constraints. Thereby, further research is suggested to engage the same students in the three different conditions at three different times to examine the actual effect on their performance.

There is much research conducted on collaborative work but a few focused the attention on collaborative writing. All but one study examined pair work only as a collaborative work and ignored group work. Thus, the current research seems to be the first one in Oman that attempts to explore the consequences of collaborative writing in L2 learning by comparing individual, dyads and groups' compositions. Further, the use of triangulation strengthens the truthfulness and validity of the results. For example, it could be noticed that there is a contradiction in learners' data in some areas comparing results from the survey and those from the self-reflections, interviews and the writing task. Findings of qualitative methods are more supportive to each other especially that self-reflections and interviews were conducted after exposing learners to the collaborative writing activity.

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