



DOI: <https://doi.org/10.38035/dijemss.v7i3>
<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>

The Impact of Collaborative Writing on Young Learners' Writing Performance

Elizabeth Fitriani¹, Juhana², Milawati³

¹Universitas Terbuka, Bandung, Indonesia, 501232681@ecampus.ut.ac.id

²Universitas Terbuka, Tangerang Selatan, Indonesia, juhana@ecampus.ut.ac.id

³Universitas Terbuka, Surabaya, Indonesia, milawati@ecampus.ut.ac.id

Corresponding Author: 501232681@ecampus.ut.ac.id¹

Abstract: As we know, writing is one of the most difficult skills for EFL learners. This skill emerges with challenges with vocabulary, grammar, and structural coherence. This study investigates the impact of collaborative writing on the writing performance of fifth-grade elementary students compared to individual writing. A quantitative method with a quasi-experimental design is conducted by using collaborative activities such as chain story, word construction, and comic strips. The writing performance was assessed using Jacob's ESL Composition Profile across five key aspects. The result of the research showed that collaborative writing significantly improved students' organization area ($p = 0.003$) and mechanics ($p = 0.046$). However, statistical analysis also showed no significant difference in content ($p = 0.058$), vocabulary ($p = 0.059$), and grammar ($p = 0.414$). The findings show that even though collaborative strategies effectively help young learners in structuring texts and improving punctuation usage, these strategies may not immediately enhance linguistic accuracy or enrich vocabulary without further treatment. This study also offers empirical evidence distinguishing which specific writing skills are most responsive to collaborative activity in elementary settings.

Keywords: Collaborative writing, Writing aspects, Young learners.

INTRODUCTION

Writing is widely recognized as one of the most challenging skills for EFL (English as a Foreign Language) learners because this skill requires generating ideas, organizing them cohesively, and applying grammar and vocabulary accurately simultaneously (Jashari & Fojkar, 2019; Niño & Páez, 2018). For many young learners, writing also becomes a source of anxiety, boredom, and demotivation because they struggle to express their ideas and feel burdened by the linguistic demands. The preliminary evaluation was conducted on fifth-grade students and shows a wide variation in writing productivity, with some students able to produce more than 100 words, while some find difficulties reaching the minimum requirement of around 50 words. In addition, the analysis of grammar and coherence shows low mean scores (42.67% and 43.10%), indicating that students still struggle in constructing sentences accurately and maintaining logical flow in narrative writing. The findings demonstrate that although English

instruction has been given, the majority of students' writing skills remain below the expected standard. Students' motivation also becomes an important aspect in this issue. When the teacher gave a questionnaire that asked which language aspects students considered the easiest and which they liked the least, writing skill was chosen as the most difficult and least enjoyable. They depicted writing as a boring, tiring, and time-consuming activity. However, other skills such as reading, listening, and speaking were perceived more positively because students felt more confident and engaged in those activities. The findings show that the writing difficulties are not only linguistic problems but also affective, which is related to low motivation and negative learning experiences. To address these challenges, teachers need to find suitable approaches that promote active participation, peer interaction, and meaningful learning experiences. One of the promising approaches is collaborative writing, where students work together in planning, drafting, and revising a text. Research indicates that collaborative writing enables students to learn new vocabulary, improve sentence structure, enhance idea development, and reduce anxiety through peer support (Abahussain, 2020; Anggraini et al., 2020; Pardede, 2024). This process supports shared authorship, negotiation of meaning, and knowledge construction through collaboration, allowing students to benefit from each other's strengths.

Some previous studies have explored collaborative writing in various contexts. Murtiningsih (2016) shows that integrating artwork with collaborative storytelling can improve students' creativity. Coffin (2020) reports that collaborative writing can improve communication and teamwork, but needs teacher preparation. Zheng et al. (2021) state that although teachers believe collaborative writing is beneficial, it is not always implemented because of institutional constraints. Svenlin & Sørhaug (2023) show that the previous study solely focuses on the drafting stage, leaving early stages like brainstorming and outlining underexplored. Meanwhile, Fitria et al. (2023) find that online collaborative writing helps university students improve communication and critical thinking, yet there are still some challenges, such as uneven participation and time management. However, the majority of the studies examined older learners like university students or tertiary-level contexts, and the methods are predominantly qualitative. Studies focusing on young EFL learners, specifically in elementary school settings, remain limited. The cognitive, social, and motivational aspects of children are significantly different from those of adults, and teachers need evidence-based strategies that are suitable for the developmental needs of young learners. The lack of quantitative studies also leaves a gap in understanding whether collaborative writing produces measurable improvements in writing performance among young learners. Therefore, this study specifically focuses on fifth-grade students to investigate the impact of collaborative writing on their writing performance. Writing performance in this study refers to students' capability to produce narrative text that is assessed through content, organization, grammar, vocabulary, and mechanics, using an analytical rubric that is adapted from The Jacob ESL Composition Profile (Tiwari, 2023).

Collaborative writing is operationally defined as structured activities where students work in pairs throughout all the stages of pre-writing, writing, and post-writing, such as chain story, constructing a story from scrambled letters (flower words), and creating a comic strip together. These activities are designed to support peer interaction, idea negotiation, and shared responsibility in producing a narrative text. Based on the problems, skills gaps, and motivational challenges that are identified in the preliminary assessment, and the limited number of quantitative studies on collaborative writing in elementary EFL settings, this study seeks to provide empirical evidence of whether collaborative writing can significantly improve students' writing performance. The findings are expected to contribute theoretically to the understanding of collaborative writing in the context of young learners and practically for teachers in designing engaging writing activities that are focused on students.

METHOD

This study employed a quasi-experimental design to investigate the impact of collaborative writing on the writing performance of fifth-grade EFL students. A quasi-experimental non-equivalent control group design was chosen because the classes involved had been predetermined by the school, making random assignment impractical, a condition that commonly happens in school-based research. In this design, both the experimental and control groups completed a pretest to know their initial writing proficiency, received different instructional treatments, and were given an identical post-test to measure changes in performance. The design maintained ecological validity, as all activities took place within natural classroom settings, allowing the findings to accurately reflect real learning and teaching practices and learning conditions, consistent with methodological principles explained by Bhardwaj (2019).

The population of this study consisted of 97 fifth-grade students in one private elementary school that implements the Kurikulum Merdeka. Students at this developmental stage, categorized as phase C, are expected to demonstrate increasing capacity for communication and collaboration, making them appropriate subjects for a study focusing on interactive writing practices. Purposive sampling was used to choose the research sample. The fifth grade was divided into bilingual and regular classes, and the preliminary observation indicated that the regular classes demonstrated lower writing proficiency, thus presenting greater instructional need. Based on the information, 58 students were chosen from these two regular classes. One class of 29 students served as the experimental group and received collaborative writing instruction. Meanwhile, 29 students from another class became the control group and received individual writing practices. This sampling approach ensured that the targeted learners would benefit the most from the instructional treatment. Two primary instruments were used to collect data: a writing performance test and an analytical scoring rubric. The writing test required students to write a short narrative text based on a picture prompt. The same prompt was used for both the pre-test and post-test to control for variations in topic difficulty and ensure comparability of results. The students' writing was assessed by using an analytical rubric adapted from The Jacobs ESL Composition Profile, which evaluates five writing aspects: content, organization, vocabulary, grammar, and mechanics. Each of them has a four-point scale from very poor to excellent. The rubric was slightly modified to adjust to the proficiency level of young EFL learners, following the suggestion that analytical scoring provides clearer diagnostic information about strengths and weaknesses specifically in writing (Tiwari, 2023).

The procedures for data collection consisted of three stages: pre-testing, instructional treatment, and post-testing. First, all students individually completed a narrative writing test within 20 minutes to know their initial proficiency. During the treatment phase, the experimental group participated in collaborative writing activities such as making a chain story, developing ideas with a word flower, and creating a story through a comic strip. These activities required students to share ideas and jointly construct written texts, which reflected collaborative writing frameworks elaborated by Rezeki & Rahmani (2021). Mixed-ability grouping was used to facilitate peer support and scaffold learning (Moonma & Kaweera, 2022). The control group, meanwhile, completed the same writing assignment individually and without peer interaction. At the end of the instructional period, both groups completed the same narrative writing test administered during the pre-test to measure changes in writing performance attributable to the instructional treatment. All the quantitative data were analyzed using SPSS. Descriptive statistics were computed to determine the mean and standard deviation of each writing component in both the pre-test and post-test. Before hypothesis testing, the data were examined for normality using the Shapiro-Wilk test and for homogeneity of variance using Levene's test. The results showed that most writing component scores were not normally distributed, even though some were homogeneous. Due to the violation of parametric assumptions, the Wilcoxon Signed-Rank Test was chosen as the primary method for analyzing differences between pre-

test and post-test scores. This non-parametric test is suitable for paired data that do not follow a normal distribution. It allows for the examination of whether the instructional treatment produced significant improvements. A significance level of 0.05 was used, and components resulting in p-values below this threshold were interpreted as showing statistically significant improvement. The analytical approach ensured that the study’s conclusions were based on appropriate statistical procedures.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This section presents the results of the statistical analyses that were conducted to determine whether the instructional treatment had a significant impact on students’ writing performance across the five key writing aspects: content, organization, vocabulary, grammar, and mechanics. The analyses include the descriptive data, non-parametric hypothesis testing, and interpretations supported by relevant literature. The integration of tables and discussion aims to provide clear evidence regarding whether the treatment led to measurable improvements, thus directly addressing the research questions and hypotheses. Before conducting the hypothesis test, the overall pattern of students’ writing performance was examined. The result shows that most of the students experienced difficulties in making sentences with proper grammar and coherence. The initial pattern highlights the relative strengths and weaknesses of students before inferential testing. To determine whether the differences between pre-test and post-test performance were statistically significant, the Wilcoxon Signed-Rank Test was used. The decision to use the non-parametric test was based on the result of the normality test, which consistently showed that the data was not distributed normally ($p < 0.05$). Therefore, the Wilcoxon test was the most suitable analytical tool for paired comparison of non-normally distributed data.

Hypothesis Testing For Each Writing Component And Discussion

Table 1.1. Pre-test and Post-test Comparison of Students’ Content Scores Based on the Wilcoxon Signed-Rank Test

Comparison	Sig. (p-value)	$\alpha = 0.05$	Decision
Pre-test vs Post-test	0.058	0.05	Not Significant

Source: Research data

The Wilcoxon analysis resulted in a p-value of 0.058, which is slightly above the significance value of $\alpha = 0.05$. Therefore, the difference in content scores between the pre-test and post-test was not statistically significant. The findings suggest that although some descriptive improvement may have occurred, the gain was not strong enough to confirm a meaningful change in students’ ability to develop ideas and provide detailed support in their writing. The content of a written piece requires students to generate and organize ideas that are expressed by the author (Hasanah et al., 2023). As Shan (2024) states, students with higher background knowledge tend to produce better organized and more developed writing. The findings likely showed that the treatment did not provide sufficient time for students to develop the cognitive skills to enrich their written content. Moreover, the major problems in students’ writing are the lack of vocabulary and the limited knowledge of grammar (Thi & Anh, n.d.). Therefore, it is reasonable that the treatment, despite having structured practice, did not yield an increase in the content area.

Table 1.2. Pre-test and Post-test Comparison of Students’ Organization Scores Based on the Wilcoxon Signed-Rank Test

Comparison	Sig. (p-value)	$\alpha = 0.05$	Decision
Pre-test vs Post-test	0.003	0.05	Significant

Source: Research data

The organization aspect showed a significant improvement with a p-value of 0.003, showing that the treatment results in a statistically measurable improvement in students' ability to structure their writing. The significant improvement in the organizational aspect shows that the treatment effectively helped students arrange their ideas coherently, use transitions properly, and structure paragraphs with better clarity. The previous study supported the idea that organization in writing shows high responsiveness through the explicit modelling and scaffolded instruction (Chairinkam & Yawiloeng, 2024). It is possible that during the treatment, the collaborative activities help students improve their writing organization. Organization is a skill that benefits from immediate feedback and visible models because students can observe the example, and they can more easily imitate and adapt the patterns in their writing. In collaborative writing, students are continually exposed to peer input and jointly produced text. This interaction could explain why organization improved more significantly than content, vocabulary, or grammar.

Table 1.3. Pre-test and Post-test Comparison of Students' Vocabulary Scores Based on the Wilcoxon Signed-Rank Test

Comparison	Sig. (p-value)	$\alpha = 0.05$	Decision
Pre-test vs Post-test	0.059	0.05	Not Significant

Source: Research data

The p-value of 0.059 showed that the difference between pre-test and post-test vocabulary scores was not statistically significant, although it closely approached significance. Vocabulary knowledge grows slowly and cumulatively because it needs multiple meetings across different contexts to solidify retention (Shin & Kim, 2023). In EFL settings, students frequently need extensive reading and repeated lexical encounters before they use new vocabulary productively through their writing. Because of that, the limited treatment duration probably does not give enough chance to strengthen and use vocabulary actively. Another explanation is about the vocabulary acquisition that relates to their reading habits. If their intensity of reading is low, then the vocabulary improvement naturally collides with the limitation. Because of that, the instructional treatment probably has introduced new vocabularies, yet the exposure is not enough to produce statistically measurable improvement.

Table 1.4. Pre-test and Post-test Comparison of Students' Vocabulary Scores Based on the Wilcoxon Signed-Rank Test

Comparison	Sig. (p-value)	$\alpha = 0.05$	Decision
Pre-test vs Post-test	0.414	0.05	Not Significant

Source: Research data

The grammar aspect showed the lowest result, with a p-value of 0.414, indicating no significant improvement from pre-test to post-test. Grammar accuracy is widely regarded as one of the most challenging areas of EFL writing (Vu, 2024). It is different from mechanics or organization; grammar requires rule internalization, repeated exposure, contextual usage, and consistent corrective feedback. Students often need substantial time to improve their grammatical accuracy, because writing tasks demand both fluency and correctness. No improvement shows that the treatment may have been more meaning-oriented and less form-focused, leaving limited space for grammar instruction. The findings align with the studies that show grammar acquisition is supported by multiple components, including explicit instruction, structured practice on target forms, and continual corrective feedback (Amani et al., 2024). Therefore, the result is consistent with theoretical expectations and empirical evidence.

Table 1.5. Pre-test and Post-test Comparison of Students' Vocabulary Scores Based on the Wilcoxon Signed-Rank Test

Comparison	Sig. (p-value)	$\alpha = 0.05$	Decision
Pre-test vs Post-test	0.046	0.05	Significant

Source: Research data

Mechanics showed a statistically significant improvement with a p-value of 0.046, indicating that students improved in punctuation, capitalization, and spelling. Mechanical accuracy is typically easier for students to improve because such errors are concrete and more noticeable. When teachers provide direct correction, editing checklists, or model texts, students are better at acknowledging their mistakes and understanding expected patterns (Grønli et al., 2025). Mechanical features also require less deep linguistic processing compared to grammar or content. Thus, the improvement in the mechanics aspect reflects the effectiveness of immediate pair feedback and structured editing activities that were utilized during the treatment.

In general, the findings showed that the treatment produced partial but meaningful improvement in students' writing performance. Significant progress occurred in organization and mechanics, which shows that the instructional strategies successfully strengthened students' structural writing skills. These findings are consistent with the view that writing development benefits from explicit scaffolding, modelling, and direct corrective feedback. On the other hand, no significant improvement was observed in content, vocabulary, and grammar, indicating that deeper linguistic and cognitive dimensions of writing require more sustained and intensive instruction. Content development includes idea generation and elaboration, which rely on background knowledge and students' cognition. Vocabulary acquisition depends heavily on repeated exposure and meaningful usage, which generally develops over a longer time. Grammar acquisition is part of a complex developmental process and needs explicit instruction and consistency in giving corrective feedback. In general, these findings partially support the hypothesis. The treatment successfully improved several aspects of writing, yet it was not sufficient to produce equivalent improvement across all aspects. These findings highlight the multifaceted nature of writing proficiency and emphasize the need for balanced instruction that addresses both form and meaning.

CONCLUSION

The purpose of the study is to investigate whether the instructional treatment leads to significant differences in students' writing performance across the five key aspects: content, organization, vocabulary, grammar, and mechanics. Based on the results of the Wilcoxon Signed-Rank Test, the study concludes that the treatment produced a partial yet meaningful impact on students' writing development. The impact is clearly seen, especially in organization and mechanics, where statistically significant improvements were observed. This indicates that the instructional techniques, such as guided writing, direct corrective feedback, and modelling, were effective in enhancing students' ability to structure their text more coherently and with greater accuracy. On the other hand, the treatment did not result in statistically significant improvement in the aspects of content, vocabulary, and grammar. These findings indicate that while the instructional approach successfully strengthened surface-level structural components of writing, this approach did not sufficiently influence the deeper linguistic skills required for idea development, lexical expansion, and grammatical accuracy. Aligning with the purpose of the study, it provides clear evidence regarding the extent to which the instructional treatment influenced each writing aspect. By identifying which aspects improved and which aspects remained unchanged, the study contributes to a better understanding of how writing instructional works for young EFL learners, especially within classroom conditions that prioritize structured practices and direct teacher feedback.

The improvement in the organization and mechanics aspect shows that even short-term instructional treatment can positively shape students' procedural writing knowledge. Meanwhile, the challenges that emerged in content, vocabulary, and grammar reveal areas where instructional design must be strengthened and extended. Beyond its immediate findings, the study contributes to the education field by reinforcing the understanding that writing competence is multidimensional and must be addressed through differentiated pedagogical strategies. The findings support the argument that writing instruction cannot rely only on general practice but must be component-specific, with the target of accuracy and deeper linguistic development. This study provides empirical evidence that short-term treatment has an impact on structural writing skills, whereas conceptual and linguistic dimensions require long-term processes. In general, the conclusion from this study highlights the importance of properly designing writing instruction that is holistic and continuous. Although the treatment successfully strengthened certain aspects of students' writing, the findings highlight the necessity for long-term, integrated instructional writing practices to achieve comprehensive improvement in every aspect of writing performance.

REFERENCE

- Abahussain, M. O. (2020). *Investigating EFL Learners' Perceptions of Collaborative Writing*. *International Journal of English Linguistics*, 10(3), 32. <https://doi.org/10.5539/ijel.v10n3p32>
- Amani, Z. J., Sadeghi, K., & Alavinia, P. (2024). *Combined Effect of the Phase of Explicit Instruction and Feedback Timing on Task Performance and Grammar Acquisition*. *Teaching English Language*, 18(2), 69–92. <https://doi.org/10.22132/tel.2024.341440.1374>
- Anggraini, R., Rozimela, Y., & Anwar, D. (2020). *The effects of collaborative writing on efl learners' writing skills and their perception of the strategy*. *Journal of Language Teaching and Research*, 11(2), 335–341. <https://doi.org/10.17507/jltr.1102.25>
- Bhardwaj, P. (2019). *Types of sampling in research*. *Journal of the Practice of Cardiovascular Sciences*, 5(3), 157. https://doi.org/10.4103/jpcs.jpcs_62_19
- Chairinkam, J., & Yawiloeng, R. (2024). *The Use of Scaffolding Strategies to Enhance the Writing Development of EFL Students*. *Theory and Practice in Language Studies*, 14(9), 2996–3007. <https://doi.org/10.17507/tpls.1409.35>
- Coffin, P. (2020). *Implementing Collaborative Writing in EFL Classrooms: Teachers and Students' Perspectives*. In *Journal : Language Education and Acquisition Research Network Journal* (Vol. 13, Issue 1).
- Fitria, R., Trisnawati, I. K., & Mulyani, M. (2023). *What Indonesian EFL Learners Perceive of Collaborative Writing: Experience in Writing Essays Online*. *English Education Journal*, 14(1), 493–516. <https://doi.org/10.24815/eej.v14i1.29227>
- Grønli, K. M., Walgermo, B. R., Uppstad, P. H., & McTigue, E. M. (2025). *Transforming teacher feedback: A checklist for assessing and supporting reading skills, motivation and student agency in oral reading*. *Contemporary Educational Psychology*, 82. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.cedpsych.2025.102377>
- Hasanah, N., Noviasmy, Y., Amalia, N., & Mazhur, M. (2023). *Enhancing Content Development in EFL Students' Writing: Leveraging the Four-Square Writing Method*. *International Journal of Multicultural and Multireligious Understanding*, 10(12), 188. <https://doi.org/10.18415/ijmmu.v10i12.5226>
- Jashari, L. T., & Fojkar, M. D. (2019). *Teachers' perceptions of developing writing skills in the EFL classroom*. *ELOPE: English Language Overseas Perspectives and Enquiries*, 16(2), 77–90. <https://doi.org/10.4312/elope.16.2.77-90>

- Moonma, J., & Kaweera, C. (2022). *A Study of Critical Thinking Skills Practice in Collaborative Writing in EFL Context*. *Asian Journal of Education and Training*, 8(1), 8–14. <https://doi.org/10.20448/edu.v8i1.3656>
- Murtiningsih. (n.d.).
- Niño, F. L., & Pérez, M. E. V. (2018). *Building Writing Skills in English in Fifth Graders: Analysis of Strategies Based on Literature and Creativity*. *English Language Teaching*, 11(9), 102. <https://doi.org/10.5539/elt.v11n9p102>
- Pardede, P. (2024). *Collaborative Writing in EFL Setting: A Review Article History*. *Journal of English Teaching*, 10(1), 92–109. <https://doi.org/10.33541/jet.v9i3.526>
- Rezeki, Y. S., & Rahmani, E. F. (2021). *The Implementation of Collaborative Writing Technique to Improve Students' Writing Performance and Soft Skill*. *VELES Voices of English Language Education Society*, 5(2), 81–94. <https://doi.org/10.29408/veles.v5i2.3614>
- Shan. (2024). *Effect of Background Knowledge, Writing Self-Efficacy and Critical Thinking on Writing Performance*. *Pegem Journal of Education and Instruction*, 14(4). <https://doi.org/10.47750/pegegog.14.04.11>
- Shin, J. W., & Kim, J. Y. (2023). *Effects of Exposure Frequency, Depth of Processing, and Activity Repetition Types on Vocabulary Learning*. *English Teaching(South Korea)*, 78(4), 293–322. <https://doi.org/10.15858/engtea.78.4.202312.293>
- Svenlin, M., & Sørhaug, J. O. (2023). *Collaborative Writing in L1 School Contexts: A Scoping Review*. *Scandinavian Journal of Educational Research*, 67(6), 980–996. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00313831.2022.2115128>
- Thi, D., & Anh, N. (n.d.). *EFL Student's Writing Skills: Challenges and Remedies*. 9(6), 74–84. <https://doi.org/10.9790/7388-0906017484>
- Tiwari, H. P. (2023). *Use Of Jacobs ESL Composition Profile to Evaluate University Students' Writing*. *ELT Worldwide: Journal of English Language Teaching*, 10(2), 288. <https://doi.org/10.26858/eltww.v10i2.51632>
- Vu, P. T. (2024). *Using Grammarly in Enhancing Students' Grammatical Accuracy in English Writing: A Case at a Private College in Hanoi*. *Proceedings of the AsiaCALL International Conference*, 6, 81–96. <https://doi.org/10.54855/paic.2466>
- Zheng, Y., Yu, S., & Lee, I. (2021). *Implementing Collaborative Writing in Chinese EFL Classrooms: Voices From Tertiary Teachers*. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 12. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2021.631561>