

Exploring male students' perceptions in doing collaborative writing in an EFL writing course

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ABSTRACT

Literature informs that writing collaboratively can help students to interact more in class, lower their anxiety about completing tasks alone, and raise their confidence. However, despite the benefits of collaborative writing, not all English as a Foreign Language (EFL) students enjoy writing in a group. This study aimed at exploring male university students' perceptions of doing collaborative writing in their EFL online writing class using Google Docs. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews with ten male university students at a private university in Central Java, Indonesia. The analysis results of this study indicate that most students showed a positive perception of their collaborative writing activity, such as getting useful and immediate feedback, fostering the exchange of knowledge, information, and experience, and getting the work done faster. This study is expected to offer some insights for EFL teachers to design more effective online collaborative writing activities in EFL writing classrooms, specifically in an Indonesian higher education context.

Keywords: collaborative writing, online writing class, google docs

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Introduction

Writing is an important skill that English as a Foreign Language (EFL) students must learn and master (Koura & Zahran, 2017). However, students usually see writing as an uninteresting activity because of a lack of purpose and motivation (Bahous et al., 2011; Farrah, 2011). They also face difficulties writing in English since they do not master English grammar and structures (Ariyanti & Fitriana, 2017; Belkhir & Benyelles, 2017; Ibnian, 2017). Some EFL teachers use a collaborative writing approach to help students deal with those problems. In short, collaborative writing is an approach where students produce a single text in pairs or groups (Dobao, 2012; Storch, 2019). Writing collaboratively might help students to improve their confidence to write in English and their ability to use English structure effectively (Anggraini et al., 2020; Winarti & Cahyono, 2021). Collaborative writing can also help students notice the errors they make

in writing their tasks, leading them to have a meaningful revision (Dobao & Blum, 2013; Farrah, 2011).

Despite the benefits of collaborative writing, as mentioned above, not all EFL students enjoy writing in a group. Deveci (2018) found that some students express concern about the fair workload distribution among a group. Moreover, some other students expressed concern about facing conflict in a group as they have different ideas (Winarti & Cahyono, 2021). Students also need more time to finish their writing tasks as they sometimes find it difficult to arrange a suitable time to discuss the tasks (Farrah, 2011). Finally, the jointly written text might also not be well-organized since it is a mixture of different writing styles (Farrah, 2011).

Writing for The Media (WTM) course in the English Language Education Program at Universitas Kristen Satya Wacana, Salatiga (henceforth called PBI-UKSW), do a lot of

collaborative writing activities. Exploring students' perceptions of using these collaborative writing activities is necessary for teachers to know students' experiences in doing collaborative writing and design more effective collaborative writing activities. Moreover, it is also useful to identify students' perceptions of their collaborative writing experiences related to gender, such as those experienced by male students, an area that received little attention from previous studies since male students, as believed by Takeda and Homberg (2014), tends to be uncommitted and have lower performance in group work. With that background in mind, this research will explore the perceptions of male students in WTM classes at PBI-UKSW towards their collaborative writing activities. More specifically, this research aims to answer this research question: *What are the perceptions (perceived benefits and challenges) of EFL male students in doing collaborative writing in their WTM class at PBI-UKSW?* The answer to the research question is expected to offer some important insights for EFL teachers to design more effective collaborative activities in an EFL online writing classroom in Indonesia. By designing more effective collaborative activities, it is hoped that teachers can fully support their students in achieving their learning goals. For EFL students, the answer to the research question is expected to inform ways to fully maximize their online collaborative writing activities in their WTM class.

Generally, *perception* is a term referring to the process of creating meaning for an experience. However, there are various definitions of perceptions experts define. Pickens (2005) stated that perception is a process when a person interprets meaning from experience. Similarly, (Feldman, 1999) believed that perception is a constructive process to create a meaningful situation by what is presented to us. Wood (2016) stated that perception is a process in which someone selects, organizes, and interprets information that is influenced by factors of the person's learning environment to create meaning. Based on the definitions above, this research regards 'perceptions' as meanings interpreted by students on their prior collaborative writing experiences in their WTM class.

Collaborative writing (henceforth

called CW) is a teaching approach in which students produce a writing product in a group. Experts have variedly defined CW. According to Swain and Lapkin (2001), CW is a task where it involves learners interacting and comprehending the target language to produce a shared document in a group. CW is also defined as an activity where the class is divided into groups; each group should produce a paper together, and each group member should participate in the writing stages (Barkley et al., 2005). In addition, Storch (2019) stated that CW is a writing process where learners in a group share authorship and responsibility for a final writing task. Last, Shahrokhi and Jalili (2017) said that CW is a writing activity in which the final writing product results from a collective effort among group members. CW in this study can be seen as the activity of students completing a writing task with their group members in their WTM class through the process of interaction, collective efforts, and task and responsibility sharing among group members.

Some international studies also describe the perceptions and experiences of different levels of students in doing CW. In the United Arab Emirates (UAE), Shehadeh (2011) reported on a study that investigated 38 first-year students' perceptions of CW activity. The result of the study showed that most of the students enjoyed the CW activity and believed that the activity positively impacted their language learning. A study in Saudi Arabia was conducted by Alkhalaf (2020), who investigated the attitude of 50 female EFL learners towards CW and the challenges they faced during the practice using questionnaires. The findings revealed that the learners had a positive attitude toward CW but faced time management and student behaviour problems. Another study in Saudi Arabia was carried out by Abahussain (2020), who explored 30 EFL students' attitudes and perceptions toward CW. The result showed that the participants had positive attitudes towards CW and found it effective increasing their writing skills.

Similarly, Shahrokhi and Jalili (2017) attempted to investigate the attitudes of 60 Iranian EFL learners towards CW activity. The result would seem to show that the learners had a positive attitude towards the activity.

Along with that, Khodabakhshzadeh & Samadi (2017) also researched the perception of 60 Iranian learners towards CW strategy using a semi structured interview. The findings seem to indicate that most participants found CW helpful for them in terms of motivation, comprehension, and writing skills. In addition, another study was carried out by Kwon (2014) in Thailand, who conducted a study about 4 students' perspectives on CW and peer feedback using multiple forms of qualitative and quantitative data. The result revealed that students had positive attitudes towards writing in a group. However, they face some challenges, like making decisions and maintaining a good relationship with their group members.

A study by Farrah (2015) aimed to investigate the attitudes of 55 students in an English writing class towards online CW activity. The findings also seem to indicate that the students perceived CW to be an enjoyable experience and had positive attitudes towards the activity. Similarly, Dobao and Blum (2013) investigated 55 intermediate-level learners' attitudes and perceptions towards CW. The study found that most students showed positive attitudes towards CW and believed CW enabled them to participate actively, have more knowledge to share, develop their language skills, and improve their grammatical and lexical accuracy. In addition, Lin and Maarof (2013) explored 30 students' perceptions and problems in doing CW activities using questionnaires and interviews. The findings showed that most students believed that CW positively affected their language and writing skills. Another study by Deveci (2018) investigated 64 EFL students' views on CW using a survey and a discourse completion task. The result would seem to show that the students had a positive perception of CW activity and found it helpful for their general skills. A study by Chen and Yu (2019) attempted to explore 3 selected students' perceptions of CW using the analysis of multiple data sources. The findings highlighted that the participants believed that CW had a positive impact on writing skills. However, they expressed concerns about the difficulty of dealing with various views and

provoked negative emotions. Additionally, (Coffin, 2020) conducted a study about the perspectives of teachers and students towards CW practice. The result revealed that the participants believed that positively influenced teamwork and communication skills but also raised issues about the fairness of workload.

With regard to the Indonesian context, some studies (Anggraini et al., 2020; Rezeki & Surmiyati, 2021; Winarti & Cahyono, 2021) attempted to explore Indonesian students' perceptions of the CW strategy. Anggraini et al. (2020) provided some evidence that their 80 EFL participants found CW helpful for them in generating writing ideas and developing their writing. With similar views, Rezeki and Surmiyati (2021) explored the perceptions of CW experiences involving 36 EFL students in writing skill development classes. The result would seem to show that students had positive perceptions of the CW practice, which positively influenced their language and soft skills development. Lastly, Winarti and Cahyono (2021) conducted a study to explore 30 EFL students' perceptions of the CW experience. The result revealed that the students believed they benefited from CW and had better writing.

To sum up, the following may be stated dealing with the related literature and past studies discussed in this section:

- They help me to determine a specific purpose of the present study, which is to explore the perceptions of EFL male students towards their CW activity experience (Shahrokhi & Jalili, 2017).
- While the issue of EFL female students' perceptions towards CW has been discussed by Alkhalaf (2020), the issues of male students' perceptions towards CW have not been sufficiently discussed with regard to Indonesian students as EFL learners. Therefore, the primary purpose of this study is to fill the research gaps, reaffirming the essence of students' perceptions in their learning (Coffin, 2020; Dobao & Blum, 2013), particularly to investigate the perceptions of EFL male students in WTM classes at PBI-UKSW towards their CW activities.

Research Method

This research was conducted to explore male students' perceptions in doing CW activities in their EFL WTM course at PBI-UKSW. I approached the study qualitatively to achieve this objective. Using a qualitative method, I tried to find out and describe how the participants feel about a certain experience that may not be discovered in a quantitative method (similar to Korstjens & Moser, 2017). Following Ary et al. (2010) and Dawson (2009), I also tried to get the participants' in-depth opinions about their experiences. Last, the data findings expressed a detailed description and interpretation of the participants' statements in an interview based on their experience (Moser & Korstjens, 2018).

This study was in line with the characteristics mentioned above. First, I explored participants' experiences in doing CW and how they felt about it. Next, I interpreted participants' statements about their experiences in an interview as the finding of the data. Finally, the data was obtained by seeking the answer to the research question: *What are the perceptions (perceived benefits and challenges) of EFL male students in doing collaborative writing in their WTM class at PBI-UKSW?*

The study setting was the WTM course at PBI-UKSW. This selected class aims to make the students able to paraphrase and summarize texts, write out-text references, and write a paragraph essay (Hastuti, 2020). It is selected because the students do a lot of CW activities for their assignments. To facilitate the CW activities and students' learning activities, the lecturers of WTM classes implemented technology. The lecturers used Google Docs to enhance their teaching instructions and facilitate the students with their online writing activities. The students of this course worked in pairs to write their writings using Google Docs, and most of the writing activities were done in Google Docs since the course was held online throughout the semester. The students went through almost all the writing process via Google Docs, namely, drafting, revising and editing.

In this study, criterion sampling was used in which the participants had to meet predefined criteria of importance (Ary et al.,

2010; Moser & Korstjens, 2018). In this study, the sampling was ten male students of PBI-UKSW who registered in the WTM course and had the experience of doing the CW activities in the course. The male students were selected to address the gap in the literature that has not yet explored EFL male students' perceptions of CW to investigate if different gender has different perceptions towards CW as Alkhalaf (2020) fills the research gaps by investigating the EFL female one.

To collect the data, the study implemented semi-structured interviews. A semi-structured interview is a depth interview using open-ended questions where the participants can answer the questions freely and often be followed by follow-up questions (Adams, 2015). This method aims to gain specific information from the participants (Dawson, 2009; Moser & Korstjens, 2018). As I wanted to obtain the participants' own feelings and perceptions about their experiences in doing CW, it was suitable to use semi-structured interviews to enable the participants to speak more freely (Previous researchers conducted their research about students' perceptions in doing CW also used semi-structured interviews to collect the data (e.g., Anggraini et al., 2020; Coffin, 2020)). Finally, the interview questions of this research were adapted from multiple sources (e.g., Abahussain, 2020; Farrah, 2015; Nguyen & Phuong, 2021), as shown in Table 1 below.

Table 1. The Interview Questions

No	Interview Questions	Adapted/ Generated from
1	What do you think about collaborative writing?	Abahussain, 2020;
2	What are the perceived benefits of collaborative writing for you? Can you give an example?	Farrah, 2015; Nguyen and
3	What are the perceived challenges and difficulties of collaborative writing for you? Can you give an example?	Phuong, 2021

-
- 4 How do you perceive your writing skills after doing writing tasks collaboratively?
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Before conducting the interviews, the data instrument was piloted on three male students who had taken the WTM course. The data and feedback from the pilot interviews were used as consideration for me to revise the interview items and delete the irrelevant ones. After making some revisions, I conducted the interview with ten male students. At first, I contacted the male students and asked them to participate in this study. Along with that, I informed them about the purpose of the study and gave them instructions to answer the interview questions. I used those steps to ensure that the participants fully understood what they would do in the interview. The interview was conducted via Zoom Meetings. Several questions were asked to the participants, and the questions were the same for each participant. There were also follow-up questions to clarify the participants' answers to

each interview question. Following Mali (2017); Mali and Salsbury (2021), the interview was done using *Bahasa Indonesia* to ensure that the participants could give detailed responses to the interview questions without any language barriers.

Following Braun and Clarke (2006); Dawson (2009), thematic analysis was used to analyze the interview data. In this phase, the interview data were transcribed and read to develop themes to answer the research question.

The member checks method was used to ensure that the research was truthful. More specifically, the interview transcripts were sent back to the participants to allow them to read and check if the transcripts were all that they wanted to say. This was done to validate the accuracy of the data and might obtain additional helpful information from the participants (Ary et al., 2010; Candela, 2019). Previous researchers also used member checks (e.g., Canagarajah, 2011; Harvey, 2015) to ensure the trustworthiness of their research.

Results & Discussion

This section presents the findings on the students' perceptions in doing CW in their WTM class. I aimed to display the perceptions by classifying the results into four main indicators, adapted and developed from multiple sources (e.g., Abahussain, 2020; Farrah, 2015; Nguyen & Phuong, 2021). The indicators are the students' perceptions of [1] the benefits of CW and [2] the challenges and difficulties of CW. This section discussed three primary perception categories for each indicator, including the students' excerpts of the results obtained from interview data. Below are the details of the findings and discussion.

The Students' Perceptions of Benefits of Collaborative Writing

I found nine perceptions of the benefits of CW by the students. Table 2 elaborates on the perceptions in a ranked order.

Table 2. The Students' Perception of Benefits of CW

No	The Perceived Benefit (translated by the researcher)	n	%
1	Useful and immediate feedback	8	25,81%
2	Fostering exchange of knowledge, information, and experience	5	16,13%
3	Getting the work done faster	5	16,13%
4	Producing higher quality work	4	12,90%
5	Enhancing interpersonal skills	3	9,68%
6	Improving linguistic features (content, organization, grammar, and vocabulary)	2	6,45%
7	Enhancing negotiation skills	2	6,45%

8	Enhancing confidence	self	1	3,23%
9	Making management easier	time	1	3,23%
Total Number			31	100%

This section is continued by discussing three primary perceptions of the benefits of CW by the students, namely useful and immediate feedback, fostering the exchange of knowledge, information, and experience, and getting the work done faster.

Getting Useful and Immediate Feedback

Most participants perceived that CW enabled them to get useful and immediate feedback (25,81%). Statements included in this perception were "We would give feedback to each other. It was helpful." (Student 4/Interview/translated by the researcher). Additionally, "I sometimes forgot to put the references or quotations in the essay, so my friends would give suggestions and remind me to be more careful." (Student 7/Interview/translated by the researcher). These statements seemingly appear as other participants stated:

Excerpt 1

"My partner fixed everything that I missed. For example, what I wrote was incorrect, my partner would give me feedback and explain that what I wrote was incorrect, the language features were incorrect. Vice versa. It helped us in finishing the work, we fixed everything based on the feedback from each other."

(Student 3/interview/translated by the researcher)

Excerpt 2

"Feedback from my partners was very helpful for us in finishing the work because it contained the error that I did not realize, so when they gave me their feedback, I could immediately fix it."

(Student 5/interview/translated by the researcher)

In accordance with the results, a previous study by Chao and Lo (2011) reported that most of their participants expressed the availability of mutual assistance for improvement in their essays. Their findings also seem to align with the current study with

the view that corrective feedback within the group is beneficial to improve students' writing. The current finding also supports the findings of Winarti and Cahyono (2021), which said that peer feedback during CW activities positively affects the language development of the students' writing.

Fostering the Exchange of Knowledge, Information, and Experience

Additionally, the participants believe that they were benefiting from CW activities to have an exchange of knowledge, information, and experience (16,13%), as some students stated:

Excerpt 3

"Because we worked together, we could share our knowledge with each other. We could find which one is more interesting or which one we should use in our writing. We explained to each other what was in our mind and we discussed everything together."

(Student 9/interview/translated by the researcher)

Excerpt 4

"In the process of collaborative writing, we could share our thoughts, our opinion and experience with each other."

(Student 2/interview/translated by the researcher)

This supported the findings of Chao and Lo (2011) that CW activities allowed their participants to understand their teammates' thoughts and collect ideas from them. The findings would seem to indicate that discussions the students had during CW activities take an essential role in helping them to write their writing based on the shared knowledge, information, and experiences in the group.

Getting the Work Done Faster

Furthermore, the findings showed other perceptions frequently mentioned by the students, namely getting the work done faster (16,13%). Within this perception, the students said that they get their work done faster with CW as some students said in the interview:

Excerpt 5

"My partner is good at brainstorming ideas. He can brainstorm and find

new ideas really fast, so every time he gave me ideas, I immediately wrote it down. We found ideas faster."

(Student 6/interview/translated by the researcher)

Excerpt 6

"It was easier to look for the topic and references because we looked for them together. We found no difficulties in looking for the journals for our references and it was faster than if we looked for it only by ourselves."

(Student 7/interview/translated by the researcher)

The findings seem to address issues that may emerge in CW activities studies; agreement and disagreement. This current finding is in line with Sukirman's (2016) finding, whose participants reported that they got time-saving benefits from CW. However, a number of studies (Anggraini et al., 2020; Dobao & Blum, 2013; Lin & Maarof, 2013) reported that CW activities lead to take longer time to finish writing tasks but produces higher quality texts. This might indicate that CW activities that are done online significantly affect the duration of the collaboration.

The Students' Perceptions of Challenges and Difficulties of Collaborative Writing

The present study reveals nineteen cited responses about the students' perceptions of challenges and difficulties of CW. More specifically, the responses are categorized into five main categories, namely arguments and conflicts due to differences in opinion, making time management more difficult, uncooperative peers, lack of knowledge, and less advanced peers. The results are completely displayed in table 3.

Table 3. The Students' Perception of Challenges and Difficulties of CW

No	The Perceived Challenges and Difficulties (translated by the researcher)	n	%
1	Arguments and conflicts due to differences in opinion	6	40,00%
2	Time management problems	4	26,67%

3	Uncooperative peers	2	13,33%
4	Lack of knowledge	2	13,33%
5	Less-advanced peers	1	6,67%
Total Number		15	100%

I continue this section by discussing three primary perceptions of challenges and difficulties of CW by the students, namely arguments and conflicts due to differences in opinion, making time management more difficult, and uncooperative peers.

Having Arguments and Conflicts Due to The Differences in Opinion

The most perceived challenge that was mentioned by the students in the interview is the arguments and conflicts due to the differences in opinion (40,00%). This category includes statements:

Excerpt 7

"There were times when we had different opinions. For example, I wanted to make an essay about economics, and my partner did not agree with that topic. This partner would give another alternative topic for the essay, but I knew that her topic was not appropriate for the essay, but she denied it. So, for me, the biggest challenge of collaborative writing is to have the same perception of an opinion."

(Student 5/interview/translated by the researcher)

Excerpt 8

"The challenge was having conflicts because sometimes we had different opinions. Because of those differences, we sometimes had little arguments."

(Student 2/interview/translated by the researcher)

The findings seem to be in line with a number of studies (Anggraini et al., 2020; Chen & Yu, 2019; Deveci, 2018; Herwiana, 2021; Sukirman, 2016; Winarti & Cahyono, 2021) which reported that students express concern about having conflicts because of the differences in opinions. This might indicate that different opinions among group members affect the students' engagement in the collaborative learning process.

Having Time Management Problems

Additionally, time management problems (26,67%) is the next perceived difficulty that is frequently mentioned by the students. Some students stated in the interview:

Excerpt 9

"Because the class was done online, it was more difficult for us to match our schedule because we had different activities at our home or campus. There were times when I could not make it, but my partner could, and vice versa. Because of that, sometimes we did not work together to finish the assignment, we had to distribute the work to be done individually and compile it at the end."

(Student 3/interview/translated by the researcher)

Excerpt 10

"There were times where we had difficulties with time management, like when we had to interview a person for our writing assignment. We had to make a schedule for the meetings with the interviewee, but my partner could not make it at the scheduled time."

(Student 5/interview/translated by the researcher)

The findings seem to be in agreement with Deveci (2018), whose participants stated that they had time management problems clashing schedules. This might indicate that finding the best time for students to get together to finish their tasks is a big challenge.

Conclusion

This study explored EFL male students' perceptions in doing CW, particularly in WTM class at PBI-UKSW. Based on the analysis results, I came up with the following concluding points:

Indonesian EFL learners perceive that CW is helpful for them to have a meaningful exchange of knowledge and feedback, foster the exchange of knowledge, information, and experience, and get the work done faster. Nevertheless, they also perceive CW as challenging, especially when they encounter conflicts with their peers, face time management issues, and work with passive

Having Uncooperative Peers

Furthermore, the students mentioned uncooperative peers (13,33%) as the perceived challenge and difficulty of CW. Some participants said:

Excerpt 11

"I became braver to discuss things with my lecturer because there was no use discussing it with my partner. I also had greater responsibility for the assignment as if it was individual work. My partner also just contributed when we had Zoom Meetings with the lecturer, and after that, I worked on our assignment by myself again."

(Student 6/interview/translated by the researcher)

Excerpt 12

"My partners were not active in contributing to the assignment that later on made the assignment was submitted late, and it made me annoyed."

(Student 8/interview/translated by the researcher)

The findings are also in agreement with Deveci (2018) whose participants expressed concern about careless members who depended on others and put very little effort into the group project. This is also in line with Herwiana (2021), who found that some students were passive and did not contribute to finishing the group work.

peers. Regarding the findings of the current study, EFL lecturers in the WTM class should provide support and monitor the activity of CW in their class to maximize the opportunity to learn, minimize the challenges and difficulties of CW, and maintain the students' engagement in doing CW activity. To support the online CW activity, the lecturers may introduce and combine the technology applications they use in the class. The technology does not always to be the newest one, but the "simple" one, such as Google Slides, can help the students complete their EFL writing tasks (Mali & Salsbury, 2021) within their group and minimize the barriers

could be considered. The lecturer may also minimize the challenges of CW by using a peer assessment rubric. The rubric could facilitate the students to assess their peers' performance during the CW activity. The peer assessment rubric is hoped to lower the issues of encountering conflicts with peers and having passive peers. I also suggest that the students be active during their CW activities to help them in their learning and language development process.

This study was limited in the area of data collection, which involved only 10 male students in WTM classes of PBI-UKSW to participate in the study. These 10 students may not represent all male EFL learners. Thus, it might be better for further studies to be conducted in a broader context, such as involving a larger number of male students from different universities. It would also be interesting if further studies compare the perceptions of male and female students in doing CW.

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