

Improving EFL Learners' Collaborative Skills Through A Writing Module

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ABSTRACT: *This study aimed to enquire into the effectiveness of a developed writing module in sharpening the collaborative skills of EFL university learners. The study was conducted in one of the public colleges in Oman. The participants of the study were 35 Omani EFL students who studied at The General Foundation Program. The study was underpinned by Cooperative Learning Theory (Johnson & Johnson, 1989). The data were collected through semi-structured interviews and reflection journals. The findings revealed that the study module significantly sharpened the students' collaborative skills.*

KEYWORDS: EFL students, collaborative skills, writing module, Cooperative Learning Theory

INTRODUCTION

Collaboration is indispensable in the writing process. Studies and research have claimed that students' writing skills can be honed when they are engaged in collaborative writing. Collaborative writing is the process of two or more students working together to complete a writing task or achieve a writing goal (Inglehart et al., 2003). The plurality of research and studies have indicated that collaborative writing makes students' writing production far beyond expectations (Chen, Xie & Loui, 2012; Dobao & Blum, 2013; Ong & Maarof, 2013). Collaboration in the writing classroom is an effective method that can improve students' social and linguistic skills as it supports student-student interaction with considerable input and output in an encouraging atmosphere (Ahangari & Samadian, 2014). Collaborative writing contributes to enhancing students' writing performance in five writing areas: vocabulary (choice of proper vocabulary), grammar (proper use of grammar and sentence structure), organization (maintaining coherence and order of ideas), and content (expanding of ideas that are written via facts and opinions, illustration and personal experience) (Yusuf, Jusoh & Yusuf, 2019). Additionally, collaborative writing helps students with low achievement improve their performance when they work with students with good achievement (Corcelles & Castelló, 2015). The act of success enhances both the group's and the individual's self-esteem (Munawar, 2019). Since students work collaboratively in groups, anxiety is minimized as the writing tasks are distributed to group members and the results correspond to the entire

group (Aminloo, 2013; Gillies, 2006; Hanjani & Li, 2014; Popov et al., 2012; Ross, 2008). Although collaborative writing is very significant in honing students' writing skills, the writing syllabus in this higher education institution does not promote students' collaborative skills (Al Tai, 2015). The writing syllabus focuses utterly on individual writing production. Students write individually without interacting or collaborating with other classmates (Al Ajmi & Holi, 2014). The non-existence of collaboration in the writing syllabus does not stimulate the students to work in pairs or groups to construct and develop different ideas for the writing tasks (Ginosyan & Tuzlukova, 2014). The students don't interactively work with their peers as the writing syllabus fosters an individual writing approach which does not encourage the students to learn from others (Ahmed & Abouabdeldkader, 2016). The absence of collaborative skills in the writing syllabus does not encourage students to use L2 which negatively affects their writing quality (Al-Mahrooqi & Tuzlukova, 2014). Research and studies have shown that students have faced many challenges during collaborative work such as a lack of collaborative skills (Barron, 2003; Janssen & Wubbels, 2018; Kreijns, Kirschner & Jochems, 2003). Another problem which is encountered by students in this study is the poor caliber of students' explanations in group interaction (Ross, 2008), the variable quality of group discussions (Popov et al. 2012), and also students' inability to adjust to collaboration work (Gillies, 2006; Webb, 2009). Therefore, improving students' collaborative skills can contribute to sharpening their overall writing skills. Since, the current writing syllabus adopted the individual writing approach which doesn't help improve students' writing skills, the present study aimed to develop students' collaborative skills to avoid the individual approach drawbacks and encourage students to write collaboratively. The current study developed a writing module that aimed to enhance students' collaborative skills in L2 writing classroom. The writing module comprised 10 chapters that aimed to enhance students' writing and collaborative skills. The total number of hours allotted for teaching the module was 44 hours (4 hours for each chapter). The study was underpinned by the following question: "To what extent has the module enhanced students' collaborative skills? To this end, the study aimed to investigate whether the module has enhanced the students' collaborative skills.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Collaboration bears upon the action of labor sharing and therefore collaborative writing is a unified cognitive process where several writers discuss and share responsibility and co-authority to produce a text (Storch, 2013). Hence, collaborative writing is constructed on the idea that multiple learners work out a cognitive process (writing task) collaboratively (Lowry et al., 2004). The social interaction concept of collaborative writing has been backed by many scholars. For example, Colen and Petelin (2004) maintain that collaborative writing is considered a social interplay in which students work together to reach a consensus. Collaborative writing starts with forming groups and selecting group members which should be done randomly by students and with no preference for certain members (Burke, 2011; Frykedal & Chiriac, 2012; Hassaskhah & Mozaffari, 2015; Hodges, 2018). The social interaction perspective of collaborative writing has been broadly viewed as a stage where students can improve and evolve their competence. Moreover, it enables them to have a clear comprehension of the existence of social networking in the writing process. Accordingly, some educationalists such as Ritchie et al. (2007) and

Rex et al. (2002) claim that collaborative writing is a reciprocal procedure of understanding oneself and also others' thoughts in social relationships in which construing collaboratively those thoughts into a written text can mirror oneself understanding of others in that type of writing partnership. Flower and Hayes (1981) describe the cognitive process of collaborative writing as a procedure that incorporates three major phases: the planning phase, prewriting phase, translation or interpretation phase, writing phase, and reviewing phase (post-writing phase). The planning phase is the first phase where students work collaboratively for setting goals, generating ideas, and organizing the information required for the writing activity. Interpretation is the middle phase which connects the initial phase to the final one. It is also called a 'drafting stage' where students work in groups to collaboratively construe plans and analyze notes to/into a written text. Eventually, the reviewing phase aims to edit the original goals and ideas, examine the written draft, and correct the text. Hence, Flower and Hayes (1981) suggest that collaborative procedure is a type of cognitive process that can be described as a group effort to perform a text. The aforementioned theory and two techniques were employed by the study to enhance students' collaborative skills. The two techniques encouraged students to write collaboratively to accomplish the writing task. Although in the first technique (Flower and Hayes, 1981) students were required to work individually, in the second method students worked in groups to finish the writing activity (Barkley et al., 2005). The two approaches or techniques could contribute to developing students' collaborative skills as the writing practice was carried out in groups but the assessment was done individually. Collaborative writing activities support students' writing ability and also collaborative skills (Deveci, 2019; Dobao, 2014; Dobao & Blum, 2013; Khodabakhshzadeh & Samadi, 2017; Mozaffari, 2016; Ong & Maarof, 2013; Talib & Cheung, 2017; Yeh, 2014). Specifically, peer feedback can enhance the quality and quantity of peer discussion and maximizes students' negotiation and interaction in the process of writing (Alnasser, 2018; Biria & Jafari, 2013; Pasand, 2017; Philp, Adams & Iwashita, 2014; Rahmat, 2014; Stell, 2015; Wichadee, 2013; Yastibasc & Yastibas, 2015; Zaky, 2018). Further, collaborative writing helps students to generate and share (Aydin & Yildiz, 2014; Bikowski & Vithanage, 2016; Talib & Cheung, 2017; Zhang, 2018) ideas and also improve their understanding of text coherence and cohesion (Chittooran, 2015; Dowse & Van Rensburg, 2015; Nixon & McClay, 2007; Storch, 2005). Moreover, collaborative writing enables students to improve their writing achievement, critical thinking, and high-level thinking skills (Neumann & McDonough, 2015). It also helps students to develop their writing organization and convention (Silby & Watts, 2015; Wette, 2014) and improve their overall writing performance (Chen & Yu, 2019; Fong, 2012; Hurst, Wallace & Nixon, 2013; Saparuddin, Prasetyo & Mahanal, 2018; Yeh, 2014). There are several benefits of collaboration in the writing classroom (Lundsford, 1991). Collaboration helps students identify problems and find appropriate solutions for them, facilitates learning abstractions, assists assimilation and transfer as it promotes interdisciplinary thinking, sharpens students' critical thinking skills (students must expound, defend, adjust), and also deepens their understanding of others and also helps students to achieve a better accomplishment in general. Further, collaboration engages students in active learning and productive writing as it integrates writing, reading, thinking, talking, and also provides practice in both analytic and synthetic skills.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The present study utilized Cooperative Learning Theory (Johnson & Johnson, 1989). The theory may be deemed the predominant theoretical framework for collaborative learning. The theory proposes that learning is a situation that involves a group of students who attempt to share their educational experiences. In such environments, learners are capable of learning from others, using their skill resources and sets, and sharing knowledge that may assist the whole group. The theory supports collaborative learning among students to work collaboratively in small groups helping the members have mastery over the assigned tasks, engage in learning activities to improve their skills; work independently at their own pace to effectively achieve their learning goals (Johnson, Johnson & Holubec, 1998). The theory suggests five fundamental factors for effective collaborative learning: Positive Interdependence, Promotive Interaction, Individual Accountability, Social Skills, and Group Processing. Positive Interdependence refers to successful collaborative learning. The theory suggests that students should be connected to others and they need to cooperate with other members to achieve their goals. Promotive Interaction enables students to support, encourage and assist each other's endeavors to learn. Students promote their peers' learning by explaining to group members how to carry the activity, discussing with each other the nature of the strategies and concepts being learned, sharing knowledge, and explaining to each other the relationship between current and past learning. Individual Accountability is the third element in the theory in which students' performance is gauged and they are provided with results. The results help students to know who needs more help in carrying out the activity. In the writing classroom, every student is given a task and their writing production is assessed by the teacher so they can be able to know who needs more assistance in the group. Social Skills are the fourth element in the theory. For the group to function successfully, they need some social skills including communication, trust-building, and decision-making. Students learn, for instance, to share credit for good notions with others; acknowledge and appreciate others' skills; experiences, contributions, and creativity; and expand on the notions of a team member or a peer (Johnson, Johnson & Holubec, 2013).

METHODOLOGY

This section provides an exhaustive elucidation of the approach utilized to conduct the study.

Participants

The participants of the study were 35 EFL students who studied English at a public college in the Sultanate of Oman. The course aimed to prepare students for their various disciplines which utilized English as a medium of instruction.

DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS

The study data were collected via two instruments: a semi-structured interview, and a reflection journal.

Semi-Structured Interview

Semi-structured interviews were conducted face-to-face with 10 students who were selected randomly from the group of 35 students. The semi-structured interviews provided data on the development of students' collaborative skills. The themes and sub-themes that emerged from semi-structured interviews provided rich data that could be utilized to learn about the extent to which their collaborative skills were enhanced. The interview questions were structured to facilitate asking the 10 participants the same questions (Guest et al. 2006). The qualitative findings of the semi-structured interviews helped reach data saturation in the present study. Pseudonyms were used for the semi-structured participants.

Reflection Journals

The reflection journal method was used in the current study as a personal record of student's learning experiences. Reflection journals enabled students to reflect upon and recorded their observations, feedback, and responses to various learning situations embedded in the module. The reflection journals were completed by the 35 students. The participants were given reflection journal forms and were requested to write about their learning experiences, challenges, and insights. Reflection journals helped gauge the development of their collaborative skills.

Method of Data Analysis

Before embarking upon data analysis, it was necessary to clean the data to prepare them for the analysis. Data cleaning refers to the process of removing or fixing incomplete, duplicate, incorrectly formatted, corrupted, or incorrect data within a database (Chu & Ilyas, 2016). Data cleaning entails the removal (or correction) of inconsistencies and errors in a database or data set due to incorrect entry or corruption of data. Irrelevant, inaccurate, or incomplete data are pinpointed and then they can be superseded, adapted, or deleted (Geerts et al., 2013). When multiple data source is combined, such as obtaining qualitative and quantitative data, algorithms and outcomes are unreliable, although they may seem correct. To undertake qualitative data cleaning in the present study, some pivotal procedures were taken as proposed by Volkovs et al. (2014). The first step included removing irrelevant or duplicate observations. Duplicate observations mostly occur during the process of data collection. The themes and sub-themes generated from the semi-structured interview and reflection journals were rigorously scrutinized for the sake of de-duplication. Irrelevant data were eliminated. This made the analysis more efficient and decreased distraction from the primary target of the current study which was to answer the study questions. The second step aimed to fix structural errors. Structural errors occur when we transfer or measure data and detect incorrect punctuation, typos, or unfamiliar naming conventions. This helped to relate the quotations to their respondents. For instance, coding of the student's responses in the semi-structured interview was done based on the symbols which were previously given to the notations accompanied by a number of the interview questions they answered. Hence, the symbols were correctly and accurately attached to the interview question they answered. Step three was relevant to filtering unwanted notations and outliers. In this stage, observations that did not fit within the data that were analyzed were eliminated. Filtering the data helped to rigorously look closely into the collected data and determine its relevance to the research questions. The last step was connected to handling missing data. In this stage, the missing observations

should not be accepted. No missing observations were detected in the current study. In conclusion, data cleaning significantly prepared data for analysis and improved the present data quality as well. To analyze the data obtained from semi-structured interviews and students' reflection journals, the researcher made use of thematic analysis. To analyze the data obtained from the students' reflection journals, the researcher used Moustakas's (1994) method of phenomenological analysis (PA). This method aimed to elucidate the essence, meaning, and structure of the student's experiences in the module. The first step of the analysis, which is called 'Horizontalization', was to thoroughly read through the students' reflection journals repeatedly to discern or pinpoint pivotal statements in the data and categorize them into groups. After that, each statement was given an equal value. Textural categorization was linked to these statements or themes. Hence, the analysis of the experimental group's reflection journals was informed by intuition or insight and reflection which were based upon a thorough and constant reading of the collected narratives. To analyze the semi-structured interview data, the researcher employed the 5-step technique of data analysis which was propounded by McCracken (1988). The first step incorporated the rigorous reading of the interview transcripts. The researcher carefully and repeatedly read the transcripts to pinpoint themes and sub-themes which were relevant to the development of students' collaborative skills. In the second step of the analysis, the notations were developed into interpretive and descriptive groups which were based on evidence manifested in the transcripts. Grouping of notations aimed to gauge the development of students' collaborative skills. The third stage of the analytical framework incorporated thorough and rigorous examination of the notations to spot the relationship among them. The fourth stage of analysis included categorizing students' answers and making use of notations according to their similarities or dissimilarities. Students' similar responses were given a code that indicated the question and the relevant answer. Finally, students' irrelevant responses were excluded and those which were pertinent to the topic and purpose of the interview were utilized to answer the research question.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Data obtained from both semi-structured interviews and students' reflection journals provided themes and sub-themes that answered the research question. To make sure that the data was contextualized, as is the principal practice in the qualitative study, prodigious chunks of data were quoted to elucidate the meaning proposed by the participants. Extracts, which were taken from the interview transcripts, were marginally adapted to discard some hedges and digressions such as "erm", "err", repetition, and filters like "you know". The latter changes were crucial to making the text legible and those adaptations did not impact the meaning. Pseudonyms were used for the semi-structured interview participants. The following themes and sub-themes were emergent findings of the semi-structured interview and reflection journals. They indicated that students' collaborative skills were developed by the module. The themes and sub-themes were supported with examples from students' responses and also examples from the writing module.

Understanding the Significance of Others' Opinions

The module implicitly and explicitly helped improve students' pivotal collaborative skills required in the writing classroom. Students' responses revealed that the module helped them to understand and appreciate others' opinions to build up healthy relationships with classmates.

- *Do you agree or disagree with the writer's opinion? Why or why not? (Remember! When you express your opinion, you should respect others' opinions even if you don't agree with them) (Module chapter 6, page 84)*
- *In your opinion, why are many people learning English nowadays? Give examples to support your answer. (Remember! Others may have different opinions from yours, so you have to respect them) (Module chapter 6, page 154)*

Semi-structured interview findings revealed that the module helped students learn the fundamental skills required for successful collaborative work. One of the salient skills required for successful collaboration is allowing others to express their opinions. Another pivotal skill needed for effective collaboration is respecting others' opinions. Shaymaa and Eman mentioned that the module enabled them to learn to listen to other members of the group and appreciate their opinions. In the same vein, students Fatima and Basem stated that it was not good to talk all the time and deprive others of expressing their viewpoints.

"I should to listen to everyone in the group and respect the opinions." (Eman)

"It is not good to talk and talk and don't to let other students give ideas, they will leave the groups." (Basem) (Interview)

Similarly, the reflection journal findings provided data about students' collaborative experience concerning their agreement and disagreement with others' opinions. They, for instance, recorded that the module helped them to accept others' opinions though they sometimes did not agree with them. It can be concluded that the module helped students to know their roles and understood their responsibilities within their groups. They learned to listen to others and appreciate their opinions too.

"I learned to listen to my friend opinion and she ask about my opinion" (Aisha)

*"I can hear my friend opinion and I don't say I am not liking the opinion." (Khalid)
(Reflection journal)*

Division of Responsibilities within Groups

To enhance students' collaborative skills, the module guided students to divide various writing tasks among group members. The module aimed to help students to be attached to the group and satisfactorily shoulder the tasks assigned to them. Consequently, students learned to work together to accomplish the assigned work collaboratively. This enabled students to accomplish the tasks and present them as a group. The module enabled students to divide assignments among the group members equally. As a result, group members were satisfied with the work assigned to them:

Write a paragraph of 150 words about your dream job. Divide the paragraph into parts among your group members. Once you have finished, combine the paragraphs, edit them, and select a member of the group to read them to the class. (Module chapter 5, page 54)

It can be inferred that the module helped students to appreciate teamwork so they accepted the task which was assigned to them. This was communicated by students Aisha and Ali in the semi-structured interview.

“When the group gave me work, I accepted because I am member in the group.” (Aisha)

“I never said no I will not do the work which they give me because I want my group to be best in the class.” (Ali) (Interview)

Making Decisions about Writing Tasks

Making decisions is deemed one of the crucial skills students need to learn to develop their collaborative skills. A decision should be made as a group, so every group member can feel involved. Taking that into consideration, the module encouraged students to make decisions about their writing choices. The module incorporated many writing activities which encouraged students to choose from various writing topics, select an activity to write about, and opt for the most suitable way of presenting their writing as a group.

- *Write an essay of about 250 words about the job responsibilities of a nurse. As a group, decide how you want to present your essay, by role-play, PowerPoint slides, video, etc. (Module chapter 10, page 138)*
- *Work in pairs. Study the supporting points and decide which one is the most important and put 1 next to it. Number the next supporting points 2 and three according to their importance. (Module chapter 6, page 86)*

Students' responses in the semi-structured interviews confirmed that the module improved their ability to make decisions. Aisha, Shaymaa, Samira, and Khalid mentioned that working in pairs helped them to improve their collaborative skills. Collaborative writing helped them to share ideas and meanings of new words. Similarly, Eman, Nadia, and Noora stated that collaborative writing benefited them so they were able to make decisions about their writing topics and share their ideas. In addition, students decided on others' writing mistakes. During peer editing, students were required to find writing mistakes and provide corrections. It was found that students accepted their peers' decisions in terms of what was right and what was wrong. Thus, students showed acceptance of the group's decision. Eman and Khalid indicated that collaborative writing embedded in the module helped them to generate ideas and brainstorm writing activities.

“Work in pairs helped me to understand the writing tasks to sharing ideas with my classmates.” (Eman)

“I learned by the writing experience from friends.” (Aisha)

“For me it (collaborative writing) was very useful way to understand writing good.” (Noora) (Interview)

In the same vein, findings of students' reflection journals revealed that collaborative experience exposed students to a new learning experience in which they shared ideas and collaboratively made decisions about their writing. Collaborative skills developed by the module helped students to give and receive feedback from classmates which enabled them to find and correct their writing errors. Students mentioned that they had never accepted to be assessed by other students since they had the same language level. However, when they worked in teams, accepted others' comments on their writing which helped them to improve their writing performance.

"I am not like student to tell me the mistakes but my group tell me the mistakes in kind way" (Ali)
"The students in my group help me to correct my mistakes." (Nadia)
(Reflection journal)

Sharing Learning Experience

Working in small groups helped improve students' collaborative ability. Students shared their learning experiences and knowledge about various writing tasks. The module encouraged students to share their writing experience so those with low writing ability could benefit from other students with good writing performance. This was done by requesting students to work in pairs or groups.

- *Write the concluding sentence for each of the following paragraphs. Once you have finished, share your answers with your classmates and write them on the whiteboard. Are your answers different from your classmates'? (Module chapter 2, page 29).*
- *Share the examples you've written with the rest of the class. (Module chapter 10, page 184)*

This was confirmed by the findings of both semi-structured interviews and students' reflection journals. Students provided and exchanged explanations with other members of their group. That helped them to understand the tasks they were required to carry out. Ali and Khalid stated that collaboration in the classroom supported students with low writing ability to cope with other students in the classroom.

"Work with my classmates helped me to write well because all students explained me what I don't understand." (Ali)
"All students shared our writing experience." (Khalid) (Interview)

In the same vein, students stated in their reflection journals that they were helped by group members to understand the requirements of various writing tasks. Students provided explanations to help every group member understand the task.

"When I don't understand, I ask my friends." (Fatima)

“The students in my group explain to me the new words I don’t understand.” (Basem) (Reflection journal)

Providing Peer Feedback

The module included many activities that guided students to provide feedback on their classmates’ writing. Students were provided with a checklist which helped them to give useful and constructive feedback. Peer feedback helped students to work collaboratively to learn from each other.

- *Finish the following activity. Exchange books with a classmate. Read your classmate’s writing. Then use the checklist below to help you to comment on your classmate’s writing. (Module chapter 2, page 14).*
- *Select a topic to write a definition paragraph on a piece of paper. Brainstorm your ideas in the space provided. Then exchange papers with a classmate. Read your classmate’s writing. Then use the checklist below to help you to comment on your classmate’s writing. (Module chapter 3, page 47).*

Semi-structured interview findings revealed that peer feedback enabled students to provide and get feedback from members of the group. Ali stated that peer feedback helped them to understand the writing tasks they were required to carry out.

“Work with my classmates helped me to write well because all students explained me what I don’t understand.” (Ali) (Interview)

In the same vein, students’ reflection journals revealed that peer feedback helped students to edit others’ writing errors. For instance, Samira noted that peer feedback helped them to learn from their mistakes.

“The students in my group help me to correct my mistakes.” (Samira)
(Reflection journal)

Peer feedback also helped students to share ideas needed for their writing tasks. Since one of the problems encountered by students in this study was related to their inability to generate ideas, peer feedback enabled them to generate and exchange ideas. Eman mentioned that working with other students in the group helped them to share ideas with their classmates.

“Work in pairs helped me to understand the writing tasks to sharing ideas with my classmates.”
(Eman) (Interview)

Students’ reflection journals revealed that sharing ideas helped students to correct their mistakes.

“I am not like student to tell me the mistakes but my group tell me the mistakes in kind way.”(Nadia) (Reflection journal)

Students’ responses in the semi-structured interviews revealed that peer feedback helped them to acknowledge and appreciate others’ skills, experiences, and creativity. Noora stated that they learned to listen to every member of the group and appreciate their opinions and contributions

“I should to listen to everyone in the group and respect the opinions.” (Noora)
(Interview)

The findings revealed that peer feedback helped students to listen to and acknowledge the opinions of others. This was recorded by one of the students in their reflection journals.

“I listen to my friend opinion and she ask about my opinion” (Aisha)
(Reflection journal)

Peer feedback enabled students to state areas of disagreement and personal opinions tactfully. They also learned to support the group’s decision even if they were not in total agreement. Reflection journal findings revealed that students learned to listen to and respect others’ opinions.

“I learned to hear my friend opinion and I don’t say I am not liking the opinion.” (Shaymaa)
(Reflection journal)

The qualitative findings of the current study confirmed that the students’ collaborative skills were developed. The development of students’ collaborative skills took several forms which reflected the enhancement of students’ skills. To begin with, students’ ability to form groups to carry out various writing tasks reflected the improvement of students’ collaborative skills. This finding is in line with other studies (Aminloo, 2013; Gillies, 2006; Hanjani & Li, 2014; Popov et al., 2012; Ross, 2008) which concluded that working in groups contributed to improving students’ collaborative skills. Students were encouraged to form groups to carry out writing activities. Students learned to have no preference for working with certain students in a group. When students were requested to work in groups, they selected the group members without considering who the students were. Selecting group members was done randomly, so any student could join any group to work as a team. This finding is in congruence with other studies (Burke, 2011; Frykedal, & Chiriac, 2012; Hassaskhah & Mozaffari, 2015; Hodges, 2018;) that students should not have a preference when they work in groups. This implies that the module designed by the researcher helped students to learn that forming groups to carry out writing tasks was of high priority to them. The students learned to give priority to teamwork to produce a written text and did not give preference for working with their friends in the group.

The finding of the current study is in line with other studies (Dowse & Van Rensburg, 2015; González et al., 2013; Li & Kim, 2016; Nosratinia & Nikpanjeh, 2015) that collaboration in the writing classroom helped the students to implicitly learn and understand the significance of others' opinions. One of the salient skills required for students' successful collaboration in the writing classroom is allowing others to express their opinions. The module helped the study students to allow other students to express their opinions on various writing tasks. Students also learned to listen to other members of the group and appreciate their opinions. Further, they learned to accept others' viewpoints though they sometimes did not agree with them. Thus, it can be inferred that the module enabled students to become cognizant of their responsibilities within the group. Another important element that is pertinent to the development of students' collaborative skills is connected to the way students divided the writing tasks among the group members. The researcher designed the module to help students to work as a group and to enable them to divide the learning tasks among the group members. The aim here was to accomplish the task and present it as a group. The division of tasks and assignments within the group was done equally. As a result, group members were satisfied with the work assigned to them. This finding is in line with previous studies (Abdullah, Abu Bakar & Mahbob, 2012; Al-Ghafri, 2018; Qing-he, 2016; Tesfaye & Berhanu, 2015) which suggested that equal distribution of tasks within the group encouraged students' participation and improved group's productivity. Collaborative writing helped students to make decisions about their writing topics. Students also made decisions about their writing mistakes. During the peer editing stage, students were required to find the writing mistakes of their peers and provide corrections. Students accepted their peers' decisions in terms of what was right and what was wrong. Thus, students learned to accept the group's decision as found in these studies: Deveci, 2015; Jafari & Ansari, 2012; Khatib & Meihami, 2014; Tai, 2016; Yang, 2014; Yen, 2014. The findings of the present study support previous studies (Chen & Yu, 2019; Fong, 2012; Hurst, Wallace & Nixon, 2013; Saparuddin, Prasetyo & Mahanal, 2018; Yeh, 2014) which claimed that working in small groups helped improve students' collaborative ability. Students in the present study learned to share their experience and knowledge about various writing tasks with other students. Students could also provide and exchange explanations with other members of the group. Consequently, they understood the tasks they were required to carry out. Furthermore, collaboration in the classroom supported students with low performance to cope with other students in the group.

PEDAGOGICAL IMPLICATIONS

The present study incorporates two types of implications: implications for research or study and implications for practice. The following lines shed light on the study's implications.

Implications for Research

To improve students' collaborative skills, the current study employed Cooperative and Collaborative Learning Theory which is deemed the predominant theoretical framework for collaborative learning. According to the theory, learning is a situation that involves a group of students who attempt to have a shared educational experience. In such environments, students are capable of learning from each other,

using each other's skill resources and sets, and sharing experiences that may benefit the whole group. Cooperative and Collaborative Learning was adopted by the researcher to enhance students' collaborative skills through its five prime principals: interpersonal and collaborative skills, face-to-face interaction, beneficial interdependence, individual responsibility, and group interaction processing. The students were able to receive and provide feedback on peers' writing, make decisions, and respect other students' opinions. The findings of both the semi-structured interviews and students' reflection journals revealed that employing Cooperative and Collaborative Learning Theory effectively contributed to enhancing students' collaborative skills. Hence, the study findings strongly supported the theory.

Implications for Practice

The present study has crucial implications for practice. To improve students' collaborative skills, teachers should encourage students to work in pairs and small groups (Aminloo, 2013; Gillies, 2006; Hanjani & Li, 2014; Popov et al. 2012; Ross, 2008) to carry out the writing activities. This can help the students to implicitly learn the skills required for working collaboratively with other group members (Dowse & van Rensburg, 2015; González et al. 2013; Li & Kim, 2016; Nosratinia & Nikpanjeh, 2015;). Further, working in groups can encourage students to share their experiences, ideas, and understanding of various writing tasks (Chen & Yu, 2019; Fong, 2012; Hurst, Wallace & Nixon, 2013; Saparuddin, Prasetyo & Mahanal, 2018; Yeh, 2014). Teachers should also encourage students to allow others to express their opinions (Dowse & van Rensburg, 2015; González et al. 2013; Nosratinia & Nikpanjeh, 2015). Additionally, students should be encouraged by teachers to listen to other members of the group and appreciate their opinions. Teachers can encourage students to work as a group to divide the learning tasks equally among the group members. This will help students to accomplish the task and present it as a group. Equal division of tasks among group members can promote students' participation and improves groups' productivity (Abdullah, Abu Bakar & Mahbob, 2012; Al-Ghafri, 2018; Qing-he, 2016; Tesfaye & Berhanu, 2015).

RECOMMENDATION FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

Although the present study yielded significant findings to validate the potential advantageous effects of the writing module in enhancing the collaborative skills of students, future studies should recruit a larger number of participants. Furthermore, future similar studies should be reproduced by incorporating culturally and geographically diverse groups. The results would be more reliable and generalizable if participants come from different Omani cities, L1s, ages, proficiency levels, or even races.

CONCLUSION

The present study generated some rudimentary and valuable insights into the contributions of the writing module in improving students' skills. The module significantly sharpened the students' collaborative skills. Overall, the qualitative evidence in the study supported the efficacy of the writing module. Therefore, the researcher believes that it is viable to conclude that developing a writing module for

students can improve their collaborative skills. The syllabus developers need to give recognition of the importance of the writing module. Educational practitioners and academics should investigate further developing writing modules to hone students' skills. However, due to certain limitations, future intensive empirical studies into the realm of developing writing modules to enhance students' collaborative skills need to be conducted for further clarification.

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