

# Interactive methods used in collaborative writing in the online ESL classroom

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# Presentation overview

- Rationale for research
- Theoretical foundations
- Methodology
- Results
- Discussion
- Implications for teaching and further research
- Conclusion
- Questions

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## Rationale for research

- The COVID-19 pandemic accelerated the use of digital technology in second language (L2) classrooms
- ELICOS classrooms have returned to campus, but many providers are exploring effective strategies for classroom interaction – i.e., what worked online?
- Collaborative writing (co-writing), where two or more individuals work on a task together, can facilitate interaction
- Our research aimed to improve understanding of co-writing delivery and practice for ELICOS students and teachers
- We specifically examined co-writing in online learning environments
- We wanted to know two things:
  - a) what interactive methods students use during co-writing activities
  - and**
  - b) the extent to which these improve L2 learning
- Our study (hopefully!) enhances understanding of students' interaction methods in co-writing



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# Theoretical foundations

- Collaboration is commonly used in language education and workplaces
- Piaget (1959) and Vygotsky (1978) explored interactions and scaffolding and highlighted the relationship between collaboration and learning
- Piaget emphasised learners' interactions with peers aids cognitive development
- Vygotsky argued that learners can achieve proficiency beyond their ability with support from teachers, peers, and appropriate scaffolding
- Situated learning involves peripheral participation and building engagement and trust among learners (Lave and Wenger 1991)
- Social participation and knowledge-based social structures, such as communities of practice (Wenger, 1998), foster learner collaboration as members

# Methodology

## Research setting

- The study took place at Swinburne College, affiliated with Swinburne University of Technology
- It included an upper-intermediate English for Academic Purposes (EAP 4B – IELTS 5.5) class, with the goal of enhancing writing opportunities and collaborative skills

## The technology

- Swinburne College uses Canvas as its LMS
- But our department (and this study) opted for Microsoft Teams in online learning environments
- Microsoft Teams provides valuable chat functions, video calls, concurrent file editing, and collaborative tools, supporting language development and research on interactive methods.



## The study

- Study conducted over four weeks during November-December 2021 ELICOS term
- All students studied online and offshore due to COVID-19; written consent obtained from all participants
- Participant information summarised below:

Participant information	
Number of students	15
Age range	19-25
Gender	6 males, 9 females
Countries of origin	Japan, The People's Republic of China, Cambodia, The Republic of China (Taiwan), Vietnam

- The project enabled students to co-write academic tasks, usually done individually
- They formed groups of 2-3, working on weekly co-writing tasks targeting specific academic writing aspects
- The tasks: writing a job application, an introduction, and an effects and solutions essay
- Tasks were recorded via MS Teams breakout rooms, with students receiving thorough scaffolding and instructions
- Other than the job application, the tasks built towards the final writing exam.

# Data analysis

- We analysed and evaluated each group's co-writing tasks to using task-specific rubrics
- We wanted to know if co-writing production compared favourably to individual writing production
- Participants also completed reflections using narrative frames
- This qualitative data helped us understand language and writing skill improvements from the perspectives of students, along with their experiences.



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# Results

## Participation

- We observed various participation methods based on interactional and cognitive theories of second language acquisition (Long, 1983, 1985; Swain, 1985, 1995; Storch, 2013)
- Initial observations identified various interactive methods
- Most became more comfortable and found ways to communicate as tasks progressed
- Less active students faced challenges with technical issues and sometimes retreated
- All tasks were completed sufficiently for evaluation.

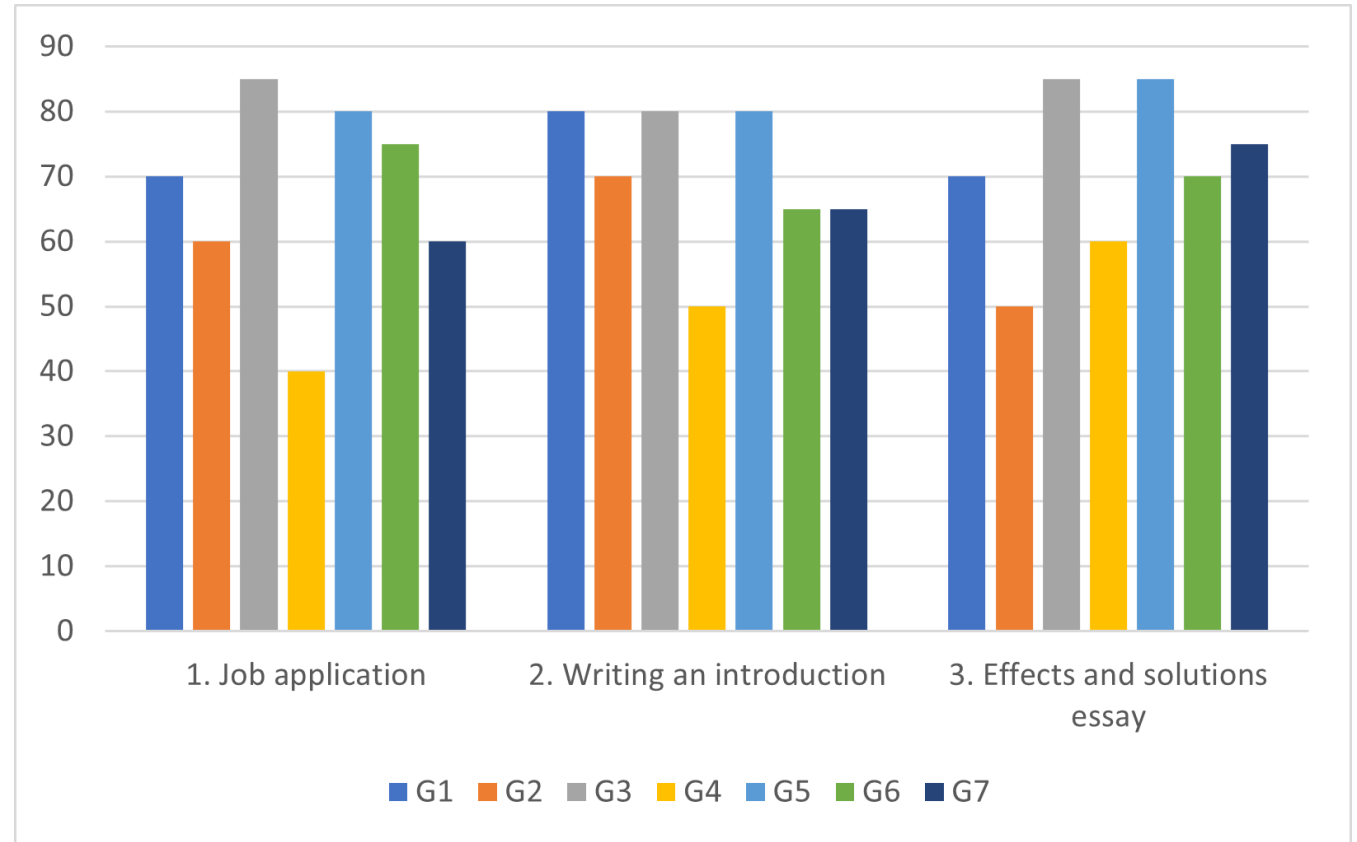
Table 2. Interactive methods used in co-writing checklist: Combined activity and group totals

Method	Task 1 total	Task 2 total	Task 3 total	Combined total
<b>Modes of communication</b>				
Written communication in chat	15	1	45	61
Using L1	29	3	27	59
<b>Content of the communicative event</b>				
Providing input	14	21	73	108
Seeking clarification on task requirements	22	24	37	83
Leadership	22	23	33	78
Discussing structure	2	21	30	53
Making requests	8	7	26	41
Seeking knowledge about topic from partner or group	8	7	26	41
Conversing about topic	8	7	21	36
Language or concept clarification	12	7	17	36
Delegation	9	5	16	30
Assessing/providing feedback on others' work	3	6	20	29
Negotiation	2	1	11	14

## Learning outcomes

- Group members effectively communicated through Microsoft Teams
- Some showed improved word forms, paraphrasing, and writing fluency
- Varied writing abilities were observed, with some students and groups demonstrating stronger skills (see Figure 1)
- The scores for writing task 1 ranged from 40 to 85, with a mean score of 67
- While writing task 2 scores ranged from 50 to 80, with a mean score of 70
- Writing task 3 scores ranged from 50 to 85, with a mean score of 71
- Group 4 showed the strongest improvement in co-writing results over time.

Figure 1. Group co-writing scores by task



# Learner perceptions

## Perceived benefit of practice

•Students' narrative frames revealed that co-writing tasks were challenging but helped them improve communication skills, learn different writing styles, and expand their vocabulary (Excerpt 1):

*(1) I can know how to write differently after three tasks and get many new vocabulary and ideas because of partner. Also, I could communicate and speak English more using my own words. I felt comfortable expressing myself.*

# Learner perceptions

## Perceived benefit of practice

- They found discussions and observing peers' writing styles engaging and beneficial for learning, boosting confidence in speaking and writing (Excerpt 2 and 3):

*(2) The most efficient ways that I was able to collaborate with my partner were to keep talking. We split the work and then combine it later. I noticed that looking at other student writing helped me learn about my own and improve because different structure and vocabulary.*

*(3) The most engaging aspects of the tasks for me is being able to see the sentences written by other people. I always use similar expressions, so it is very interesting to see other people's writings.*

- Overall, students felt co-writing tasks boosted confidence and enhanced writing skills by exposing them to various writing styles and peer feedback (Shehadeh, 2011).

## Learner challenges

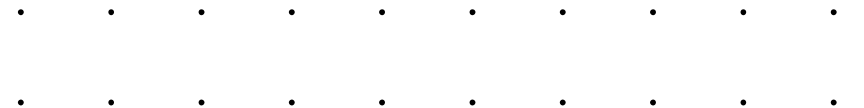
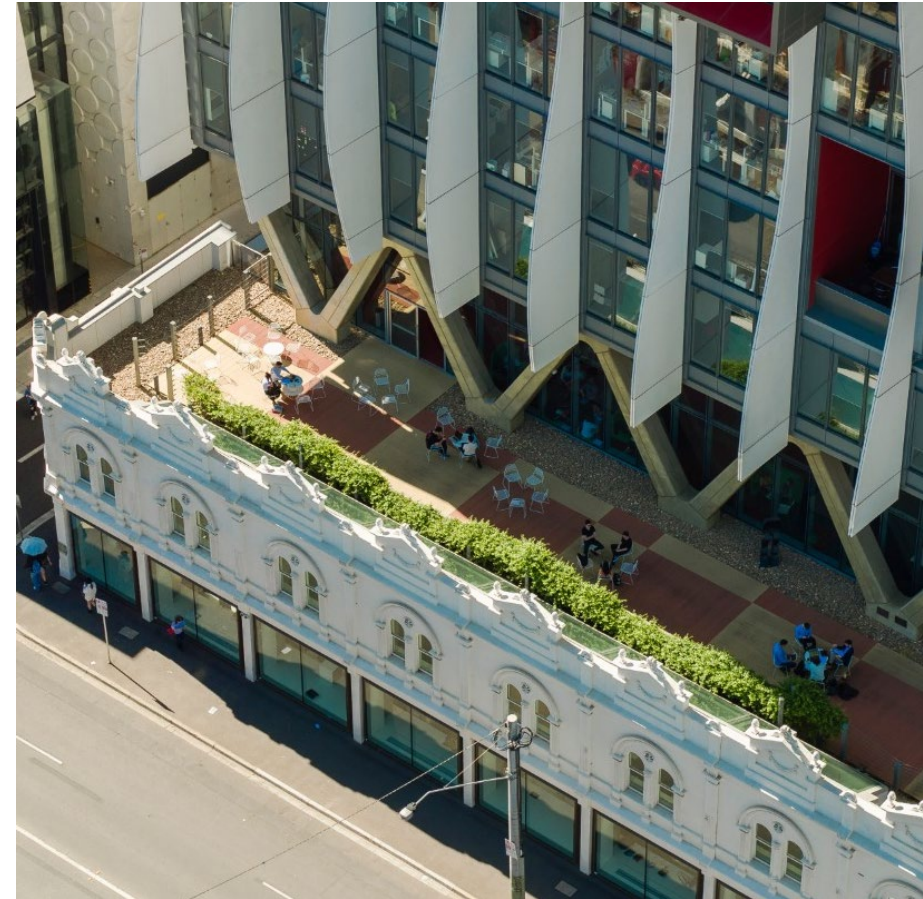
Despite challenges, students found co-writing valuable with practice, leading to improved skills and comfort with group members (Excerpts 4 and 5):

*(4) I struggled with co-writing and had a hard time, but I think once you do it a few times then it gets much easier and is helpful.*

*(5) Co-writing was very difficult. I try my best and learn a lot from my partner.*

Co-writing provided learning opportunities and students perceived it as enhancing their overall learning experience (Excerpt 6):

*(6) In general, I found that co-writing was a place of learning.*



## Discussion

- While students reported benefits from co-writing, the extent of improvement varied
- Some groups did not show significant progress in their writing scores, especially those who were already skilled writers
- Study had small sample size, conducted exclusively online via Microsoft Teams
- Mostly Japanese L1 participants, potentially limiting generalisability
- Limited exploration of same L1 co-learner interactions, potential for future research

## Future directions and conclusion

- Pre-pandemic, co-writing was used in face-to-face contexts
- COVID-19 shifted L2 education, boosting technology use
- Familiarity with technology allows teachers to adapt writing tasks for co-writing with scaffolding
- Translanguaging strategies can aid language learners in co-writing
- Exploring interactions among same-language co-learners enriches collaborative learning
- Online, co-writing can combat isolation, promote communication, and integrate diverse learning methods
- This technology suits face-to-face settings with proper adaptation and scaffolding
- Full-length research report in the upcoming English Australia Journal issue 😊

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**Questions?**

**Thank you 😊**