



THE ASSOCIATION OF TEACHING ENGLISH  
AS A FOREIGN LANGUAGE  
IN INDONESIA

ISBN 978-602-294-066-1

# The<sup>nd</sup> 62 TEFLIN

## International Conference 2015

Denpasar, 14th - 16th September 2015

### PROCEEDINGS

*Teaching and Assessing L2 Learners  
in the 21st Century*



ENGLISH DEPARTMENT  
FACULTY OF LETTERS AND CULTURE  
IN COLLABORATION WITH  
UDAYANA UNIVERSITY POST GRADUATE STUDY PROGRAM

**BOOK 2**



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**ISBN 970-602-294-066-1**

**UDAYANA UNIVERSITY PRESS**

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# THE POWER OF PAIR-WORK IN EFL WRITING

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## **Abstract**

*Writing is believed to be difficult for most students. This is in line with some theories also stating that writing is a very highly complex skill. Many research findings have proven it. In general, the findings state that many college students and university graduates in Indonesia have low writing competency, especially in writing academic texts. In specific, the findings reveal that the students have low motivation to write, poor writing ability, and lack of confidence to begin writing. Pair-work is one of alternatives to be used in order to improve students' writing performance. Many researchers have investigated the use of pair-work in EFL writing and stated some positive findings on using pair work in EFL writing. First, , collaborative (pair work) writing has an overall significant effect on students' L2 writing. Then, pairs produce shorter and better texts that have greater grammatical accuracy. Next, students working in pairs had better writing accuracy than those working individually. The following is practicing in pairs really improves the overall quality of the learners' writing productions. At last, collaborative work (pair work) could improve students' grammatical accuracy in their upcoming writings.*

**Keywords:** *pair work, power of pair work, and EFL writing*

## **1 INTRODUCTION**

Writing skill is considered to play a role in the learner's academic achievement. Graham and Perin (in Wulyani, 2009) state that writing skill is a predictor of academic success and a basic requirement for participating in civic life and the global economy. It means that if someone has a good writing skill, it can be predicted that s/he will have a good academic achievement. Related to learning to write, Harmer (1998) says that writing should be taught for several reasons. First, writing is useful for reinforcement. Most students acquire a language from seeing the language written down. Even, the students often find it useful to write sentences using new language shortly after they have studied it. Second, writing is also useful for language development. The actual process of writing helps the students to learn as they go along. The mental activity they have to go through in order to construct proper written text is all part of the ongoing learning experience. Third, it is a learning style. Writing can be a quiet reflective activity. Some language learners will be able to master a language if they experiences using the language, like writing activity. At last, writing is a skill. The students need to know how to write letter, how to reply to advertisement, etc. In addition, they also should know some of writing



convention (punctuation, paragraph construction, etc). It is considered to play a role to someone's academic achievement.

Many studies were conducted by researchers related to students' writing ability. Some of them are Attamim (2007) who studied the implementation of cooperative learning strategy to improve college students' proficiency in writing paragraph, Ulfiati (2010) who reported a study about cohesive devices in papers written by college students of English Department, and Isnawati (2010) who conducted the improvement the English students' writing skill using Task-based language teaching. In their research report, they stated the phenomenon about students' writing.

They reported that the students had problems related to writing. In general, the students had low motivation, poor writing ability, and lack of confidence. Referring to low motivation, the students did not do the exercises seriously and did not bring dictionary into classroom to help them in writing. Their poor writing ability was reflected in the facts that they often did not know what to write, how to organize ideas well, could not explore ideas, and did many mistakes related to grammar (ungrammatical sentences and inappropriate transitional signal) and vocabulary (wrong words choice). If they could complete the writing task, the result was far from what was expected. They were also not confident with what they wrote. They tend to rewrite what they had written. For them, what they had written was not good. It seems that this condition is line with Nunan's idea (1999). He states that writing is something native speakers never master. Furthermore, he says that for second language learners, the challenges are more enormous, particularly for those who go on to university and study a language that is not their own. Richard and Renandya (2002) also say that the skills involved in writing are highly complex. It consist of the higher level skills of planning and organizing ideas as well as the lower level skill of spelling, punctuation, word choice, etc.

Furthermore, they said that the problems stated above were caused by many factors. Some of them are that teacher dominated the teaching-learning process, the teacher seldom gave writing practice and rarely acted as facilitator, guide, and motivator, and writing activities in the classroom were boring.

Ahmed (2010), Barrett and Chen (2011), Zakaria and Mogaddam (2013), Hammad (2014), Al Seyabi and Tuzlukova (2014), and Javid and Umer (2014) also invented what was found by the previous researchers above. In general, their findings revealed that students had writing problems in the aspects of article, grammar, vocabulary, cohesion and coherent, content, and organisation.

Paying an attention to phenomenon above, there should be a concrete action conducted to improve such a condition in order that what the students writing ability is expected to be can come true. An alternative action that can be done is teaching writing using pair work technique.

## 2. MERITS OF PAIR WORK IN EFL WRITING

Pair work also has been attracting the attention of many researchers. Pair-work activity can be employed following procedures as suggested by Alwasilah and Alwasilah (2005:26-27), Mulligan and Garofalo (201:6) and Wigglesworth and Storch (2009). First, students are asked to choose partners to work in pairs. Then, the students are asked to work in pair to plan what topic to write. After choosing a topic, they are asked to write an outline about the topic chosen. Next, they write an essay in pairs based on the outline. Finally, they should reread what they have written to make sure that the essay is correct.

Although the use of pair work in classroom is relatively limited (Storch, 2011), this strategy is believed to have beneficial points. Storch (2007:143) states that pair-work



has strong pedagogical and theoretical support. From pedagogical aspect, Biria and Jafari (2013:166) state that pair-work offers language learners with more chances to use the language. From theoretical point, this strategy is in line with two major theories of language learning: the psycholinguistic theory of interaction and sociocultural theory of mind. Both theories emphasize the importance of interaction for learning. Seen from the sociocultural theory of mind, the role of interaction and peer collaboration is considered important in L2 development (Dobao, 2012:41). In addition, Xiao (2008:106) also states that paired-peer review give students benefits in terms of EFL writing proficiency, transferrable skills, and self-efficacy. Beside that, Mulligan and Garofalo (201:9) emphasize that collaborative writing (pair-work) is a non-threatening approach for students that results in purposeful usage of the target language across skills and demonstrable improvements in writing. In short, pair-work is not only an activity to employ, it also gives advantages to students writing performance.

Studies on pair-work in EFL writing still seems to be continued in the future because what previous researchers found in the past is still inconclusive. In general, their finding is that pair work has an overall significant effect on students' L2 writing. However, what was found in the past still has gaps that can be investigated in the future by next researchers.

Many researchers found that pair work contributed to students' writing performance. In a study, Storch (1999:363) stated that collaboration had a positive effect on overall grammatical accuracy. In another study, Storch (2005:168) found a comparison of the products (completed texts) of pairs and individuals. The finding showed that pairs produced shorter and better texts that had greater grammatical accuracy and linguistic complexity, and are more succinct. They seem to fulfill the task more competently. In a collaborative study, Wigglesworth and Storch (2009:445) found that collaboration impacted positively on accuracy although it does not affect fluency and complexity.

Other than Storch, four other researchers also find the effect of pair work toward students' writing performance. First, Shehadeh (2011:286) found that collaborative writing had an overall significant effect on students' L2 writing. However, this effect varied from one writing skill area to another. Specifically, the effect was significant for content, organization, and vocabulary, but not for grammar or mechanics. Globally, her findings are the same as Storch's. However, she also found a different result from Storch (2005). Her finding said that collaborative writing did not have a significant effect on grammar. Meanwhile, Storch found that pairs produced shorter and better texts that had greater grammatical accuracy.

The second researcher who found the effect of pair work toward students' writing performance is Jafari and Ansari (2012: 128). They found that students working in pairs had better writing accuracy than those working individually. What Jafari and Ansari found indirectly reveals that pair work contributes to the improvement of students writing performance.

The third researcher who investigated the effect of pair work toward students' writing performance is Biria and Jafari (2013:164). They found that practicing in pairs really improved the overall quality of the learners' writing productions even though the fluency of written texts did not change significantly.

Four, Meihami, Meihami, and Varmaghani (2013:47) found that collaborative work (pair work) could improve students' grammatical accuracy in their upcoming writings. It means that correcting each other and sharing ideas one another in pairs will guide students to better grammatical accuracy in their writings.



Based on research finding by Storch (2005 and 2009), Jafari and Ansari (2012), Biria and Jafari (2013) and, it can be concluded that pair work can develop students' writing performance. Specifically, it helps students to produce better written text viewed from content, organization, vocabulary, and grammatical accuracy.

In addition to research finding on the effect of pair work toward students writing performance, there are several benefits of employing pair work in EFL writing. A number of researchers have found them in some terms.

Pair work, in fact, contributes to students' idea development. In a study, Storch (2005:153) found that collaboration afforded students the opportunity to pool ideas and provide each other with feedback. This finding can be a solution and useful for EFL learners studying writing skill. Writing requires students to develop ideas to be a paragraph and an essay. Students often have problem fulfilling this requirement if they should write individually.

Pair work in EFL writing also can make students active. In another study, Storch (2007:143) finds that although there are no significant differences between the accuracy of tasks completed individually and those completed in pairs, most pairs engage actively in discussing language. They tend to reach correct resolutions. Making students active is sometimes hard to do. However, pair work can be one alternative solution to make it come true.

The next power of employing pair work in EFL writing is on language improvement. Dobao (2012:40) states that writing tasks completed in pairs offer learners an opportunity to collaborate in the solution of their language-related problems, co-construct new language knowledge, and produce linguistically more accurate written texts.

Another advantage of employing pair work is that it can make students enjoy in learning. Shehadeh (2011:286) found that most students in the pair work setting have the enjoyable experience. This condition plays an important role in EFL class, especially in EFL writing. If students feel enjoyable in a class, they will do their best in teaching-learning process.

Seeing what previous researchers have found on writing in pairs, it can be summarized that writing in pairs is beneficial in several aspects. It can be drawn in the following table.

*Table 1.1: merits of pair writing in EFL Writing*

Aspects	Treatments	Pairs
Grammatical accuracy		+
Better text and writing accuracy		+
Idea development		+
Vocabulary		+
Organisation		+
Language improvement		+

### 3 CONCLUSION

Paying attention to research findings on the effect of employing pair work in EFL writing toward students' writing performance and its power in several aspects, writing in pairs is apparently beneficial and very useful for students. Pair work in EFL writing enables

students to produce good quality written texts. This should be a consideration for writing teachers.

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