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PROCEEDINGS

“Creativity and Innovation in
Language Materials Development and
Language Teaching Methodology
in Asia and Beyond”

BOOK 2

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3	Christine C.M. Goh, PhD	Nanyang Technological University, Singapore)
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3.	Ted O'Neill	JALT
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MERITS OF EMPLOYING PAIR WORK STRATEGY IN EFL CLASSROOMS

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ABSTRACT

EFL instruction strategy has been revised from time to time in order that EFL learners can have better EFL competence. One of strategies offered is pair work strategy in EFL classrooms. This strategy has been successfully attracting EFL researchers' attention. They conducted studies on the strategy and found several advantages of employing pair work in EFL classrooms. First, learners who completed the task in pairs outperformed those who attempted it individually. Second, learners working in pairs had more opportunities to communicate in the target language than in teacher-fronted classrooms. Three, students working in pair can assist each other, sharing ideas to complete the task. Next, pair work had positive contributions to learners' motivation. Then, learners' anxiety decreases and their language proficiency improves when they work in pairs. The following is pair work enhance learner self-esteem to improve their communication skill. At last, pair-work helps students build positive interpersonal relationships and create a high level of academic solidarity and confidence. Based on the findings above, EFL teachers are suggested to employ pair work strategy in EFL classrooms to get students's better competence.

Key words: *merit, pair work strategy, EFL classrooms*

INTRODUCTION

Teaching writing as foreign language does not mean teaching how to transfer sentences in students' mother tongue into English sentences. An English teacher should consider many things in teaching writing as foreign language. Related to this, Sokolik (2003) and Kroll (2001), who are interested in English Language Teaching propose several ideas related teaching writing.

Sokolik (2003) proposes some principles for teaching writing. First, students' reasons for writing should be understood. The big dissatisfaction with writing instruction comes when teacher's goals do not match the students' goals or the goals of the school. It is important to understand the students' goals or the goals of the school and to convey goals that are meaningful to students. Second, the teacher should provide many opportunities for students to write. Writing skill requires a lot exercises because it has many aspects to fulfill (grammar, vocabulary, discourse features). It is impossible to master it in short time and with a little exercise. Writing in mother tongue is very difficult, let alone in foreign language. The practice given to the students should provide be presented in different types of writing. Third, the teacher should make feedback helpful and meaningful. If a teacher wants to write comments on student's works, he has to be sure that the students the vocabulary or symbol used. He can take time to discuss them in class. Fourth, the teacher should clarify for himself and for students how the writing task will be evaluated. To avoid students' misunderstanding toward teacher's evaluation, the teacher should develop a rubric, a kind of scoring grid that elaborates the elements of writing that are to be evaluated. This rubric should outline the weight of grammar and mechanics in relationship to content and ideas as well as other features of writing that are considered to be important.

Kroll (2001) sates that there are some point to be considered for teaching EFL writing course. The first is syllabus design. A syllabus should be designed to take into account

curricular goals and particular students and teacher will face. The syllabus further reflects the philosophy of teaching writing that a teacher has adopted for particular course in a particular institution. In general, the teacher uses syllabus to announce to students what he or she sees as important as the course and what is important to good writing.

Second, teacher should have techniques to help writers get started. Sometimes, it is hard to write something and it requires stimulus from outside in order to be able to write. To do this, teacher can do several activities; a) brainstorming. This is a group exercise in which all students in the class are encouraged to participate about particular subject. This generates far more material than any one student is likely to think of on his or her own; b) listing. It is a quiet and individual activity. In this step, students are encouraged to think as many ideas as possible of main ideas about topic to be discussed; c) clustering, this activity is done by jotting down all of free-association triggered by subject matters; d) free-writing, for EFL learners, this technique often works best if the teacher provides an opening clause or sentence for the students to start with to structure the free writing.

Third, there should be assignment design. In designing assignment, a teacher should pay attention to some points; a) a writing assignment should be presented with its context clearly stated such that the student understands the reasons for the assignment; b) the content of the task/topic should be accessible to the writers and allow for multiple approaches; c) the language of the task and the instruction it is embedded should be clear, comprehensible, and transparent; d) the task should be focused enough to allow for completion in the time or length constraints given; e) the rhetorical specifications should provide a clear direction of likely shape and format of the finished assignment, including appropriate references to an anticipated audience; f) the evaluation criteria should be identified so that students will know in advance how their output will be judged. At last, there should be teacher's and peers responses to writing.

Talking about students' writing ability, many studies were conducted by researchers on this aspect. Some of them are Attamim (2007), Ulfiati (2010), and Isnawati (2010). They reported that the students, in general, had problems in writing. 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. Related to this, Spelkova and Hurst in a study (...) also say that the most problematic problems in writing were inappropriate grammar and structures and Strong influence of mother tongue. Talking about self-confidence, they were also not confident with what they wrote. They tend to rewrite or change what they had written. For them, what they had written was not good.

Actually, writing is considered to be relatively difficult by some students for, at least, two reasons. First, writing is really difficult. Related to this, Nunan (1999) states that writing is something native speakers never master. It means that English native speakers themselves cannot master writing skill, let alone foreign language learners. 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. Second, Richard and Renandya (2002) also say that the skills involved in writing, particularly in English, 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. From what Nunan and Richard and Renandya said above, it can be seen that writing skill, particularly in English will be a challenging for language learners.

Related to the study on the writing performance of students working individually as employed commonly in classroom, Kasman (2004) and Irawati (2008) found that many college students and university graduates in Indonesia had low writing competency, especially in writing academic texts.

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

organisation. The research findings indirectly can lead to a conclusion that writing individually is a hard task to complete.

Paying attention to what was found by previous researchers above, it seems that the findings can be evidences to support Cahyono and Widiati's statement (2011) saying that writing is often believed to be the most complex one compared to the three other skills (listening, speaking, and reading). The findings is also related to Tsai and Lin's idea (2012) saying that writing is considered a complicated and multifaceted task. In addition, the findings also support opinion by Richard and Renandya (2002) that the skills involved in writing are highly complex. It consists of the higher level skills of planning and organizing ideas as well as the lower level skill of spelling, punctuation, and word choice.

PAIR WORK IN EFL WRITING

Pair work is one of strategies in language learning in which students work in pairs to complete language task. This atrategy also can be employed in EFL writing classroom. Fauziah and Latief (2015:180) propose activities of pair work in EFL writing. It can be seen below table

Table 1: The Activities of Pair Work in EFL Writing

Writing Stage	Students Activities
Planning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The pairs discuss the given topic. • The pairs share ideas and brainstorm the target topic and organize the information together. • The pairs formulate a draft thesis or argument.
Drafting/writing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Separately (each student have his/her own portion of writing to do) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -After planning and making an outline, the students divide the writing task equally. For instance they want to compose a four-paragraph essay, then every student have to write two paragraphs. -The researcher explaine to the students that brainstorming the main points of their paper as a group was helpful, even if separate parts of the writing are assigned to individuals. They have to be sure that everyone agrees on the central ideas. -While writing, the student may ask his/ her friend if they find any difficulties • Together (the group actually compose text collaboratively) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -The pairs discuss and decide where their individual writing fit into the whole document. -The pairs have to make sure that the finished document have one cohesive voice. -The pairs might get all of the ideas down on paper in a rough form before discussing exact phrasing.
Revising, editing, and proofreading	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Although the pairs drafted parts of the document separately, they had to merge their ideas together into a single document first, then focus on meshing the styles. The first concern was to create a coherent product with a logical flow of ideas. Then the stylistic differences of the individual portions had to be smoothed over. • Revising: The pairs revised the ideas and structure of the paper before worrying about smaller, sentence-level errors (like problems with punctuation, grammar, or word choice). Is the argument clear? Is the evidence presented in a logical order? Do the transitions connect the ideas effectively? • Editing and proofreading: Checking for typos, spelling errors,

	punctuation problems, formatting issues, and grammatical mistakes.
Publishing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • After they revised and checked all components as mentioned in the previous step, then they were ready to publish their draft. • For the first draft, the student A wrote the final draft in the instrumentation form. • Work on the second draft, student A and B switched role for this part. That was, this time student B had to write the final draft. For the next writing assignment, if a student was already assigned the role of A, they then assumed the role of B and vice versa, to ensure fairness.

Many researchers also pay attention to investigate pair work. Although the use of pair work in classroom is relatively limited (Storch, 2011), this strategy is believed to have beneficial points. Many researchers found that pair work contributed to students' writing performance. They are Sorch (1999, 2005, and 2007), Wigglesworth and Storch (2009), Shehadeh (2011), Jafari and Ansari (2012), Chen (2012), Biria and Jafari (2013), Meihami, Meihami, and Varmaghani (2013), and Dobao (2012). Their findings, in general, are as follows.

First, collaboration had a positive effect on overall grammatical accuracy. It means that pairs produced shorter and better texts that had greater grammatical accuracy and linguistic complexity, and are more succinct. Second, Beside Storch, four other researchers also found the effect of pair work toward students' writing performance. 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. Third, students working in pairs had better writing accuracy than those working individually. Fourth, most students perceived their collaborative writing experiences quite positively. Students' perceived benefits of collaborative writing were numerous, ranging from opportunities to exchange ideas to development of communication. Fifth, practicing in pairs really improved the overall quality of the learners' writing productions even though the fluency of written texts did not change significantly. Sixth, collaborative work (pair work) could improve students' grammatical accuracy in their upcoming writings. Seventh, collaboration afforded students the opportunity to pool ideas and provide each other with feedback. Eighth, most pairs engage actively in discussing language. They tend to reach correct resolutions. Ninth, 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. Tenth, most students in the pair work setting have the enjoyable experience.

CONCLUSION

EFL students are required to have good EFL writing ability and they should be facilitated to reach the target. Teacher can do many things in classroom to facilitate the students. One of them is employing pair work in the classroom. Many researchers have found that this strategy is really beneficial to help students to have good EFL writing ability.

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