Synchronous Web-Based Collaborative Writing: Attitudes of Learners toward Working in Pairs and Small Groups

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Abstract

This study explored learners' attitudes toward collaborative writing in pairs and small groups (fours and sixes) in a synchronous web-based environment. Sophomore pre-service teachers in one intact class in the Philippines (n=31) completed the same collaborative writing tasks using Google Docs. In three separate out-of-class sessions, they first worked in pairs, and then they were assigned to either groups of four or groups of six in the succeeding two sessions. After completing the tasks, they were asked to complete a post-task questionnaire. The learners had an overall positive attitude toward peer collaborative writing in a web-based synchronous environment as it helps them to develop the content better, find appropriate vocabulary, and improve the grammatical and mechanical accuracy of the texts they produced. Students highly appreciated working in pairs and groups of four. In pairs, they felt that it is easier to manage text-chat deliberation, resolve concerns, and attend to each other's suggestions. In groups of four, they acknowledged the increase of peer resources for knowledge sharing and in ensuring the accuracy of their language use. Hence, the majority complained that a group of six is not that conducive in a real-time text-chat environment. When asked about their preference, most students would prefer to work in a similar task and environment in pairs. These findings on learners' attitudes toward collaborative writing concur with the previous literature in face-to-face educational settings and open new insights on synchronous web-based collaborative writing via text-chat.

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1.   INTRODUCTION

The use of peer collaborative writing in second/foreign language classrooms has gained increasing attention over the last three decades with the sociocultural turn in education (Li & Zhu, 2017; Storch, 2013) which was translated into communicative language teaching approaches in second or foreign language classrooms (Oxford, 2011). From teacher-fronted classrooms, the pedagogical movement reversed the emphasis from teachers' talk to learners' talk in a bid to promote active learning. In turn, this philosophical shift leads to the popularity of pair and small group activities in communicative language classrooms. Additionally, the ubiquity and accessibility of technological tools with features supportive of collaborative writing tasks (e.g., Google Docs, Wikis) led to their increased popularity in classrooms, especially at the university level (Storch, 2013).

Research on task-based language learning suggests that collaborative writing could improve the quality of vocabulary, content, and organization of ideas in the text produced by the learners (Rahayu, 2020; Shehadeh, 2011; Ubaldo, 2020). Collaboratively written texts are also more grammatically accurate and syntactically complex (Storch, 2005; Ubaldo & Adams, 2020) when compared to those independently written. More so, collaborative writing tasks create affordances for learners to improve their linguistic knowledge as they scaffold one another and pool their linguistic resources together while completing the tasks (Donato, 1994; Storch, 2008; Swain & Lapkin, 2002).

Previous research shows that students have generally positive attitudes toward collaborative writing. Students who worked in pair collaborative writing (e.g., Shehadeh, 2011; Storch, 2005) in a face-to-face context seem to acknowledge the benefits of collaborative writing tasks mentioned earlier compared to completing the same task individually. In other studies, where participants completed the task in either pair or small group, both groups of students demonstrated a positive attitude toward collaborative writing and tended to prefer the joint writing condition which they experienced (e.g., Dobao & Blum, 2013). Dobao and Blum (2013) reported that students appreciated the opportunity for active participation in pair work and the opportunities for more knowledge and ideas in small groups. Hence, they call for the need to look into "how the same student reacts to carrying the same writing task in pairs and in small groups" (p. 375) in various writing tasks to obtain more generalizable findings.

Considering the gap identified in the literature, this study is designed to obtain the reactions from students who repeatedly completed the same writing task (albeit with different stimuli) in pairs, groups of four, and groups of six in a synchronous web-based environment. The choice of an online setup reflects the current demand for students to develop their technological literacy as well as the need to look for different strategies for online remote teaching which could be beneficial in times of a pandemic and other threats to the conventional face-to-face modality of education. Understanding the learners' attitude toward collaborative writing would enable the teachers to design collaborative writing tasks in a way that fully maximizes its

purported benefits in text quality and potential L2 development. Taken together, this study will help classroom teachers with their decision on forming peer groups for collaborative writing tasks in an online environment. This study is guided by the following research question: What is the learners' attitude when completing synchronous web-based collaborative writing in pairs and small groups?

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 L2 Collaborative Writing Tasks and Potential L2 Learning

Collaborative writing in its broadest sense entails various ways of completing a joint writing project (see Noël & Robert, 2004). From a second language acquisition (SLA) viewpoint, however, what could be potentially beneficial for L2 development is the collaborative writing task that requires learners to work together throughout the entire writing process, share and negotiate in the decision-making process, and assume responsibility for the single text produced (Storch, 2013). Some of these tasks in the previous research include jigsaw (Dobao, 2012), dictogloss (Storch & Wigglesworth 2007), data commentary (Storch, 2005), and composition tasks (Storch, 2001).

The joint responsibility for the creation of text creates exigency for students to agree on what to say and how to say it in the text, and thus pushes them to talk about the target language, deliberate their language use, and collaborate to find solutions to their emerging language-related problems (Storch, 2013). Swain (2000) described this learners' engagement in a joint problem-solving activity as collaborative dialogue. Collaborative dialogue is a form of languaging which is the "process of making meaning and shaping knowledge and experience through language" (Swain, 2006, p. 98). In SLA, this translates into using language as a mediating tool to learn the target language (Manchon, 2011). Through collaborative dialogue, learners engage in problem-solving and knowledge-building activities where they use language as a cognitive tool. In response to a peer corrective feedback or a question, students formulate and test their language hypothesis. They self-correct or correct their peers. Students can also provide mutual scaffolding that leads to either consolidation of previous knowledge or co-construction of a new one by pooling their individual resources together (Donato, 1994; Ohta, 2000). The new knowledge, a product of collective cognition (Stahl, 2006), becomes a new tool at the disposal of the members for further or later use at the individual level (Storch, 2013). From a sociocultural perspective, this process is referred to as internalization (Vygotsky, 1978).

Collaborative dialogue about language problems is operationalized in L2 peer interaction literature as language-related episodes (LRE). The LRE is "any part of the dialog where the students talk about the language they are producing, question their language use, or correct themselves or others" (Swain & Lapkin, 1998, p. 326). Previous research which used collaborative writing tasks such as jigsaw, dictogloss, data commentary, and short composition generate LREs in the learners' talk and provide evidence that learners develop their knowledge of grammar, vocabulary, mechanics, and stylistics based on results of a tailored post-test based on the learners generated LREs (Adams, 2007; Dobao, 2014a). Taken together, these findings suggest that the LREs in learners' collaborative talk as they complete collaborative writing tasks facilitate L2 development.

2.2   Students' Attitude towards Collaborative Writing

Storch (2005) is one of the earliest researchers who looked into the learners' attitude towards collaborative writing. She assigned two of her adult ESL classes at an Australian university to write a commentary based on a set of visual data. Students were given the choice to complete the task alone or in pairs. A number of 18 students opted to write in pairs, while five chose to complete the task independently. Based on a post-task interview, 16 out of 18 students in pair work reported having benefitted from working with a peer. These students spoke highly of their writing experience in pairs and mentioned that it offered them opportunities to compare their ideas and learn different ways of expressing the same ideas. Additionally, the students mentioned that pair writing helped them improve their grammatical accuracy and learn more vocabulary. In terms of the text produced, those written by pairs were shorter but were more grammatically accurate than those written independently. Despite positive views about pair work, some students had reservations about collaborative writing because of a lack of confidence in their L2 skills or concern about making criticisms of their peer's work. Shehadeh's (2011) findings from his own class corroborated with Storch's (2005). After a 16-week semester, these students reported that pair writing "enabled them to generate ideas, pool ideas together, discuss and plan, generate their text collaboratively, provide each other with immediate feedback, and put their text in better shape" (Shehadeh, 2011, p. 296). The results were encouraging as these students never had such activities in their previous classes in the United Arab Emirates. In an online context, students have also reported having enjoyed their pair writing experiences and that they felt empowered (Zeng & Takatsuka, 2009).

In another study, Dobao and Blum (2013) asked students enrolled in an intermediate Spanish as a foreign language class in a US university from different classes to write a story based on randomly arranged photos (jigsaw task). In two classes, students completed the task individually. In other classes, students were divided into those who completed the task in pairs and groups of four. All of the 55 participating students received the same set of pre-task and post-task questionnaires designed to elicit their views about collaborative writing. The majority of the students in collaborative writing conditions reported a very positive attitude toward collaborative writing. All but one learner who worked in pairs considered that writing with a peer was helpful for L2 learning as it provided them with more opportunities for active engagement and use of the target language. The learner who did not find collaborative writing helpful for L2 learning argued that pair work might not be conducive if one happens to be paired with an ill-prepared peer to the task, something that he believes would be unlikely to happen in small groups. On the other hand, all but two of those who worked in four-member groups believed that small group activity is beneficial for L2 development. The students reported that small groups offer a convivial atmosphere for learning, an increased pool of resources, and more opportunities to get and receive feedback. When Dobao and Blum (2013) asked the students about their preference for different writing conditions (i.e., solitary, pair, small group), 21 out of 28 students in dyads preferred to work in pairs, while 20 out of 27 students in the small group opted for small group work prompting the researchers to conclude that the views of the students were "directly influenced by their previous engagement with the task" (p. 371). Those students who completed the writing task in pairs would prefer to complete the same task in pairs citing the opportunity for active

participation. Meanwhile, those who worked in fours would intend to work in fours due to affordances of increased ideas and knowledge that can be shared with the members.

Taken together, the previous research suggests that students had generally positive attitudes about their actual experiences in completing collaborative writing tasks. These students appeared to have recognized the benefits of collaborative writing with a peer not only in terms of content and organization but also in improving the grammatical accuracy and word choice of their texts. While some previous research asked about the students' attitudes toward collaborative writing completed in pairs and groups of four, the students worked only in either one of the writing conditions, and thus researchers call for the need to study learners' attitudes after completing collaborative writing task in pairs and small groups.

In the present study, I investigated the learners' attitude toward collaborative writing in pairs, groups of four, and groups of six in the context of synchronous web-based collaborative writing tasks where students experienced all the writing conditions. First, I looked into the learners' evaluations of their experiences in completing the task with different numbers of peer collaborators. I examined the reported advantages and disadvantages of each collaborative writing setup which correspond to their numerical rating. Second, I analyzed their preference for the number of peer collaborators when completing a future similar task. I examined not only their preference for the number of collaborators but also whether they would want to complete the task independently, and their perceived benefits of this choice on their written texts, and the efficiency of facilitating the text-chat conversation.

3. METHODS

3.1 Participants

The study was conducted in a second language learning setting. All participants were enrolled in one intact class in a public university in the Philippines and were taking the same set of courses for sophomore pre-service teachers during the data collection. Forty-two learners consented to participate in the project, but only 31 were able to complete the three study sessions which were all conducted outside their regular class time. Eight students missed one of the sessions while three did not show up at all.

The participants completed the same writing task (see Appendix A for task instructions) as well as the same pre-task and post-task activities. The mixed-gender participants were between 18-20 years old, and a majority of them speak Tagalog (Filipino) as their first language (L1). The learners had an intermediate level of English proficiency based on their self-assessment using the CEFR (Common European Framework of Reference)-scale.

3.2 Collaborative Writing Task

For the purposes of this study, the writing task was based on a visual prompt. The students were asked to retell what they have watched in the assigned three short

TV advertisements. The advertisements were all under 3.5 minutes and did not contain any dialogues. Although produced for different audiences/countries, all the advertisements featured universal themes of love and kindness. The URLs of these advertisements are provided below:

- Unsung Hero (Thailand)
  URL: http://y2u.be/uaWA2GbcnJU
- Eden Christmas #DamangDama (Philippines)
  URL: http://y2u.be/VIOus0uvLBs
- Love Has No Labels (USA)
  URL: https://bit.ly/3pk6CZL

Before engaging in the task, the students participated in a task practice session in the platform used in the study (i.e., Google Docs). During the first study session, the learners were assigned to work in pairs. In the second and third sessions, they were assigned to work in either groups of four or groups of six. Those who worked in groups of four in the second session were reassigned to work in groups of six in the last session while those who worked in groups of six in the second session had to work in groups of four in the last one. They were given 45 minutes to complete each writing task.

3.3 Questionnaire

A written questionnaire, composed mostly of open-ended questions, was designed to elicit students' experiences in synchronous web-based collaborative writing (see Appendix B). The first two questions focused on the ease and efficiency of using Google Docs for a joint writing activity including potential technical problems that they experienced which aims to determine the suitability of this platform in the study context.

The next three questions asked them to evaluate their experiences in completing the collaborative writing task in pairs, groups of four, and groups of six. They were asked to provide a numerical rating (1-10, 10 being the highest) for each writing condition and explained it afterward. In addition, they were requested to indicate their preference between writing in pairs, groups of four, or groups of six. The format of the questionnaire, distributed via Google Forms, ensured the anonymity of the learners' responses which was expectedly encouraging them to express their views without hesitation.

3.4 Procedure

This study is part of a bigger project about real-time collaborative writing in a web-based platform using text-chat. Due to bandwidth constraints and unavailability of sufficient computer units in the university's technology facilities to accommodate the learner participants, the students' tasks were completed outside class time on four different days at a commercial internet cafe, rented solely for the purposes of the study. The procedure involved four sessions. Prior to the study sessions, the learners were asked to accomplish consent forms and to conduct a self-assessment of their English language proficiency using the CEFR tool. The preliminary session involved four parts: (1) completion of a background questionnaire, (2) training on the use of Google Docs for a joint writing task including its text-chat feature, (3) pre-task modeling where the learners watched a screencast where a group of learners carrying out a real-

time collaborative writing task in the same platform and collaborating to resolve linguistic problems they encountered, and (4) task practice session. The first session involved the learners collaborating in dyads. In the second session, half of the learners were assigned to work in groups of four, while the remaining half were instructed to work in groups of six. In the third and final leg of the study trial, those who worked in groups of four in the previous session were switched to work in groups of six. In the same manner, those who earlier collaborated in groups of six were redistributed to work in groups of four.

In all the sessions, the learners were shown the visual prompt (i.e., TV advertisements) twice. They were further instructed that the first one was meant to familiarize them with the prompt and that they should not do anything but watched, while the second run allowed them to jot down notes to be used for the writing task. All text-chat interactions and composing activities were screens recorded using the free version of Flashback Express. Regardless of the number of collaborators, the learners were asked to nominate a scribe who was in charge of composing the group's draft while the rest of the group members participated via Google Docs' text-chat function (located on the right side of the composing screen). This strategy prevented the students from (i) simultaneously composing their respective versions and choosing what the best one was, and (ii) dividing the paragraphs between the members as shown in the pilot study. Rather, the design aimed to foster collaborative dialogue and consultation among the members.

The class had been in the same section since entering the university three semesters back and had known each other well. The learners were randomly assigned to their respective groups in the writing tasks to ensure that they would be able to work in different group sizes and to ensure efficient assignment of computer units at the study site.

The written questionnaire was administered immediately after the fourth session. The questionnaire was presented in both English and Filipino, the learners' L1, and learners were given an opportunity to express themselves in a language they were most comfortable with (including mixed-language codes) to accurately describe their experiences. It was distributed using an anonymous Qualtrics link.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

4.1 Students' Attitude toward Using Google Docs for Synchronous Web-Based Collaborative Writing

The first phase of the analysis involved the examination of the students' overall attitude in using Google Docs for collaborative writing tasks based on students' responses to the first two questions. Aside from those who completed the three study sessions, responses from other students who partially completed the sessions were also considered in this section of the analysis. Compared to other collaboration tools available on the market, Google Docs features a shared writing screen and a built-in text-chat which allow simultaneous access of the collaborators to the document and instant text-chat messaging.

On a difficulty scale of 1-10 (10 being the most difficult), the students' rating had a mean score of 3.25 suggesting that Google Docs is relatively easy to use for a

web-based writing collaboration. One student even described Google Docs as "very user-friendly". Four students made a direct comparison of the similar interface and screen layout between Google Docs and Microsoft Word. In the excerpt below, a student explained that Google Docs is easy to learn as it shares a common interface with the popular word processor. Consequently, there is a minimal adjustment on the part of the student in using Google Docs due to this familiarity.

Excerpt 1: **Similarity of Google Docs and Microsoft Word**

> Google [D]ocs is not a very hard app to master, [its] interface is similar to that of Microsoft Word, that being said, I did not need to adjust that much while using the app.

Aside from the similarity in the writing interface, the students also verbalized the synchronicity features of Google Docs which makes it suitable for accomplishing collaborative writing tasks, i.e., availability of the text-chat for real-time communication needs and real-time access to the shared composing screen. In the excerpt below, the student pointed out that one of the helpful features of Google Docs is its affordance for the collaborators to consult with one another without leaving or switching into another platform through its text-chat function, a feature not currently available in wikis and/or other platforms for writing collaboration, as they co-composed the text. These features on Google Docs pointed out by the students as helpful for web-based collaborative writing tasks reflect the findings of previous research (e.g., Ishtaiwa & Aburezeq, 2015; Suwantarathip & Wichadee, 2014; Zhou et al., 2012).

While an overwhelming majority spoke highly of the value of Google Docs for collaborative writing, one student had a different opinion. One student considered using Google Docs as "hard" for two cohorts of students: those who do not have access to an internet connection and those who lack computer literacy. The student wrote: "...it [using Google Docs] was hard especially to those who don't have an internet connection and are not computer literate." It is important to note that in the context of the study, students who do not have personal computers and/or internet connection at home/dormitory have to rely on the services provided by commercial internet cafes for their technological needs and they are charged on an hourly basis (Php 10.00 [approx. US$ .21 or Rp. 2,906] for use of computer units without internet access and Php 20.00 for those units connected to the internet). On the other hand, some students in the Philippine public schools, especially in remote areas, lack access to computers for hands-on practice (Lorenzo, 2016), and students may enter the undergraduate level without basic computer proficiency skills.

With regard to problems encountered by the students, the majority reported that the sudden interruption of the internet connectivity in the middle of their collaboration is the main concern. However, in the context of the study, this problem did not last for more than three minutes. It is important to note that for the purposes of this study, two commercial internet cafes with the strongest available connectivity on campus were booked for the students and were filled at 80% capacity to minimize this problem. Unfortunately, the Philippines remains to have one of the most expensive yet the slowest internet connectivity in Southeast Asia (Leyco, 2020).

4.2 Learners' Attitude toward Collaborative Writing in Pairs

When students were asked to rate their experiences in pair collaborative writing, their average satisfaction score was 8.53 (on a scale of 1-10, where 10 is the highest possible score). Eleven students rated their experiences as 10. The ease in the management of text-chat conversation and the lesser time needed to achieve consensus on matters of some concern seems to be the students' strongest points of working with only one peer. Consequently, these factors, according to the students, facilitated a better flow of conversational exchanges and attention to each other's suggestions. In the excerpt below, one student stressed how a collaborative writing task with a pair is smoother than in small groups. She emphasized that the messages (via text-chat) are clearly communicated and that it is easier for two students to agree on something (than in small groups). Additionally, she appreciated that all their ideas can be accommodated in the text.

Excerpt 2: **Satisfactory experience in pairs**

> *...ang experience ko sa collaborative writing in pairs ay mas naging maayos dahil mas klaro ang mga mensahe naibibigay at mas madaling kayong magkasundo ng iyong ka-pair. Mas maayos ang daloy ng pag-uusap at mas nailalagay lahat ng mga ideas and thoughts na pwedeng gamitin sa inyong output.*
> ["...from my experience, the task is more organized [in pairs] because information can be transmitted clearly, and also, it's easier to agree on something. There's a better conversation flow and that all suggestions are being accommodated and considered for the output.]

However, pair writing did not sit well with some students. Two students reported negative experiences in the pair collaborative writing task. The first one complained about the problem of agreeing on something with his peer partner while the second one pointed out the difficulty of resolving differences in opinion and writing style with a peer collaborator. He wrote that "...sometimes it is hard to communicate [with] my partners because [at] some point we have different ideas and styles of writing such sentences".

Some learners admitted that pair work (compared to small groups) made it easier for them to engage in the division of labor, i.e., the first student works on the draft, while the second student jumps into proofreading right after it. Consequently, this strategy will less likely promote negotiation about meaning and language, a process identified to be helpful in language learning (Storch, 2005; Swain & Lapkin, 1998).

Taken together, the students' reactions in pair writing suggest the potential benefits and perils of having two learners co-compose a text which has been previously reported in the literature (Alexopoulou & Driver, 1996; Dobao & Blum, 2013). On one hand, pair writing offers opportunities for students to actively participate in the deliberation, engage in other's suggestions, manage text chat conversation more efficiently, and arrive at a consensus in a shorter time. On the other hand, it also creates an intimate setup where it be could less conducive for disagreements which may prevent students from sharing their thoughts or providing their feedback to save face. Consequently, it may rob them of the opportunity to learn from one another through their collaborative dialogue.

4.3   Learners' Attitude towards Collaborative Writing in Groups of Four

Students gave an overall satisfaction rating of 8.00 (on a scale of 1-10, where 10 is the highest possible score) for their experiences collaborating in groups of four. Five students who felt positive about the addition of two members rated their experiences 10.

The students' positive experiences when working with three of their peers are linked to increased resources for idea generation and greater attention to language. A number of 14 students explicitly mentioned the availability of more ideas and linguistic resources in groups of four compared to pairs, and it is the recurring theme in most responses. For instance, one student noted that working in a four-member group "means having four brains", while another one said that with the increase in the number of collaborators, they were able to attend better to concerns on grammar, spelling, and vocabulary. Another student wrote that with "everyone...actively sharing what is on their mind", "the collaboration [task] became easier". Previous research in a face-to-face setting shows that having four collaborators offers more learning opportunities for grammar and vocabulary to the learners than pairs (Dobao, 2012, 2014a, 2014b). In the excerpt below, a learner detailed how groups of four could be more beneficial for a collaborative writing task. She reported that working in groups of four is "fun" as she had more peers who helped her check grammar concerns and also improve the content. Additionally, her peers were helpful in providing her with words she cannot think of.

Excerpt 3:   **Advantages of working in groups of four**

> *Masaya ang collaborative writing in fours. Marami po akong katulong, sa pag e-edit ng grammar at ganun na rin po sa mga ideas. May mga times po na wala na akong maisip na salita o susunod na pangyayari, pero dahil may katulong po ako, natutulungan po nila akong mag- isip ng ilalagay.*
> [Collaborative writing in fours is fun. My peers help me edit grammar and [develop] ideas. When I can no longer think of a word to write or remember a detail [in the video prompt], they also help me come up with one.]

Some learners, however, did not find the increase in knowledge resources helpful. For instance, one learner expressed her concern that not all ideas of his groupmates could be accommodated in the draft. He wrote: "because of multiple ideas and suggestions...some of those...cannot be written and included". Other learners complained that the influx of suggestions about what ideas to be included and how to resolve some linguistic problems led to "confusion" in the group chat. For instance, one student wrote: "We have too many ideas and sometimes, we do not know [whose] ideas we should consider". Another student mentioned that the "limited time" gave them difficulty in sorting out the ideas and suggestions from their peers.

The students' reactions in completing the writing task in groups of four suggest the advantages of having more ideas and linguistic resources to draw upon. Dobao and Blum (2013) reported that students who worked in groups of four in their jigsaw task mentioned the same benefits of collaborating in fours. Consequently, it offers the group members an opportunity to write better content and produce written texts with more grammatical accuracy than those in pairs. The students' responses also raise cultural issues that could potentially affect their engagement in collaborative written tasks. These students are concerned about not being able to accommodate all their

peers' ideas or suggestions in the final text and may consequently lead to some students' demotivation to participate in the task and offer their opinions to the group. In other studies, students are also reluctant to provide critical feedback to their peers (see Yu et al., 2016).

4.4 Learners' Attitude towards Working in Groups of Six

The students gave the lowest satisfaction rating in completing the collaborative writing in groups of six averaging 6.78, but there were four students who rated their experiences with a perfect 10. All students recognized the numerous exchanges of messages in the chat box. One student described their text-chat interaction as "always lively" with "six people flooding the chat box with ideas".

One recurring complaint of the students is the challenge of managing and resolving conflicting suggestions and observations. In the excerpt below, a student who served as their groups' scribe mentioned that her peers helped in generating ideas and looking for the most appropriate word to use, but she found it difficult to catch up with what they had agreed on.

Excerpt 4: **Pros and cons of working in groups of six**

> *Nakakatulong ang aking kagrupo upang magdagdag ng ideas at mag suggest ng right word na gagamitin in writing. Pero dahil sobrang dami na po, naghahalo-halo na ang mga ideas, hindi na po alam kung anong idea ang dapat ilagay. Marami na rin pong suggestion ang bawat isa na hindi naman sinasang- ayunan ng lahat.*
> [My groupmates helped in adding ideas and suggesting appropriate words to use in our draft. However, suggestions were numerous and often mixed. And I don't know which one to consider. Many of these are often met with disagreements from other group members.]

Other scribes voiced out their apprehensions that they might possibly offend their peers whose suggestions (e.g., choice of word) cannot be considered which was confessed by one of the students: "I would really like to share my ideas, but it seems that...only two ideas [are] being considered…[hence] I stopped sharing mine". These student apprehensions were also mentioned by some students in groups of four.

Based on the students' report of experiences, a six-member team may no longer be conducive for collaborative writing, especially in the context of a text-chat environment and a timed task. However, the students' willingness to still engage even in groups of six suggest that this number of collaborators may work in other contexts where students could communicate using other online modalities closer to a face-to-face environment (not only exclusive to text-chat) and they are given a longer time to finish the task.

4.5 Students Preference for the Number of Peer Collaborators in a Future Similar Task

When asked about the students' preference for the number of peer collaborators in future collaborative writing assignments, nearly half (n=15) would like to work in pairs. These learners pointed out the convenience of managing the exchange of messages between two collaborators. For instance, one learner wrote: "[I] would like to do it in pairs because [it's] more convenient and you can both share your ideas clearly". Similarly, some students agree that it is "easier" to resolve stylistic concerns

especially on "formulating sentences" in addition to "less confusion while chatting". Other students highlighted the opportunity for more equitable participation in pairs. One student even cautioned about "unresponsive members" or "lost opportunity to participate" in small groups. However, one student is quick to note that pair collaborative writing would be more beneficial for him if he would be paired with a "more linguistically competent" peer. Previous studies have also reported students' belief that they could not improve their linguistic proficiency with peers of the same proficiency level (Dobao & Blum, 2013). He wrote in the excerpt below that having someone whom he can "trust" on grammatical concerns would be more efficient compared to weighing competing suggestions from several peers.

Excerpt 5:   **Asking for a more language proficient peer**

> When I write, I am someone who [consult] for…grammar. It would be better if I will write with a linguistically competent partner because I don't have to consider too many ideas…[but] focus...only [to the] one who[m] I can trust.

The students who would prefer to work in groups of four (n=4) considered that having four collaborators in completing a collaborative writing task on Google Docs is still manageable, contrary to those reported by other students. One student, as shown in the excerpt below, described that having four collaborators in a writing task is "absolutely fun" as she equated it with the lively generation and exchange of ideas.

Excerpt 6:   **'Fun' in working in collaborative writing**

> It is absolutely fun when you are in a group; suggestions are not always empty and dull. Everyone has thoughts to share and to express. But for me, I think writing in pairs or groups of four will do.

While some students complained about the challenges of collaborating in groups of six, three students would prefer to work with five of their peers. One student wrote that if there are "more people evaluating [his] work" then it "means less error." In a concurring opinion, another student argued that despite his "not so good experiences" this time she would still want to work in groups of six in the future due to potential learning benefits to be derived from her peer collaborators as shown in Excerpt 7.

Excerpt 7:   **Group of six is 'merrier', 'more brains to function'**

> I would prefer having six in the group, more ideas, more brains to function, and the more the merrier, though I have experience[d] not so good instances about this, I would still choose to be in six because in that we can learn from each other.

Some students (n=4) explicitly verbalized their aversion toward completing writing tasks collaboratively. One student claimed that he is "not suited' for pair and group collaborative writing without elaborating any details. For two students, solitary writing makes them "more comfortable" in the writing process, and one of them explained that the need for consultation with their peers when writing collaboratively curtails her freedom to "express [her]self". The other student seems to have concerns with the social dynamics in a collaborative writing setup as she wrote: "...sometimes I was too shy to suggest my ideas". Previous literature suggests that some students are

reluctant to engage in a collaborative writing task (e.g., Dobao & Blum, 2013; Shehadeh, 2011; Storch, 2005). In some cases, students are anxious to collaborate if they have low language proficiency (e.g., Storch, 2005).

5. CONCLUSION

The majority of the English as second language learners who participated in this study had a positive attitude toward peer collaborative writing in a web-based synchronous environment. Only four students said that they would not prefer collaborative writing over solitary writing in a similar task in the future. The collaborative writing task allowed them to improve the content, pool their collective notes/memory of the advertisement details to reconstruct the story, notice and resolve grammatical concerns and spelling errors, and find the most suitable vocabulary to accurately reflect their intended meaning. With regard to the number of collaborators, the students highly favored working in pairs and groups of four in the context of this study (i.e., synchronous online collaboration via text chat). Working in pairs allowed the students to manage text-chat interaction more efficiently, accommodate each other's suggestions, and achieve a consensus easily. In groups of four, the students appreciated the increase of peer resources for knowledge sharing and ensuring the accuracy of their language use. Despite the active participation of collaborators in groups of six, the students were put off by the challenges of managing the conflicting ideas and suggestions from their peers in the text chat especially as they try to complete the writing task within the same time constraint.

Despite the advantages of having four collaborators in completing a collaborative writing task in synchronous online mode, most students in this study still preferred to work with only one peer partner, mostly due to the ease of managing text-chat interaction. This scenario calls for a closer look at student-led synchronous online group interaction via text-chat to help them manage their conversations and thus benefit more from the knowledge of their peers. Despite the several limitations of text-chat conversation, it remains to be the most reliable and feasible means of web-based communication in most educational settings due to its minimal bandwidth requirement (Traphagan et al., 2010). Taken together, these findings support the use of web-based collaborative writing tasks in the classroom and contribute to our understanding of learner-learner collaboration in pairs and small groups, not only in a face-to-face context, as documented in previous studies but also in an online environment which is gaining more momentum as more schools in the world still use distance online learning program to deliver education due to the threats of Covid-19 (Ivone et al., 2020). Consequently, the findings of this study may benefit classroom teachers who use peer collaborative writing strategies in teaching additional languages whether in the second or foreign language context, especially in the online educational environment. Future research will need to compare learners' reactions to different tasks completed in other modalities (e.g., via synchronous online video/voice chat, asynchronous modality).

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APPENDICES

Appendix A

Task Instructions for the Participants

In this activity, you will watch a YouTube commercial on your computer terminal. Please check the link forwarded to your assigned email address [YouTube link].

1. You will watch it twice. During your first time, you need to focus on watching it and you are not allowed to write anything on your notepad.
2. By the second time, you CAN PAUSE the video to take notes for the activity that follows. You are given a maximum of 5 minutes for this note-taking activity. In taking notes, you don't have to write full sentences to save time!
3. After watching the commercial, you will prepare a reconstructed story as a group. Your story should be written in the PAST TENSE, please keep this in mind.
4. While Google Docs allow simultaneous writing and editing activities, ONLY ONE PERSON (the designated group scribe) CAN WRITE THE TEXT.
5. Please use English when discussing any concerns while writing. You ARE NOT ALLOWED TO consult an online dictionary or Google Translate. Please discuss it in your group.

6. Please correct your peers throughout the task by calling out any mistake or error. Say your partner wrote, "goed" rather than "went".
7. Remember, this is a COLLABORATIVE ACTIVITY. It should be a joint output, meaning each of you should have a meaningful contribution. Please consult your partner from time to time.

Appendix B

Questionnaire

1. How long did it take you and the rest of the group to successfully coordinate your work on the team project in Google Docs?
2. While using Google Docs, did you experience any technical problems/issues? (What were they, and how did you try to solve them?)
3. On a scale of 1-10 (10 being the highest), how would you rate your experience in collaborative writing in pairs? Why do you say so?
4. On a scale of 1-10 (10 being the highest), how would you rate your experience in collaborative writing in groups of four? Why do you say so?
5. On a scale of 1-10 (10 being the highest), how would you rate your experience in collaborative writing in groups of six? Why do you say so?
6. Between the pairs, groups of four, and groups of six, which number of participants do you prefer for online collaborative writing? Why?
7. In your future writing activities in your subjects, would you want to write alone, in pairs, in groups of four, or groups of six if you would be asked to choose? Why?