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# **THE NATURE AND DYNAMICS OF COLLABORATIVE WRITING IN A MALAYSIAN TERTIARY ESL SETTING**

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## ABSTRACT

This classroom-based study provides insights into the nature of collaborative writing in a Malaysian tertiary ESL setting. It tracked the collaborative writing processes of three case study groups over one semester and elicited students' reflections on their collaborative experience. The study focussed on three case study groups formed by nine undergraduates who were enrolled in an academic writing course in a large public university in Malaysia. The individuals volunteered to be involved in the study and they self-selected their group members.

Multiple research instruments were used for data collection. The primary data was comprised of audio and video-recordings of the case studies' collaborative writing sessions over three writing tasks. Interviews, journal entries, and a questionnaire supplemented the primary data. The use of various techniques ensured that data collection was sufficiently covered in breadth and in depth.

Results showed that the collaborative writing process was a complex phenomenon. The nature of collaboration is influenced by group composition, role flexibility, and task complexity. The findings reveal that familiarity with group members is crucial for group cohesion; it provided a safe and comfortable working environment. Flexibility in role-taking also helped the groups to carry out their collaboration effectively. Leader, contributor, and gate-keeper roles were interchangeable across groups and across tasks except for the scribe role. It was found that as tasks increased in complexity, conflict also intensified. During negotiations and resolutions of conflicts, the students had considered cultural issues, such as sensitivity to face and group harmony. Other affective factors such as cooperation, willingness to share, team spirit, and tolerance aided the collaboration while apathy and domineering behaviour were detrimental. These multiple factors, which differed from one case study to another, shaped the distinctiveness of each group. Nonetheless, findings from the students' transcripts and personal reflections revealed that group collaboration changed and became more positive over time.

This study provides a revised definition of collaborative writing. The three case study groups shared some common features, such as mutual interactions, sharing of expertise, conflict, and use of colloquial sentence particles. However, there were other features which were peculiar to each group, namely, self-questioning talk, use of local language, creative use of language, and humour. These features not only mediated the writing processes, but also expanded the students' knowledge construction and language acquisition.

Based on the analyses, a number of implications have been drawn regarding the use of collaborative writing in the classroom. The study culminates with several recommendations for future research.

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*"To God be the Glory"*

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