Bridging Success through Comparative: Uncovering the Motivation Potential of Improving Students' Writing, Individually vs Collaboratively

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Abstract

Writing effectively is crucial in upper secondary education, yet many students face challenges with vocabulary, grammar, spelling, and punctuation. Educators can assist by incorporating both individual and collaborative writing methods. This study investigates the impact of these writing activities on students' writing skills and examines the role of student motivation. Using a causal-comparative method, the study involved 35 tenth-grade students from SMA Negeri 2 Tambang, Indonesia. A questionnaire based on Dörnyei (1994) indicators assessed student motivation levels, while a descriptive writing test evaluated their writing skills. Writing samples were scored using an analytical scoring rubric, and a two-way ANOVA analyzed the effects of motivation levels on writing skills in both individual and collaborative contexts. Results showed a significant interaction between the type of writing activity and motivation level, with a significance level of 0.006. The findings indicate that collaborative writing activities significantly enhance writing skills, while motivation levels do not have a substantial impact on writing performance. Educators are encouraged to blend individual and collaborative writing activities to optimize students' writing skill development. Individual writing supports personal reflection and growth, whereas collaborative writing promotes peer learning and idea exchange.

Keywords: Individual and collaborative writing, motivation, EFL, writing skills.

INTRODUCTION

Writing is a critical foundational skill in education, reflecting students' understanding of subject matter as well as their ability to think critically and communicate ideas clearly and effectively. However, many students face significant obstacles in writing, particularly with grammatical knowledge, spelling, punctuation, developing and organizing their ideas, vocabulary selection, and receiving constructive feedback. These challenges are often rooted in problems with vocabulary selection and sentence construction (Yoandita, 2019). Students struggle to find the right words to develop their ideas and convey the characteristics of the

subjects they want to describe. Additionally, they find it difficult to understand and apply correct grammar rules and sentence structures, leading to unclear and disorganized writing. Ratnaningsih & Azizah, (2019) confirms that a major difficulty students face is their limited vocabulary, which further complicates their ability to describe objects, places, or events accurately. This limited vocabulary hampers their ability to fully express ideas and develop coherent and detailed descriptions.

Furthermore, Rahmatunisa (2015) identified three main problems encountered by EFL students are linguistic, cognitive, and psychological problems. Linguistic problems include issues with grammar, vocabulary, and sentence structure. Cognitive problems involve difficulties in organizing and developing ideas, while psychological problems include anxiety and lack of confidence in writing. She suggested that teachers need to encourage students' motivation to write and provide various supportive writing activities, such as peer correction and the frequent use of dictionaries. Additionally, the absence of constructive feedback means that students may not identify weaknesses or areas for improvement in their writing, resulting in repeated mistakes and a lack of progress (Zhang & Hyland, 2022). Students often struggle to generate and structure their ideas effectively, leading to fragmented and disorganized writing that lacks coherence, which can stem from a lack of experience in brainstorming and planning their writing.

Addressing these multifaceted challenges requires a comprehensive approach. Encouraging students to explore their ideas independently helps them develop their unique writing styles and build confidence in organizing their thoughts. Individual writing reflects a writer's unique style and expression, influenced by personal experiences. This method allows students to delve into their own ideas and writing styles independently, fostering greater confidence in performing tasks individually (Kaweera et al. 2019). individualized writing helps students delve deeper into their thoughts and creativity. However, individual writing has its challenges, such as the lack of constructive feedback from classmates. This makes it difficult for students to identify weaknesses in their writing or discover new approaches to developing ideas (Fan & Xu, 2020; Suprapto et al., 2022).

Furthermore, providing an environment where students can collaborate and receive feedback from their peers is essential since each student has a different learning style. Interactive learning activities encourage students to share ideas, learn from one another, and engage in discussions, leading to richer and more diverse content. Collaborative writing is a teaching method where students work together in groups to generate ideas, write, and edit texts. As defined by Wilder (2021), collaborative writing involves the joint production of a text by two or more writers, and it is becoming increasingly common in academic and professional settings. This method fosters interaction, peer learning, and the exchange of ideas, which can enhance content richness and diversity. In the context of second language learning, collaborative writing can be a valuable tool for language acquisition, especially when carefully designed and monitored (Storch, 2011). Howevwe, one of the main challenges is the difficulty in reaching consensus or coordinating different ideas among group members (Roxas, 2023). When disparate opinions converge within a collective, the writing process may be impeded due to the necessity of reaching a consensus, which often necessitates additional time and effort. Murtiningsih (2016) also underscored that difficulties in reaching consensus can impede the collective progress of the group.

Therefore, both individual and collaborative writing methods have their own advantages and challenges, and their effectiveness depends on various factors. One critical factor is the level of student motivation. Motivation, an internal or external drive that pushes a person to perform an action or achieve a goal, significantly influences writing performance. Shen et al. (2020) found that many students were anxious and disinterested in writing due to a lack of practice and insufficient knowledge of grammar and vocabulary. Research by Alves-Wold et al. (2023) showed that motivational levels varied depending on students' ability levels and that students' self-efficacy beliefs were positively related to their actual writing performance. Chen (2021) also highlighted that students' motivation levels play an important role in the effectiveness of writing methods. Therefore, it is crucial for teachers to consider this factor when designing teaching methods. By understanding and addressing the motivational needs of students, educators can tailor their approaches to enhance student engagement and improve writing outcomes.

Several studies have examined the potential benefits of both collaborative and individual writing practices in enhancing language skills in second and foreign language learning contexts. Writing methods, whether collaborative or individual, have gained considerable attention in language education due to their ability to foster interactive and engaging learning environments. This literature review synthesizes findings from three key studies that investigate the efficacy of these writing practices in language learning. Villarreal and Gil-Sarratea (2020) examined collaborative writing in a secondary school foreign language (FL) context. The resarch found that pairs produced shorter but more accurate and slightly more lexically and grammatically complex texts. Collaboration afforded students the opportunity to pool ideas, deliberate over language use, and provide each other with feedback (collective scaffolding). Importantly, collaborative writing was beneficial for all intermediate secondary learners, suggesting it as a useful strategy for improving FL writing skills in secondary schools. In addition, Lázaro-Ibarrola (2021) investigated the impact of written corrective feedback provided via model texts on both individual and paired writing. The study did not find significant differences between pairs and individuals in terms of incorporating features from the model texts into their final drafts, with both groups incorporating around 50% of the noticed features with an accuracy rate of 60%.

Yet, McDonough and De Vleeschauwer (2019) explored the effects of prewriting planning on L2 writing performance. Their study compared individual and collaborative prewriting planning among Thai EFL writers. The findings were mixed; students who planned individually showed improvements in analytic ratings (content, organization, grammar, and vocabulary), while those who planned collaboratively demonstrated gains in accuracy. This study highlighted the complexity of planning strategies in L2 writing and called for further investigation into how different planning conditions affect long-term language development.

While several studies have highlighted the potential benefits of both collaborative and individual writing practices, a notable gap remains in understanding how student motivation influences the effectiveness of these methods. This study aims to fill this gap by comparing the effectiveness of individual and collaborative writing activities while considering the moderating effect of students' motivation levels. Specifically, it seeks to explore the interaction between writing methods (individual vs. collaborative) and student

motivation at the senior high school level. Therefore, the key research question addressed in this study is: Is there any significant interaction on students' writing ability in individual and collaborative writing based on high and low students' motivation? By addressing this question, the study aims to provide a nuanced understanding of how different writing methods interact with student motivation, ultimately leading to improved educational strategies and outcomes.

METHOD

This research employs a causal-comparative method. As outlined by Mills & Gay (2018), the causal-comparative method involves selecting two groups that differ in terms of the variable of interest and subsequently comparing them based on the dependent variable. To identify high and low motivation students, a motivation questionnaire was administered prior to the writing test. To address the research question regarding the significant difference between individual and collaborative writing based on high and low motivation, the data was analyzed using a two-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) with the SPSS version 22.00 program. Moroever, the sampling method employed in this study was purposive sampling. A total of 35 students from class X.4 participated, and they were divided into groups based on their motivation levels. Each group consisted of three to four participants, with highly motivated students placed with other high motivation students and low motivation students placed with other low motivation students for collaborative writing.

The instruments used in this study included a motivation questionnaire and a writing test. The motivation questionnaire was designed to determine students' motivation levels, while the writing test assessed students' writing abilities under two conditions: individual and collaborative writing. In the initial meeting, students completed the individual writing test, and in the subsequent meeting, they completed the collaborative writing test. The motivation questionnaire was based on indicators adapted from Dörnyei (1994) consisted of 22 items. This questionnaire was validated by an expert lecturer and demonstrated high reliability, with a Cronbach's alpha of 0.954, as measured using SPSS 22.00. The motivation questionnaire utilized a Likert scale model, where students responded to a series of statements by indicating their level of agreement on a scale from 1 to 4: (1) strongly disagree, (2) disagree, (3) agree, and (4) strongly agree. Students were given 30 minutes to complete the questionnaire, which was administered when they were prepared and had entered the classroom. This data was then used to categorize students into high and low motivation groups. The categorized motivation data informed the grouping of students for the collaborative writing test. The questionnaire results were analyzed to calculate percentages, following the adaptation method by Degang (2010), to classify students' motivation levels accurately.

The writing test was conducted in two stages. In the first stage, students individually wrote descriptive texts. They were asked to create a descriptive text on one of the following topics: describing people, tourist attractions, famous people, or animals. Each student was instructed to write approximately 200 words within a 40-minute time frame. After 40 minutes, the students submitted their writing tests in the classroom. In the second stage, students participated in a collaborative writing assessment. They were divided into groups based on their motivation levels, with each group consisting of three to four students. The

collaborative method aimed to facilitate the exchange and implementation of ideas discussed within the groups. Each student was assigned specific responsibilities, such as selecting a topic, establishing the central idea, and determining the content of the paragraph. Similar to the individual test, students were tasked with writing a descriptive text of approximately 200 words within 40 minutes, after which they submitted their collaborative writing assignments.

The writing test instrument was validated by a lecturer who is an expert in writing studies. The reliability of the test was ensured through inter-rater reliability, with the test being evaluated by two raters. The collected writing tests were assessed using an analytical scoring rubric proposed by Brown and Abeywickrama (2010). The mean scores of the students' written work were analyzed based on four main categories: "Very Good," "Good," "Limited," and "Very Limited." The "Very Good" category included scores between 3.51 and 4, indicating outstanding and consistently high performance. The "Good" category included scores from 2.51 to 3.50, indicating solid and adequate performance with room for improvement. The "Limited" category included scores from 1.51 to 2.50, indicating significant shortcomings that require immediate improvement. The "Very Limited" category included scores between 1 and 1.50, indicating performance that is severely lacking and requires urgent attention and corrective action.

FINDING AND DISCUSSION

This study investigates the writing abilities of students with varying levels of motivation, utilizing both individual and collaborative writing methods. The research aims to identify how these different approaches impact students' performance across key aspects of writing, including composing, style, sentence formation, usage, and mechanics. By categorizing students into high and low motivation groups and assessing their writing in both individual and collaborative settings, the study seeks to provide insights into the effectiveness of each method. The data collected and analyzed in this research offers a comprehensive understanding of how motivation and writing methods interact, ultimately informing educators on how to better tailor their teaching strategies to enhance student writing outcomes.

Table 1 presents the writing ability scores of students categorized by their motivation levels (high and low) and the writing methods used (individual and collaborative). The scores are divided into five key aspects of writing: composing, style, sentence formation, usage, and mechanics.

Table 1. Writing ability scores of students with high and low motivation using individual and collaborative writing methods

No	Aspects	Composing	Style	Sentence Formation	Usage	Mechanics
1	High Motivation Individual	3.6 (Very Good)	3.1 (Good)	2.9 (Good)	2.9 (Good)	3.0 (Good)
2	High Motivation Collaborative	2.5 (Limited)	2.8 (Good)	2.7 (Good)	2.7 (Good)	2.6 (Good)
3	Low Motivation Individual	3.2 (Good)	2.8 (Good)	2.6 (Good)	2.6 (Good)	2.6 (Good)

| 4 | Low Motivation Collaborative | 2.6 (Good) | 2.9 (Good) | 2.6 (Good) | 2.9 (Good) | 3.5 (Very Good) |

Students with high motivation who engaged in individual writing demonstrated a strong ability to compose texts, with a very good score in composing (3.6). Their style (3.1), sentence formation (2.9), usage (2.9), and mechanics (3.0) all fell within the good category, indicating consistent writing skills across different aspects. Conversely, high motivation students using collaborative writing showed limited skills in composing (2.5) but maintained good performance in style (2.8), sentence formation (2.7), usage (2.7), and mechanics (2.6). This suggests that while collaboration may have impacted their ability to compose effectively, other aspects of their writing remained strong.

Low motivation students who engaged in individual writing performed well, with good scores in composing (3.2), style (2.8), sentence formation (2.6), usage (2.6), and mechanics (2.6). This indicates that despite their lower motivation, they were able to produce competent writing individually. On the other hand, low motivation students using collaborative writing achieved good scores in composing (2.6), style (2.9), sentence formation (2.6), and usage (2.9), and an exceptional score in mechanics (3.5). This implies that collaboration may have helped them focus on and improve their technical writing skills, even if their overall motivation was low.

Overall, the table illustrates that both high and low motivation students can benefit from individual and collaborative writing methods, but the impact varies across different aspects of writing. High motivation students excelled in individual writing, particularly in composing, while collaborative writing highlighted their technical skills. Low motivation students showed consistent performance across all aspects when writing individually, but collaboration significantly improved their mechanics. These findings suggest that incorporating both individual and collaborative writing practices can cater to different motivational levels and enhance various writing skills.

To ascertain whether there is a significant interaction in the writing abilities of students with high and low motivation for individual and collaborative writing, the researcher conducted a two-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) using SPSS 22.0. The results are summarized below.

Table 2. Two way analysis of variance test on students' writing ability

Source	Type III Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Corrected Model	1.821[a]	3	.607	5.593	.002
Intercept	555.508	1	555.508	5118.868	.000
Activity	.879	1	.879	8.104	.006
Motivation	.201	1	.201	1.852	.178
Activity * Motivation	.879	1	.879	8.104	.006
Error	7.162	66	.109		
Total	566.780	70			
Corrected Total	8.983	69			

a. R Squared = .203 (Adjusted R Squared = .166)

Dependent Variable: Writing Ability

The corrected model shows a Type III sum of squares of 1.821 with 3 degrees of freedom (df), resulting in a mean square of .607. The F-value is 5.593 with a significance level (Sig.) of .002, indicating that the overall model is statistically significant in explaining the variance in writing ability. The intercept has a Type III sum of squares of 555.508 with 1 df, leading to a mean square of 555.508. The F-value for the intercept is 5118.868 with a significance level of .000, suggesting that the overall mean writing ability is significantly different from zero.

The analysis of the writing activity (individual vs. collaborative) reveals a Type III sum of squares of .879 with 1 df, resulting in a mean square of .879. The F-value is 8.104 with a significance level of .006, indicating that the type of writing activity (collaborative) has a significant impact on students' writing ability. In contrast, the effect of motivation (high vs. low) shows a Type III sum of squares of .201 with 1 df, resulting in a mean square of .201. The F-value is 1.852 with a significance level of .178, suggesting that motivation level alone does not significantly impact writing ability.

The interaction between writing activity and motivation shows a Type III sum of squares of .879 with 1 df, leading to a mean square of .879. The F-value is 8.104 with a significance level of .006, indicating a significant interaction effect between writing activity and motivation on students' writing ability. The error term has a Type III sum of squares of 7.162 with 66 df, resulting in a mean square of .109. The total sum of squares is 566.780 with 70 df, representing the total variation in the data, and the corrected total sum of squares is 8.983 with 69 df, indicating the total variability in writing ability after accounting for the model.

These findings demonstrate that both the type of writing activity (individual and collaborative) and the interaction between writing activity and motivation level significantly affect students' writing ability. However, the motivation level alone does not have a significant impact. This suggests that the effectiveness of writing activities is influenced by the combination of writing method and student motivation. By understanding these dynamics, educators can better tailor their instructional strategies to enhance writing skills, taking into account the different levels of student motivation and the impact of collaborative and individual writing practices.

Moreover, the analysis revealed that students with low motivation achieved "good" scores in both individual and collaborative writing. Notably, while high-motivation students performed well individually, the collaborative approach resulted in more significant improvements in overall writing ability for both high and low motivation students. These findings indicate that collaborative writing activities significantly enhance general writing ability regardless of motivation levels (Kaweera et al., 2019; Sever & Akyol, 2022; Alwahoub et al., 2022). This outcome aligns with Abbas & Fathira (2022) perspective that collaborative writing can facilitate the development of 21st-century skills and result in higher-quality writing through discourse and debate between writers. Prior research supports these conclusions, showing that collaborative writing often leads to superior outcomes in enhancing students' writing abilities. For example, a mixed-methods study by Rezeki & Rahmani (2021) found higher scores in translation skills tests when collaborative writing was employed.

This study also supports the finding that the quality of students' collaborative writing is often poor. However, the researchers found that individualized writing presented fewer problems for students compared to collaborative writing. Dimililer & Kurt (2019) observed that students generally preferred collaborative writing to individual writing, despite facing some difficulties. Valizadeh (2022) showed that collaborative writing can improve EFL learners' writing skills. This study compared engagement levels between groups to determine the impact of collaborative writing on student engagement. The results indicated that collaborative writing not only enhanced students' writing abilities but also fostered more active engagement and interaction among them. Despite the challenges encountered in the collaborative process, the benefits gained from improved writing skills and active participation make this method valuable in writing education.

However, the results of this study contrast with some previous findings that suggest collaborative writing skills are superior to individual writing. Despite the general preference for collaborative work noted by researchers like Kaweera et al. (2019), students in this study tended to prefer working alone in writing activities. Therefore, further research is needed to understand the dynamics between writing activities and students' preferences more deeply. Additionally, this study found no significant difference in writing ability between highly motivated and low-motivation students. Although theories by Dörnyei & Csizér (1998) and Harmer (2008) assert that intrinsic motivation is positively correlated with academic achievement, including writing ability, this study shows that motivation alone does not significantly predict students' writing ability. Wang & Troia, (2023) add that the learning environment plays an important role in shaping students' motivation, demonstrating the complexity of the interaction between contextual factors in influencing writing outcomes.

In contrast, the correlation between learning motivation and writing ability is confirmed by Julian et al. (2021) findings, which highlight the importance of motivation in achieving academic performance, especially in writing skills. However, the non-correlation between self-confidence levels and writing ability shows the complexity of psychological factors that affect students' performance in writing. Other findings emphasize the effectiveness of collaborative methods in improving students' writing ability. Research by Pham (2021) and Soraya (2016) showed that learning approaches incorporating social interaction and individual creativity positively impact writing ability. Additionally, studies by Cahyono & Rahayu (2020) and Van Drie et al., (2021) found a significant relationship between motivation and writing ability, reinforcing that motivation is crucial for success in writing. However, a different finding by Andheska et al. (2020) showed no significant difference in writing motivation between different cognitive style groups, raising questions about the role of other factors such as prior learning experiences, individual tendencies toward certain types of tasks, and the social environment in shaping students' motivation to write.

An alternative explanation for these findings suggests that students need more than motivation to improve their writing. Structural support and a conducive learning environment are also critical. This underscores the importance of collaborative approaches in education to enhance student learning outcomes. The implications of these findings suggest that educators should integrate collaborative writing practices into the curriculum to maximize students' learning potential. Acknowledging the limitations of this study, such

as the sample size not being fully representative of the larger population and uncontrollable variables like the quality of instruction and classroom environment, it is clear that further research is needed. Future research should explore how a combination of motivation, teaching methods, and structural support can collectively influence students' writing abilities. Additionally, future studies would benefit from using a larger and more diverse sample to increase the generalizability of the findings.

CONCLUSION

This study underscores the importance of collaborative writing methods in enhancing students' writing skills, as evidenced by the significant differences between individual and collaborative writing activities. Collaborative writing fosters constructive feedback, collective error correction, and critical thinking, all contributing to improved writing quality across proficiency levels. Interestingly, the study found that motivation did not significantly affect students' writing ability, diverging from previous literature that emphasizes motivation's role. This highlights the multifaceted nature of writing success, which encompasses factors beyond motivation, such as teaching methods and the learning environment. For future research, educators and researchers should integrate collaborative writing practices into the curriculum, considering factors such as motivation, instructional methods, and structural supports. Studies with larger and more diverse samples are necessary to enhance the generalizability of the findings and provide more robust guidance for educational practice. This research deepens the understanding of factors influencing students' writing abilities and offers practical implications for improving writing instruction effectiveness. The findings can inform innovative teaching strategies and the creation of learning environments that better develop students' writing skills, allowing educators to design curricula that are more responsive to students' needs and promote higher academic achievement in writing.

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