

The Implementation of Collaborative Writing Technique to Improve Students' Writing Performance and Soft Skill

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5 Abstract

The aim of this study was to investigate the implementation of collaborative writing technique to improve the writing performance and soft skills of higher secondary students. This was conducted referring to the results of previous researches that indicated the effectiveness of collaborative writing technique in improving students' ability in writing and developing their soft skills. The study employed a mixed-method research design conducted to Grade 10 students of *Sekolah Tunas Bangsa Kubu Raya*. The data were gathered through observation checklist and field note for the qualitative, and questionnaire and writing tasks for the quantitative ones. After being analyzed and calculated, the researchers found that collaborative writing was powerful to improve students' writing performance and soft skills. It was indicated by (1) the improvements of writing task mean scores from 78.67 in Meeting 1 to 87.13 in Meeting 3; (2) students' responses on questionnaire of their writing ability and soft skills reached 92% in elaborating ideas and 93% in gaining self-esteem and confidence; (3) the improvements of observation checklists that were responded excellently performed (scale 4) by the observers on the 3rd meeting; and (4) the positive comments from the note taker on the field notes related to the students' writing performance and soft skills. Therefore, by considering this evidence, collaborative writing technique is recommended to be applied to higher secondary students to both writing performance and soft skills of students.

Keywords: collaborative writing, soft skills, writing performance

1. Introduction

Writing is a skill that is required and used in many contexts throughout life (Hidayati, 2018). It is believed as an effective tool to express oneself, and a hard copy of someone's intellectual level in delivering thoughts, feelings, and knowledge (Sadiku, 2015). According to Chappell as cited in Klimova (2012), there are at least seven benefits of writing if it is regularly done by learners which include expressing one's personality, fostering communication, developing thinking skills, making logical and persuasive arguments, giving a person a chance to later reflect on his/her ideas and re-evaluate them, providing and receiving feedback, and preparing for school and employment. At schools, in higher secondary level notably, English writing mostly takes a bigger portion either in daily tasks, projects, quizzes, or even final tests. Its complex traits and benefits are probably the primary reasons. Furthermore, Sadiku (2015) analogized that writing is a gem to pick which means a valuable tool to help the learners shape their mindset and develop ability to be able to express what they are thinking in written form.

For the last ten years, there are abundant researches discussing the importance of writing for EFL learners. One correlation research conducted by Hosseini et al. (2013), for instance, indicated that there was a significant correlation between content score of all students with their writing skills. This study concluded that writing skill was meaningful to EFL learners that it could be major criteria towards better academic position and greater education success (p. 10).

Another example was the qualitative study about the importance and challenge of teaching writing to EFL learners conducted by Nasser (2016) revealed that writing plays an important role in language development of EFL learners, especially in promoting learning and the learners' critical thinking. It helps learners a lot with the acquisition of English as the foreign language taught. Therefore, he (2016, pp. 200–202) suggested that teachers had to be very careful and smart in selecting the appropriate techniques or methods for teaching writing; a wrong technique applied might cause the students to fail acquiring the writing skills. The last example to consider was a study conducted by Rao (2019) about the significance of writing skills in English language learning environment. He mentioned that despite the difficulties of teaching it to ELL, writing always plays important roles in English acquisition for foreign learners since it contains complex language elements such as grammar, spelling, pronunciation, structure, and contextual meaning. So, he (2019) claimed if the learners succeeded in performing writing, the other three English skills would succeed, as well.

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In Indonesian context, English writing has always been challenging for teachers and students. There are lots of studies discussing this issue such as Ariyanti (2016); Hidayati; (2018); Toba et al. (2019); and Wahyuningsih; (2018), which discussed and pointed out more or less similar results indicating writing skills were important to master. In contrary, teachers and students still faced huge challenges on it involving (1) techniques to teach writing were less effective; (2) lack of interesting resources and facilities; (3) teachers' creativity in designing writing activities and exercise in classroom; (4) teachers' ability in writing somehow had not supported the students to learn writing; (5) the great influence of the students' mother tongue when producing writing; (6) lack of comprehensive feedback from teachers; (7) lack of awareness from students about the importance of writing; and (8) negative mindset towards writing. Fortunately, researches responded to these studies increased. For the last five years, there are more than ten researches published discussing various effective techniques in the response of solving the problems of writing skill above (i.e. Farida, 2017; Isgiamo et al., 2020; Kartawijaya, 2018; Ranabumi et al., 2017; Septiani, 2018; Yulianti et al., 2019; etc). This excitement that researchers showed are the proof of their concern towards the disparity regarding writing skill mastery in Indonesia.

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In the light of the matter above, the researchers of this study would like also to contribute to the enrichment of researches related to writing skills for EFL learners, as well as, to introduce an effective writing technique to the teachers to be implemented in their writing classes. The conducted study focused on investigating the implementation of collaborative writing (CW) technique in improving the writing performances of higher secondary students in Sekolah SPK Tunas Bangsa Kubu Raya. This school adopts two curriculums: National and Cambridge curriculum. According to the teachers, due to this curriculum combination, the students were not only targeted to succeed the national examination but also the Cambridge examinations (i.e IGCSE, A Level, and AS Level). These examinations dominantly had writing sections, especially in English subject. Therefore, the teachers assigned the students to do writing activities or tasks in all topics in the lesson. The tasks and activities were mostly individual

works. By doing so, the teachers expected that they could help the learners to get accustomed to writing, so that they would not find difficulties when they had the Cambridge examinations.

However, the problem was during writing, the students did little interaction. As they were assigned to write individually; the method or technique also led them to work individually. Limited interaction during class activity was not always good. It could bring negative impacts to students' psychology. They would become self-publicist, and only focus on achieving good grades/scores (grade-oriented) without thinking about building good relationship with others. In **6** it, the objectives of the school were not solely on achieving good grades; but also developing the IB learner profile involving inquirers, knowledgeable, thinkers, communicators, principled, open-minded, caring, risk-takers, balanced, and reflective. Therefore, in spite of its individual grading system, teachers in the writing class were supposed to apply a technique or a method that could allow the students to interact one to another. And, one of the writing techniques that had been researched and examined its effectivity was Collaborative Writing (CW) technique.

The effectiveness of CW technique from the students' writing quality, students' perceptions, influential factors, and also group dynamic during collaborative writing activities ensued positive results (Rezeki, 2017, p. 25). The nature of Collaborative Writing (CW) is collaborative learnings that reinforces the students to work collaboratively in producing a writing product (not necessarily the group one). In its implementation, the students are feasibly to work either in group or in pairs with the main purposes of sharing ideas, doing peer teaching such as checking grammatical stuff or writing mechanics, or even suggesting ideas to enriching the writing, as well as build social skills such as negotiation and open-mindedness (Fung, 2010). CW technique in improving students' writing ability is indisputable. According to Deveci (2018) and (Fung, 2010), collaborative writing enables students to assume responsibility for their own learning, grows maturity in discovering learning style, develops critical thinking when composing their own writing, and also builds social skills.

In line with it, Rahayu (2016) emphasized that through writing collaboratively, the students are able to develop the ideas easily, as well as, take a review or argument from others as the proof-reading phase. Moreover, from the teachers' perspective, CW technique was trusted to help teachers to manage the class and achieve the learning goals in writing class where teachers were the facilitators and the agents were the students (Sormunen et al., 2013). Through CW technique, the students are triggered to communicate intensely and contribute in sharing knowledge, ideas, and even teaching their friends who are not good at English without hesitation (Fung, 2010). They are given chances to interact with each other over different aspects of writing (Zhang, 2018). They could also establish social skills, empathy and open-mindedness, as well as, listen to other people and respect their point of views (Hammond et al., 2010; Zhang, 2018). Then, from the social psychological aspect, CW technique encourages the students to be better individuals through collaboration that they gain self-esteem and confidence working in groups because they are resourceful and have freedom to speak equally (Hillyard et al., 2010).

From the problems found in Grade 10 Sekolah Tunas Bangsa and the previous studies, it was clear why the researcher conducted this study. In its implementation, the study anchored

mixed-method approach. In a broader sense, it has a similar concern with the previous studies discussed above which was examining and introducing a technique for solving problems in writing or improving students' writing performances. However, what makes this study different is the foci that involved not only students' writing performances but also soft skills development when and after CW technique was being implemented. In accordance with it, this study addressed three research questions: (1) Do the students' writing improve after CW technique is implemented? (2) What soft skills are dominantly appeared during writing collaboratively? And (3) how are the students' responses towards CW technique? The researchers believe the results presented in this paper would be beneficial for the target readers, especially higher secondary teachers and other researchers with similar research interests.

2. Method

Research Design

To conduct the study, the researchers employed a mixed-method methodology. Mixed-method research design allowed the researchers to have triangulations, complementarity, development, initiation, as well as expansion towards the data; starting from the procedures until the discussion of the results (Creswell, 2014). Combining qualitative and quantitative- approach was aimed to provide a more complete or richer discussion of the analyzed data as being suggested by (Creswell, 2014; Creswell & Plano-Clark, 2007). In the implementation, the researchers adapted the concurrent design of mixed-method from Creswell (2014) where the quantitative data and the qualitative data were gathered approximately the same time.

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Research Site and Participants

This research was conducted to students of Year 10 of *Sekolah SPK Tunas Bangsa* Kubu Raya. There were 17 students in total. *Sekolah SPK Tunas Bangsa* is the only higher secondary school in West Kalimantan that holds an *SPK (Satuan Pendidikan Kerjasama)*; This SPK term was used to change the term "international school" to the schools that adopted international curriculum, such as Cambridge. *Sekolah SPK Tunas Bangsa* adopts two curriculums: national and Cambridge curriculum. As the consequence, the first language used in this school is English, and the examinations that the students have to take are not only national examinations, but also Cambridge examinations including IGCSE, A Level, and AS Level. These international examinations dominantly have writing sections, such as creating a paper or an essay.

Tools and Technique of Data Collection and Analysis

The qualitative procedures in this research employed field note and observation checklist to gather the information of the students' behavior while collaborative writing techniques was implemented. The statements in observation checklist were adapted from Fung (2010) containing the soft skills and hard skills (i.e. mutual interaction, negotiation, cognitive conflicts, shared expertise, and portion of speaking) that were dominantly appeared during the implementation of CW technique. The observation used interval scale of 1 – 4 where 1 represented "Not

Performed”, 2 was “slightly performed”, 3 was “well performed”, and 4 represented “excellently performed”. The field note was also formulated adapted from Fung (2010) which covered the soft and hard skills performed by the students. The results of field note were transcribed, interpreted, and explained qualitatively through narration and description.

Then, for the quantitative procedures, the researchers used closed-questionnaire and writing task. The statements in questionnaire were adapted from Fung (2010) and Wati (2013). It used the rating-scale form with 4 scales: (1) Disagree; (2) Fairly Disagree; (3) Agree; (4) Strongly Agree. The questionnaire data were calculated using percentage formula. The results, then, were converted to charts, and were described thoroughly to present comprehensiveness of the data. Meanwhile, the writing tests were conducted in each meeting (Meeting 1, Meeting 2, and Meeting 3) to see the progress of the students’ writing performance. The test was created by the teachers to maintain the validity of it. The form was a descriptive essay with a topic taken from the textbook. The test scores were calculated to find the mean score from each meeting. Then, the results were compared; and finally, were interpreted comprehensively to see if writing improvement happened.

Research Procedure

The steps involved (1) gathering data using an observation checklist and a field note while CW technique was being implemented; (2) distributing the closed-questionnaire after CW technique was implemented; (3) conducting a semi-structured interview after the questionnaire distribution; (4) analyzing the data separately; (5) combining the results of the data analysis; and (6) interpreting and discussing all the data together as one result. Figure 1 below represents the flow of the research.

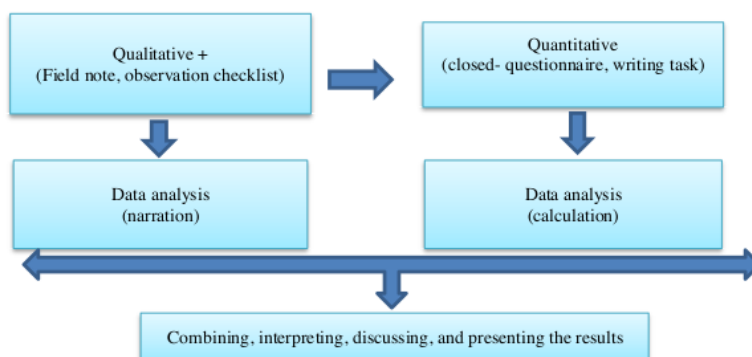


Figure 1-. The Flow of the Research

In details, the researchers conducted three times (three meetings) Collaborative Writing activity. The topics were taken from the textbook, and were all different in each meeting. In its implementation, the students were divided into group of 3 to 4 members. Then, a topic was given. They had to discuss the topic with other members of the group. They were allowed to use

laptops to find the information from internet during the discussion. This lasted for 60 minutes: 10 minutes brainstorming, 15 minutes drafting/outlining, 15 revising, 20 minutes editing. After that, the students had 10 minutes to finalize including proof read their writing, and publish / submit it to the teachers. The teachers gave feedback after that. In all meetings, the researchers with the help of two assistants collected the data using field note and observation checklist. Specifically, in meeting 3, the researchers distributed the questionnaire find out the students' perspectives towards CW technique. After all the intended data gathered, the researchers then analyzed them thoroughly. The researchers combined the results of all data, interpreted, and finally discussed them comprehensively in Results and Discussion section of this paper.

3. Results and Discussion

This section presents the results of the study. It is divided into four parts: data analysis of questionnaire, observation checklist, interview, and field note respectively; followed by discussion section. The discussion discusses the data comprehensively to answer the formulated research questions (the foci of the research). Therefore, the discussion part is written in three parts based on the numbers of research questions.

Results of Questionnaire Analysis

The questionnaire asked the students' opinion towards CW technique from writing skill aspect and soft/social skill aspect. The results are presented in Figure 2 and Figure 3.

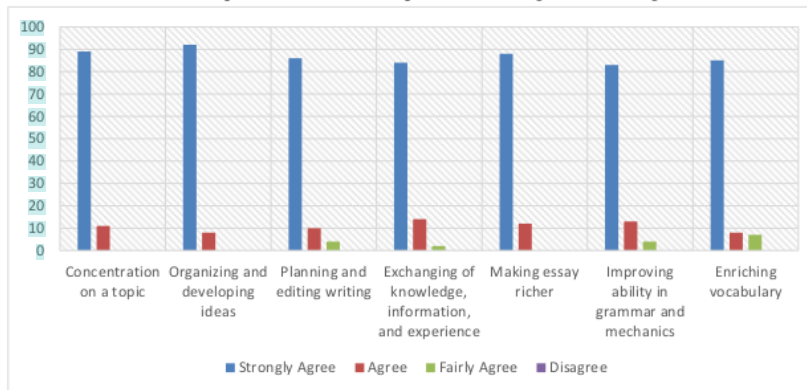


Figure 2. Writing Skill Aspect

Figure 2 above indicated that out of 7 categories (statements) that the students had to rate, none were responded by disagree. Averagely the students strongly agreed that CW technique has helped them improving their writing skills, especially in organizing and elaborating ideas that obtained the highest percentage of 92%. Besides, the students highly agreed that through CW

technique, their concentration of a topic assigned improved. This actually was related to their understanding of the topic with a percentage of 89%. Last but not least, the students believed that through CW technique, they could create richer essay than before with a percentage of 88%. From these results, it can be concluded that from the students' perspective, after implementing CW technique for 3 times, their writing skills improved excellently.

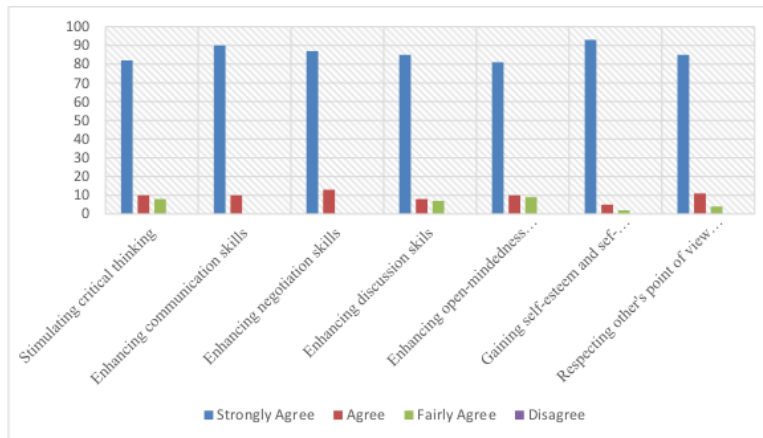


Figure 3. Soft skills aspect

In terms of soft skills aspects, there are 7 statements had to be responded by the students including (1) stimulating critical thinking, (2) enhancing communication skill, (3) enhancing negotiation skill, (4) enhancing discussion skill, (5) enhancing open-mindedness and empathy, (6) gaining self-esteem and self-confidence in speaking, and (7) respecting other's point of view. Figure 3 above indicated that in terms of the soft-skill aspect, CW technique has been successful enhancing 4 out of 7 skills significantly. Those are (1) gaining self-esteem and self-confidence in speaking with the percentage of 93%; (2) enhancing communication skills with the percentage of 90%; (3) enhancing discussion skill with the percentage of 87%; and (4) enhancing negotiation skills with the percentage of 87%, as well. In addition to that, the other 3 soft skills were also responded by 'strongly agree' with the average percentage of 83%.

Results of Observation Checklist

There were 5 criteria to be observed during the implementation of collaborative writing which included mutual interaction, negotiation, cognitive conflicts, shared expertise, and portion of speaking. The observation was done within three meetings during CW was being implemented. The observation was done by two observers, and the results are presented in Table 1 to Table 3 representing each meeting respectively.

Table 1. Observation checklist results from 2 observers (Meeting 1)

No.	Aspects	Observer 1	Observer 2
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1	The Students are performing mutual interaction in group while doing the process of writing which includes initiating ideas, responding to each other, and developing compliments	3	3
2	The students are performing negotiation in their group to reach an agreement of ideas which includes expressing thoughts and intentions, clarifying and confirming thoughts and intentions, using convincing expressions, and solving a shared problem	2	2
3	Cognitive conflicts are seen amongst students in the group which includes using the target language, maintaining thoughts and ideas, and accepting differences of viewpoints (being open-minded)	3	3
4	The students are performing shared expertise which includes suggesting ideas of writing, teaching their friends in group (peer-teaching), and contributing ideas to create a more accurate and richer text	3	3
5	The students have same portion of speaking in group (no one is dominant)	2	3

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Table 1 presents the results of observation checklist done by 2 observers in Meeting 1. The Table 1, it can be seen that both observers observed that mutual interaction (Aspect 1), cognitive conflicts (Aspect 3), and shared expertise (Aspect 4) had been well performed indicated by Scale 3 by students. Meanwhile, negotiation aspect (Aspect 2) was observed as slightly performed indicated by Scale 2 by both observers. Then, for the portion of speaking (Aspect 5), Observer 1 and Observer 2 perceived different opinions. Observer 1 scaled the aspect by slightly performed indicated by Scale 2 while Observer 2 scaled the aspect by well performed indicated by Scale 3. None of the aspects was observed by 4 or by 1 in Meeting 1.

Table 2. Observation checklist results from 2 observers (Meeting 2)

No.	Aspects	Observer 1	Observer 2
1	The Students are performing mutual interaction in group while doing the process of writing which includes initiating ideas, responding to each other, and developing compliments	4	3
2	The students are performing negotiation in their group to reach an agreement of ideas which includes expressing thoughts and intentions, clarifying and confirming thoughts and intentions, using convincing expressions, and solving a shared problem	3	3
3	Cognitive conflicts are seen amongst students in the group which includes using the target language,	4	3

	maintaining thoughts and ideas, and accepting differences of viewpoints (being open-minded)		
4	The students are performing shared expertise which includes suggesting ideas of writing, teaching their friends in group (peer-teaching), and contributing ideas to create a more accurate and richer text	4	4
5	The students have same portion of speaking in group (no one is dominant)	3	3

Table 2 presents the results of observation checklist in Meeting 2. From the [Table 2](#), we can see that all aspects are scaled by at least well performed indicated by Scale 3 which means the students during discussion or CW implementation showed good progress. In details, it can be seen that both observers agreed that all students in the group excellently performed expertise (Aspect 4). This indicated that they agreed CW has motivated the students to develop the shared expertise including suggesting ideas of writing, doing peer-teaching, contributing ideas to a get richer and accurate text. Meanwhile, the aspect of negotiation (Aspect 2) and same portion of speaking (Aspect 5) are scaled by well performed indicated by Scale 3. Yet, on the aspect of cognitive conflicts (Aspect 5) and mutual interaction (Aspect 1), the observer perceived different opinions. Observer 1 agreed to give Scale 4 (excellently performed) while Observer 2 gave Scale 3 (well performed). In contrary, on the mutual interaction (Aspect 4), Observer 1 scaled it by 4 (excellently performed) while Observer 3 scaled it by 3 (well performed).

Table 3. Observation checklist results from 2 observers (Meeting 3)

No.	Aspects	Observer 1	Observer 2
1	The Students are performing mutual interaction in group while doing the process of writing which includes initiating ideas, responding to each other, and developing compliments	4	4
2	The students are performing negotiation in their group to reach an agreement of ideas which includes expressing thoughts and intentions, clarifying and confirming thoughts and intentions, using convincing expressions, and solving a shared problem	4	4
3	Cognitive conflicts are seen amongst students in the group which includes using the target language, maintaining thoughts and ideas, and accepting differences of viewpoints (being open-minded)	4	4
4	The students are performing shared expertise which includes suggesting ideas of writing, teaching their friends in group (peer-teaching), and contributing ideas to create a more accurate and richer text	4	4
5	The students have same portion of speaking in group	4	4

Table 3 showed the observation results of two observers in Meeting 3. From the table, we can see the observers agreed that all aspects (mutual interaction, negotiation, cognitive conflicts, shared expertise, and same portion of speaking) have been performed excellently in Meeting 3 indicated by Scale 4. If we see from Meeting 1 to Meeting 3, we would comprehend that there happened improvements on each of the soft skills. This means within merely 3 meetings; CW technique has shown its effectiveness or power to help students to not only improve their writing ability aspects, but also their performance on social skills (soft skills).

Result of Field Note

The field note was used to record the behavior of students during the implementation of CW technique of the three participants within 3 meetings. The field-note taker used a guideline while observing consisting of 5 aspects of soft skills. The field note was aimed to gather more specific data while CW was being implemented involving (1) mutual interaction in specific phase of writing, (2) negotiation in specific phase of writing, (3) cognitive conflicts in specific phase of writing, (4) shared expertise in specific phase of writing, and (5) problems appeared during collaborative writing.

The field note results 10 emphasized that within 3 meetings, the students had performed collaborative features excellently. The mutual interaction, negotiation, cognitive conflicts, and shared expertise are performed vividly from these groups. Specifically, the aspects were seen mostly in brainstorming phase rather than in the other four phases of writing: drafting, editing, revising, and publishing. From the notes, in Meeting 1, there were four problems found during discussion including (1) students were hesitant to speak up (not confident), (2) one or two student were dominant in the discussion found in all groups, (3) many students showed worriedness or lack of trust to their friends, (4) students were upset when their opinions were rejected or not responded. In Meeting 2, these problems were reduced.

The field note-taker listed (1) some students were still hesitant to speak up but lesser than in Meeting 1; there were only 1 or 2 persons in the several groups reluctant to share the opinions. (2) Dominancy was found less than in Meeting 1; only in two groups dominancy was detected. In Meeting 2, students showed more confidence in themselves and in their friends. They started to learn how to conduct a good discussion such as giving or asking other members' opinions and accepted them. In Meeting 3, there was a significant progress. It was found out that there were no problems identified as in Meeting 1 and Meeting 2. The discussion was running smoothly and livelier as they were much more active sharing their opinions and such. They were sure they knew the objectives of conducting collaborative writing process. All in all, soft skills were identified to developed very well in Meeting 3.

Result of Writing Task

The tests were conducted three times; one test in each meeting. The task was a part of collaborative writing process. It was the product of the students writing. The writing assessment involved content, organization, vocabulary, grammar, and punctuations and spelling. The researcher calculated the mean score from each meeting as being presented in Table 4.

Table 4 Writing Mean Score

Task Meeting-	1	2	3
Mean Score	78,67	82,33	87.13

From Table 4 above it can be seen that within 3 meetings, the students' writing performances have improved. In Meeting 1, the mean score is 78,67; Meeting 2 is 82,33, and Meeting 3 is 87,13. These improvements indicated that CW technique could affect the students' ability in writing although range of the score was not too far different.

The results derived from the questionnaires, observation checklist, field note, and writing task above indicated that CW technique has been effective to help students of Year 10 improving both their writing ability and soft skills within three meetings. The discussion session that the students did has brought lots of experience to them which affected their writing performances and soft skills at once. If we see thoroughly, although the writing scores were not significantly improved indicated by the small mean score range from Meeting 1 to Meeting 3, the soft skills were developed very well. From the observation checklist, for example, it can be seen that all important aspects of soft skills performed excellently by the students indicated by Scale 4 (excellently performed). The, from the students' perspectives towards CW emphasized the effectiveness. The students strongly agreed that CW could help them improving their ability in writing and also developing their soft skills (see questionnaire results).

In line with these results, a study conducted by Zhang (2018) also indicated that collaborative writing was effective to engage mutual and sustainable interaction and cooperation, share decision-making process, and share responsibility amongst the students. Moreover, the finely evidence from the findings of a study conducted by Fung (2010) emphasized that the students were feasibly to work in groups or in pairs with the main purpose of sharing ideas or doing peer teaching resulting a rich writing product and better writing skills. What make collaborative writing powerful to improve the students' writing skills and to develop the soft skills are actually complete and complex features that allow the students to share ideas, do peer teaching, even do suggesting to help their friends enrich the writing (Fung, 2010). Through the discussion, the students were triggered or motivated to participate actively in which it broke boundaries between good and poor students, and boosted their self-confidence to speak (Hillyard et al., 2010; Wati, 2013). Moreover, during CW implementation, the students learned how to listen and respect differences (being open-minded), they also enrich broader knowledge and information from other students (Deveci, 2018; Fong, 2012; Hammond et al., 2010; Laal & Laal, 2012; Rezeki, 2017; Zhang, 2018).

4. Conclusion

The goal of learning EFL is not solely to achieve high scores or good grades on the lesson, but also still to develop the social or soft skills of the student. Accordingly, an interactive technique is much needed. In writing, specifically, the fact that collaborative writing technique is effective to improve both writing ability and also social skills of the students is

indisputable. As this study has revealed, ¹collaborative writing technique is indeed powerful to improve the writing performances and soft skills of higher secondary students after three times implementation. The results indicated within three meetings, the mutual interaction, negotiation skills, cognitive conflicts, shared expertise, and balance portion of speaking performed excellently by the students supported by the improvement of their writing scores. Therefore, it can be concluded for higher secondary level, collaborative technique is highly recommended because its ability has been scientifically proven.

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