EFL female students' perceptions in doing collaborative writing in an online writing class

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Article Info

Abstract

Collaborative writing is an approach teachers can apply to support their students' writing development. However, despite the benefits from collaborative writing, some English as a Foreign Language (EFL) students might not enjoy writing in groups. This qualitative study aims to explore the perceptions of EFL female students in doing collaborative writing in a Writing for the Media class, such as how they think about finishing their writing tasks collaboratively, the benefits and challenges of doing collaborative writing in order to know whether collaborative writing can actually improve students' writing skills or the opposite. The female students were chosen because studies prove that they contribute more for the group's success. Data were gathered through a semi-structured interview with five EFL female students from a private university in Central Java, Indonesia. My analysis results indicated that EFL female students had positive perceptions towards collaborative writing, i.e., helping other students complete their writing tasks, providing opportunities to share ideas, and improving writing skills. Meanwhile, challenges that most of the research participants faced were dealing with differences in opinion, and lacking equal contribution from group members. Practical suggestions for improving online collaborative writing activities in online EFL writing classrooms and recommendations for future research are presented, i.e., assist and monitor the progress, giving a specific topic to write about to minimize conflict and differences of opinion, and providing rubrics for peer assessment.

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INTRODUCTION

Writing is one of the four language skills that many English as a Foreign Language (EFL) students consider as a difficult skill to master. One of the reasons is that EFL students need to use appropriate language in their writing (Karyuatry et al., 2018). Students should master the grammar-related rules to decrease their writing errors (Kusumawardhani, 2019; Pratiwi, 2016). According to Utami et al. (2012), writing is an activity that needs to be arranged in specific order to make it logical and connected. Thus, it requires a considerable amount of time to produce it. It is often challenging because students find difficulties in passive words, new vocabulary, and making phrases (Karyuatry et al., 2018). Writing is hard to acquire and requires a lot of experiences (Richards, 1990).

In that case, collaborative writing might be one of the approaches that language teachers can adopt to assist their EFL learners' writing development. Collaborative writing provides an opportunity for students to improve their language use and writing quality by working together with their peers (McDonough et al., 2018). In addition, students could discuss, share ideas, and even debate to get a joint agreement when they write collaboratively (Rezeki & Surmiyati, 2021). Moreover, collaborative writing allows the students to improve their understanding, willingness to listen, social skills, and respect others' ideas (Hammond et al., 2010; Zhang, 2018).

Despite those benefits, not all students feel comfortable or enjoy writing collaboratively with others due to several obstacles that they encounter in their collaborative writing activities. For example, they do not know how to collaborate when they start to work in groups (Le et al., 2018). As a result, students often criticize each other, interrupt, reject suggestions, and ignore others' ideas (Barron, 2003). Eventually, some members work on most of the writing, while others work less, and some do not do their parts (Le et al., 2018). Moreover, there are arguments regarding gender differences affecting collaboration performance and effectiveness. Female students tend to have more interpersonal interaction through group discussions and debates, and influence the quality of group work results than what male students do (Curseu et al., 2018).

EFL students often do collaborative writing, as discussed in the previous paragraphs, in Writing for the Media classes in the English Language Education Program at a private university in Central Java, Indonesia. In this study, the researcher is interested in finding out if writing collaboratively can genuinely help female students in improving their writing skills. The gender role is also the background of this research since according to Takeda and Homberg (2014), female students tend to put more effort and contribution for the success of the group and they take the tasks more seriously than male students. This research intends to know how EFL female students perceive doing collaborative writing activities in their classes. More specifically, this research aims to answer this question: *What are the perceptions (i.e., advantages and challenges) that EFL female students experience when doing collaborative writing in Writing for the Media classes?*

This research expects to provide inputs for EFL teachers in improving the practices of students' online collaborative writing in their classes. The study can also inform EFL students about what they should/should not do when doing similar online collaborative writing activities in their EFL writing class. In this study, the EFL students might also learn practical ideas on how to improve their writing skills through their online collaborative writing activities.

It is essential to know the definition of perception because perception is the basis of this research. According to Qiong (2017), perception is the process that enables people to notice and observe the existence of various impulses, then gives them intentions. Along the same line, Crane (2005) stated that perception is "the consciousness of surroundings through our five senses which are seeing, feeling, hearing, smelling, tasting" (p. 237). It actively demonstrates that, through perceptions, people can manage their senses to give meaning to a particular concept or situation, and each person can have a perception of something in positive or negative ways. To sum up, perception is people's response or opinion from their senses about something that happens around them. In the context of learning, perception defines students' views of the learning method or model used by their teacher.

In this research, collaborative writing includes the following activities. First, it requires students to participate and be responsible for the text that has been written together from the first stage to the final stage of writing, which are brainstorming, gathering information, organizing outlines, drafting, revising, and editing the writing (Storch, 2019). Second, it includes decision-making, problem-solving, and knowledge sharing of each student. It is because collaborative writing is a writing process that requires students' contribution, which is effort and ideas at each stage of its writing (Shah & Veramuthu, 2020). Furthermore, it requires each student to take responsibility

while doing the writing task with others, which can be participation and interaction. It is because collaborative writing allows students to train their English ability and develop their writing with their peers or group clearly (Nguyen & Trinh, 2021). Fourth, in this study, all the activities described above were done in an online environment through the use of technology, such as *Google Docs*. In conclusion, collaborative writing in this study refers to a method that allows students to work together in an online environment to complete a writing task and produce good writing results.

Many researchers have indicated positive perceptions of the students and various effects of collaborative writing in the learning process. These positive perceptions and outcomes were informed by studies conducted in Saudi Arabia (Alkhalaf, 2020; Abahussain, 2020), Vietnam (Nguyen & Trinh, 2021; Pham, 2021), Indonesia (Anggraini et al., 2020; Aulia & Zulfikar, 2020; Cahyono & Winarti, 2020; Emzir et al., 2020; Murtiningsih, 2016), United Arab Emirates (Deveci, 2018), Iran (Khodabakhshzadeh & Samadi, 2018), Thailand (Coffin, 2020; Kitjaroonchai & Suppasetseree, 2021), China (Du, 2018), and Palestine (Farrah, 2015).

In the study conducted with 50 female students in Saudi Arabia, Alkhalaf (2020) informed that the collaborative writing improved the students' writing and language skills. They also had positive attitudes towards it, even though some problems, such as students' behavior, proficiency, lack of contribution, and time management occurred. Along the lines, Abahussain (2020) also showed that students preferred the collaborative writing method because they had positive perceptions of its use. A more recent study in Vietnam by Nguyen and Trinh (2021) on students' perceptions of collaborative writing showed that students found collaborative writing helpful to complete their writing task. Similarly, Pham's (2021) study reported that collaborative writing was beneficial to increase students' writing fluency.

Several studies in Indonesia also revealed that students had a positive perception towards collaborative writing. Cahyono and Winarti (2020) found out that EFL students in their research gained many advantages from collaborative writing, such as shared information, give comments, and improved their writing ability. Anggraini and her colleagues (2020) revealed that students acquired a significant positive impact on their writing skills after doing their collaborative writing. Aulia and Zulfikar's study (2020) on EFL students' perceptions of collaborative writing in Aceh, Indonesia informed that collaborative writing was not always successful due to different writing styles; however, they were pleased with their collaboration results. Emzir et al. 's (2020) study on EFL students' perceptions of collaborative writing also showed that students had positive perceptions in many aspects of collaborative writing, such as cooperation, understanding concepts, and their writing skills in the classroom.

In a study conducted with 60 EFL learners from a language institute in Kashmar, Iran, Khodabakhshzadeh and Samadi (2018) indicated that Iranian EFL students had positive collaborative writing perceptions. It provided a positive effect on writing tasks, such as changing unproductive writing style, motivation to write, and understanding a topic. In a study by Coffin (2020) on teachers' and students' perspectives on implementing collaborative writing in EFL classrooms in Thailand, collaborative writing practice had positively affected communication, problem-solving skills, and teamwork. Besides, a survey by Kitjaroonchai and Suppasetseree (2021) showed that online collaborations had helped students in an international university in Thailand shape their interaction patterns, language proficiency, behavior, and cooperativeness. In a case study of students' perceptions about language improvement and collaborative writing products conducted with 69 students in China, Du (2018) reported that collaborative writing had helped the students improved their writing. In a study by Devici (2018) on students' perceptions of collaborative writing in a project-based class in the United Arab Emirates, the female students were found to be more satisfied with their experience in doing collaborative writing compared to what male students experienced. In a study conducted at Hebron University in Palestine about students' perception of online collaborative writing, Farrah (2015) revealed that online collaborative writing improved writing performance, developed personal communication, and increased critical thinking. It actively demonstrates that students showed positive attitudes towards collaborative writing.

To conclude the above previous studies in this section:
- Most of those studies confirmed that collaborative writing had many advantages, and students also found it beneficial to help them with their writing abilities.
- Despite the challenges students faced, as revealed by Alkhalaf (2020) and Aulia and Zulfikar (2020), students still had positive perceptions of collaborative writing to help them with writing assignments.

However, collaborative writing-related studies conducted in an online environment from the eyes of Indonesian EFL undergraduate students and focusing on the EFL female students' perceptions towards online collaborative writing activities are still limited in number. This study hopes to fill those empirical gaps and contribute to the discussions of online collaborative writing in an EFL writing classroom. With this background in mind, previous researchers help me to undertake this research, explore the EFL female students' perceptions towards writing collaboratively since they considered to be more satisfied with their experience in doing collaborative writing (Deveci, 2018).

METHODS

This research aimed to explore EFL female students' perceptions of online collaborative writing in Writing for the Media classes at a private university in Central Java. A qualitative approach was applied to achieve the aim of this research. The qualitative approach gives depth and detailed data through an attentive explanation of attitudes, conditions, and interactions with smaller groups of people or cases observed (Labuschagne, 2003). In addition, it analyzes things in natural settings (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005), which means that the data of this research was collected in the field where participants are experiencing collaborative writing in a writing class. There was no attempt to manipulate the students' collaborative writing experiences. A qualitative approach is better when research focuses on one specific case (Gerring, 2017).

This research was conducted in Writing for the Media classes at a private university in Central Java. Those classes were chosen because collaborative writing was often used in teaching and learning activities. The teaching and learning activities were conducted in the Zoom Meeting application. Meanwhile, for online writing, the students usually use Google Docs to complete the writing tasks and collaborate with their peers or groups. The collaborations in those classes aimed at supporting students' writing so that they could produce good essays (Hastuti, 2020).

Participants

The participants for this research were five female students from Writing for the Media classes a private university in Central Java. In a qualitative research, the sample size used tends to be smaller to ease the collection of accurate and depth information (Dworkin, 2012). The researcher employed the criterion sampling method in which the researcher determines the criterion first and then selects participants who meet that predetermined criteria (Ary et al., 2010). In this study, the researcher looked for participants who have experience in doing collaborative writing. The female students in Writing for the Media classes were selected as the sampling because they got some experiences collaboratively doing the writing activities. The selection of the participants was also to address gaps in the literature where there is still a limited number of previous studies that explore the perspectives of female EFL students in doing their online collaborative writing.

Data collection instrument

The data for this qualitative research was collected through a semi-structured interview. The researcher used the interview because it offers the researcher a list of organized questions, with the intention that all participants can answer the questions in the same sequence. Semi-structured interviews are usually followed by further why or how questions (Adams, 2015). By implementing semi-structured interviews, the researcher will be able to engage in an in-depth conversation with the participants to gather detailed information from participants (DeJonckheere & Vaughn, 2019). The interview questions were adapted from two previous studies in the literature review. All participants were asked the same questions with some follow-up questions.

This section describes the research approach used, respondents involved in the study, if any, which should be kept confidential, instruments, procedures of collecting the data, and ways of analyzing the data. The blueprint of the instrument may be provided if necessary. Commonly used statistical formula should not be putin this section.

This section can also be divided into several subheadings as shown below. However, to write it in paragraphs (without subheadings) is preferred. This section should not exceed 10% (500-700 words for qualitative research) or 15% (500-1000 words for quantitative research) of the manuscript.

Table 1. The Interview Questions

No.	Interview Questions	Adapted/ generated from
1.	Have you taken the Writing for the Media class?	
2.	What do you think about collaborative writing to complete a writing task?	Anggraini et al. (2020)
2.1	What challenges do you face when doing collaborative writing? Why?	
2.2	What benefits do you get from doing collaborative writing? How?	
3.	How do you perceive your writing skills after doing a writing task collaboratively?	Trinh and Nguyen (2021)

Data collection procedures
The procedure of collecting the data was done in several steps. First, the researcher contacted and informed each participant about the purpose of the research via WhatsApp messenger. Afterwards, the researcher made an appointment by scheduling an online meeting with each participant to conduct the interview. The interview was conducted through the Zoom Meetings application to facilitate the continuity of the interview with the research participants. During the interview, the researcher recorded the interview to ease the data transcription process. Then, the results were clustered into several points or themes.

Data analysis procedures
The researcher analyzed the research data through a thematic analysis. The thematic analysis was used since the researcher analyzed the data by themes. Using thematic analysis, the researcher can link the frequency analysis of one theme to another, increasing the meaning of the study and providing accuracy (Alhojailan, 2012). It also allows the researcher to recap, highlight main features, and interpret or make sense of all the data (Kiger & Varpio, 2020). The researcher first recorded the interview process and transcribed the interview data. Then, the researcher reread the transcription to verify the accuracy of the data. And finally, similar to Mali and Salsbury (2021), the researcher grouped the similar ideas of each theme and developed them to answer the research question.

Research trustworthiness
To ensure the research's trustworthiness, the researcher did member checks. It is also known as participant feedback. After collecting and interpreting the data, the researcher asked the participants to comment or review the interpreted data to verify the accuracy and meaning and avoid confusion (Ary et al., 2010; Mali, 2017). According to Hagens et al. (2009), member check also allows for correcting misconceptions or errors, clarifying content and deleting or adding transcription statements. Moreover, the interview questions were pilot tested with five participants in the research setting. Based on the participants' comments and the result of the evaluation of the pilot data, the researcher used the appropriate points to arrange the final draft of the interview questions. Previous researchers (e.g., Le et al., 2018; Trinh & Nguyen, 2021) also piloted their research instruments to ensure their research's trustworthiness.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION
This section presents the findings of this research to answer the following research question: What are the perceptions (i.e., advantages and challenges) that EFL female students experience when doing collaborative writing in Writing for the Media classes?. Five themes emerged as the answer to the research question. The themes will be discussed in detail in the next subsections.

The online collaborative writing helps to complete writing tasks
In the interview, the participants were asked how they think of writing collaboratively in completing a writing assignment in their Writing for the Media class. Most of them stated that collaboration is helpful for them in finishing the writing tasks assigned.

Excerpt 1
I think it's helpful, like when we're doing the task, it becomes easier because there is someone who helps us when we do that (writing task). (Student 1)
Excerpt 2
I think it's easier to write in groups, it helps us to decide ideas like that … it's easier to find new ideas from our friends … it helps us complete writing tasks like essay easily with the help of the group members. (Student 3)
Excerpt 3
Since we work in groups, the task is quite a lot, but we can do it together, so I didn't feel like working alone and thank God my friends in the group are working too so the task completed properly as the lecturer wanted… (Student 5)

These three findings are similar to one of the previous studies in the literature review (Nguyen & Trinh, 2021), which indicated that students perceived collaborative writing as helpful for generating ideas and values to complete writing assignments. Based on the findings in excerpt 1, Student 1 stated that collaborative writing is beneficial for completing a writing task. She felt that doing a writing task in pairs made it easier because she had someone to work with and help her complete the job. Along the same line, student 3 also indicated that writing collaboratively helped her decide on specific topics to write and generate new ideas from her friends in the group. Moreover, she also believed that with collaborative writing, finishing tasks such as essays are more manageable because they could work together in their group. Meanwhile, in excerpt 3, Student 5 also stated quite the same perception. Writing in groups also helped her to complete a writing task correctly. She said that she worked with support group members so that they could finish many writing tasks together, and she did not feel like she did the functions by herself. These statements indicate collaborative writing helped the participants to finish many assigned writing tasks, makes the writing tasks easier to complete and gain new ideas from others.

The online collaborative writing provides opportunities to share ideas
Based on the interview results, some participants shared that when they did collaborative writing in the Writing for the Media class, they also shared ideas, information, and knowledge with their group members or pairs.

Excerpt 4
We can exchange ideas to discuss a certain topic, or we can develop a topic together…, and we can develop our thoughts with each other. (Student 1)
Excerpt 5
It really helps me to share ideas and exchange information with friends like when we are doing group writing assignments. (Student 4)

These findings are also consistent with Farah's (2015) findings that students had a chance to express their ideas in the group, which makes them perceive collaborative writing as a worthy experience. Excerpts 4 and 5 showed how some of the research participants got the opportunity to share their ideas and information with other group members. Student 1 stated that collaborative writing allowed her to express her thoughts when discussing a writing topic. Similar to student 1, student 4 also mentioned that collaborative writing helps her share her thoughts in the group, and they could also share helpful information related to the writing tasks they are working on. This might indicate they could build up their thoughts to complement each other's ideas and collaborative writing allows to share ideas and information regarding the writing tasks.

The online collaborative writing improves writing skills
In a writing course, it was evident that students get a lot of writing assignments they must complete, whether they have to do it alone or in groups. There are also many kinds of writing texts that they are expected to be able to make and understand well. From the interview result, the researcher found out that the participants agreed that collaborative writing could improve their writing skills.

Excerpt 6
My writing skills are improving; I've understood about paraphrasing, summarizing, then making an editorial opinion. Some writing tasks are quite good for my writing skills ... my skill has improved since I took this course, that's why I became more excited. It seems like my writing is getting better. (Student 1)
Excerpt 7
I feel like my writing skills have improved because my friends also gave me advice if you want to write something like this, then I can apply it when I write. (Student 2)
Excerpt 8
I think my writing skills have started to improve... It's because I've taken WFTM twice. I didn't understand WFTM at first, so it was like a lot of failed tasks last semester, so this time has improved because there are more CW than the individual. (Student 3)

Excerpt 6 shows that student 1's writing skills got better by doing collaborative writing. She also stated that improving her skills made her more enthusiastic about writing, and she understands the given materials. It means that by doing collaborative writing, student 1 felt that she improved her writing skills, her understanding of some topic materials, and her writing enthusiasm. Nearly the same as in the previous excerpt, student 2 also agreed that her writing skills improved by doing collaborative writing with her group. She stated that she could apply the suggestions from her friends in the group when doing collaborative writing.

These findings confirm those reported by the previous studies (e.g., Alkhalaf, 2020; Anggraini et al., 2020; Emzir et al., 2020) that collaborative writing allows students to improve their writing skills or writing abilities in English. Alkhalaf (2020) found that collaborative writing as an applicable method does particularly help students improve their writing skills. Significantly, collaborative writing offers positive outcomes for students' writing skills (Anggraini et al., 2020). In other words, collaborative writing allows students to help each other improve their skills in writing (Emzir et al., 2020). The participants of the present research seem to confirm that they experienced some improvements in their writing skills after they wrote collaboratively with their group members in the Writing for the Media class they had taken. This might also indicate that writing skills could be improved by the help (e.g., advice or recommendations) of other members in the group when writing collaboratively.

Students often deals with different opinions
In group work, it is believed that each member has a different view or thoughts on certain things. It is undeniable that debates or differences of opinion can occur in group discussions. From the results of interviews with the participants, the researcher found out that some participants were often in an uncomfortable situation where every group member had a different opinion in the discussion, which slowed the progress of writing a task.

Excerpt 9
When we work in a group, of course, we have lots of opinions from our friends. Well, some friends insist on choosing their idea to be the topic, the rest also the same, they insist on choosing their idea to be written. (Student 3)
Excerpt 10
Since everyone has different opinions, combining two different opinions sometimes does not end up with the same view. So, sometimes, I want an education topic, but my friend wants to talk about health, so we need to find a way to solve that different opinion. … So it's better for us to look for other ideas so that there is no guilt for each other…. (Student 1)
Excerpt 11
For example, there are different topics, we have different opinions on one topic, so the challenge is how we want to mediate to equalize our opinions to decide what we want to discuss on that one topic. (Student 5)

As shown by the statements above, students encounter disagreement in determining the topic to write. Student 3 stated that when she worked in her group, she got many ideas from her friends. Still, some of them became selfish, insisting on choosing their thoughts without thinking about other members' opinions, which slowed down their writing progress. On the other hand, student 1 also

encountered the same challenge. Differences of view about the topic to be chosen make her and her friends have to find ways to resolve the problem of the opinion difference by selecting another topic. Along the same line, student 5 had the same challenge as two other participants. She also encountered differences of opinions with her group members, and she needed to find a way to overcome their different views by stabilizing their opinion and deciding what topic to choose. These findings are almost similar to the results of Alkhalaf (2020). In his study, some participants also experienced different opinions from their group members. This might indicate that when writing in groups or pairs, differences of opinion would more likely occur when selecting the subject or idea to write together.

Students experience lack of equal contribution from group members
When working in a group, there must be some common issues or challenges that may arise. One of the issues or challenges is unequal contribution. It is believed that students may find this kind of challenge when working on an assignment in a group. One of the research participants also stated that she deals with the lack of contribution of her group members when doing collaborative writing.

> *Excerpt 12*
> ... then sometimes in the group, there are members who want to work, but some of them are difficult to contact, and some don't work at all. (Student 3)

The statement above shows that student 3 has dealt with a lack of contribution when doing collaborative writing in writing for the Media class. She found some challenges, such as difficulty contacting other group members to work, then dealt with members who did not want to contribute writing. One of the previous studies in the literature review also confirmed this problem. In Alkhalaf's (2020) study students claimed that some group members did not fairly contribute when writing the texts, so they believed that the same score for all group members is unfair. This finding might indicate that writing in groups is not always easy because some members want to get good grades without contributing and often rely on others' abilities.

CONCLUSION
This research explored how EFL female students at a private university in Central Java perceive doing collaborative writing in Writing for the Media classes. The researcher revealed that helping to complete writing tasks, providing opportunities to share ideas, and improving writing skills are the benefits EFL female students get from collaborative writing. However, some challenges they also experienced when doing collaborative writing include differences in opinion and the lack of group members' contributions. Nevertheless, the findings indicate that all research participants positively perceive collaborative writing in their Writing for the Media classes. Regarding the findings, the gender roles of female students seem to provide outstanding performances in writing collaboratively. As results, skill improvement and task completion were achieved. Furthermore, the researcher would like to suggest EFL teachers in the Writing for the Media class to assist and monitor the progress in every stage of collaborative writing. Giving a specific topic to write about might be needed to minimize conflict and differences of opinion in choosing a topic that can affect students' performance in writing the task given. While monitoring students' contribution to the task, providing rubrics on peer assessment in every writing task may also be needed to ensure every student takes part in writing collaboratively. The researcher also suggests that the students contribute in each writing stage, be less self-absorbed to other group members, and be more active in writing collaboratively. Since this research is limited by gathering the participants, only five female students from Writing for the Media classes participated. These participants may indicate only some EFL female students in Writing for the Media classes. For future research, involving more participants to get expansive perceptions of collaborative writing may be better.

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