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EFL teachers' use of collaborative writing and its challenges: A dual-case study from Vietnam

 Quyen Thi Thuc Bui^{1*},  Tran Thi Bao Nguyen²

¹*Faculty of Foreign Languages, Ho Chi Minh City Open University, Vietnam.*

²*Tra Vinh University, Vietnam.*

Corresponding author: Quyen Thi Thuc Bui (Email: quyen.btt@ou.edu.vn)

Abstract

This dual-case study investigated how EFL (English as a foreign language) upper-secondary teachers implement collaborative writing (CW) in practice and what challenges they perceive during implementation. Two teachers were conveniently recruited. Data collection, analyses and interpretation were guided by the Activity Theory (AT) [1]. Semi-structured interviews were employed as the main data collection instrument. The findings revealed that both participating teachers, though in different school contexts and with different experience in CW pedagogy, were found to have successfully implemented CW in their classroom. The participants were also concerned about pedagogical and non-pedagogical challenges in implementing CW in their classrooms. Several recommendations for teacher professional training programs and to teachers to optimize CW were included.

Keywords: Activity Theory (AT), Collaborative writing, EFL teachers.

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Institutional Review Board Statement: This study adhered to the guidelines of Ho Chi Minh City Open University Human Ethics Committee [Decision No. 582/ QĐ-ĐHM] in Vietnam. An official invitation letter and consent form were delivered to all participants who were informed in detail of the research aims and procedures, the use of audio recording and their right to withdraw from the study.

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1. Introduction

In EFL settings, collaborative writing (CW) is widely acknowledged for promoting linguistic development, critical thinking, and social engagement [2]. Many researchers worldwide highly recommend EFL teachers to assign CW tasks to their students [3] since it has been proven to provide learners with productive feedback and critique, written language accuracy, writing effectiveness, and student-centred teaching and learning [4]. Notably, during the last decades, there have been many published studies investigating the impacts of CW on EFL learners (e.g., Storch [3] and Zulfikar and Aulia [5]),

and students' perspectives and attitudes toward this innovative pedagogical approach of CW (e.g., Anshu and Yesuf [6]). CW benefits EFL writing development, especially with structured feedback and ongoing practice [7].

In Vietnam, in 2018, the Vietnamese Ministry of Education and Training (MOET) enacted an educational policy called 'New General Education English Curriculum' (GEEC), aiming to enhance teaching methods so as to help improve interaction in EFL (English as a Foreign Language) classrooms [8]. Vietnamese EFL teachers are strongly encouraged to incorporate collaborative learning into their English language lessons to enhance student-centred teaching, provide valuable feedback, and improve both linguistic and communicative competence for EFL learners.

Just like in other places in Vietnam, the Department of Education and Training (DOET) in Long An strictly followed the principles of the English language curriculum development. After the implementation of GEEC in 2022, English language teachers have tried to use new interactive methods in their lessons. Based on the premise that the action offers considerable advantages for EFL writing [9] many of them have attempted to incorporate CW activities into their classrooms.

A preliminary literature review indicated that despite the increasing popularity of CW worldwide, research primarily focuses on its impacts on learners' learning outcomes and experiences, rather than its actual classroom implementation, which is equally important [10]. Moreover, as can be seen, CW has been recognized in various educational contexts and an innovative writing pedagogy in Vietnam; however, the same research examining teachers' perceptions and practical applications of CW in Vietnamese EFL classrooms, particularly in upper secondary schools, remains limited. This research gap highlights the need for an in-depth examination of the actual practices of CW in classrooms and the challenges that teachers encounter when implementing CW in their lessons.

Two research questions to guide its investigation are:

1. How have EFL upper secondary school teachers implemented CW in their writing classrooms?
2. What are the challenges they perceived when implementing CW in their writing classrooms?

2. Literature Review

2.1. Collaborative Writing

Writing is a productive skill that involves generating ideas, expressing them clearly, and organising them into coherent text [11]. This can be done individually or with the collaboration of other people (CW). CW is based on Vygotsky [12] sociocultural theory. It provides the condition for peer interaction that fosters cognitive and linguistic development.

In CW, students work in pairs or groups together to complete the writing process, including drafting, composing and editing a shared text. They can share ideas, correct errors, and refine their writing as a joint project [13] depending on the teacher's goal which can be meaning-focused or language-focused. No matter what goal it is, CW is evidenced to enhance learners' expressive capabilities and overall writing proficiency, particularly in EFL contexts [14].

2.2. Implementation of CW in EFL Context

In recent years, CW has gained global attention as a practical pedagogical approach in EFL classrooms. Numerous studies outside Vietnam [7, 15, 16] have shown that CW enhances learners' writing quality and fosters positive attitudes toward writing [6]. A study in Saudi Arabia found that the application of CW helped students produce longer, more accurate texts with richer vocabulary [7] or increase their confidence and satisfaction [10]. Likewise, studies in Spain and Hong Kong, Ma [17]; Wang, et al. [18] identified a positive impact on motivation, collaboration, and linguistic awareness from using CW. In Turkey and the Emirates, project-based CW has been used to promote learner autonomy and peer feedback [15, 19]. These studies confirmed that peer interaction and feedback significantly contribute to improved writing quality and motivation [17, 18].

Numerous studies have also been conducted on the use of CW in Vietnam. One of the dominant studies conducted by Tram [20] reported improved writing fluency and favourable attitudes among university learners after implementing CW. Another study, by Nguyen and Phuong [21] found similar gains in secondary students' paragraph writing and enthusiasm toward CW.

2.3. Challenges in Implementing CW

The research identified some considerations when applying CW. First, it is based on the teachers' knowledge and beliefs of CW as suggested by Zhang and Chen [22] which can determine the success of CW use [23, 24]. Second, CW can be related to students' attitudes, which helps improve their motivation and collaboration [25, 26] however, without the appropriate use of CW, learning outcomes can be limited by negative emotions. Storch [3, 27] identified four peer interaction patterns - collaborative, dominant/dominant, dominant/passive, expert/novice - that shape CW effectiveness. Third, environmental constraints such as large class sizes, limited contact hours, and exam-driven curricula can restrict CW practices [28]. For instance, the high-stakes national exam system often leads teachers to prioritize grammar-based instruction. However, external English environments (e.g., language centres, online platforms) can positively influence CW integration [29] encouraging more communicative and collaborative teaching practices. Finally, external English environments can also have a significant impact on classroom practices. Studies also show that participation in language centres and extracurricular activities improves learners' writing ability and attitudes toward CW, thereby shaping teachers' instructional approaches [29, 30].

3. Methodology

3.1. Research Design and Setting

Given the exploratory nature of the research questions, the study used a qualitative approach to learn about participants' *experiences* and perspectives [31]. Two cases which can suffice for cross-case analysis [32] were investigated due to time constraints and participant availability. The study was conducted in Long An Province in the Mekong Delta. Data were collected over 12 weeks during the second semester of 2023–2024 school year.

3.2. Research Participants

Invitation emails were sent to English teachers in Long An to recruit those who were teaching Grade 10 or 11 under the 2018 curriculum, applying CW in their classrooms and consented to our interviews and classroom observations. Six teachers agreed to participate; however, due to scheduling conflicts, only two joined. They were from two different schools - one with normal and the other with specialized English language training program.

3.3. Data Collection and Analysis

Data collection was carried out through semi-structured interviews in Vietnamese. Classroom observations (before the interviews), and relevant official and examinations of teacher-generated documents were also used support the data from the interviews when necessary.

The AT (Figure 1), a framework for examining human practices within sociocultural contexts [1] were employed to as a guide of data collection and data analysis to explore teachers' CW practices and perceived challenges.

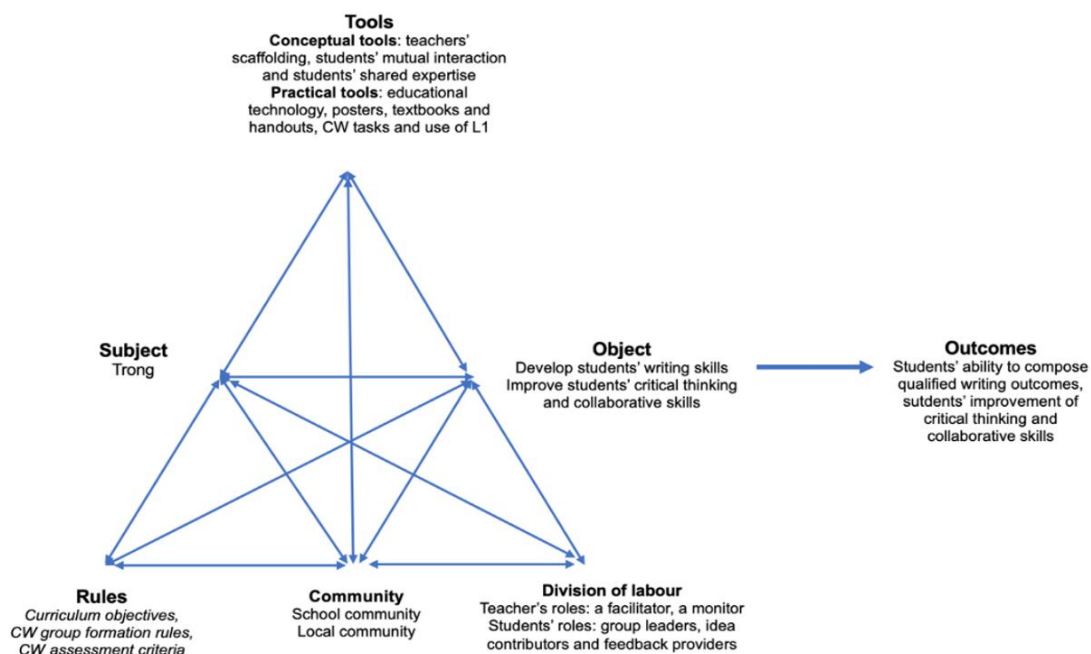


Figure 1.
CW Implementation Activity System.

AT helps observe how individuals (subjects) interact with mediating tools to achieve a shared goal (object), while being influenced by contextual elements such as rules, community, and division of labor. These six components collectively form an activity system that shapes actions and outcomes. The current study's subjects were the participating teachers; the object was the implementation of CW to improve students' writing; the tools included instructional materials and strategies; the rules referred to teaching norms and school regulations; the community encompassed students, colleagues, and administrators; and the division of labor described the teacher–student dynamics in CW tasks.

Data from interviews were analyzed both manually and using NVivo 14, following a two-stage process: individual case analysis, and cross-case thematic analysis. Each case report included the teacher's background, CW implementation practices, and perceived challenges. Initial codes were generated using constant comparative analysis [33] with AT also informing the identification of contradictions and tensions within each activity system. The researchers translated the written interview transcription into English, using a back-translation strategy [34] which was completed by both the research team and a native English-speaking scholar to ensure linguistic and cultural accuracy.

3.4. Trustworthiness and Ethics

All ethical standards for human research were strictly followed [35]. The participants were fully informed of and consent to of the study. Confidentiality was protected by anonymizing all data, and participants were free to decline any question of the interviews. Interview transcripts were shared with participants for verification, and the data were securely stored with restricted access. Pseudonyms for the two participants: Trong, aged 34, from Upper Secondary A; and Nam, aged 36, from Upper Secondary B. Both hold a master's degree in TESOL.

4. Results

The study used the AT's guiding framework to investigate both cases. The six key elements Subject, Tools, Object, Rules, Community, Division of Labour structured the analysis of CW practices in the classroom.

4.1. CW Implementation Activity System - Teacher Trong

4.1.1. The Subject – Trong

Trong has taught English writing for 12 years at Upper Secondary School A, a school with special program for English. From the outset, he has applied the Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) approach, emphasising student-centred and communication-focused learning. Despite his focus on student interaction through pair and group activities in CLT, in the interview, Trong noted his students' writing challenges to thought organising, structuring writing and developing coherence:

While students became more comfortable speaking and sharing ideas verbally, their writing skills did not improve at the same pace as speaking. Many students still struggled with organizing their thoughts, structuring their writing, and developing coherent paragraphs.

According to the 2018 GEEC, collaboration is highlighted to enhance co-learning for collective outcomes. He noted:

CW thus enables students to progress from merely sharing ideas to co-constructing texts, wherein each participant's contribution significantly influenced the development of the final written piece.

He actively participated in several professional activities, including attending British Council workshops on innovative EFL methods and MOET training to implement the 2018 GEEC, on how to promote student-centred and collaborative learning. Trong noted:

The MOET training courses provided EFL teachers with strategies that emphasize student collaboration, marking a significant departure from the previously predominant teacher-led approaches. This training encouraged me to adapt my teaching methods to align with the evolving expectations of the educational system.

Trong believed that CW is one of the ways to encourage students' initiatives and collective work. He shared the following in the interview:

CW not only improves students' writing skills but also prepares them to work effectively in any community or team environment...

Within CW, values are emphasized as it offers valuable experience in guiding collaboration and handling student group dynamics. As he remarked:

The practical challenges I encounter while implementing CW, such as managing group interactions, offer me learning opportunities to refine my teaching approach.

He defined CW as a flexible process where students work together in groups of varying sizes to produce written texts, depending on the nature of the writing task and the specific topic being addressed. In this regard, he stated:

Collaborative means that students can write together in groups. It could be a pair group, or a group of three or four. Or even a larger group depending on the requirements... Depending on the topic and the type of exercise.

Trong understands that the use of CW should be adaptive to the specific needs and writing tasks. Therefore, Trong has consistently sought to adapt and improve his utilization of CW based on experiences from previous classes. He shared:

I often apply the lessons I learned from one class to another, using those experiences to make improvements the next time. This allows me to address challenges in CW implementation, such as time management during brainstorming and topic selection.

4.1.2. The Object

Below highlights Trong's goal of enhancing student writing through collaborative brainstorming and peer feedback. He believed that group discussions promote diverse and creative ideas and that high-achieving students can support their peers by offering immediate corrective feedback, thereby fostering a supportive learning environment.

I want my students, in groups, through communication, to brainstorm more ideas for their writing.

Moreover, the high English language achievers will provide instant corrective feedback to the lower ones, hence helping them improve their writing outcomes.

The second objective of Trong's CW teaching, as revealed from the analyses of his lesson plan and documents, was to improve his students' critical thinking and collaborative skills. In his own words, Trong noted:

I believe that my students will exchange ideas and refine their thoughts through peer interaction. This process plays a significant role in developing their debating and argumentative skills, helping them think more critically about their own perspectives as well as those of others.

4.1.3. The Tool

Trong encouraged students to use smartphones or tablets to research during CW activities. Web 2.0 tools, such as Padlet and Google Docs, were also used, although he admitted their integration was occasional, despite recognizing their value. Below is the statement from the interview.

These devices and platforms offer a useful platform for brainstorming, sharing ideas, and providing feedback, given that the Internet speed was sometimes unstable.

Trong also used posters as a physical medium for groups to display their final written products during CW lessons.

When the students put their work on the posters, they had to think about how to make their ideas clear and look good all together. This made them use their imagination and think carefully. Using posters made their product something they could see and touch.

Trong, in addition, used handouts to complement the textbook, providing clear instructions and targeted support at each stage of the CW process.

These handouts might include graphic organisers, vocabulary lists, or checklists that students use to organise their ideas, review their drafts, and provide peer feedback.

He also applied two types of CW tasks: namely, meaning-focused tasks and language-focused tasks.

I usually stick to tasks like argumentative and descriptive paragraphs. These are the types that align with the curriculum's focus on content understanding and peer collaboration. I keep them [the length of these tasks] around 120 to 180 words. It's a manageable length for their [students'] English level.

4.1.4. The Community

It includes students, school leaders, and fellow EFL teachers. Most students had learned English since Grade 3 under the 2018 curriculum, which had a positive influence on their motivation. Trong noted:

These students have been exposed to English from a young age, and it shows in their willingness to learn and improve. Their positive attitude and familiarity with English make it much easier to introduce collaborative writing tasks.

The local community outside the school also plays a significant role in shaping Trong's implementation of CW in his classroom.

A lot of parents prioritise learning English for their kids. Many of my students started learning English at language centres when they were very young, so they come to my classes with a solid foundation and familiarity with different teaching styles.

4.1.5. The Rules

The rules were set by the curriculum objectives, CW group formation rules, and CW assessment criteria. First, curriculum objectives form a key rule in Trong's CW activity system. Through his lesson plans, he designed the CW activities that consistently reflected these objectives, helping students achieve the competencies outlined by the education system.

When I'm planning CW activities, I constantly refer to the curriculum. It's vital that each CW task. I assign is in line with the educational standards we're expected to meet.

Trong's activity system for CW implementation is CW assessment. To enhance collaboration and output, Trong emphasised the need for clear and accessible assessment criteria. He believed this helps students focus and organise their work effectively. Trong explained:

Before they begin any writing task, I make sure that students fully understand the assessment criteria. I provide them with detailed rubrics that outline how their work will be evaluated...

4.1.6. Division of Labour

Trong frequently moved among the groups, carefully observing their discussions and interactions. Mentioning his monitor role, in his own words, Trong noted in the interview as below:

I make it a point to watch how each group is working together and sometimes ask questions to check if the quieter students are participating. When I see them actively engaging and sharing ideas, I know the group's collaboration is on track.

In Trong's CW classes, students took on key roles—such as group leaders, idea contributors, and peer-feedback providers—to support group work as evidenced in the interview.

Choosing the right person to lead the group is essential. If we select a student who's too strong or overly dominant, it can be risky because the group might end up following only that person's ideas, rather than collaborating.

Another role that each student in Trong's CW classrooms was assigned was that of idea contributors. Specifically, Trong's students were expected to share their perspectives, build on each other's thoughts, and collectively refine the content of their work.

This role is essential in promoting active engagement with the topic and fostering a collaborative learning environment where students learned to express and expand on ideas together.

4.2. CW Implementation Activity System - Teacher Nam

4.2.1. The Subject - Nam

Nam is an EFL teacher at Upper Secondary School B, a normal school situated. Only when EFL school teachers were encouraged to integrate micro skills, such as collaborative and critical thinking skills, into language skills according to the objectives of the 2018 GEEC, did Nam realise the effectiveness of CW.

I used to be in favour of assigning students with individual tasks. It was not until I saw how well students responded to working together that I truly understood the value of CW.

He regularly attended professional development workshops, both online and offline, focused on language teaching, including CW. He participated in MOET training for the 2018 GEEC. Although the training did not focus solely on CW, Nam noted it greatly enhanced his understanding and helped him refine his CW teaching approach.

CW is more than just having students write together. It's about promoting collaboration and enhancing their learning through peer interaction. This [peer interaction] is what really helps them better.

Nam said CW classrooms not only share writing ideas but also learn from each other in ways that individual work cannot offer. Although Nam understood what CW is and its roles in developing students' writing and communicative skills, he was not confident in implementing CW and confessed:

What I know about CW is limited, I think I need to be trained further. Sometimes, I have difficulty in selecting the writing tasks suitable for teaching CW. I also lack knowledge about CW principles, what I know just a little from EFL workshops in general.

4.2.2. The Object

Nam aimed to develop his students' writing skills by engaging them in collaborative writing tasks.

When students brainstorm as a group and provide feedback to each other, they learn much more than when they work alone. They get different perspectives, and it helps them address their own weaknesses in writing.

Nam emphasised the importance of structured group activities, where students could share ideas, practice writing, and receive immediate feedback, ultimately enhancing their writing abilities.

The positive impact of collaborative environment on students' learning allows them to learn from each other, thereby addressing their weaknesses and reinforcing their understanding of effective writing techniques.

Nam recognised that besides language skills, students needed to develop broader competencies that would benefit them in real-life situations.

I also want my students to develop skills that go beyond just writing. Through CW, they will learn to think critically, evaluate their peers' ideas, and discuss how to improve their writing.

4.2.3. The Tool

In his CW teaching activity system, Nam utilized both types of pedagogical tools, including conceptual tools and practical tools. By gradually reducing support as students become more competent, he could foster greater independence and encourage them to take ownership of their learning, ultimately enhancing their ability to tackle writing tasks collaboratively and individually.

Through these interactions, students collaborate to plan, generate ideas, offer alternatives, respond to each other's perspectives, and provide peer feedback.

The third conceptual tool was his students' shared expertise. In his CW teaching practices, Nam greatly took advantage of each student's strengths in the groups and noted:

Some students excel at organising ideas, others have strong grammar and vocabulary, while some are particularly creative with generating ideas or have neat handwriting. By allowing them [students] to contribute based on their strengths, I think they will collaborate well and therefore enhance the overall quality of the group's work.

Nam also employed five practical tools to support his CW teaching. These included educational technology, posters, textbooks, handouts, CW tasks, and the use of their first language, all of which were designed to facilitate and enhance the collaborative writing process.

Posters are very convenient, especially when the school's internet connection was unreliable. As they work together, students can discuss, refine, and expand on the ideas written on the posters, helping them to develop a stronger and more cohesive piece of writing. When students type on smartphones, tablets or computers, teachers can't check they're because of the automatic error correction features.

The fourth practical tool in Nam's CW lessons was the use of CW tasks. Like Trong, Nam incorporated both meaning-focused and language-focused tasks to meet his teaching objectives. He often selected tasks like argumentative and descriptive compositions, to support his CW practices.

I wanted the students not only to be able to express their ideas effectively but also to produce polished and grammatically correct texts.

The fifth practical tool in Nam's CW implementation is his use of L1 to enhance comprehension and facilitate collaboration in the EFL classroom.

Sometimes, when students find it difficult to express their ideas in English, I encourage them to briefly discuss in Vietnamese. This helps them clarify their thoughts before transitioning back to English for writing.

4.2.4. The Community

Nam's community included the school community where he was teaching (e.g., the students in his CW classrooms, the school leaders, and his peer EFL teachers) and the local community (e.g., students' parents and the EFL community outside the school). Although they come from rural areas and do not have much exposure to English, they are studious and eager to learn English.

I am aware of this issue and try to encourage more open participation. Thus, I often use strategies like peer feedback and smaller group presentations to gradually ease them into sharing their thoughts with a

larger audience. Parents here often send their children to English centres to supplement what they learn at school.

4.2.5. The Rules

In Nam's Activity System, rules play a significant role in guiding the implementation of CW tasks in his classroom. These rules include curriculum objectives, group formation rules, and CW assessment criteria. Each of these rules shaped how Nam structured his CW lessons and how his students engaged with the CW tasks.

In terms of group size, I prefer groups of four, then I select a leader for each group. In terms of students' abilities [English proficiency], because most of the students like to work with their intimate peers.

Another rule within Nam's CW teaching Activity System pertains to the CW assessment rules.

I give them clear rubrics so that they can know how their writing will be evaluated. This helps them stay focused on the quality of their ideas, their teamwork, and the accuracy of their language.

Additionally, Nam not only utilized formal assessment rubrics but also observed the groups' interactions during the writing tasks, assessing how well they collaborate.

When students collaborate in writing, I observe and evaluate which groups are actively participating. I sometimes ask spontaneous questions to see how well the weaker students are participating and how much stronger students are helping them...

Furthermore, Nam implemented a peer group feedback system, where groups provided feedback to each other's products.

I encourage students to critically assess their classmates' work but also allow them to reflect on their own writing outcomes and improve their understanding of the tasks.

4.2.6. Division of Labour

Nam regularly moved between groups, observing their discussions and interventions.

When students review each other's group work, I need to observe and guide them even more carefully. Sometimes, they lack accuracy in finding structure errors. Or sometimes, they get side-tracked and miss the focus of the task.

In his CW classrooms, group leaders, usually high-achieving students, organized the group's work. Their role was to contribute ideas, ensure active participation from all members, coordinate the writing process, and assign responsibilities.

I always tell my students that every idea counts, no matter how small or simple. During brainstorming, I encourage everyone to share their thoughts, even if they're not confident with their English.

Another essential student role is that of the feedback providers. Nam placed a strong emphasis on peer feedback.

By providing feedback, students also engage in a reflective process, considering how their own contributions align with the group's goals.

4.3. Perceived Challenges of CW Application

4.3.1. Trong's Case

First, ensuring equally active participation from all students in Trong's class posed a significant challenge in his CW lessons. Trong noticed and shared in the Interview that, despite his efforts to create a non-threatening and supportive environment, many of his students were still hesitant to share ideas.

Most students [They] often hesitate to speak up, partly due to their shyness and partly for fear that speaking incorrectly or making mistakes could lead to ridicule. Additionally, most high school students tend to be passive. They were often reluctant to volunteer answers or engage actively in group discussions.

Second, although he assigned group leaders who were both linguistically capable and non-dominant, the inherent nature of some students led to imbalances in the group. Many of the students who were confident in their English proficiency were inclined to lead discussions and take control of tasks.

Since most of my students have strong English skills, they sometimes want to take control in group work.

Several students, who are accustomed to excelling individually, tend to try to lead the group or push their ideas forward more forcefully.

Third, managing the diverse expectations of the local community, including parents and external learning influences, also presented challenges to Trong's perception. Many parents in the local community prioritised individual performance, and their preference for traditional individual assessments often conflicted with the collaborative nature of CW tasks.

Many of my students have been exposed to a variety of teaching methods at different English centres.

They are used to those styles, so when I introduce my approach in CW, there is often an adjustment period. Sometimes, their familiarity with other methods can make it harder for me to achieve the goals of certain activities...

4.3.2. Nam's Case

Nam's limited experience with CW practices constituted a significant challenge to his CW implementation. With only brief exposure through generalized EFL workshops, Nam is perceived to lack the confidence needed to implement CW techniques or manage group dynamics effectively.

I have always been used to teaching students to write individually, guiding them directly through their tasks. Nevertheless, with CW, it is a whole different environment. I had only a brief introduction to CW

during some EFL workshops, but that is not enough. I often feel lost when it comes to managing the groups...

Second, another major perceived challenge Nam faced was the time-intensive nature of scaffolding in CW. His attempts to foster student interaction and autonomy were often hindered by uncertainty, resulting in delays in advancing students toward more complex, collaborative tasks.

I use various strategies to guide them, such as breaking tasks down or asking questions to encourage deeper thinking, but it takes a lot of time. Sometimes, by the time we are ready to move on, there is barely any time left to finish the lesson...

Third, the reality of students' varying proficiency levels and affective factors, such as shyness, hindered Nam from implementing CW activities effectively because many students remained hesitant to participate actively, particularly when presenting their ideas in group discussions.

I support them and assign different roles within the groups, but some students are too shy to speak up, especially those who feel their English is not as strong. When it is time to discuss ideas, a few students do most of the talking, while others barely contribute.

5. Discussion

Regarding the role of subjects' knowledge, Teacher Trong appears to have extensive teaching experience, advanced TESOL training, and direct exposure to CW, which contributed to his holistic understanding of CW. Teacher Nam, on the other hand, seems to be exposed less to CW, and gears his focus more on student engagement and writing outcomes. This disparity may signify the impact of professional development in shaping teachers' CW understanding. Li [36] found that the degree of effectiveness of CW implementation depends on the centrality of teachers' knowledge and beliefs in this approach, which can hinder teachers from innovative teaching [22].

Instructional tools emerged as crucial mediators in CW implementation, facilitating alignment between pedagogical intentions and students' learning processes [37]. The results uncover that both teachers employed conceptual and practical tools, though their usage varied. For example, scaffolding was consistently applied by both teachers. Trong segmented CW tasks, used sentence starters, and provided models to guide students. Similarly, Nam provided step-by-step support throughout different CW phases. These strategies reflect [12]. Zone of Proximal Development, emphasizing guided learning tailored to students' proficiency levels.

Another conceptual tool—students' mutual interaction—was actively fostered by both teachers who facilitate students' collaboration so they can share ideas and incorporate feedback, supporting [27] framework, which fosters better interactions to involve all students in contributing their ideas to the classroom [38]. Moreover, both teachers leveraged the concept of shared expertise within student groups. While Nam assigned roles based on individual strengths, Trong employed a complementary approach to encourage students to participate and contribute to the lessons. The ideas were supported by Hyland [39] and Li and Kim [40] who affirm that utilizing peers' varied competencies enhances group performance and individual confidence.

Regarding practical tools in CW activities, both teachers employed educational technology—Trong selectively used PowerPoint and Padlet, while Nam integrated interactive TVs, and Padlet more extensively. These practices align with those by Suwantarathip and Wichadee [41]; Delgado, et al. [42] and Pradipta and Mustofa [43] who underscore the benefits of digital tools in collaborative writing. Besides, posters served as brainstorming platforms and visual scaffolds during the prewriting and revision stages. Both teachers used poster galleries for peer evaluation, a practice echoed by Li and Zhang [10] and Sasmaz and Çifci [14] who emphasize the reflective and collaborative benefits of visual tools.

Furthermore, textbooks and handouts, though foundational, were adapted by both teachers to fit specific learning needs. Nam drew from relevant units and augmented them with custom tasks, whereas Trong created materials that targeted linguistic challenges. These findings align with those of Li and Harfitt [44] supporting the view that teaching materials should strike a balance between standardisation and teacher-driven customisation.

Both teachers allowed their students to use their mother tongue during brainstorming and group discussions to promote clarity and inclusivity. This approach corresponds with Manegre [29] and Vygotsky [12] who highlight the cognitive and affective benefits of mother tongue used to boost collaborative work. Alrabai [45] also confirms its positive impact on student motivation and participation.

In terms of lesson objectives, both teachers foster collaboration, core goals identified in CW activities to improve writing skills [37]. Teacher Trong focused more on higher-order thinking through argumentative and project-based writing, aligning with Vygotsky [12] social constructivist approach. In contrast, Teacher Nam, constrained by large and mixed-ability classes, concentrated on foundational writing accuracy, reflecting [30] findings on the influence of context on teaching aims.

Moreover, teachers' beliefs and constraints can also influence how teachers decide to implement CW [22]. For instance, Trong's use of multimodal tasks and peer feedback contrasted with Nam's simplified approach to ensure participation.

Regarding the division of labor in CW classrooms. Both teachers acted as facilitators, monitors, and providers of feedback. Trong employed digital and graphic tools to scaffold collaboration, while Nam structured tasks around curriculum goals. These roles mirror best practices in CW [40, 46, 47].

In monitoring group dynamics, both teachers ensured balanced participation, echoing findings from Khamouja [11] and Coffin [30]. As feedback providers, they offered both formative and summative input: Trong via structured rubrics, Nam through balanced and motivational feedback practices aligned with CW literature [37, 46]. Group leaders were

mentioned as a valuable source for involving other group members in tasks to contribute their ideas for writing improvement [36, 47, 48]. Regarding community, professional exchanges among related stakeholders within the school setting enabled strategy sharing [49].

Local communities also played a role. Early language exposure at private centres benefited many students, though disparities in access affected classroom participation [50, 51]. Trong contend that his collaborative school culture is beneficial, with peer learning and administrative support, while Nam's school focused on emotional support strategies to counteract students' shyness [23].

Regarding the rules regulating CW practices, curriculum alignment, group formation, and assessment—were pivotal. Both teachers adhered to national objectives promoting language proficiency and soft skills, consistent with Storch [3]; Storch [27] and Zheng, et al. [52]. Trong grouped students by proficiency for balanced input; Nam opted for mixed-ability groups to enhance peer learning [3, 26].

Their assessment practices included the use of rubrics and dual-level evaluations, promoting fairness and transparency [49]. In emphasising mutual respect in group work, while Nam encouraged interdependence, both encountered common issues, such as dominant students and resistance to peer feedback [53].

Finally, Nam tended to use structured peer assessments, whereas Trong tended to use observational feedback, reflecting a shared commitment to inclusivity [54, 55] despite the enduring challenge of balancing individual and group accountability [37].

Secondly, the study will discuss the challenges the two teachers face while implementing CW. With the second research question, the study focuses on four themes: personal challenges rooted in teachers' knowledge and beliefs, scaffolding challenges, managing group dynamics and role allocation, and institutional and community challenges, respectively.

Regarding personal challenges rooted in teachers' knowledge and beliefs about CW, Trong and Nam had contradictions stemming from their differing beliefs and knowledge about CW. Trong's strong belief in CW as a tool to foster collaboration was counterbalanced by challenges such as conflict resolution and time management during brainstorming. Nam had less training in CW, so he was sometimes unsure of how to effectively transition from traditional, individual-focused instruction to a collaborative, facilitative role. The results support the literature, emphasizing the critical role of teacher cognition in CW implementation [22, 56, 57] stress that CW requires sufficient training and practice.

Regarding scaffolding, Trong said that students heavily relied on peer support, which could make them less independent learners. Meanwhile, Nam said scaffolding made progress slow down when classroom time was limited. Hence, it is crucial to use appropriate scaffolding [3, 27, 57].

Regarding managing group dynamics and role allocation, the two teachers stated that mixed-proficiency groups often led to uneven participation, a point previously mentioned by Calzada and García Mayo [23]. Both tried to rotate peers' roles to balance contributions, but it was sometimes hard to choose group members when they did not want to be passive for this selection [50].

Finally, regarding institutional and community constraints, exam-oriented curricula and community expectations also posed challenges to these two teachers. Trong addressed parental skepticism by promoting CW's relevance to real-world skills. Nam tackled student reluctance by scaffolding tasks and showcasing tangible writing improvements. These results reflect those found by Mozaffari [25] and Coffin [30] who found attitudes toward CW could influence its implementation.

6. Limitations, Implementations and Recommendations

6.1. Limitations

First, the two case studies offer rich, context-specific insights into CW practices in real teaching, nonetheless they did not capture the diversity of teaching situation or teacher experiences across different regions. Second, the study has methodological limitations as it relied heavily on the qualitative data collected from two interviews, four classroom observations, and relevant official and teacher-generated documents to explore CW implementation in classroom practices. Third, the study was guided by a single theory (i.e., Activity Theory), which is less potent than an integrated theoretical framework that considers multiple theories. As data collection and analysis are guided by a single theoretical lens - namely, Activity Theory - the results were interpreted considering this theory only. Finally, systemic factors, such as exam-oriented curricula and disparities in resource availability, could provide a more detailed interpretation of the results, as these contextual elements may shape CW teaching practices, particularly in how CW was implemented in the observed classrooms.

6.2. Implications

First, advanced teacher training and professional development (PD) programs should focus on raising teachers' awareness of the benefits of CW (Object) as well as governing guidelines for CW implementation (Rules). Such programs should equip teachers with practical CW teaching strategies for incorporating CW goals into lesson objectives (e.g., Objects) and instructional tools (e.g., scaffolding and managing group dynamics, as well as aligning CW with exam-oriented curricula) (Tools). Highlighting CW's broader benefits, such as fostering teamwork, critical thinking, and creativity, can help address their skepticism over CW, thus ensuring greater acceptance of CW pedagogies. Third, for effective CW implementation in classrooms, EFL teachers who desire to implement CW in their classrooms should learn how to assign roles to their students, such as leader, scribe, and editor, which ensures student accountability while promoting equitable collaboration among students. Finally, building students' confidence in collaborative learning is

essential during CW, and teachers can achieve this by paying attention to students' diverse needs, such as their levels of interest and language proficiency.

6.3. Recommendations

Future research could highlight the conditions under which CW has the most significant impact on writing outcomes. This would enable educators to design CW practices that maximize long-term benefits for students. Further research for exploring pedagogical strategies to address students' English language proficiency gaps is another promising area for future research. Moreover, future research could explore objects and tools that can help boost members' participation in group work, especially in fully mixed-ability classes. Schools and teachers may face difficulties if they cannot persuade the community that CW is useful for enhancing students' learning outcomes. Addressing these areas in future research would contribute significantly to advancing CW methodologies in diverse educational contexts.

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