EVALUATING COLLABORATIVE LEARNING IN MALAY LANGUAGE WRITING INSTRUCTION: A CASE STUDY

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Abstrak: Introduction of Kurikulum Standard Sekolah Menengah (KSSM) demands innovative pedagogy in language education. Collaborative learning is highly recommended to be integrated into teaching and learning process of Malay language. This paper reports the evaluation of collaborative learning in Malay language writing instruction for Form One student in Kuala Lumpur. Seven students and one teacher were interviewed for this qualitative research. The thematic analysis of the study revealed that collaborative learning supported shared information and knowledge, promoted joint activities, and development of soft-skills. However, issue involving uncooperative members emerged from the data. This paper then discussed the findings, implication, and recommendation for future researchers and practitioners.

Keyword: Malay Language, Collaborative Learning, Secondary School, KSSM

INTRODUCTION

Writing instruction has been largely dominated by individual approach for a long period of time. However, the shifted trend on current pedagogy- with more focus on collaborative approach shows that writing instruction slowly adapting to the demand. Collaborative learning in language education is one of the powerful approach stimulates language development among learners. Collaborative learning refers to joint intellectual efforts by students and aims for common learning goal (Nunan, 1992; Smith & MacGregor, 1992). Specifically for collaborative writing, Storch (2005) described it as joint works of several authors on contributing and producing written materials in terms of language, content and structure. Following that, instructional writing modules based on collaborative approach was developed. Trialogical Learning Approach (TLA) model by Paavola and Hakkarainen (2009) was adapted to guide the design and development of collaborative activities. This study attempts to evaluate the collaborative learning in Malay language writing instruction among secondary school students in Kuala Lumpur.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Although collaborative writing is a common writing approach at international level (Khoii & Arabsarhangi, 2015; Mohammad Khatib & Hussein Meihami, 2015; Sufatmi Suriyanti & Aizan Yaacob, 2016;Chuang, 2018; Daud, Hanafi, & Laepe, 2018;Jalili & Shahrokhi, 2017), it is still in its infancy in Malaysia setting (Ansarimoghaddam & Tan, 2013; Challob et al., 2016; Lai Lee Chung, 2017; Ajideh, Leitner, & Yazdi-Amirkhiz, 2016). Majority of the studies applied qualitative methodology whilst the findings showed mixed perceptions among the respondents. However, majority of the respondents cited that collaborative writing is favourable instructional approach thus lends more enjoyable writing experiences (Challob et al., 2016; Lai Lee Chung, 2017; Sufatmi Suriyanti & Aizan Yaacob, 2016), spurred motivation on writing (Daud et al., 2018) besides producing better writing products, however, there were mixed results on the components of writing enhancements (Ansarimoghaddam & Tan, 2013; Khoii & Arabsarhangi, 2015;Ajideh et al., 2016;Chuang, 2018; Jalili & Shahrokhi, 2017).

This study adapted Trialogical Learning Approach (TLA) model by Paavola & Hakkarainen (2009) to guide the design and development of the collaborative activities. Trialogical Learning Approach is a learning approach proposed by Paavola and Hakkarainen (2005) and revolved from Mediated Triangle proposed by Engeström (1987) and Vygotsky (1978).

Paavola and Hakkarainen (2005) explains Trialogical Learning Approach as follows;

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> The acquisition view represents a ''monological'' view on human cognition and activity, where important things are seen to happen within the human mind, whereas the participation view represents a ''dialogical'' view where the interaction with the culture and other people, but also with the surrounding (material) environment is emphasized. The knowledge-creation view represents a ''trialogical'' approach because the emphasis is not only on individuals or on community, but on the way people collaboratively develop mediating artifacts. (p.239).

Figure 1 illustrates the concept of Trialogical Learning Approach that consists of three metaphors- acquisition metaphor, participation metaphor, and knowledge-creation metaphor. Clear way to describe, it is how individual entities, e.g. ideas, arguments, knowledge; were later externalized through social collaboration in the learning community through dialog, discussion, integration of technology or mediating tools. Then, the learners collaboratively developed objects and produced learning artifacts e.g. products, essays, or assignments.
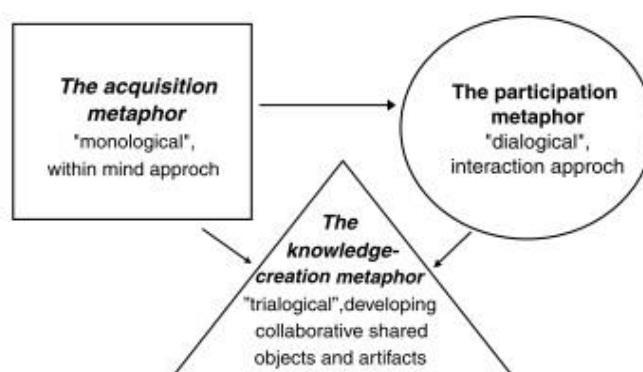

Figure 1. Trialogical Learning Approach (Paavola & Hakkarainen, 2005)

METHOD

A case study approach was employed with face-to-face interviews were conducted during the evaluation phase. There were eight respondents involved in the interview session with seven of them were the students and a teacher.

Prior to evaluation process, four weeks of module implementation had taken place at Sekolah Menengah Kebangsaan 2 located in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. After the implementation, face-to-face interview sessions regarding the usability of Collaborative Instruction for Form One Malay Language Writing with eight respondents were conducted for, minimum 30 minutes and maximum 90 minutes per respondents. Based on Hass & Edmunds (2019), the system-testing (implementation) in a real-world setting could be conducted in at least 1-1.5 hours per task with 3-5 tasks and post-implementation interview questions for usability testing could be completed in 20 minutes (p.116).

This study employed thematic analysis phases as suggested by Braun and Clarke (2008). They listed six phases on analyzing the themes- familiarizing the data, generating initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing the themes, defining and naming the themes, and producing the reports on qualitative findings.

Phase one started with understanding and familiarizing with the data. During this phase, the data were transcribed, read, re-read, and the researcher listed down the initial ideas. It was done using Microsoft Word. It was then followed by phase two - generating initial codes. The initial coding was conducted across the entire data with systematic procedures using Microsoft Word. Phase three involved searching for themes from the data. The codes were then collated and the relevant data were gathered into major themes. Then, in fourth phase, the themes were reviewed to ensure the relevancy of the codes classified under the same themes. Thematic mapping was also build during this phase. The next fifth phase involved defining and naming themes. The ongoing analysis of the data, codes and texts were conducted simultaneously and data were thoroughly analysed in order to get the clear definition of the themes. Lastly, all the data were then reported following the scholar writing styles which includes relating to the research questions, theories or models used in the study and extracted data examples to support the arguments.

Consequently, all of the phases were conducted using the general purpose software – Microsoft Word and Microsoft Excel as suggested by Miles & Huberman, (1994) and La Pelle (2004). The researchers used these products due to cost-effective factor yet effective since it is free subscription from the university. In Microsoft Word, the researchers exploited the command of Memo and Macro to complete phase one to three. Whilst the remaining phases- four to six, the researchers used Microsoft Excel and the feature Sort and Filter tremendously aided the streaming process. Lastly, all the analyzed data were reported in Microsoft Word.

RESULTS

The findings of the study reveal two major themes – strength and weakness of collaborative approach in Malay language writing instruction. The impacts of it were then elaborated in terms of learning process and experiences.

Table 1
Themes and subthemes

No.	Themes	Subthemes
1	Strength	Supported shared information and knowledge. Promoted joint activities Development of soft-skills
2	Weakness	Uncooperative members.

Collaborative Approach Supported Shared Information and Knowledge

Shared object is the element under Trialogical Learning Approach – later defined as conceptual object e.g. idea, opinion, knowledge, which is being externalized before systematically collaborated through the collaborative activity and become knowledge artefacts (Paavola & Hakkarainen, 2009b). In this study, object is referred to writing and content knowledge based on the D*okumen Standard Kurikulum dan Pentaksiran* (DSKP) for Malay Language Form One.

All of the respondents' statements implied that collaborative learning is practiced when they systematically shared their knowledge on pre-writing process. They were also perceived to externalize their knowledge. As modelled by Flower and Hayes (1981), pre-writing process involved recalling of knowledge on writing plans, content knowledge and audiences. Knowledge sharing involved those who have flair understanding on writing instruction discussing their expertise with the improving peer writer. In fact, they were scaffolding their peer learning process.

> In our group, there are ones who smart and intelligent. There are also those who are not. Those smart friends can teach the one who is less performed. We are not that good, so we can ask those good on writing (L167-169: ESR1: February 8, 2018).

> We acquire writing knowledge. We can use it during examination. We also received general information about our [country] history (L119: ESR1: February 8, 2018).

> In terms of knowledge sharing […] we have our own groups. All of us know our strength and weaknesses. We are able to identify which friends in need. If they need help, we helped (L23: ETR1: February 12, 2018).

The respondents perceived that traditional learning, which required them to learn individually, did not help them to clarify their misunderstanding of writing knowledge in comparison to a collaborative approach.

> If we learn on our own, I'm a little shy to ask a friend of mine. If we're in a study group, we can ask if we don't understand. If not, our friends will explain it to us (L175-176: ESR2: 9 February 2018).

Another element of pre-writing is recalling the knowledge of topic. It is a content knowledge – dealing with the question 'What should I write?', and this happened to be one of the biggest problems among students. Collaborative learning seems positively impacted the students on researching content knowledge. They also argued that shared content knowledge provided rich and extensive information on the chosen topic.

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> Advantage is, we can share our ideas. It's not just me who shared the ideas. My friends have two or three ideas and they're still contributing to our group. I really appreciate it. It helps my writing when I exchanged ideas with my friends (L155: ESR5: 9 February 2018).

When commenting on this, the teacher agreed that collaborative approach enabled knowledge to be shared within group members.

> But I think it is okay. There are at least two or three people in one group who are […] at least able to share and exchange ideas with the members of the group. (L31: ETR1: February 12, 2018).

Collaborative Approach Promoted Joint Activities

Shared activities are systematic and iterative practices during the collaborative session, which focused on modifying knowledge artifacts to the desired products (Paavola & Hakkarainen, 2009b). In this study, interview transcripts indicated that students were engaged in shared writing activities in different phases of writing, such as-construction of sentences,

> We share our ideas during the writing process. Maybe I have these ideas, and they have their own ideas. During the explanation and expansion of the sentences, we exchange the writing style, the idea and the suggestion (L173-175: ESR4: 9 February 2018).

building the framework,

> Even though it is a framework, we need to do it in a pair (L125: ESR5: February 9, 2018).

construction of phrases and paragraphs,

> During discussion and brainstorming about the origin, background, elements and cultural events, we exchanged ideas. We didn't do this on our own. Each one of us is writing specific sentences and paragraphs. Then we put the paragraphs together and edited them. So that it is well written (L123-125: ESR6: 12 February 2018).

editing process,

> R: Does that mean you are talking about writing sentences?
> ESR4: Yes, yes
> R: Then you're all going to edit it together?
> ESRR4: Yes, yes. We are editing the writing together (L186-188: Respondent 4: 9 February 2018).

and lastly when they published their essay to public and received feedbacks on their work.

> There are questions and feedback, a bit tricky. We discussed how to answer the questions in front of Puan Rozi [Assistant Principal]. But we've managed to do it. If we don't try and trust ourselves, we'll never get that chance (L189-190: ESR1: 8 February 2018).

Collaborative learning is said to benefit students by cultivating peer learning as stated by the teacher;

> We cannot assume that 100% of them will complete the task. But, as it is a group work [...] if there is a lack anywhere, the members of the group will help. But at the same time, the teacher needs to monitor. So there is no sleeping partner (L180-182: ETR1February 12, 2018).

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Collaborative activities also helped students sharing the tasks between the members of the group, so that they were all equally involved in the process. It is perceived capable to relieve stress among students, "We've divided the jobs. I don't feel the stress of completing the task "(L127: ESR3: 9 February 2018).

It also ensure that those with scarce resources, e.g.,- the internet, printer or laptop, do not miss out on the participatory. Collaborative learning has cultivated a sense of teamwork that has led to shared resources.

> If we have friends over the Internet, they can help us out. Friend, like Bat [Batrisyia], she had Internet access, she snapped [instruction], then she sent it to Whatsapp group [Form] 1 *Ungu* (L84-86: ESR 6: February 12, 2018).

Development of Soft-Skills through Collaborative Learning

One of the goal from Malaysia Education Blueprint is to produce holistic student with balanced achievement in cognitive, social, and soft-skill (Ministry of Education, 2014). Thus, it is important to educators to integrate innovative pedagogy to achieve that goal. From the study, we found that collaborative approach capable to develop soft-skills among the students. We categorize two types of soft skills under this subthemes- positive self-perception, and social skill.

Positive self-perception

Positive self-perception is an intrapersonal skill that honors self-confidence, self-efficacy, self-awareness and beliefs as well as self-esteem of oneself (Lippman, Ryberg, Carney, & Moore, 2015). This feature is vital on shaping healthy self-perception among students and strong predictors of success in the future including workforce. The finding from the interviews revealed students' perceived their positive self-perception is heightened with their participation on collaborative learning sessions, "I know I become more confident. Many times I have to present in front of my class. Especially that one, using the microphone" (L178: ESR6: February 12, 2018).

Better self-perception seems to incite competitiveness among the students- especially introvert students as perceived by;

> When in groups and all want to talk, we will feel left out if not doing so. So we will try harder. So, when we did this, we want more knowledge. When I saw my friends, being competitive in class, asking question, again, asking questions, I also want to ask questions. L95-98: ESR7: February 12, 2018).

Another value emerged based on the data is act of responsibility. Students perceived that they became more responsible on their learning and also their group, "I feel like […] after that our teamwork is more strengthened. More responsible. If one person did not complete her/his task, all of the members will be affected" (L149-151: ESR6: February 12, 2018).

Social skill

Social skills referred to a group of attributes that essential to get along with others and vital for successful teamwork (Lippman, Ryberg, Carney, & Moore, 2015). Data from respondents indicated that they learnt to being helpful to ensure successfulness of their project during execution of the instructional module, "We worked together, helped each other to complete the project" (L155: ESR1: February 8, 2018).

They were also learnt to understand character differences between their peers which led to better rapport and good teamwork.

> We understand ourselves more. I also understand them more. I think I can share and work better with them. I can identify their characteristics. Which one speak faster. Which one speak slower (L25-28: Respondent 7: February 12, 2018).

They were also able to resolve conflicts by being tolerate to each other, "If there is any mistake, we correct it. Sometimes, my friends rectified my mistakes. I accepted it. Tolerate [it]" (L68: ESR7: February 12, 2018).

Uncooperative Members

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Among the major setback on collaborative approach is uncooperative member. It is potentially waive learning motivation and affect the harmonious climate of the group. The teacher opined that the selection of group members is extremely crucial and considering the choices of the students might contribute to successful collaborative learning.

> If we chose low achievement class, high achiever or moderate students might help the others. But if only one or two members working on the task, the other kept playing truant, neglect the responsibility, those good one might feel unmotivated. Giving up. As if they were being bullied to complete the homework. We don't want to ruin their motivation. We should let them choose their members. Better for them to work it later on (L211-213: ETR1: February 8, 2018).
> Sometimes, our friends didn't turn up [for meeting]. We ask many time but still, they didn't come (L133-135: ESR2: February 8, 2018).

DISCUSSION

We divide the discussion into two major parts – explaining how collaborative approach is capable of reducing learning inequality and its impacts on soft-skill development.

How collaborative approach minimizes homework gap?

From the findings, collaborative learning has narrowed homework gap affecting the students. This statement is supported by the work of Mendoza, Arteaga, and Broisin (2019 and Siti Hajar Halili and Zamzami Zainuddin (2015) stating that the collaborative learning environment provided an opportunity to minimize inequality through joint work. Extrapolated from the findings of this study, we found that collaborative learning has promoted shared knowledge and activities among students. Based on the Social Cultural Theory (Vygotsky, 1978), knowledge construction is not limited to personal cognitive activities, but it also includes social activities within the community. Thus, this premise provides the basis for the expanded model based on suggestion from Paavola & Hakkarainen (2005) that- internalized knowledge represented by monologic metaphors should be externalized during the dialog process. The processes were explained in the following discussion.

Writing has been dominated by cognitive processing theory, but recently, researchers and practitioners have gradually accepted the notion that writing is also a cultural product (Sharp, 2016). Collaborative learning involved sharing process – in terms of knowledge and activities, but not limited to. Students come to school with their own background- including prior knowledge, culture and history (Vygotsky, 1978). The task was designed around a shared 'object,' which in this case is a thematic content. Thus, when they are prepared before class with the intended learning content, they have created new prior knowledge that needs to be externalized during the collaborative dialog process (Hakkarainen, Paavola, Kangas, & Seitamaa-Hakkarainen, 2013). The process of outsourcing ideas or knowledge in a group- often conducted during brainstorming sessions, has enabled the creation of new knowledge among the group members. This particular feature of collaborative learning is capable of compensating any differences in an individual level through new knowledge-building among peers (Gendole & Coenders, 2019).

In addition to the knowledge sharing, collaborative learning also promotes joint on-task activities among the collaborators (Siti Hajar Halili et al., 2015). In this study, they were assigned the task of writing based on the thematic content given. Each of the groups has been given specific roles or tasks to be completed in groups (Paavola & Hakkarainen, 2005). In the lesser known tenet of Vygotsky's theory – extended by his followers, the period of child development lends its foundation on premises – children are developed according to their ages through specific social and cultural activities. By stating that, Vygotsky suggested team-based works including discussion suit the pre-adolescent age (13-15 years old). Whereas, Piaget focused on internal-driven development, Vygotsky argued that social-based activities supported the development of children (Kozulin, 2015).

Other components of the Social Cultural Theory (Vygotsky, 1978) are, The More Knowledgeable Other (MKO) and the Proximal Development Zone. These two components proposed in Vygotskian could be the factors behind better writing products. Their works have shown improvement in terms of content knowledge, maturity in expressing opinions and better style of organization. Generally, better writing products were the results of collaborative approach as demonstrated in Chu, Capio, van Aalst, and Cheng (2017) and Storch (2005) studies. Collaborative approach works by heightened the engagement of the students on the learning and one of the opportunity is engagement to shared feedbacks on their writing. Through a joint process, students learn to be receptive to the critics of their writings. This feature is not available for individual writing and could be the best explanation for enhanced quality of their writings. This peer co-

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construction of writing plays major role on the novice learners before they transforming themselves to a competent learners- who are more independent and self-reliant as posited in works by Ansarimoghaddam and Tan (2013); Rahman (2018) and Reusser and Pauli (2015). Besides that, anxiety on learning could be possibly minimized through the peer collaboration as demonstrated in a study by Pruet, Ang, and Farzin (2016).

Soft-skill and collaborative approach

The roots of collaborative approach is strongly influenced by the tenet of sociocultural theory- cognitive development, it is not only a mental processing but it is also majorly depends on the social engagement with community's members throughout the process (Cole & Gajdamaschko, 2007; Moll, 2014). Besides, the participation metaphor and knowledge-creation metaphor presented on the Trialogical Learning Approach demand interaction between the students' inner voices into the community spaces. This interaction potentially develops soft skill among the students- offering humanistic feature to be relevant in IR 4.0 wave. The outcome from this tenet is children who are cognitively developed and socially functioning in the real world as suggested in extended works of Vygotsky in Nabuzoka and Empson (2010). Thus, it is no surprise to acknowledge that collaborative part from this module promotes soft skill development among the student respondents.

The societal dynamics offer through collaborative approach teaches the children to make their own decision, communicative strategy, and confronting conflicts are part of crucial skills on workforce and real-world. These findings were in-line with notion from Nunan (1992) whilst Abdul Razaq Ahmad, Chew, Hutkemri Zulnaidi, Kiagus Muhammad Sobri, and Alfitri (2019) extended the notion by stating that school is prominent feature on education ecosystem when it comes to soft-skill development of the students. Besides, being stable and easy going with others are predictors of coping with stressful working life (Räty et al., 2019). The findings also stated that they have better self-perception which includes better confidence on their abilities and competencies due to the trust received during process of learning. Giving the students autonomy on their learning process enhances their self-pride and increases engagement on learning (León, Núñez, & Liew, 2014; Marshik, Ashton, & Algina, 2017; Zhou, 2016).

CONCLUSION

This study claims its novelty on the adaptation of Trialogical Learning Activities (TLA) model on designing the collaborative activities for Malay language writing instruction. Within the framework of the TLA model, the writing activities are designed and developed to maximize the benefit of community roles on learning. The researchers believe that writing should not neglect the collaborative approach so that the co-construction knowledge would be able to help the struggling writer.

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