Collaborative Writing in Omani ESL Classrooms: A Quasi-Experimental Study from a Sociocultural Perspective

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Abstract

This study investigates the impact of collaborative writing (CW) on the academic writing development of English as a Second Language (ESL) learners in a higher education institution in Oman. Drawing on Sociocultural Theory (SCT) and the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), the study examines how dialogic interaction in CW tasks promotes scaffolding, cognitive engagement, and linguistic development. A quasi-experimental design was employed with two groups of Level 2 undergraduates: a control group engaged in individual writing tasks and an experimental group that completed structured CW activities. Quantitative data from pre- and post-tests were triangulated with qualitative insights from student reflections and classroom observations. Findings demonstrate that students in the CW group achieved greater improvement in idea organization, grammatical accuracy, and lexical range compared to their peers in the control group. Moreover, participants reported enhanced motivation, learner autonomy, and a stronger perception of writing as a socially mediated activity. These results carry important pedagogical and policy implications. In Oman, they align with national priorities articulated in Vision 2040, which emphasizes collaboration, innovation, and collective research through initiatives such as BLOCK Funding. The study provides evidence to support the integration of CW into writing pedagogy, showing that it not only strengthens linguistic competence but also cultivates collaborative skills essential for academic and professional contexts. At a broader regional level, where Arab learners share collective cultural orientations and writing remains a persistent challenge, the findings highlight the need for further evidence-based research to inform culturally responsive curriculum design and instructional practice.

Keywords: collaborative writing, sociocultural perspective, SCT theory, peer interaction. writing in second language

1. Introduction to the Study

Writing in English remains one of the most challenging skills for learners in EFL/ESL contexts, and this difficulty is especially pronounced in the Middle East, where research consistently shows that writing is the weakest linguistic competence among students (Al-Mohanna, 2024; Alzahrani, 2025; Yousuf, 2025). In Oman, where academic and professional success increasingly depends on effective writing in English, this issue has become urgent. The researcher's experience of teaching a Professional Writing course to Level 2 university students highlighted the problem. Although the course aimed to prepare students to write purposefully and professionally, including for competitive opportunities such as BLOCK Funding grants, students displayed minimal motivation and resistance toward writing tasks. Their inability to generate ideas resulted in short, fragmented sentences with frequent linguistic errors and limited vocabulary, while many relied on tools like Google Translate or ChatGPT, reflecting a lack of internalized writing competence. Earlier studies in other Arab contexts have shown that collaborative writing can yield positive results, particularly as Arab cultures are collective in nature and align well with peer-based learning. More importantly, Oman's Vision 2040 and initiatives like BLOCK Funding explicitly promote collaboration, making it increasingly critical to test pedagogical models that integrate collaboration into writing instruction. Thus, this study addresses an urgent regional gap by experimenting with collaborative writing as a means to enhance both engagement and proficiency among Omani EFL learners.

At the same time, this study is informed by the sociocultural realities of Oman, where students are accustomed to collective ways of working and learning. In classroom contexts, group interactions are often perceived as more engaging and less intimidating than individual tasks, which makes collaborative writing a culturally appropriate approach. Recent research with Omani undergraduates has shown that students generally view collaborative writing positively, noting its benefits for grammar, vocabulary, and idea generation, even if some hesitation exists in mixed-gender settings (Al Hilali, Balasubramanian, & Al Alawi, 2025). Similarly, experimental classroom studies in Oman have demonstrated that collaborative writing fosters motivation, peer support, and greater attention to language form (Al-Makhmari, 2024). These findings reinforce the theoretical grounding of collaborative writing in the social constructivist view of learning (Storch, 2005), itself underpinned by Vygotsky's (1978) sociocultural theory, where knowledge is co-constructed through interaction. Thus, in an Omani context, collaborative writing not only resonates with sociocultural practices but also promotes the kind of peer interaction that is widely recognized

as conducive to second language learning.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Collaborative Writing

Collaborative writing is a widely researched phenomenon in terms of students' writing accuracy. It is considered as one of the very effective techniques at the tertiary level of education since the 1970s. When communicative teaching method was introduced in the 1970s, teachers would often involve students into group and pair work so that they could learn from each other by collaborating. This moved the classrooms from being teacher centered to more student centered. According to Thomson (2003) collaborative learning is a very important technique, as it helps the learners develop their language skills by working on tasks together. Collaborative writing has been recommended by many researchers worldwide as it has shown positive impact in the classroom teaching as one of the useful teaching methods (Dobao, 2012 & Storch, 2011).

Collaboration as a Tool for Social Interaction

Various researchers have also stressed on the idea that cognition is not something that could be acquired by individual's isolated work (i.e. Lantolf, 2013). Rather, it is shaped by social interactions. According to this perspective, when individuals collaborate in shared tasks through negotiation and shared authorship, they develop linguistic and rhetorical control. According to Lowry et al. (2004), collaborative writing can be considered a social process, as when students work together to produce a final product, they negotiate and discuss to reach a shared goal effectively.

Scaffolding & Internalization

Scaffolding can also be seen as a very meaningful concept in collaborative writing. It is defined as a support through dialogues or social assistance during learning interactions. According to Ohta (2001), scaffolding is a dynamic process through which learners are provided with necessary help to accomplish something that is usually seen as something that goes beyond their current abilities. When it comes to collaborative writing, scaffolding can be used to offer lexical alternatives, making unclear ideas clearer, or providing organized patterns to the learners so they can learn to accomplish tasks that would have been difficult for them without such assistance. Learners provide scaffolding to each other when it comes to group tasks and they all grow and develop necessary skillsets together.

Along with the cognitive support, SCT also tends to stress on the importance of language as a mediating tool when it comes to scaffolding to shape learners' thoughts. Several scholars like Cazden (2001) and Thorne and Hellermann (2015) have also highlighted the role of language (oral instructions) in second language learning. When it comes to collaborative writing, language in the form of discussions and negotiations provide useful opportunities to learners to explore and rehearse language and develop necessary skills. These oral exchanges can become central to the way written language is jointly constructed and refined.

Similarly, the process of internalization also holds immense importance when it comes to interactive ways of teaching writing skills. According to this, when scaffolding is provided to learners in a way that is meaningful for them, they eventually start moving from extreme dependence on guidance to produce a piece of writing to self-regulation and independent producers of it. Such individual growth is shaped by collaborations that they go through while participating in group work.

SCT also emphasizes that learners are active participants in their learning. Vygotsky (1986) and later scholars such as Donato (2000) point out that learners develop not only through individual effort but also by working with others. They receive support, give support, and co-construct understanding during interaction. These ideas help us see how group writing activities can become learning spaces where students build language knowledge together, rather than simply completing tasks.

Interaction plays a central role in this process. From a sociocultural viewpoint, interaction is not just helpful; it is essential for learning. Dobao (2016) explains that through interaction, learners help each other notice and solve language problems. Research shows that this can lead to more accurate language use, better understanding of grammar, and increased awareness of how language works (Ellis, 2003). In the context of collaborative writing, such interaction might help students notice and discuss language choices as they write together, which could support their learning in meaningful ways.

Cooperation, Collaboration and Competition

To understand the specific value of collaboration, it is helpful to differentiate it from other group-based approaches such as cooperative and competitive learning. In competitive learning, students are often focused on outperforming one another, which does not require them to interact meaningfully. In cooperative learning, group members usually divide tasks so that each person completes a separate part. While there is some coordination, the interaction is often limited. In contrast, collaborative learning involves students working together more closely, sharing responsibility, discussing ideas, and jointly creating outcomes. These distinctions are important for this study, which explores how shared writing tasks—where students plan, write, and revise texts together—may promote deeper engagement with the language.

In lieu with collaboration, Languaging, a term introduced by Swain (2006), refers to the process of using language as a tool for thinking, problem-solving, and constructing meaning. It plays a central role in second language development, particularly in collaborative writing tasks where learners engage in meaningful dialogue about vocabulary, grammar, and content (Storch & Wigglesworth, 2007). Unlike cooperative or competitive writing activities, collaborative tasks offer more sustained opportunities for languaging episodes, during which

learners co-construct meaning through interaction (Wigglesworth & Storch, 2012). This collaborative negotiation not only deepens engagement with language forms but also enhances the activation and use of collocations, as students consciously reflect on and select appropriate word combinations (Swain, 2010). Thus, collocational awareness becomes more visible and impactful in collaborative writing settings compared to other group work formats.

2.2 Theoretical Framework

This study draws on Sociocultural Theory (SCT), developed by Lev Vygotsky (1978), which views learning—and particularly language acquisition—as a socially mediated process. Central to SCT is the idea that development occurs first through interaction with others and is later internalised by the learner. The concept of the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) captures the space between what a learner can do alone and what they can achieve with guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers. When it comes to academic writing, this concept means something not just a task where learners work together to accomplish it, rather it suggests a space where the potential of learners is activated through meaningful factors like peer support and social engagement.

According to this framework, learning is not just the transfer of knowledge to students, it is rather constructed mutually by learners when they participate in various social and academic activities. Within this theory, Vygotsky (1978) has stressed over the idea that learner development moves from one phase to another when they construct the knowledge together. According to him, the initial phase is called 'interpersonal plane', where knowledge is shared by students through social interactions, and the later phase is called 'intrapersonal plane' where the students internalize that knowledge as a concept.

In contexts such as Oman, where collaboration is deeply embedded in cultural practices, collaborative writing can function as a pivotal tool for promoting learners' linguistic development. This cultural alignment highlights the need for further research into how collaborative learning practices interact with local community values and shape learner engagement in meaningful and contextually relevant ways.

Since English is a second language in Oman, examining how Sociocultural Theory (SCT) applies to second language learning—particularly through collaborative writing (CW)—will deepen our understanding of the theoretical framework and its practical relevance.

2.3 Pedagogical Implications of Collaborative Writing

Over the past decade, CW has received growing attention as an effective pedagogical approach in English as a Second Language (ESL) and English as a Foreign Language (EFL) setting. Research consistently demonstrates that CW contributes positively to learners' linguistic development, cognitive engagement, affective responses, and overall academic performance. Rather than viewing CW as a mere group activity, contemporary studies emphasize its deeper role in fostering language acquisition through interaction, negotiation, and shared meaning-making.

- **Linguistic Development and Language Accuracy**

A central pedagogical implication of CW lies in its ability to enhance language accuracy and syntactic control. Numerous studies report that students who write collaboratively produce texts that, although sometimes shorter, are more grammatically accurate and cohesive than those written individually (Prinsen et al., 2009; Shehadeh, 2011; Yeh, 2014). These outcomes are largely attributed to mutual scaffolding during collaboration, where learners co-construct meaning, question linguistic choices, and offer corrective feedback to one another (Dobao, 2012). Peer-editing in such settings encourages the development of metalinguistic awareness, allowing students to not only improve their writing in the moment but also transfer these skills to future individual tasks.

- **Cognitive Engagement and Critical Thinking**

CW tasks also promote higher-order thinking by requiring learners to discuss, evaluate, and justify their ideas. Engaging in collaborative composition compels students to externalize their thoughts, make deliberate linguistic decisions, and reflect critically on both form and content. Empirical studies indicate that CW fosters cognitive engagement through dialogic interaction, negotiation of meaning, and shared problem-solving—key components of academic literacy (Tar et al., 2009; Neumann & McDonough, 2015; Latawiec et al., 2016). This aligns with sociocultural theory, where learning is seen as a socially mediated process occurring within the learner's zone of proximal development (Vygotsky, 1978; Suzuki, 2008). At the university level, as Bremmer (2010) points out, instructors often assign group-based academic projects, with each student assuming responsibility for a particular component. This division of labor encourages interdependence, efficient task completion, and improved outcomes. In academic writing classrooms specifically, grouping students to collaboratively brainstorm and draft outlines has been shown to enhance both the structure and clarity of student writing.

- **Affective and Motivational Benefits**

Another pedagogical benefit of CW is its positive effect on learners' motivation, attitudes, and self-efficacy. Students frequently report that collaborative tasks reduce anxiety and increase enjoyment, as they share responsibility and support each other during writing (Chen, Xie, & Looi, 2012; Ong & Maarof, 2013). The sense of accomplishment that comes from jointly producing a text often exceeds learners' expectations and motivates them to apply similar strategies in individual writing. Furthermore, the peer interaction inherent in CW enhances students' understanding of effective writing practices, which in turn builds confidence and autonomy (Dobao, 2012). McDonough (2004, p. 208) highlights that pair and small-group tasks not only promote learner autonomy and target language use but also create a less intimidating environment that supports emotional well-being. These positive emotional responses are important in maintaining learner motivation and increasing investment in writing tasks (Chen, Xie, & Looi, 2012; Ong & Maarof, 2013).

- **Vocabulary Development and Discourse Awareness**

CW also contributes to vocabulary acquisition and improved discourse organization. Through peer interaction, students are exposed to varied lexical items, rhetorical structures, and grammatical constructions, which enrich their language repertoire (Storch, 2005; Dobao, 2014). Discussions surrounding word choice, sentence structure, and coherence provide students with practical models of how to structure texts effectively. Learners often report that collaborative engagement helps them better organize their thoughts, apply new vocabulary in context, and improve the overall cohesion of their writing (Ong & Maarof, 2013).

In addition to immediate gains, CW has long-term implications for students' academic development. It helps cultivate transferrable writing strategies that students can apply independently in future academic tasks. By engaging collaboratively, learners identify gaps in their language knowledge, test hypotheses about language use, and receive real-time feedback—all of which contribute to deeper language internalization. This aligns with the principles of guided participation and apprenticeship in learning, where students gradually develop into independent writers through social interaction (Nosratinia & Nikpanjeh, 2015).

2.4 Empirical Support from ESL/EFL Contexts

Evidence from experimental and mixed-method studies further substantiates these pedagogical implications. For example, Shehadeh (2011) conducted a 16-week quasi-experimental study with university students, where one group wrote individually and the other collaboratively. Results revealed that CW had a statistically significant positive impact on writing performance, particularly in grammar, idea generation, and peer feedback. Students also reported increased confidence and speaking proficiency due to active verbal engagement during writing tasks.

Similarly, Dobao and Blum (2013) investigated the perceptions of 55 Spanish EFL learners who engaged in CW tasks in either pairs or small groups. Most participants viewed the experience positively, citing increased opportunities for idea sharing, grammar refinement, and active participation in the writing process. Although a small number preferred individual work, the overall sentiment favored CW for its cognitive and linguistic benefits.

In the Omani context, Ajmi et al. (2014) employed a mixed-method design involving 64 college students and five teachers. Findings revealed widespread positive perceptions of CW, with both students and instructors recognizing its value in improving writing quality. The study also identified key strategies to enhance CW implementation, including clarifying learning outcomes, managing group dynamics, ensuring fair assessment, and resolving conflicts. The current study draws on these insights to inform its interview protocols and explore localized pedagogical practices.

- **Advances in Methodological Rigor and Sociocultural Insights**

Recent studies on collaborative writing (CW) have introduced methodologically rigorous frameworks that not only strengthen the reliability of findings but also refine how CW can be implemented in classroom settings. These advances provide valuable models for the present research, which integrates their strategies to ensure robust data collection, equitable group participation, and effective evaluation of learners' writing outcomes.

One notable example is the study by Vu Phi Ho Pham (2021)**,** which examined the effects of CW on writing fluency in a Vietnamese EFL context. By designing a structured task-sharing framework, Pham addressed the common issue of unequal contributions in group tasks—a challenge previously observed by Ajmi et al. (2014) in Oman. In Pham's study, each participant was assigned clear responsibilities during drafting, revising, and editing, which led to measurable improvements in writing fluency and engagement. The current study adopts this task-division model to ensure all participants contribute equally during collaborative sessions, while also using a similar pre- and post-test design to track changes in writing performance.

Wiboolyasarin et al. (2024) extend this methodological rigor by exploring the integration of AI-enhanced feedback within a three-step collaborative writing framework (planning, drafting, and revision). Their study with Thai undergraduate students demonstrated that AI tools—particularly in the revision stage—substantially improved grammatical accuracy and coherence. Building on this approach, the current study borrows their validated marking rubric and essay prompts to evaluate writing quality systematically, ensuring comparability with established instruments. While the present study does not fully replicate the AI component, it draws on the structured intervention stages demonstrated in Watcharapol et al.'s design.

In the Omani context**,** Al-Makhmari (2024) provided further evidence of CW's effectiveness by implementing an eight-hour classroom intervention that combined collaborative drafting with reflective feedback. The study emphasized the importance of explicit training in CW strategies, noting that students benefit from guided interaction and structured peer feedback. This insight has been incorporated into the current study, where learners receive pre-task training sessions on collaborative planning, idea-sharing, and peer editing to optimize the quality of interaction during writing.

These methodological models collectively inform the design of the present research, ensuring that the intervention is both pedagogically sound and empirically robust. By incorporating Pham's equitable task allocation**,** Watcharapol et al.'s rubric and staged intervention design**, and** Al-Makhmari's structured CW training, the current study builds upon best practices to address challenges identified in earlier Omani research (Ajmi et al., 2014).

From a theoretical standpoint, these studies—and their adoption in the current research—are grounded in Sociocultural Theory (SCT)**.** Each

framework operationalizes key SCT principles such as scaffolding, peer mediation, and learning through dialogic interaction. For instance, Pham's task-sharing framework mirrors the SCT concept of distributed expertise within the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD). Similarly, Al-Makhmari's emphasis on guided peer interaction reflects SCT's focus **on** shared meaning-making and gradual internalization of language skills.

In conclusion, the synthesis of these methodologically rigorous studies with SCT underpins the current research design, ensuring that CW tasks not only foster linguistic accuracy and writing fluency but also create socially mediated learning environments that promote critical thinking, self-regulation, and collaborative competence.

Having discussed the literature review in detail, next, an overview of English language learning in Oman is presented below to contextualize findings.

2.5 The Situation of English in Oman

Oman is considered part of Kachru's (1992) Expanding Circle, where English is regarded as a foreign language. Despite this status, the government recognizes English as a vital tool for national development, particularly in the context of Omanisation—the initiative to replace expatriate workers with skilled Omani nationals (Al-Issa, 2005).

From 1970 to 1998, English was introduced at Grade 4, meaning students received around 600 hours of instruction over nine years before entering tertiary education (Al-Hammami, 1999, as cited in Al-Lamki, 2009). However, in 1998, a significant reform known as the Basic Education program was launched by the Ministry of Education. This reform began English instruction from Grade 1, extending the total period of English learning to twelve years, which effectively doubled instructional hours to about 1,200 (Al-Hammami, 1999, cited in Al-Lamki, 2009).

Under this system, students undergo ten years of Basic Education (Grades 1–10), divided into two cycles: Cycle 1 (Grades 1–4) and Cycle 2 (Grades 5–10). This is followed by two years of General Education (Grades 11–12). The purpose of these reforms was to equip students with stronger English skills to meet both academic and professional demands. Considerable investment was made to improve materials, teacher training, and curriculum quality. Despite these efforts, expected outcomes have not been fully realized. Many high school graduates still struggle with English and require foundation programs at university to reach the necessary proficiency level. This gap also affects their employability, particularly in the private sector where good English communication is often essential (Al-Issa, 2011; Al-Mahrooqi, 2012a; Al-Mahrooqi & Asante, 2010). As Altbach (2010) points out, addressing these shortcomings early would help reduce the need for remedial education and produce more job-ready graduates.

Moreover, Oman Vision 2040 reinforces this priority by highlighting English as a key competency for students. The Ministry of Education has recently adopted international standards such as the Global Scale of English (GSE) and the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR). English is now taught from Grade 1 using internationally benchmarked materials. Vision 2040 emphasizes developing globally competent graduates equipped with skills in English, digital literacy, and scientific thinking—central to Oman's transition to a diversified, knowledge-based economy.

Several studies have examined the challenges faced by Omani students in acquiring effective writing skills in English. Al-Abri (2003), for example, attributes many of these challenges to the structural differences between Arabic and English writing systems. Arabic's right-to-left script, rhetorical style, and grammatical structures create additional obstacles when students learn to write in English.

Another critical factor is motivation. Al-Issa (2002) argues that many students lack intrinsic motivation to learn English, a claim supported by earlier educational analyses (Harmer, 1983). This lack of engagement can hinder language development, particularly in writing, which requires more creativity, planning, and expression than rote memorization.

The Omani education system has also been criticized for being heavily reliant on memorization-based teaching (Al-Toubi, 1998; Al-Balushi, 1999; Al-Hammami, 1999; Al-Issa, 2002). Exams are designed to assess discrete skills—reading, writing, listening, speaking—alongside grammar and vocabulary, often in isolation. As Babrakzai (2001) notes, this fragmented approach does not reflect how language is used in real-world contexts, where integrated and functional communication is essential. Because of this approach, students tend to memorize textbook content without fully understanding or retaining it. Textbooks dictate both classroom instruction and assessment methods. Consequently, language becomes a tool for reproducing textbook knowledge rather than a skill for authentic communication. Al-Toubi (1998) and Al-Issa (2002) stress that this system encourages superficial learning, which does not promote long-term language retention or competence.

When Omani students enter English-medium universities, they often lack the ability to express themselves clearly in writing. Babrakzai (2001) argues that this stems from a linear and rigid transmission of knowledge, where creativity and independent thought are discouraged. Students may "write the textbook," but they cannot write for real-life purposes—limiting their academic success and contribution to national development.

In the light of above literature review and consequent need of such studies in Oman, present study explores the following questions.

2.6 Research Questions

RQ1: What are the differences in L2 writing proficiency between the experimental group exposed to a collaborative writing intervention and the control group receiving traditional instruction at a higher education institution in Oman?

RQ2: What are the perceptions of students in the experimental group regarding the effectiveness and challenges of the collaborative writing intervention implemented at a higher education institution in Oman?

3. Methodology

3.1 Research Method

This study adopted a quasi-experimental design with a non-equivalent pre-test & post-test control group (Creswell & Creswell, 2022) to investigate the impact of a three-step collaborative writing activity on the L2 writing proficiency of the experimental group. Two intact groups were used: a control group (n = 42) that engaged in individual writing activities, and an experimental group (n = 48) that participated in collaborative writing exercises over a four-week period. Both groups were given a pre-test essay task to establish baseline writing proficiency and later a post-test essay task to investigate the differences.

3.2 Context and Participants

The participants in this study were Level 2 students enrolled in a Professional Writing course. A total of 90 Level 2 students (aged 18–20), including both males and females, took part in this study. All participants were enrolled in English language courses and had completed their foundation year, which provided them with prior exposure to English writing skills and later they took two more courses targeting their writing skills in English.

Participants were grouped based on the university's scheduling and placement practices (convenience sampling). To ensure initial comparability, both groups were matched for age, years of English study, and initial language proficiency.

3.3 Research Instruments

3.3.1 Writing Tasks and Evaluation Criteria

This study was designed to examine the progression of L2 writing proficiency through both individual and collaborative writing tasks. Therefore, the main research instrument used were essays. The topics for the essay were also adapted from Wiboolyasarin et al (2024) study. They were simplified to some extent to suit the context and student's level of proficiency (details in Appendix A). These tasks were designed to measure the development of writing skills before and after engaging in the three-step collaborative writing activity.

All participants were tasked with composing five essays over the course of the study. Two of these essays functioned as both individual writing pretests and post-tests, requiring participants to craft a 300-word essay on a predetermined topic. Writing performance in these essays was assessed using an analytical rubric adapted from Wiboolyasarin et al (2024) which was based on established sources (Becker, 2016; Butvilofsky & Sparrow, 2012; Rakedzon & Baram-Tsabari, 2017; Soltero-Gonz ́alez et al., 2012; Uludag & McDonough, 2022). The rubric evaluated six areas: content, structure, use of examples and evidence, language use, vocabulary and word count, and mechanics (spelling and punctuation). Each area was scored on a 4-point scale, totalling 24 possible points per essay Full rubric details are available in Appendix B.

Regarding reliability of the scores, the researcher sought help of two trained evaluators to independently assess the essays to ensure objectivity. Any discrepancies in scores were discussed and resolved through consensus to maintain grading reliability.

3.3.2 Interviews

This study employed semi-structured interviews to collect in-depth qualitative data. This format allowed for a flexible, yet focused exploration of participants' experiences and perceptions related to collaborative writing. The interviewer allowed for follow-up questions and probing, enabling to elaborate on relevant issues in their own words. This approach facilitated the generation of rich, detailed responses essential for meaningful qualitative analysis. In total, thirteen codes were formed which were reduced to six themes. A further discussion of themes will be presented in discussion section.

The students were contacted using purposive sampling for interviews. The researcher targeted students based on their performance or engagement levels as it yielded richer, more relevant data about perceptions, motivation, and obstacles. Participants from top, moderate and low score were invited and in total 6 interviews were recorded, containing two participants from each level.

3.4 Data Collection Procedure

The pre-test essay was administered to both groups before the intervention to establish a baseline for comparison. Over the following four weeks, both groups wrote three additional essays: the control group worked independently, while the experimental group collaborated in small teams (3–4 students). These sessions were scheduled in advance, and students were informed a week prior to each task to encourage attendance.

To promote collaborative flexibility, students in the experimental group were encouraged to rotate group members. However, it was observed that most female students preferred to retain their original group compositions across tasks, while male students were more open to changing teammates. After receiving feedback on their three writing tasks, all students completed a post-test essay, allowing for a final comparison of writing development between the groups.

To ensure that the experimental group actively engaged in languaging and genuine collaborative writing—rather than merely cooperative work—and to maintain consistent attendance, the researcher informed both the control and experimental groups that their pre- and

post-intervention essays would be written individually and graded. As the researcher was also the students' teacher, this strategy was based on the observation that students in Oman tend to take graded assignments seriously and are more motivated to perform well when their work is graded towards final marks. Throughout the collaborative writing sessions, the researcher regularly encouraged students to engage in meaningful dialogue around language use, emphasizing that such interaction would help them improve and succeed in the final individual writing task at the end of the term.

After the conduct of post-test, students were contacted using purposive sampling for interviews. The researcher targeted students based on their performance or engagement levels as it yielded richer, more relevant data about perceptions, motivation, and obstacles. Participants from top, moderate and low score were invited and in total 6 interviews were recorded, containing two participants from each level.

3.5 Data Analysis

3.5.1 Quantitative Data analysis

The quantitative data analysis began with testing for normality using the Shapiro–Wilk test. As pre-test scores met the assumption of normality, an independent samples t-test was used to compare the two groups at baseline. However, post-test scores violated normality, so non-parametric tests were employed. A Mann–Whitney U test was used to compare post-test scores between groups, and a Wilcoxon Signed-Rank Test was conducted to assess within-group improvement in the experimental group**.**

3.5.2 Qualitative Data

For analyzing the qualitative data obtained through software-related interviews, the Constant Comparative Method (CCM) was employed (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Maykut & Morehouse, 1994; Memon 2017). CCM is an inductive approach that involves systematic coding and continuous comparison of emerging categories. Following the steps outlined by Maykut and Morehouse (1994), the data were analyzed by: (1) identifying units of meaning, (2) grouping similar units into provisional categories, (3) refining categories through comparison, and (4) developing themes. This method ensured rigorous and consistent analysis, allowing patterns to emerge directly from the data.

4. Results and Discussion

First, the assumption of normality for pre-test scores was assessed and found to be met for both groups. The Shapiro–Wilk test for Group A yielded a statistic of 0.968 (p = 0.346), and for Group B, the statistic was 0.945 (p = 0.052). Since both p-values exceeded the conventional alpha level of 0.05, the null hypothesis of normality was not rejected. Thus, parametric tests were deemed appropriate for comparing pre-test scores.

Table 1. Tests of Normality for Pre-Test Scores

Group	Test	Statistic	df	p-value
A	Shapiro–Wilk	0.968	38	0.346
B	Shapiro–Wilk	0.945	40	0.052

To determine whether the experimental group (Group A) and the control group (Group B) began with comparable levels of L2 writing proficiency, an independent samples t-test was conducted on their pre-test scores.

Table 2. Independent Samples t-Test for Pre-Test Scores

Test	F	p (Levene's)	t	df	p (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	95% CI Lower	95% CI Upper
Equal variances assumed	0.692	0.408	-0.514	76	0.609	-0.282	-1.372	0.809

Levene's test indicated homogeneity of variances (F = 0.692, p = .408). The t-test revealed no significant difference in pre-test scores between Group A and Group B, t(76) = -0.514, p = .609. This confirms that both groups had similar writing proficiency levels prior to the intervention.

To address RQ1, the primary analysis focused on post-test scores following the intervention. Normality tests indicated violations of normality in both groups, as shown below:

Table 3. Tests of Normality for Post-Test Scores

Group	Test	Statistic	df	p-value
A	Shapiro–Wilk	0.934	40	0.022*
B	Shapiro–Wilk	0.938	39	0.032*

* Significant at p < .05

Given these results, a non-parametric Mann–Whitney U test was used to compare post-test performance between the groups.

Table 4. Mann–Whitney U Test for Post-Test Scores

U	Z	p (2-tailed)
10.000	-7.577	< .001***

The test revealed a highly significant difference in post-test scores between the groups, U = 10.00, Z = -7.577, p < .001, indicating that the experimental group (Group A) significantly outperformed the control group (Group B). These results suggest a significant positive effect of the collaborative writing intervention on L2 writing proficiency.

To further evaluate the intervention's effectiveness within Group A, a Wilcoxon Signed-Rank Test was conducted.

Table 5. Wilcoxon Signed-Rank Test for Group A

Z	p (2-tailed)
-7.577	< .001***

The test revealed a statistically significant improvement in scores from pre-test to post-test within the experimental group (Z = -7.577, p < .001), further confirming the effectiveness of the collaborative writing approach.

In conclusion, the results provide a clear answer to RQ1**.** There was no significant difference between the groups at the pre-test stage, confirming that both started at a similar level of writing proficiency. However, following the intervention, the experimental group demonstrated significantly higher post-test scores, indicating that collaborative writing strategies substantially enhanced L2 writing proficiency compared to traditional instruction.

To explore students' perceptions of the collaborative writing intervention (RQ2), qualitative data gathered through semi-structured interviews were analyzed using the Constant Comparative Method. This analysis revealed a set of recurring themes that offer insight into how learners experienced and interpreted the intervention. The emerging themes not only reflect students' views on the effectiveness of collaborative writing in enhancing their L2 writing skills but also highlight the practical challenges encountered during the process. In the following section, each theme is discussed in detail, supported by illustrative quotes from participants, and interpreted considering existing literature on collaborative learning and second language acquisition.

a. Peer-Stimulated Idea Generation

Some participants viewed English writing classes a routine part of their university schedule—important yet often lacking the motivation to engage actively daily due to their curricular nature. This underscores the need for more interactive and stimulating classroom activities that encourage students to think critically and participate meaningfully.

'***Everyday, we have back-to-back classes which start at 8 a.m. and this drains our energy and sometimes we sit in classes with least motivation to do active learning. Working in group collaboratively work like a pull and push and we end up talking and warm up to willingly complete the task'.***

Participant 2

The experiences shared by participants in this study resonate with the concept of the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) within Sociocultural Theory (SCT), which emphasizes how learners can accomplish more when working with others who bring different perspectives and strengths. Participants reported that collaborative writing tasks increased their engagement and helped them generate ideas—demonstrating that even peers with comparable proficiency levels can provide mutual support through purposeful interaction (Donato, 1994; Ohta, 2001). Activities such as vocabulary discussions, content revision, and peer feedback acted as scaffolded processes that collectively enhanced their writing. The collaborative environment thus fostered both cognitive engagement and linguistic growth within their ZPD.

b. Psychological Safety through Peer Support

Related to psychological comfort, some participants expressed that CW creates a bond among peers, and they feel they have others to draw support from. Particularly shy students and the ones who achieve low scores find it as a great way to work within less anxious and psychologically comforting group work. One representable quote is,

'***When I work alone, I doubt myself and at times I feel like not working as I do not think I can. In CW, I had my friends, and they supported me. Unlike teachers, they knew me and I could be less nervous to speak and help complete the task.***

Participant 5

This may be because Omani society is generally seen as collectivist; learners are often more comfortable working with others than performing individually. CW aligns with these cultural values, encouraging more natural engagement and reducing pressure. These findings align with recent research in EFL contexts. Mohebati (2023) highlights that collaborative writing environments significantly reduce writing anxiety and foster more positive attitudes toward writing, thereby encouraging students to participate actively in a psychologically safe space. Li (2025) further confirms that peer support in collaborative learning enhances engagement and fosters positive interpersonal

relationships, contributing to a classroom culture where students feel respected, valued, and motivated to take intellectual risks.

Taken together, these studies suggest that CW provides dual benefits: it strengthens writing skills while simultaneously enhancing students' psychological comfort. The presence of a supportive peer network allows learners to negotiate ideas, give and receive constructive feedback, and approach writing tasks with greater confidence. In this way, collaborative writing functions not only as a pedagogical tool for academic improvement but also as a mechanism for promoting social-emotional well-being, which is particularly crucial for students who may experience anxiety or lack self-efficacy in traditional, individual-focused writing activities.

c. Tedious and disrupted task

Contrary to the positive themes, one theme emerged related negative experience. Particularly high achievers believed collaborative writing practice imposed upon them leadership role as they were required to look after everyone and listen to everyone and create a draft which voices everyone's contribution. Following is the representation quote of a participant,

'*I found it very tedious and more demanding to work with a group of mixed abilities. Suddenly, I had to be responsible for everyone'.*

Participant 2

Having gone through this experience, students acknowledged that it enhanced their motivation—not only were they engaged in writing, but they also had to fulfill communal responsibilities by leading the team toward improvement. This finding aligns with the collective cultural context in Oman, where individuals are often encouraged to accept communal responsibilities, whether willingly or due to social expectations. Recent studies support this context-specific dynamic: Al-Muzahimi (2025) emphasizes that Omani educational settings encourage students to assume communal and leadership roles, which can be both rewarding and demanding. Similarly, Al-Omari (2025) highlights that Omani university students are expected to develop leadership skills, and such roles often require managing the contributions and well-being of peers. These responsibilities, while fostering personal growth, can also create tension and workload pressures for high-achieving students. Furthermore, Al-Maamari (2014) underscores that collective cultural values in Oman encourage individuals to take responsibility for the community, situating the participants' experiences within a broader sociocultural framework.

D. Cognitive Rehearsal of Essay Structure

Some participants shared an interesting insight that pair work made them really learn as without consciously remembering they retained the essay structure, planning aids. Continuous structural rehearsal enhanced their ability to produce in the final essay individually. It positively **impacted on their post-test performance.**

'*Since the tasks were all report based and working with my friends made me really understand and internalise the structure. In fact, while writing the final essay, I remembered a lot of structures and imagined during the task if we were doing it in peer how would we plan'.*

Participant 2

This may be seen as a shift from memorization to process writing. Traditional instruction in Oman often emphasizes model essays and memorization, which may lead to surface-level understanding and limited learner autonomy. In contrast, collaborative writing introduces a process-oriented approach that encourages students to actively engage in drafting, revising, and discussing ideas. Participants in this study reported that such interaction helped them internalize structures and concepts more effectively than when working individually. Newell (1998) similarly suggests that writing enables learners to both "know" and "do" — as they explore ideas, reorganize thoughts, and articulate newly constructed knowledge. This also aligns with one of the consistent findings across multiple studies is that collaborative writing enhances grammatical accuracy and syntactic control. Students working in pairs or small groups produce texts that, while sometimes shorter in length, demonstrate greater linguistic precision and coherence compared to those written individually (Prinsen et al., 2009; Shehadeh, 2011; Yeh, 2014).

This dual role of writing — enhancing content comprehension and language development — is well established in the literature (Hirvela, 2011; Swain, 2001; Williams, 2012). In CW, learners participate in purposeful dialogue around language, focusing on vocabulary, grammar, content, and organization (Storch & Wigglesworth, 2007). These interactions often lead to language-related episodes (LREs), which offer opportunities to notice and reflect on language use (Wigglesworth & Storch, 2012). Shehadeh (2011) frames this process as a transition from jointly constructed knowledge to internalized understanding, enabled through interaction. Swain (2006, 2010) further emphasizes that CW fosters problem-solving around language, pushing learners to engage with linguistic forms at a conscious, metalinguistic level (Swain, 2000). Such engagement is central to L2 development within sociocultural theory, explaining why many students in this study felt they learned more deeply and quickly when writing collaboratively.

E. Emergence of L1-L2 Translanguaging Benefits

Some participants also shared an insightful aspect that during the collaborative writing in English, some Omani learners switched between Arabic and English. That helped them to clarify concepts, generate ideas, and internalize structure before producing L2 output.

'*With my friends in the group, at times I expressed myself in Arabic and they helped me to say those ideas in English.*

Participant 4

This finding contrasts with the participants' earlier reliance on digital devices, where they admitted to merely copying and pasting information without much thought or understanding. In such cases, their engagement with the content was passive, leading to surface-level learning. However, when they engaged in translanguaging with peers—using their native language alongside English to discuss, explain, and negotiate meaning—they were cognitively stimulated. This collaborative process required them to think critically, process ideas more deeply, and construct knowledge actively. As a result, they experienced more meaningful learning. This highlights how peer interaction and translanguaging can transform students from passive recipients of information into active learners, especially in multilingual classroom settings.

F. Conflict and Role Imbalance in Groups

Interestingly, some learners pointed out a challenge related to group dynamics in collaborative writing (CW) that contrasts with its generally positive effects. They expressed concerns that stronger or more confident students often dominated the activity, while others remained passive, felt excluded, or believed their contributions were undervalued in the final draft. Such role imbalances can hinder equal participation, reduce engagement, and negatively affect the overall learning experience. These findings are supported by recent studies. Mozaffari, Winarti, and Cahyono (2025) report that unequal participation is a major concern in collaborative writing, with dominant students frequently taking control of tasks, leaving quieter or less confident peers marginalized. Similarly, Le (2018) notes that, without careful guidance and structuring, some students may monopolize discussions while others disengage, and Gustavsen (2025) emphasizes that group activities must be carefully designed to promote balanced participation and prevent the over-dominance of certain members.

In line with these findings, the present study sensitizes the issue to the Omani classroom context. While CW can offer substantial benefits, including peer learning and enhanced engagement, teachers need to be mindful of potential inequities in participation. Strategies such as rotating group members, assigning specific roles, and fostering a supportive and inclusive environment are essential to ensure that all students feel involved, have opportunities to contribute meaningfully, and share responsibility for the group's output. By intervening thoughtfully, educators can maximize the pedagogical advantages of collaborative writing while mitigating the risks of conflict and role imbalance that may otherwise disadvantage certain learners.

5. Conclusion

This study set out to examine the impact of collaborative writing (CW) on L2 learners' academic writing development in the Omani higher education context, and the findings affirm the pedagogical value of CW in promoting linguistic competence, cognitive engagement, and learner autonomy. Drawing on both quantitative and qualitative data, the study reveals how CW supports the co-construction of knowledge, allowing learners to refine their writing through peer negotiation, discussion, and shared reflection.

The quantitative data indicated a significant improvement in the writing performance of the experimental group. Students in this group produced essays with more cohesive structure, accurate grammar, and richer vocabulary—demonstrating that CW can foster not just output but quality output. The qualitative findings further reinforced this by showing how students remembered and replicated group-developed structures in their final essays, reflecting deep processing and retention of writing strategies.

These findings resonate with McDonough (2004)**,** who emphasized that pair and group activities in L2 settings provide increased speaking and thinking time, reduce anxiety, and foster learner autonomy—features that were also observed in the current study. Similarly, Bremmer (2010) highlighted that group projects at the university level lead to better outcomes when roles are clearly defined—an approach that this study operationalized by adopting Vu Phi Ho Pham's (2021) task allocation framework to ensure equal participation among group members.

Moreover, the outcomes echo Shehadeh's (2011) findings, where learners reported that CW helped them generate and organize ideas collaboratively, improve confidence, and enhance peer feedback skills—outcomes which were similarly reported by participants in the current study. These shared experiences point toward the pedagogical viability of CW as a sustained classroom strategy.

The methodological decisions in this study were guided by recent advances in CW research. For instance, the study adapted Wiboolyasarin et al.'s (2024) carefully designed instruments—particularly their use of AI-enhanced essay prompts and rubrics—ensuring clarity in evaluation and alignment with current best practices. In addition, the Vu Phi Ho Pham (2021) study, which tackled unequal task distribution, informed this study's design, helping mitigate similar issues noted in Ajmi et al. (2014) in the Omani context.

Viewed through the lens of sociocultural theory (SCT)**,** the results confirm that collaborative writing can act as a mediated learning tool. As learners worked within their Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD)**,** they engaged in meaning-making, negotiated form and content, and co-constructed texts, leading to internalization of linguistic forms and strategies. The dialogic nature of CW supported scaffolding and reflection, fostering both metalinguistic awareness and self-regulation.

Furthermore, in a collectivist culture like Oman, CW aligns well with students' socio-cultural values. The process of joint construction and peer feedback not only supported cognitive development but also created a low-anxiety environment that encouraged risk-taking and deep learning—echoing McDonough's pedagogical observations. As students worked together, they were not only learning with one another but also through one another, a central tenet of SCT.

The study is significant in various ESL contexts particularly in Omani context where Vision 2040 places greater emphasis on collaborative and teamwork characteristics where the system hopes to encourage students to be self-directed learners. This study encourages other researchers to discover the different aspects that could help collaborative writing to be part of the curriculum and teaching pedagogy across

the world.

In sum, this study contributes to a growing body of evidence suggesting that collaborative writing is an effective pedagogical tool in ESL contexts. It validates the practice not just in terms of linguistic output but also in terms of learner identity, confidence, and academic agency. By blending the insights of recent empirical studies with a sociocultural framework, the current research reaffirms that CW is more than just a method—it is a socially grounded, cognitively rich process that should be more intentionally integrated into second language writing instruction, particularly in culturally collaborative societies like Oman.

5.1 Limitations and Future Research Directions

This study was limited by the use of intact groups and convenience sampling, which may affect the generalizability of the findings. The duration of the intervention was relatively short, and only Level 2 students in one university context were included. Future research could explore collaborative writing across different proficiency levels, disciplines, and longer intervention periods, as well as examine its impact on other language skills such as speaking and reading. Additionally, longitudinal studies could investigate how collaborative writing influences learner autonomy, identity, and academic success over time in diverse cultural contexts.

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NA

Authors' contributions

Dr. Shumaila Memon planned the study, collected data, and drafted the paper. Dr. Saadia Fatima was responsible for the study design and methodology. Section Dr. Abida Ayesha compiled the literature review. All authors contributed to the discussion of the results, reviewed and approved the final manuscript.

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Appendix A: Topics provided to prepare a 300-word report

Pre-test	Your university is planning to introduce more foreign language courses. The administration wants to know whether students believe learning a foreign language is useful for getting better jobs, either in their own country or abroad. Write a report to the university administration explaining why students learn foreign languages and how it can help them in their careers. Give reasons and examples to support your ideas.
Task 1	Your university is reviewing its teaching methods and is considering offering more online learning options in the future. The administration has asked students to share their views on the effectiveness of online courses compared to traditional on-campus classes. Write a report to the university administration discussing whether online courses are as effective as on-campus study. Give clear reasons, examples, and suggestions to support your opinion.
Task 2	Your university is conducting a survey to understand how students view the role of higher education in achieving success in life. They are collecting student opinions on whether a university degree is necessary for success, or if people can be successful without one. Write a report to the university administration explaining your opinion. Give reasons and examples to support whether you think a university degree is essential for success or not.
Task 3	Your university is reviewing its curriculum to ensure it meets the needs of students and employers. The administration is asking students whether the university should focus more on teaching practical job-related skills instead of mainly offering traditional academic knowledge. Write a report to the university administration giving your opinion. Explain whether you think the university should prioritize practical skills for the job market. Support your opinion with clear reasons and examples.
Post Test	Your university is conducting a survey to understand student views about working abroad versus staying in their home country after graduation. The administration wants to know whether students believe moving to another country offers better job opportunities and quality of life, or if it is better to live and work in their own country. Write a report to the university administration giving your opinion. Explain whether you think working abroad leads to a better life or if staying in your home country is a better option. Support your views with reasons and examples.

Appendix B. 24-point scoring rubrics for assessing L2 students' writing proficiency in English

Adopted form

Content

- 4 points: The content is accurate, complete, and engaging, with clear presentation of primary and secondary points, effective sequencing of ideas, and distinct conveyance of the author's opinions or experiences, along with reliable references.
- 3 points: The content is accurate, complete, and engaging, with clear main points and well-sequenced ideas, though the expression of the author's opinions or experiences may lack some clarity.
- 2 points: The content is accurate and complete but may lack interest, with unclear main points, inadequate sequencing of ideas, and a lack of clarity in expressing the author's opinions or experiences.
- 1 point: The content may be accurate or incomplete, with unclear main points, inadequate sequencing of ideas, and a lack of clarity in expressing the author's opinions or experiences.

Structure

- 4 points: The text features a clear introduction, content, and conclusion, with effectively connected ideas through sentences and conjunctions, maintaining a balance between content and structure.
- 3 points: The text includes a clear introduction, content, and conclusion, with appropriate use of sentences and conjunctions to connect ideas, maintaining a balance between content and structure.
- 2 points: The text may have an unclear introduction, content, and conclusion, with inappropriate use of sentences and conjunctions, and a lack of balance between content and structure.
- 1 point: The text may lack an introduction, body, and conclusion, with inappropriate use of sentences and conjunctions, and a lack of balance between content and structure.

Use of Examples and Evidence to Support Main Points

- 4 points: The text employs examples and evidence compellingly to support main points, incorporating thought-provoking questions or words to engage the reader.
- 3 points: The text uses examples and evidence effectively to support main points.
- 2 points: The text uses examples and evidence to support main points but may lack interest.
- 1 point: The passage uses examples and evidence, but they may not be interesting or may not effectively support the main point.

Language Use

- 4 points: The content uses language correctly according to linguistic principles, employing appropriate vocabulary and expressions, with conciseness, clarity, and ease of understanding.
- 3 points: The content uses language correctly according to most language principles, employing appropriate vocabulary and expressions, with conciseness, clarity, and ease of understanding.
- 2 points: The content uses language that is correct according to linguistic principles, with some errors, potentially including inappropriate vocabulary and expressions, and may lack conciseness, clarity, or ease of understanding.
- 1 point: The content uses a lot of incorrect language according to language principles, with the use of inappropriate vocabulary and expressions potentially making the content less concise, clear, or easy to understand.

Number of Words

- 4 points: The content is 300 words or more.
- 3 points: The content is from 200-299 words long.
- 2 points: The content is from 100-199 words long.
- 1 point: The content is less than 100 words long.

Spelling

- 4 points: The text is free of spelling errors.
- 3 points: The text contains no more than 5 spelling errors.

- 2 points: The text includes spelling errors ranging from 6 to 10 words.
- 1 point: The text has more than 10 spelling errors.

Interpretation of Score Values:

This rubric assesses English language L2 writing proficiency across four levels. Scores are assigned based on established criteria outlined in the scoring rubrics.

Excellent Level (21-24 Points): Essays receiving scores in this range are characterized by a high level of proficiency. Students demonstrate accuracy, completeness, and engagement in their content, presenting primary and secondary points clearly. Sequencing of ideas is effective, and the expression of opinions or experiences is distinct. Furthermore, reliance on reliable sources is evident, contributing to the overall excellence of the essay.

Good Level (16-20 Points): Scores falling within this range signify a strong performance. Content is accurate, complete, and engaging, with clear main points and well-sequenced ideas. While the expression of opinions or experiences is clear, it may lack some of the distinctiveness found in essays at the very good level.

Fair Level (11-15 Points): Essays within this score range suggest a satisfactory level of proficiency. While content remains accurate and complete, there may be a lack of clarity in the main points and the sequencing of ideas. The expression of opinions or experiences may also lack some clarity, signaling areas for improvement.

Improved Level (6-10 Points): Scores in this range indicate an improved performance. Content may be accurate and complete, but it might lack interest. The main points may not be clear, and the sequencing of ideas may be inadequate. While expressing opinions or experiences, students may encounter challenges in clarity, pointing towards ongoing development.