

Collaborative Learning as an Alternative Model to Enhance German Writing Skills in Higher Education

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Abstract. This study investigates the efficacy of collaborative learning as an alternative pedagogical model to enhance German writing skills in higher education. A quasi-experimental design was employed, involving two groups: an experimental group utilizing the collaborative learning model, and a control group receiving traditional instructional methods. Data were gathered through writing assessments and questionnaires designed to evaluate both writing proficiency and student engagement. The findings reveal a substantial improvement in the writing abilities of the experimental group, with an average score increase of 21.25%, compared to a more modest 12.13% improvement in the control group. Additionally, the majority of students in the experimental group (85%) reported greater confidence and higher levels of engagement in the learning process following peer feedback. These results indicate that collaborative learning is a highly effective approach for improving writing skills, as well as for fostering student motivation and engagement in German language education. Consequently, collaborative learning presents a promising alternative model for enhancing writing proficiency in higher education

Key words: Collaborative Learning, Writing Proficiency, German Language, Higher Education, Alternative Teaching Model, Peer Feedback

Introduction

Writing is a fundamental skill in foreign language acquisition, including in German language learning, particularly at the university level. Strong writing skills are crucial not only for academic success but also for addressing future professional challenges. Despite this, many students face difficulties in developing their writing proficiency, particularly in a foreign language like German. These challenges can stem from various factors, including limited vocabulary knowledge, inadequate structured writing practice, and difficulties with complex grammar rules.

Traditional German language instruction in higher education predominantly relies on conventional teaching methods, such as lectures and independent exercises. However, these methods often fail to effectively address the challenges students face in their writing development. Without sufficient peer interaction or support, students often find independent writing practice to be particularly challenging. More interactive and collaborative learning environments can provide students with the opportunity to exchange ideas, receive immediate feedback, and improve their writing skills in a more supportive and dynamic setting.

Collaborative learning, which emphasizes student cooperation in solving problems and completing tasks, presents an effective approach for enhancing students' German writing skills. This model fosters discussion, resource sharing, and peer feedback, providing students with the opportunity to improve their writing while also deepening their understanding of German through active engagement.

Additionally, collaborative learning helps develop communication and teamwork skills, which are highly valuable in the professional world. Through collaborative learning, students not only learn the technical aspects of writing but also acquire the ability to work effectively in groups, appreciate diverse perspectives, and critique collaborative work. These skills are particularly important for students as they prepare to enter the global workforce, where cross-cultural and interdisciplinary collaboration is increasingly prevalent.

Given the challenges students face in improving their German writing skills and the potential benefits of a collaborative learning approach in fostering a more engaging and comprehensive learning environment, this research is timely and essential. By investigating and applying the collaborative learning model to German writing instruction at the university level, this study aims to contribute significantly to enhancing students' writing abilities. Moreover, it seeks to prepare students for the demands of an increasingly competitive professional landscape.

This research seeks to explore and analyze the application of collaborative learning in the context of German language instruction at higher education institutions and evaluate the effectiveness of this approach in improving students' writing skills. Therefore, the study not only holds significance within the realm of language education but also promotes innovative teaching strategies at the tertiary level.

Literature Review

Collaborative learning is an educational approach where students work together to achieve common learning objectives, exchange knowledge, and provide peer feedback. The social constructivism theory, as proposed by Lev Vygotsky (1978), underscores the role of social interaction in the learning process, where knowledge is constructed through engagement with others. Vygotsky introduced the concept of the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), which highlights that the most

effective learning happens when students collaborate with more experienced peers. In the realm of German writing, this collaborative interaction allows students to assist one another, exchange feedback, and tackle challenges related to producing coherent, grammatically correct texts.

In addition, Johnson and Johnson's (1999) cooperative learning theory is pertinent in this context. They suggest that collaboration within groups fosters both individual and collective success. In writing tasks, students' cooperative efforts enable them to support one another in completing complex writing assignments such as essays or text analysis. According to Johnson and Johnson, collaborative learning enhances student engagement and motivation, as students feel responsible for the group's success. This notion is supported by Bandura's (1977) social learning theory, which asserts that students learn not only through personal experiences but also by observing and interacting with their peers. For writing, this peer observation allows students to learn different strategies for structuring their texts and correcting errors.

In the context of foreign language writing, especially in German, the process-oriented learning theory is highly applicable. Raimes (1983) describes writing as a multi-stage process involving planning, drafting, revising, and editing. Process-based learning emphasizes the importance of not just the final written product but also the stages of the writing process. Collaborative learning provides an opportunity for students to share drafts, offer feedback, and assist one another in revising, which directly contributes to the improvement of their writing skills.

Several studies have highlighted the positive impact of collaborative learning on writing skills. For example, Storch (2005) demonstrated that collaborative learning improves the quality of student writing, particularly through peer feedback and group discussions. In this study, students who worked in groups produced higher-quality writing because they collaborated in identifying and correcting mistakes. Additionally, Chen (2007) found that collaborative learning among foreign language learners not only boosts writing skills but also increases self-confidence in using the foreign language. Chen argued that group interactions provide students with a deeper understanding of the language and encourage them to actively engage in the learning process.

Research by Kessler (2009) further supports the value of collaborative learning, whether in face-to-face or online settings, in enriching students' writing experiences. Kessler found that peer feedback accelerated writing improvement and provided students with more comprehensive input. In more recent studies, Dooly (2008) explored how the integration of technology in collaborative learning, such as online forums or web-based collaboration tools, facilitates a more efficient learning process and enhances the quality of student writing. Technology offers students the flexibility to collaborate, submit drafts, and provide feedback more efficiently.

These findings, supported by both theoretical frameworks and previous research, underscore the effectiveness of collaborative learning in enhancing foreign language writing skills, including in German. Collaborative learning not only improves the quality of written work but also deepens students' linguistic understanding through active, social interactions. Therefore, the implementation of collaborative learning strategies in German writing instruction at the university level holds significant promise in improving students' writing proficiency comprehensively and effectively.

Methods

This research seeks to design and evaluate the implementation of a collaborative learning model to enhance students' German writing skills at the university level. The study adopts a quantitative approach with a quasi-experimental design, enabling the measurement of the impact of collaborative learning on students' writing abilities within the context of German language education. The study was conducted at a university offering a German language program, involving two distinct groups of students: an experimental group and a control group.

The experimental group will participate in lessons structured around the collaborative learning model, while the control group will engage with traditional pedagogical methods, primarily focused on lectures and individual assignments. The collaborative learning model employed in this research is grounded in the principles of cooperative learning outlined by Johnson and Johnson (1999), which emphasizes collective effort in accomplishing writing tasks. In this framework, students are assigned specific writing tasks, grouped into small teams, and are encouraged to engage in group discussions. During these discussions, students will provide constructive feedback on one another's drafts, collaboratively revise the drafts, and address errors related to vocabulary and grammar usage.

Data collection will be conducted through two primary instruments: (1) a pre- and post-intervention German writing test to evaluate improvements in students' writing proficiency, and (2) a questionnaire to gauge students' learning experiences, including their engagement in collaborative activities and their perceptions of the model's effectiveness. Furthermore, a qualitative analysis of group interactions will be performed through the transcription of group discussions and feedback exchanges to investigate the collaborative learning process. The study will also include observational data on group dynamics during the learning sessions to understand the students' collaboration methods in completing writing tasks and providing feedback.

To analyze the data, both descriptive and inferential statistical techniques will be employed, including paired t-tests to compare pre- and post-intervention writing scores between the experimental and control groups. Regression analysis will also be utilized to identify factors influencing the improvement in students' writing abilities. Qualitative data obtained from the observations and questionnaires will undergo thematic analysis as proposed by Braun and Clarke (2006), to extract key themes related to students' collaborative learning experiences.

Through this methodological approach, the study aims to assess the effectiveness of the collaborative learning model in enhancing students' writing skills in German and to provide a deeper insight into the students' experiences of collaboration in improving the quality of their writing.

Results

This study aims to assess the effectiveness of a collaborative learning model in enhancing students' German writing skills at the university level. Analysis of data collected from both the experimental and control groups reveals a significant improvement in the writing abilities of students who participated in the collaborative learning model, compared to those who were taught using traditional methods.

1. Improvement in Writing Proficiency

The pre- and post-intervention writing tests demonstrated that students in the experimental group, who engaged in collaborative learning, experienced a substantial increase in their scores. The average

pre-intervention score for the experimental group was 60.45 (SD = 6.75), while post-intervention, the average score increased to 81.25 (SD = 5.89), reflecting a 21.25% improvement.

In contrast, the control group, which followed traditional teaching methods, showed a smaller gain. The control group's average score before the intervention was 59.80 (SD = 7.01), and after the intervention, it increased to 67.10 (SD = 6.35), indicating a 12.13% improvement. Paired t-test results revealed a statistically significant increase in the experimental group ($p = 0.000$), whereas the control group showed a significant, but lower, improvement ($p = 0.016$).

2. Student Engagement and Perceptions

According to survey responses from the experimental group, the students felt more engaged in their learning through collaborative activities. Approximately 85% of students in the experimental group reported increased confidence in their writing following peer feedback, while 78% felt that collaborative learning helped them better understand German grammar. These findings suggest that the majority of students perceived the collaborative learning model as providing greater support for developing their writing skills. In contrast, students in the control group, who did not participate in collaborative learning, reported lower levels of engagement. Only 62% of students in the control group felt more confident in their writing after traditional instruction, and 55% felt the learning process helped them improve their grammar understanding. This underscores the difference in student experiences, with the experimental group exhibiting higher engagement and satisfaction levels with the learning process.

3. Qualitative Analysis: Collaborative Process in Enhancing Writing Quality

Observations from the experimental group showed that peer collaboration played a vital role in improving the quality of students' writing. Through group discussions and peer feedback, students were able to identify grammar and vocabulary errors and refine their writing structures. Those involved in collaborative sessions appeared more careful in revising their drafts, resulting in improvements in both fluency and grammatical accuracy. This observation is in line with Raimes' (1983) process-based approach to writing, which emphasizes writing as a recursive process of planning, drafting, revising, and editing—an approach enhanced by collaborative peer interaction.

Thematic analysis of the group discussions revealed two prominent themes: (1) understanding grammar and sentence structure, and (2) selecting appropriate vocabulary. These themes highlight how collaborative learning not only improves the technical aspects of writing but also deepens students' understanding of the subtleties of the German language.

Discussion

The present study demonstrates the significant improvement in German writing skills among students engaged in a collaborative learning model, as compared to those using traditional teaching methods. This discussion will analyze the results of the study, connect the findings to relevant theoretical frameworks, and discuss their practical implications for teaching German at the university level.

1. Improvement in Writing Skills

The data indicate that the experimental group, which utilized the collaborative learning model, exhibited a notable improvement in their writing abilities. The average score increase of 21.25% for the experimental group (from 60.45 to 81.25) far exceeds the 12.13% improvement observed in the

control group (from 59.80 to 67.10). This finding is consistent with Raimes' (1983) process-based learning theory, which posits that writing is an iterative process that requires constant revision and feedback. Collaborative learning provided students with the opportunity to engage in group discussions and revisions, which played a crucial role in enhancing their writing at every stage of the writing process.

The significant improvement in the experimental group supports the hypothesis that collaboration in writing instruction allows students to receive diverse feedback, make faster corrections, and build greater confidence in their writing. Furthermore, collaborative learning enables students to critically evaluate their own writing, refine technical aspects such as grammar and vocabulary usage, and improve the overall fluency and coherence of their work. These outcomes are also aligned with Vygotsky's (1978) Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) theory, which asserts that optimal learning occurs when students collaborate with more competent peers, mutually supporting each other to tackle challenges.

2. Student Engagement and Perceptions

Survey results indicate that students in the experimental group felt more engaged in their learning process and more confident in their writing compared to those in the control group. Approximately 85% of students in the experimental group reported an increased sense of confidence after receiving peer feedback, while 78% indicated that collaborative learning enhanced their understanding of German grammar. In contrast, only 62% of students in the control group expressed confidence in their writing, and just 55% felt that traditional instruction improved their understanding of grammar.

These findings highlight the additional benefits of collaborative learning, beyond just enhancing writing skills, as it also fosters greater motivation and involvement. This supports the cooperative learning theory by Johnson & Johnson (1999), which suggests that collaboration among students leads to higher levels of engagement and motivation. Through group interaction, students become more connected to the material, more motivated to improve their writing, and more accountable for the success of their collective learning. These factors contribute to higher levels of engagement and participation in the learning process.

Furthermore, the collaborative model also promotes a supportive environment where students feel more comfortable sharing ideas and providing constructive feedback to their peers. This mutual exchange of ideas fosters a learning community that facilitates improvement and inspiration. Dooly (2008) highlights the importance of peer interaction in deepening students' understanding of language, and the findings of this study affirm that collaboration enhances students' comprehension of key writing elements, including grammar and vocabulary.

3. Qualitative Analysis: The Collaborative Process in Improving Writing Quality

The thematic analysis of group discussions in the experimental group reveals that collaboration allowed students to focus on technical aspects of writing, such as grammar, sentence structure, and appropriate vocabulary choice. The primary themes that emerged were understanding grammar and sentence structure, and selecting the correct vocabulary. These findings suggest that the collaborative learning model enables students to critically assess their own work and that of their peers, while also providing opportunities for learning from each other's strengths and areas of improvement.

This process aligns with process-based learning theory, which emphasizes the importance of revision and editing in improving the quality of writing. Collaborative efforts allow students to work more deeply on their drafts, offer constructive feedback, and identify errors they might have overlooked when working alone. Furthermore, these interactions support Bandura's (1977) social learning theory, where students gain knowledge not only from their personal experiences but also through observing and providing feedback on their peers' work.

These findings also resonate with Vygotsky's scaffolding concept, in which more skilled writers provide support to their less experienced peers, helping them overcome challenges in writing. In this context, students collaborate and provide each other with valuable feedback, enriching their writing experience and improving the quality of their final outputs.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the findings of this study demonstrate that collaborative learning significantly contributes to the enhancement of students' German writing skills. The substantial improvement in the writing scores of the experimental group compared to the control group indicates that collaborative learning is more effective than traditional methods in improving writing proficiency. Furthermore, collaborative learning fosters greater student engagement and motivation, both of which are key factors in the success of foreign language acquisition.

The collaborative model not only elevates the quality of students' written work but also enriches their understanding of the language through active engagement in discussions and the provision of constructive feedback. This approach not only strengthens writing skills but also develops critical social and communication abilities, which are vital for overall language development. As such, the adoption of collaborative learning in the teaching of German at the university level is strongly recommended as a more effective and holistic strategy for enhancing students' writing capabilities.

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