



Merits of Pair-Work Strategy in EFL Class

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Date of Submission: 12-08-2024

Date of Acceptance: 25-08-2024

Abstract: The purpose of this article is to discuss the power of pair work strategy in EFL class. It is a must that the students in EFL class are required to have good written and spoken language. This requirement will be impossible to be if EFL teachers don't know teaching strategy that can help students to fulfill the target. One of teaching strategies considered to be able to help students to catch the competence is pair-work strategy. Many researchers had proven the effectiveness of this strategy. The evidences are providing more opportunities to communicate in the target language, having positive contributions to learners' motivations, paired-peer review gives students benefits in terms of EFL writing proficiency, a non- threatening approach for students that results in purposeful usage of the target language across skills and demonstrable improvements in writing, providing greater grammatical accuracy, content, organization, and vocabulary in EFL writing, Providing the opportunity to pool ideas and provide each other with feedback, making students active in discussing language.

Keywords: *pair work strategy, EFL class*

I. INTRODUCTION

The role of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) teachers extends far beyond merely imparting language skills; it encompasses addressing the diverse challenges that students encounter in the learning process. These challenges are manifold and often deeply intertwined with the students' individual needs, backgrounds, and learning environments. Understanding these problems is crucial for developing effective teaching strategies and fostering a productive learning environment.

One major issue that EFL teachers face is the wide range of proficiency levels within a single classroom. Students may come with varying degrees of language competence, which can make it challenging for teachers to design lessons that are engaging and accessible for everyone. Differentiating instruction to cater to both advanced and struggling

learners requires careful planning and additional resources, often straining the teacher's time and creativity.

Another significant challenge is the diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds of students. EFL classrooms are typically composed of learners from different countries, each bringing unique language habits and cultural contexts. This diversity can lead to misunderstandings and communication barriers that impact students' ability to engage with the material and with each other. Teachers must navigate these complexities while creating an inclusive environment that respects and integrates varied cultural perspectives.

Student motivation and engagement also pose substantial difficulties for EFL teachers. Learning a foreign language can be daunting, and students may struggle with maintaining enthusiasm, especially if they perceive the language as difficult or irrelevant. Teachers need to employ innovative and interactive methods to sustain student interest and demonstrate the practical value of English in their personal and professional lives.

Classroom management is another critical area where EFL teachers encounter problems. Managing a class with students at different levels of language proficiency and from diverse backgrounds can lead to behavioral and disciplinary challenges. Effective classroom management strategies are essential to maintain a conducive learning atmosphere and ensure that all students have the opportunity to participate and benefit from the instruction.

Assessment and feedback present their own set of problems. Teachers must design assessments that accurately measure students' language skills while providing constructive feedback that helps them improve. Balancing the need for fair, consistent evaluation with the time constraints of grading and providing individual feedback can be a daunting task for EFL educators.

Furthermore, the lack of sufficient teaching materials and resources can exacerbate these



problems. Inadequate or outdated materials can hinder the effectiveness of instruction and limit students' exposure to authentic language use. Teachers often need to supplement available resources with their own materials or creative solutions, adding to their workload.

Finally, the integration of technology in the classroom introduces both opportunities and challenges. While digital tools can enhance language learning and provide interactive experiences, they also require teachers to be proficient with technology and to manage potential technical issues. Ensuring that technology supports rather than detracts from the learning process is an ongoing concern.

Addressing these multifaceted issues requires a comprehensive approach that includes professional development for teachers, support from educational institutions, and a commitment to understanding and responding to the evolving needs of students. By tackling these challenges head-on, EFL teachers can better facilitate their students' journey towards language proficiency and academic success.

PAIR-WORK STRATEGY AS A POWER IN EFL CLASSES

Many researchers have focused their attention on using pair work in EFL class. Baleghizadeh (2009) stated that learners who completed the task in pairs outperformed those who attempted it individually. Storch (1999) also discovered that learners who worked in pairs had more opportunities to communicate in the target language than those in teacher-fronted classrooms. These findings implicitly imply EFL teachers on how to create a strategy in which students have more opportunities to communicate in the target language. Baleghizadeh and Farhesh (2014) analyzed the power of pair work to students' motivation and found that pair work had positive contributions to learners' motivations. This means that pairwork can be employed to stimulate students' motivation. Shin, et al (2015) also stated that students who worked together in pairs assisted each other, thereby recalling more correct idea units from the texts and eliminating extraneous information in their writing. These research findings have shown that pair work really, in general, gives a lot of advantages if it is employed in EFL classrooms. The findings discussed above on the merits of pair work are also related to aspects required in writing.

Although the use of pair work in the classroom is relatively limited in use (Storch, 2011), this strategy is believed to have beneficial points. Storch (2007) emphasizes that pair-work has strong

pedagogical and theoretical supports. From the pedagogical aspect, Biria and Jafari (2013:166) affirm that pair-work provides language learners more chances to use the language. From a theoretical point, this strategy meets language learning that emphasizes the importance of interaction for learning in order to develop learner's language competence. Dobao (2012:41) asserts that the role of interaction and peer collaboration are considered important in L2 development. In addition, Xiao (2008:106) also says that paired-peer review gives students benefits in terms of EFL writing proficiency, transferable skills, and self-efficacy. Besides, Mulligan and Garofalo (2011:9) emphasize that collaborative writing (pairwork) is a non-threatening approach for students that results in purposeful usage of the target language across skills and demonstrable improvements in writing. In short, pair-work does not only function as an activity to be employed in teaching-learning process, but it also gives advantages to students in writing performance.

Many research findings have showed that pair work had a significant effect or contribution on students' writing performance. Sorch (1999:363) asserted that collaboration had a positive effect on overall grammatical accuracy. In other study, Storch (2005:168) made a comparison of the products (completed texts) of pairs and individuals. The pairs produced shorter and better texts that had greater grammatical accuracy and linguistic complexity, and were more succinct. They seemed to fulfill the task more competently. In a collaborative study, Wigglesworth and Storch (2009:445) found that collaboration (pair work) impacted positively on accuracy although it does not affect fluency and complexity. Indirectly, these three research findings reveal that pair work is able to facilitate students to improve their skill in using language component (grammar) required in producing good written texts. In addition, pair work also helps students to write effectively in presenting ideas in their essays.

Some researchers also found the effect of pair work toward students' writing performance. Shehadeh (2011:286) found that collaborative writing had an overall significant effect on students' L2 writing. However, this effect varied from one writing skill area to another. Specifically, the effect was significant for content, organization, and vocabulary, but not for grammar or mechanics. Globally, her findings are the same as Storch's. However, she also found a different result from Storch's study (2005). Her finding showed that collaborative writing did not have a significant effect on grammar. Meanwhile, Storch found that pairs produced shorter and better texts that had greater



grammatical accuracy. The difference was assumed by the fact that they used the subject with different proficiency (based on IELTS score). The subjects' score (average) in Shehade's study was 4. Meanwhile, the subjects' score (average) in Storch's study was 6.5. Although research findings by Shehade on grammar accuracy is different from Storch's, Shehadeh found the significant effect of pair work on some other aspects of writing. These aspects were found to be a problem for students working individually (Sabarun:2006, Attamim: 2007, Ulfiati: 2010, and Isnawati: 2010)

Jafari and Ansari (2012: 128) found that students working in pairs had better writing accuracy than those working individually. This finding can enrich the theory on the merits of pair work found by Shehadeh (2011) and Storch (2005). In addition, this finding (students working in pairs had better writing accuracy) also has answered research finding by Kasman (2004) and Irawati (2008) in which college students and university graduates were found to have low academic writing. It means that having students to work in pairs can help them to minimize their problem in writing.

Chen (2012:25) and Kwon (2014: 85) investigated the benefit of collaborative writing viewed from students' voices. Their finding was that most students perceived their collaborative writing experiences quite positively. Students' perceived benefits of collaborative writing were numerous, ranging from opportunities to exchange ideas to development of communication. This finding indirectly completes other research findings that usually discuss the power of pair work viewed from teacher voices (based on students works). In other words, the students' voices need to be compared with teachers' voice in order to come to the more convincing result on the merits of pair work.

Biria and Jafari (2013:164) found that practicing in pairs really improved the overall quality of the learners' writing even though the fluency of written texts did not change significantly. Students need to be encouraged in order to have good writing quality and this research finding has showed that pair works can meet the target. In other words, pair work can guide students to have a good quality writing.

At last, Meihami, Meihami, and Varmaghani (2013:47) found that collaborative work (pair work) could improve students' grammatical accuracy in their upcoming writings. Their findings match what Storch (1999:363) has found on the effect of pair work on students grammar in writing. Having grammatical accuracy is a must in writing activities because sentences with wrong grammatical patterns can mislead and will not be understandable. Working

in pairs was found to be useful for students to improve their grammatical accuracy because writing activities where students correct each other and share ideas with one another guide students to better grammatical accuracy.

Based on research findings by Storch (2005 and 2009), Jafari and Ansari (2012), Biria and Jafari (2013) and Meihami, Meihami, and Varmaghani (2013), it can be concluded that pair work can develop students' writing performance. Specifically, it helps students to produce better written texts in terms of content, organization, vocabulary, and grammatical accuracy.

In addition to research findings on the effect of pair work toward students writing performance, there are several benefits of employing pair work in EFL writing. A number of researchers have found them in some terms.

Pair work, in fact, contributes to students' idea development. In a study, Storch (2005:153) found that collaboration afforded students the opportunity to pool ideas and provide each other with feedback. This finding can be a solution and is useful for EFL learners studying writing skill. Writing requires students to develop ideas into be a paragraph and an essay. Students tend to have problems fulfilling this requirement if they write individually.

Pair work in EFL writing also can make students active. In another study, Storch (2007:143) found that although there were no significant differences between the accuracy of tasks completed individually and those completed in pairs, most pairs engage actively in discussing language. They tend to reach correct resolutions. Making students active in an EFL class is a must because if the students are active, the teaching-learning process will run well and expected targets can be achieved. Pair work, based on Storch's finding, can be one alternative solution to make it come true.

The next power of employing pair work in EFL writing is on language improvement. Dobao (2012:40) states that writing tasks completed in pairs offer learners an opportunity to collaborate in the solution of their language-related problems, construct new language knowledge, and produce linguistically more accurate written texts. It seems that this finding provides more convincing evidence on the power of pair work in EFL writing because students get merits of working in pairs.

Another advantage of employing pair work is that it can make students enjoy learning. Shehadeh (2011:286) found that most students in the pair work setting have an enjoyable experience. Making students enjoy the teaching learning process is important because if students enjoy class, the teacher



can teach well and maximize the learning achieved. Shehadeh's finding proves that pair work can be employed to make students enjoy the teaching learning process.

Paying attention to research findings on the effect of employing pair work in EFL writing toward students' writing performance and its power in several aspects, writing in pairs is apparently beneficial and very useful for students. Pair work in EFL writing enables students to produce good quality written texts. Then, the findings can minimize the belief that writing is a complicated and multifaceted task (Cahyono and Widiati, 2011; Tsai and Lin, 2012; and Richard and Renandya, 2002). In addition, pair work can be one of solutions to writing problems met by most students working individually as stated by some research findings (Kasman, 2004; Irawati, 2008; Ahmed, 2010; Barrett and Chen, 2011; Zakaria and Mogaddam, 2013; Hammad, 2014; Al Seyabi and Tuzlukova, 2014; and Javid and Umer, 2014).

Pair work in EFL writing can be conducted in three types: homogeneous, heterogeneous, and randomized pairs. In a homogeneous class, students who have the same level of English proficiency work in pairs to produce a written text. In a heterogeneous class, students work in pair with partners who have higher level of English proficiency to produce a written text. Meanwhile, the randomized class is a condition in which homogeneous pairs and heterogeneous pairs are available in a classroom to produce written texts.

The studies on the homogeneous and heterogeneous pairs have been carried out by many researchers. So far, their research findings have not concluded strictly which one is the best among the two because some researchers found that the homogeneous pairs performed better in some conditions and some others found that the heterogeneous pair performed in some other condition. Even, another researcher found that there was no a significant difference among the homogeneous and heterogeneous pairs. To make it clear, let us see the following researchers with their different research findings.

Maftoon and Ghafoori (2009) investigated the effect of the homogeneous and heterogeneous collaborative interaction on the development of EFL learners' writing skill. In the study, they found that both groups, very similarly, had significantly higher post-test scores in all three writing tasks. Ghafoori (2009) conducted a study on the effect of homogeneous and heterogeneous dyadic interaction on the development of EFL Learners' Writing Skill. His research finding was that there was no statistically significant difference between G-

Hom and G-Het participants in terms of their progress from pretest to posttests. There was also no statistically significant difference among the scores obtained from the three posttest tasks. Then, Mahmoud (2011) also investigated the effect of homogeneous grouping and heterogeneous grouping on high school students' EFL Writing Achievement. Here, he wanted to know which one was better. His finding was that homogeneous pairs showed a better performance than heterogeneous ones. From the three research findings above, it can be concluded that homogeneous and heterogeneous groups have similar power on the the development of EFL learners' writing skill.

Eckley (2014) conducted a study to discover what type of cooperative learning has the best result /educational outcomes. His research finding was that students from heterogeneous groups performed better working than homogenous groups. Fauziah and Latief (2015) investigated the effect of working in Heterogeneous and Homogeneous pairs on the students' writing skill. Their research finding was that the quality of descriptive essays produced individually by the students from heterogeneous group was on the average significantly better than the quality of descriptive essays produced by the students from the homogeneous group. What was found by Eckley and Fauziah & Latief above means that heterogeneous group has better result than homogeneous group to students' achievement.

Final Remark

EFL teaching-learning process should be able to make students competent in mastering and using English in daily communication. There should be a concrete effort carried out to catch the target. One of ways that can be done is implementing pair-work strategy in EFL classes because many research findings have proved the several useful effects of this strategy in several aspects. This means that pair-work is a teaching strategy promising a good result. EFL teachers should consider this to apply in their classes.

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