

Omani University Students' Attitudes Towards Collaborative Writing

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Abstract—This paper examined the students' attitudes, based on their cultural background, towards collaborative writing (CW). The participants included 215 undergraduate students from a large public university in the Sultanate of Oman and the instrument used was a questionnaire designed for the study. The results show that students' general attitudes towards CW are largely neutral to slightly positive on some of the scales. Students acknowledged that CW improves the quality of writing, with a focus on lower-order thinking skills like grammar and vocabulary. Few students said that CW helped them with higher-order thinking skills such as organization. With respect to the influence of their cultural background on their comfort level with CW activities, the results suggest that special attention should be given when pairing or grouping students since students are not comfortable working with the opposite gender or about giving feedback to their peers. In general, results reveal that students need to be taught how to collaborate in their writing classes.

Index Terms—attitude, collaborative writing, culture, higher-order thinking skills

I. INTRODUCTION

Collaborative writing, broadly defined as joint construction of a text by two or more writers (Ede & Lunsford, 1990), has gained considerable attention in L2 research in the last decade. Collaborative writing is grounded in a social constructivist view of learning (Storch, 2005) which is inherently underpinned by Vygotsky's (1978) sociocultural theory. From this perspective, knowledge is co-constructed through interaction. Hence, classroom group activities, i.e. collaborative writing, promote a kind of interaction which is conducive to learning.

Previous studies on collaborative writing have identified numerous benefits of the practice for L2 learners, including providing learners with opportunities to exchange ideas, pool their linguistic resources and provide each other with immediate feedback (Storch, 2005), jointly revising texts and providing peer feedback (Kessler et al., 2012), increasing attention to language forms (Dobao, 2014) and enhancing audience awareness (Kuteeva, 2011). Scholars like Storch (2011) explain that an increased focus on CW in university classes is because they mirror writing activities that happen in the real world.

Despite the recognized role of collaborative writing in enhancing students' language learning, generally, L2 students tend to be reluctant to participate actively in group writing activities and prefer to work individually (Storch, 2005). Further, while CW has been found to be a useful method in L2 writing, its success as a learning experience might be dependent on learners' motivation and attitudes toward it (Thompson & Ku, 2006). In fact, recent research on CW has found that changes in learners' attitudes towards CW affected group interaction patterns and language learning opportunities (Chen & Yu, 2019). This indicates the pivotal role of learners' attitudes in the success and effectiveness of CW.

This study aims at exploring L2 learners' attitudes towards CW to better inform the current CW practices in EFL contexts. Furthermore, while existent research on learners' perceptions of CW revolves around text quality and accuracy (Du, 2018; Shea, 2017; Shehadeh, 2011; Storch, 2005), very little is known about learners' attitudes towards CW in terms of critical thinking or the impact of students' cultural/social backgrounds (including gender) on students' comfort with the practice. Hence, this study attempts to address this gap to contribute to the literature in the field of L2 CW.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

A. CW in L2 Context: Benefits and Challenges

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L2 collaborative writing research has consistently shown that more positive student learning outcomes in second language classrooms are far more frequent in contexts that support collaborative learning and negotiation among students (Koh, 2019). There is a large body of research that has investigated the nature of negotiation in language learning, and specifically, the various factors that influence the quantity and quality of negotiation. In a face-to-face class, as Weissberg (2000) points out, CW provides learners with multiple roles, all of which encourage learning more than a solitary writing task. Some of these roles include those of “tutors, co-authors, sounding boards, and critical readers” (cited in Storch, 2011, p. 276). All of these roles provide students with more opportunities to communicate, which facilitates language learning, irrespective of the nature of the collaborative task. It has also been shown that collaboration tends to produce more accurate texts (Wigglesworth & Storch, 2009; Dobao & Blum, 2013; Du, 2018).

Studies such as those of Storch (2005, 2002), van Lier (1996) and Wigglesworth and Storch (2012) show that students benefit from CW because they have opportunities to learn from each other. This learning from each other could come both in the form of direct instruction from one student to another about a particular structure, or more implicit learning because of opportunities for “*linguaging*” (Swain, 2006), which Swain explains to be engaging in a collaborative dialog, a tool of cognitive activity, where learners engage in both a building of their knowledge of a certain aspect of language or content, and a simultaneous solving of a problem, all through the use of the target language (Swain, 2006). Through *linguaging* (which results in the production of language-related episodes, or LREs, which are defined by Swain and Lapkin (2002) as “any part of the dialog where learners talk about the language they produced, and reflect on their language use” (p. 292), students co-construct new language while simultaneously producing what the task demands of them. Kuiken and Vedder (2002), in their study of the effect of CW on L2 writing, concluded that group interaction—with more opportunities for *linguaging*—enhanced students’ metalinguistic awareness and deepened their knowledge of grammatical rules. Studies of LREs in CW have shown that CW results in a greater retention of feedback, suggesting that not only is the language more accurate, but students also make progress with their language in general (Watanabe & Swain, 2007). There are, however, also studies that show that more research is needed before claiming that CW definitely has a positive effect on a student’s L2 writing. For example, Dobao (2014) claims that while writers’ accuracy improved with CW, their fluency did not necessarily. Although testing the impact of CW on learners’ writing performance, in terms of product and process is beyond the scope of this study, students’ attitudes towards CW in terms of its impact on the quality of written products, division of labour and the nature of negotiations are investigated.

It is clear from the discussion so far that the benefits of CW are many. However, CW as a face-to-face classroom practice has not been without its challenges. One of the challenges is the problems students have with CW as a practice due to gaps in L2 proficiency. While there is a lot of research (Storch, 2005) suggesting that differences in students’ proficiency in the language impact their ability to successfully collaborate, and also the quality of their product (with the most successful collaboration being between what Storch called expert/novice pairing), other research, like that of Watanabe and Swain (2007) suggests otherwise. Their study suggests that proficiency of the learners does not necessarily affect either the students’ ability to collaborate or their ultimate L2 learning. In another study that focused on students’ problems with CW, Du (2018) described how one of the participants in his study was emphatic about his negative perceptions of CW as a classroom practice because of the lack of adequate proficiency of his peer, and therefore, in his mind, the inability of his peer to contribute to the betterment of the writing product. Storch (2013) expressed a similar sentiment. A study by Fernandez Doboia and Blum (2013) also shows that some students felt that CW resulted in more disjointed and less coherent pieces of writing in addition to not facilitating their acquisition of vocabulary. Other challenges to implementing CW include assessment issues (McDonough et al., 2018), learners using their first language (Brooks & Donato, 1994) and simple issues such as how to pair or group students best (Storch & Aldosari, 2013).

B. L2 Learners’ Attitudes Towards CW

Research on L2 learners’ attitudes has long confirmed that there is a correlation between attitudes and learning (e.g. Horwitz, 1999; Leki, 1995). That is, learners are more likely to succeed if they hold positive attitudes towards L2 learning. Other researchers have recognized the importance of learners’ attitudes to successful L2 writing experiences (McKenna et al., 1995; Petric, 2002). In fact, Petric (2002) maintains that since attitudes influence learners’ writing behaviour, it is vital that L2 teachers understand how they emanate and evolve. Other studies found a relationship between writing process and attitudes (Bruning & Horn, 2000; Graham & Harris, 1989), and some others (e.g. Peng, 2011) suggested that when learners perceive classroom activities, i.e. group work, communicative tasks, as meaningful and enjoyable, they are more inclined to develop affirmative thinking about such activities. Hence, it is vital to understand how learners feel about methods, strategies and classroom activities—including collaborative writing—employed in L2 writing classroom in order to come up with best practices which are conducive to effective learning.

Several studies in the field of L2 CW investigated learners’ perceptions and attitudes towards CW (Chen & Yu, 2019; Dobao & Blum, 2013; Du, 2018; Elola & Oskoz, 2010; Shehadeh, 2011; Storch, 2005). Storch (2005) explored L2 adult learners’ perceptions of working in pairs in a writing course. The participants in her study expressed that CW afforded them the opportunity to exchange ideas and give and receive immediate feedback. In contrast, two of the participants had reservations about CW and preferred to write individually to avoid losing face due to their poor English skills and to avoid criticising others. Likewise, most participants in Shehadeh’s (2011) longitudinal study of the effectiveness of CW in EFL writing classrooms were positive about their CW experiences and stated that it was not only helpful in developing their writing skills, but it also helped enhance their oral skills and boosted their self-confidence.

Learners' views towards CW have also been probed in web-based contexts (e.g. Elola & Oskoz, 2010; Estaji & Salimi, 2018; Thompson & Ku, 2006; Zhan et al., 2015). In their case study of 12 students' experiences and attitudes towards online CW, Thompson and Ku (2006) concluded that ineffective negotiation, conflict among group members, and negative attitude toward group writing led to unsuccessful CW experiences. Some participants showed positive reactions towards CW as they felt comfortable sharing knowledge with group members, gained self-confidence, and benefited from peer feedback. On the other hand, other participants had negative attitudes due to social conflicts among group members.

It is clear from the discussion above that most studies on learners' attitudes towards CW have concluded with overall positive reactions; however, some have also reported some reservations due to social/cultural issues exhibited in concerns related to face, criticism, and conflict. These issues were not given sufficient attention in previous studies on learners' perceptions toward CW. Hence, this study attempts to address the impact of students' cultural backgrounds on their attitudes towards CW.

Further, a startling gap in the research seems to be an entire lack of research on the connection between CW and critical thinking. Previous studies on CW have focused on a focus on form and meaning, on grammatical accuracy, on vocabulary acquisition, but not on the actual process, or the thinking behind the process. As pointed out by Abrams (2019), typically, in existing work on CW, the quality of L2 output is based on grammatical and lexical accuracy, syntactic complexity, and vocabulary diversity. This ever-present focus on form in second language acquisition research is particularly significant for EFL university settings where students are learning not only the language, but getting degrees, either undergraduate or graduate, in English. The gap suggests that as much as the discipline of ELT has stressed a need to move away from a purely accuracy-based model of language teaching, the reality is that it has not, particularly with regard to the teaching of writing. Therefore, while extensive body of research on CW has, by and large, focused on quality and accuracy—lower order thinking—besides these elements, the current study aims to investigate students' attitudes about the effect of CW on their critical thinking skills.

Hence, this paper seeks to address the following research questions:

1. What are students' general attitudes towards CW?
2. What are students' attitudes towards CW in terms of the quality of work, i.e. lower/higher order thinking?
3. How do cultural and affective factors shape students' attitudes towards CW?

III. METHODOLOGY

A. Participants

The participants included undergraduate students from the Center of Preparatory Studies (CPS) and the English Department at a large public university in the Sultanate of Oman. Due to the well-established fact that many students are ill-equipped to deal with the level of English required to succeed in classes in the department, prior to entering the English Department, students are required to take between one and four semesters of Intensive English courses at the University's CPS. Students who have just one course left at the CPS are allowed to start taking courses at the English Department. The students who participated in this study included those who are taking courses at the CPS, those who are taking courses at both the CPS and the department, and those who are taking courses only at the department. Further, upon entering the department, students choose between three majors: English Arts, English Education, and Translation. Participants included those from all three majors. Also, both male and female students took part in the study.

B. Instrument

The instrument for the study is a questionnaire designed to determine students' attitudes towards CW. The questionnaire was designed based on Kouros (2000) questionnaire on student attitudes toward group environments. The instrument contains two major sections:

- a) the first section focuses on demographic information and a general question on whether they had ever experienced collaborative writing activities in the past. Naturally, if they hadn't, the rest of the questionnaire was irrelevant to them, and these questionnaires were discounted from any further analysis.
- b) The second section of the instrument had four sub-sections: i) Students' general attitudes towards group work (containing 20 statements); ii) Collaborative writing and quality of student writing (containing 21 statements); iii) Affect and Collaborative Writing (containing 11 statements); and iv) Collaborative writing and the Students' Culture (containing 19 statements). These four subsections were further sub-divided into thematic units for ease of analysis.

C. Piloting and Validating the Instrument

Once the instrument was developed, it was distributed to students in three classes in the English Department during the spring semester of 2020. The students in these classes were asked to fill out the questionnaire with a view to determine the clarity of the questions. Upon piloting the instrument, small changes were made to the questions to clarify them. Once the questionnaire was piloted, it was sent to three experts in the field, to validate them.

IV. RESULTS

A. Descriptive Statistics for Demographic Information

Table 1 shows the participants in the study divided into groups based on a) gender; b) age; c) Governorate they are from; d) where they were taking English courses; e) their major; and f) how long they had been at university.

(a). Gender

A total of 215 students participated in the study, of whom 46, or 21.4% were males, while 169, or 78.6% were females. This discrepancy between number of males versus females can be attributed to the fact that in general, there are many more female students enrolled in the Departments of English and Education at Sultan Qaboos University. However, since investigating gender differences was not an aim of this study, this did not pose any problems to the design and results.

(b). Age

95 students, or 44.2% fell in the 18-20 age group, 75 students, or 34.9% in the 21-23 age group, while the remaining 45, or 20.9% fell in the oldest age group of 24-26. This distribution is not surprising since we surveyed students who were in both the CPS and the Department of English. Those in the first two age groups include students exclusively in the CPS, those taking classes in both places, and those in just the Department in their third or fourth years. Those in the last age group, aged between 24 and 26 are students who are in their final years of study in the department. As one of the aims of the study is to determine whether students' attitudes toward CW improve as they advance in their academic careers in the department, it was important for us to have an adequate representation of students in the last group.

(c). Governorate

The greatest proportion of students came from Al Dakhiliya, (50 students), Al Sharqiya North (36 students), Al Batinah South (34 students), Muscat (26 students), and Al Batinah North (25 students). The representation of students from different governorates in this study is typical of their representation across the university. The current study did not aim to differentiate between rural and urban students, so this distribution of students was satisfactory.

(d). Where Participants Took English Courses

The largest proportion of students (73.5%) took courses just in the English Department; this represents students in their second, third, fourth, and fifth years. Those taking courses just in the CPS are in their first year (17.7%) while those taking courses in both represented 8.8% of the participant population for the study. As mentioned above, only those students who only have one course left at the CPS are allowed to start taking English Department courses simultaneously with the last CPS course; this accounts for the lower proportion of students in this category.

(e). Previous Experiences With Collaborative Writing

Of the 215 students who participated in the study, 172, or 80% said they had previous experiences with collaborative writing. The remaining 43, or 20% stated that they had not.

(f). Year of Study

103 students, (47.9%) of the participants were in years 1-3, while the remaining 112 (52.1%) were in years 4-5.

B. Descriptive Statistics for 4 Scales on the Questionnaire

Descriptive statistics are presented in the forms of means for the four sections in the questionnaire in Table 1 below. Following these results, more detailed results on sub-sections of the different sections of the questionnaire are presented.

TABLE 1
MEANS OF STUDENT RESPONSES TO 4 SCALES ON THE QUESTIONNAIRE

	Mean	Std. Deviation	Result
General attitude	3.08	.28	Neutral
Collaborative writing	3.54	.35	Agree
Affective domain	3.84	.39	Agree
Cultural domain	3.24	.35	Neutral
Overall	3.43	.23	Agree

For the means, responses were calculated based on a scale of 1-5, with 1 being strongly disagree, and 5 being strongly agree. As shown in Table 2, students' general attitude towards CW was neutral, with a mean value of 3.08 and a standard deviation of .28. This was also the case with their attitudes on the effect of their culture on collaborative writing. For this section, participants' mean score was 3.24, with a standard deviation of 0.35. For the questions addressing collaborative writing and its effect on overall writing quality, the mean score was 3.54 with a standard deviation of 0.35, suggesting that students *do* believe that overall, CW has a positive impact (however small), on writing quality. This is also true of the items that concerned the effect of students' affect on their perceptions of collaborative writing. The mean score for this scale was 3.84 with a standard deviation of 0.39, suggesting, once again, that students *do* believe that affective issues, such as how comfortable/uncomfortable they are working in groups, have an impact on their perceptions of collaborative writing.

C. Results on the Sub-Sections of the General Attitudes Scale

TABLE 2
SUB-SCALE 1: DIVISION OF LABOR

	Frequency	Percent
Strongly Disagree	6	2.8
Disagree	23	10.7
Neutral	142	66.0
Agree	38	17.7
Strongly agree	6	2.8
Total	215	100.0

As is evident from Table 2, the students surveyed were overwhelmingly neutral regarding collaborative writing assignments and division of labor. This suggests that in general, students did not have a problem with collaborative writing coming in the way of an equitable division of labor among students, although more (20.5%) of the students agreed that collaborative writing was not fair, while 13.5% of the students felt that CW did not create unfairness as far as division of labor among students was concerned.

TABLE 3
COLLABORATIVE WRITING AND QUALITY OF WORK

	Frequency	Percent
Disagree	2	0.9
Neutral	43	20.0
Agree	93	43.3
Strongly agree	77	35.8
Total	215	100.0

Table 3 shows the results for students' attitudes toward collaborative writing assignments impacting the quality of the final written product. A large majority (79.1%) of students feel that CW had a positive impact on their writing. 20% of the students, however, remained neutral on this issue, while only 0.9% felt that CW did not have a positive impact on their writing. This shows that CW should be incorporated into all writing classes as the majority of the students believe that it improves the quality of their writing.

Tables 4 and 5: Collaborative Writing assignments and Time issues

TABLE 4
CW AND PROBLEMS WITH TIME

	Frequency	Percent
Strongly disagree	49	22.8
Disagree	87	40.5
Neutral	48	22.3
Agree	24	11.2
Strongly agree	7	3.3
Total	215	100.0

Table 4 shows that the majority of students did not perceive time as coming in the way of their success in completing their CW tasks. 63.3% of the students surveyed felt that time was not a problem, 22.3% were neutral, while 14.5% of the students did think time hindered their success on CW assignments.

TABLE 5
COLLABORATIVE WRITING AND EMOTIONAL ISSUES

	Frequency	Percent
Strongly disagree	1	0.5
Disagree	11	5.1
Neutral	120	55.8
Agree	83	38.6
Strongly agree	0	0
Total	215	100.0

Statements on this sub-section of the General attitudes scale on the questionnaire dealt with issues such as students' increased enjoyment of the material working collaboratively, their comfort working with students themselves, and their comfort level expressing themselves in front of their peers. As can be seen from Table 5, students were largely neutral in their responses to the statements on this sub-section. However, 38.6% of the students surveyed expressed feeling comfortable working collaboratively with other students.

TABLE 6
COLLABORATIVE WRITING AND ITS IMPACT ON STUDENTS' GRADES

	Frequency	Percent
Strongly Disagree	10	4.7
Disagree	32	14.9
Neutral	48	22.3
Agree	91	42.3
Strongly agree	34	15.8
Total	215	100.0

There were only two questions on the impact of collaborative writing on grades. Both statements focused on a group grade being unfair. As can be seen from Table 6 above, a majority of students (58.1%) either agreed or strongly agreed that group grades are unfair. While 22.3% of the students were neutral, a minority of the participants (19.6) thought group grades were fine.

D. Collaborative Writing and Quality of Work

As mentioned earlier, this section of the questionnaire was broken down into the following sub-sections: a) Organization, synthesis, etc. (higher-order thinking skill): This consisted of 5 statements; b) usefulness of giving and receiving feedback: This consisted of 3 statements further broken down; c) Comprehension and Idea generation (higher-order thinking skill): this consisted of 10 statements; d) vocabulary, language, references (lower-order thinking skills): This consisted of 3 statements. Results for all four sub-sections are presented below.

TABLE 7
ORGANIZATION

	Frequency	Percent
Strongly Disagree	0	0
Disagree	16	7.4
Neutral	117	54.4
Agree	79	36.7
Strongly agree	3	1.4
Total	215	100.0

As seen from Table 7, more students felt that there was a positive correlation between CW and organization and synthesis; in other words, more students agreed or strongly agreed that CW assignments helped them better organize their papers. What is problematic here, is that 54.4% of the students were neutral about their feelings towards the effect of CW assignments on their ability to organize and synthesize. These are important higher-order critical thinking skills that need to be emphasized in a university writing class, and these results suggest that it is important that instructors should focus on writing activities that promote critical thinking and train students to engage in higher order/critical thinking discussions when they write collaboratively.

TABLE 8
CW COMPREHENSION AND IDEA GENERATION

	Frequency	Percent
Strongly disagree	1	0.5
Disagree	4	1.9
Neutral	63	29.3
Agree	147	68.4
Strongly agree	0	0
Total	215	100.0

From Table 8, it is clear that students strongly felt that CW helped them better generate ideas for their writing. That is, students *do* perceive that this higher-order critical thinking skill is helped by CW.

TABLE 9
FEEDBACK DURING CW IS GOOD

	Frequency	Percent
Strongly Disagree	4	1.9
Disagree	10	4.7
Neutral	8	3.7
Agree	99	46.0
Strongly agree	94	43.7
Total	215	100.0

TABLE 10
FEEDBACK DURING CW IS NOT USEFUL

	Frequency
Strongly Disagree	47
Disagree	91
Neutral	50
Agree	18
Strongly agree	9
Total	215

Tables 9 and 10 and Figure 8 above deal with students’ perceptions about the usefulness of feedback from their peers during CW assignments. Table 11, which shows students’ responses to statements indicating that they perceive that the feedback from their peers is useful, shows that an overwhelming majority of students, 89.7% felt that peer feedback is a useful aspect of collaborative writing. Table 11 shows students’ attitudes towards statements indicating that peer feedback is not useful. On these statements, again, a majority of students (64.2%) disagreed. It is interesting that more students were neutral about the statements that indicated peer feedback is not useful, when compared to just 3.7% who were neutral about the statements that were positive. This neutrality may be attributed to students’ cultural norms which do not allow them to feel comfortable saying something they receive from a peer is not useful. But this neutrality also shows that it is necessary for teachers to teach students *how* to give feedback.

TABLE 11
CW AND ITS EFFECT ON VOCABULARY AND LANGUAGE

	Frequency	Percent
Strongly Disagree	4	1.9
Disagree	9	4.2
Neutral	19	8.8
Agree	113	52.6
Strongly agree	70	32.6
Total	215	100.0

With respect to language, students overwhelmingly agreed that CW assignments had a positive impact on their vocabulary and grammar. Only 8.8% of the students were neutral, while only 6.1% disagreed.

These results are important, in that they indicate that students do believe in the positive effect CW has on their lower order thinking skills. This reiterates the importance of students being taught how to collaborate with each other to enhance their higher order thinking skills such as organization and synthesis. These results are supported by students’ responses to the item pertaining to the other lower order thinking skill – referencing. As shown in Table 12 and Figure 10, a majority of the students felt that CW helped them to correctly cite work in their papers. However, once again, a large proportion of students remained neutral on this issue.

TABLE 12
CW AND REFERENCING STYLE

	Frequency	Percent
Strongly Disagree	8	3.7
Disagree	18	8.4
Neutral	47	21.9
Agree	96	44.7
Strongly agree	46	21.4
Total	215	100.0

E. CW and Students’ Affect

Table 13 shows that a large majority of students felt that their emotions impacted their ability to successfully complete CW assignments. Specifically, all the items on this section of the questionnaire dealt with students’ enjoyment of CW assignments, and their comfort level with working with other students. The results in this section are supported by those obtained for the Emotional Issues sub-section of the General Attitudes section of the questionnaire. The results of this section show that since students are comfortable with CW, if they are taught how to do it properly, it stands to be an important teaching tool for writing classes. In fact, such results indicate that CW may lead to an environment which is more motivating and conducive to meaningful learning.

TABLE 13
CW AND STUDENTS’ AFFECT

	Frequency	Percent
Strongly Disagree	2	.9
Disagree	30	14.0
Neutral	28	13.0
Agree	74	34.4
Strongly agree	81	37.7
Total	215	100.0

F. Students' Culture and CW

This section is broken down into two sub-sections: a) Comfort giving and receiving feedback (particularly relevant in a culture that strongly favors the notion of saving face; these questions, therefore, differ significantly in their focus from those in the Quality of Work portion of the questionnaire): This sub-section had 6 items in the questionnaire, focusing on students having problems giving and receiving feedback; b) Gender: 14 statements on the questionnaire pertained to gender. This is further broken down into statements focusing on students having no problems working with the opposite gender, and statements focusing on students not being comfortable working with students of the opposite gender.

TABLE 14
PROBLEMS GIVING AND RECEIVING FEEDBACK

	Frequency	Percent
Strongly Disagree	1	.5
Disagree	1	.5
Neutral	32	14.9
Agree	73	34.0
Strongly agree	108	50.2
Total	215	100.0

As seen from Table 14, more students by far (84.2%) did not feel comfortable giving and receiving feedback from their peers because they saw this as an affront to their sense of face. It is common in this culture that participants feel a sense of loss of face among their peers if they appear to be harsh in their feedback; they value their friendship more highly than providing adequate feedback and assessing their peers' writing. Once again, this suggests the importance of teaching students *how* to provide good feedback to their peers.

TABLE 15
CW AND NO PROBLEMS WORKING WITH THE OPPOSITE GENDER

	Frequency	Percent
Strongly Disagree	1	.5
Disagree	51	23.7
Neutral	120	55.8
Agree	41	19.1
Strongly agree	2	.9
Total	215	100.0

As seen in Table 15 above, the majority of students were neutral in their responses to statements expressing discomfort with working with the opposite gender. This result is very surprising, and possibly indicates that students did not want their instructors to find out how they felt about working with the opposite gender. What is not surprising, however, is that more students expressed discomfort with working with the opposite gender than did not. The Arab cultural norms cherish the respect of the opposite gender and avoid conflict during working with the opposite gender. This is certainly due to the conservative values the Arab culture is deeply entrenched in, which does not encourage mixed-gender mingling. Hence, when pairing/grouping students for a CW activity, this cultural element should be taken into account for better practices; given that students are likely to encounter working in mixed-gender groups in future places of employment, it is important that they get comfortable doing so.

TABLE 16
CW AND PROBLEMS WORKING WITH THE OPPOSITE GENDER

	Frequency	Percent
Strongly Disagree	0	0
Disagree	5	2.3
Neutral	63	29.3
Agree	123	57.2
Strongly agree	24	11.2
Total	215	100.0

The results presented in Table 16 above support those presented in Table 16. While fewer students were neutral (possibly because they were more comfortable staying true to their culture), more stated that they were not comfortable working with the opposite gender (68.4%) than those who were comfortable working with the opposite culture (only 2.3%). These results, as stated above, are not surprising, and in mixed-gender classes, should not be a cause for an avoidance of CW assignments.

G. Inferential Statistics

To determine whether there were differences between participants based on participants' age, year of study, where they take English classes, major, and whether or not they had done collaborative writing before, an analysis of variance (ANOVA) and T-tests were conducted. As mentioned earlier, gender and the students' governorates were not examined in the current study; these would be interesting variables to examine in future studies.

The results indicate that at a significance level of 0.05, there is no statistically significant between the students based on any of the factors mentioned above. This is presented in Table 17 below.

TABLE 17
INFERENCE STATISTICS

Age		
18 - 20	3.35 ± .22	
21 - 23	3.34 ± .29	<0.601
24 - 26	3.31 ± .10	
Where do you take English courses now?		
English Department	3.32 ± .22	
The Centre for preparator	3.36 ± .27	<0.464
Both	3.38 ± .19	
Major		
English Art	3.36 ± .20	
English Education	3.31 ± .25	<0.228
English Translation	3.35 ± .14	
Have you ever had collaborative writing tasks in any of your classes at university or high school before?		
Yes	3.36 ± .29	<0.487
No	3.33 ± .21	
Year of Study		
1 - 3 years	3.34 ± .21	<0.720
4 - 5 years	3.33 ± .24	

The fact that there are no significant differences in any of the categories above suggests that students have not been taught how to write collaboratively.

V. DISCUSSION

The results show that students’ general attitudes towards CW are neutral. This tendency towards neutrality might have been caused by students’ cultural background. For example, students’ responses were mostly neutral when asked if they had a problem with giving and receiving feedback, writing collaboratively with the other gender, managing time, and the usefulness of their peers’ feedback. They seem to be conflicted in their feelings as they showed some negative feelings towards these points in other statements. This might be because they didn’t want the teacher to know they have problems with working with the other gender for example or because they find it rude to consider their peers’ help not useful. In fact, students had problem giving and receiving feedback. They found it uncomfortable and were afraid of losing face or jeopardising their friendships, which agrees with Storch’s (2005) findings that students may avoid CW to save face. Such attitudes may lead to the failure of CW experiences due to ineffective negotiation and conflicts among students as Thompson and Ku (2006) explained. Keeping this in mind, Horwitz (1999), Leki (1995) and Storch’s (2005) findings that CW usefulness depends on students’ attitude, it is vital to consider the cultural background of students when assigning CW projects.

Moreover, the results support Due’s (2018) argument that CW improves the quality of writing, especially on the lower order thinking skills like vocabulary and to some extent referencing. This also supports Swain’s (2006) claim that CW helps with second language acquisition through languaging. Students also expressed that CW helped them generate ideas and organize their writing better. However, they need to be taught how to collaborate and work on high order thinking skills like critical thinking, synthesis, planning and revision. Furthermore, students were neutral about labour division, but found CW unfair when it came to grades. This might be because of the gaps in their L2 proficiency as Storch (2005) suggested.

VI. CONCLUSION

Collaborative writing has numerous benefits. Nonetheless, if students’ worries are not addressed properly, it can not only affect the quality of their writing but also their sense of face. Therefore, it is vital that their concerns are taken into consideration when implementing CW in classes. Special attention should be given when pairing or grouping students to gender combinations since students are not comfortable working with the opposite gender. Students should also be trained on how to give feedback without being harsh, which would encourage them to provide more honest feedback and thus make their feedback more useful to their peers. Moreover, the improvement in students’ writing seems to occur only in

the lower order thinking skills. Students need to be taught how to negotiate over the higher order thinking skills and use critical thinking.

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