# English education in EFL context: Integrated approach for collaborative writing in the university level

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***Abstract:*** *This research was aimed at finding out the implementation of the integrated approach of writing in English for Foreign Language (EFL) context. The approach was set by adjusting three different approaches namely, product, process, and genre approach. There were 20 sophomores students of a private university in Indonesia who became the participants of this study. By implementing classroom action research, the study was carried out during the first half second semester. It consisted of two cycles and each cycle covered four steps: plan, observe, act, and reflect. The data were obtained from the observation during the implementation of the actions as the qualitative data and the students' writing scores of the pre-test and post-test as the quantitative data. The result of this study showed that the use of integrated approach for collaborative writing was effective to improve students' writing skills. Research results it showed that the students were able to create positive relationship when they worked collaboratively in groups. They were also offered the opportunity to give and receive immediate feedback on language used on their writings. Thus, the teaching-learning process became more interesting and the students enjoyed the writing process. The improvement was also found in the writing aspects namely, content, organization, vocabulary, language use, and mechanics. As a result, the students could perform better writing on their texts.*

***Keywords****: English for foreign language (EFL) context, integrated approach, collaborative writing*

## 1. Introduction

In the area of education with English as a foreign language, non–native students, especially undergraduate students, are required to be able to communicate in both spoken and written language. A written language is one of the language products as well as a means of communication. Accordingly, it can be used to measure the students' achievement in a process of learning the language (Harmer, 2004). The outcome of the students' written language can be produced in a certain level which requires specialized writing skills (Brown, 2001). Writing is one of productive skills which involves communicating a message by making signs, forming letters and words, and joining them into a series of sentences that link together to communicate that message (Pulverness et al., 2005). Hence, it can be assumed that students' writing skills which enable students to produce a piece of written composition by linking a series of sentences to communicate with others can reflect their achievements

toward the teaching and learning process of English. As a result, writing skills become an important part, in students' English learning process, and in their daily life as a whole.

However, writing teachers and lecturers in Indonesia still hold the view that writing is merely a product of the students (Alwasilah, 2006). It tends to be an unnecessary thing, particularly, to look at the process how the students work on their writings. It poses a problem and challenge whenever the teachers emphasize only on the final result rather than the steps how the students attempt to convey their messages into a piece of writing. In fact, the process of writing is one of recognition to see whether students are allowed to focus on content and message, and they become the centre of learning instead of the teacher (Brown, 2001). It brings the idea that what counts more on the students' writing skills of L2 is the process of how they can apply their skills appropriately. Another view examining the importance of process of writing instead of the product also comes from Nation (2009). He states that one way of focusing on different aspects of writing is to look at writing as a process.

Unfortunately, the evidence found by Alwasilah (2006) shows that the writing process in most Indonesian contexts is seen separately from the results of the students' written product. This written product is also often done individually both inside and outside classroom. Hence, the teachers and lecturers should pay more attention to the product rather than the process of writing; they fail to provide the students opportunities to follow each step of writing process and to comprehend themselves when working collaboratively in groups. This may also become one of the reasons why most Indonesian students find it difficult to write an academic writing (Widodo, 2012). In addition to their difficulties on academic writing, Syaifur (2003) also examined that there were still many issues faced by Indonesian students such as the use of grammar, the students' critical thinking, and feedback as a role of a critical peer or partner. This finding portrays evidence that Indonesian students, particularly those who are undergraduate students, cannot generate their ideas into a good piece of writing. They further find difficulties in elaborating their skills which is perhaps integrated with their reading skills that results inability of giving feedback to others' work.

For this reason, there must be an appropriate technique to well develop the writing skills of the students. Collaborative writing has the potential to help both students and teachers to obtain the goal of students' improvement in writing skills (Dale, 1997). Some studies showed that collaborative writing enhances and stimulates students' motivation in improving their writing skills. Studies by Bremner (2010), Dobao (2012), and Storch & Wigglesworth (2009) which compared individual and pair performance on short composition found that exercises completed in pairs were generally more accurate than when completed individually. Storch (2005) also said that Collaborative writing affords students the opportunity to pool ideas and provide each other with feedback. In other words, it can be said that Collaborative writing needs the students to work in groups which can promote a friendly competition among them. The students can even create a positive relationship when they work in groups and this may change their attitude toward learning (Storch, 2005). They will have multiple pairs of eyes to proofread the writing when doing the task. Creativity can be achieved when multiple writers brainstorm with each other. It increases the amount of combined knowledge of the writers on the group. Collaborative writing increases students' enthusiasm toward developing their writing skills. It means that this process can afford students the enjoyment of writing a creative task as a form of writing that relates to their personal experiences (Storch, 2005).

The personal experiences are interpreted in a form of texts in which the students can explore and discover the language that sounds familiar to them. It eases them in starting to write the texts because the language and the topic used are based on their surroundings that are very common and easy to find.

Furthermore, collaborative writing becomes the process in which the students are offered the opportunity to give and receive immediate feedback on language used on their writings that may be missing when they work individually (Storch, 2005). The invention strategies, multiple drafts, and formative feedback both by the teacher and by peers also become important parts of writing instruction in many L2 classrooms (Matsuda et al., 2006). Peer review has on the whole been regarded as beneficial in L2 writing instruction, inasmuch as it provides student writers with added motivation for revision (Ramanathan & Atkinson, 1999). The feedback which is provided in the Collaborative writing can be beneficial for students' grammatical awareness as well. It is much different with L1 acquisition because L2 students may sometimes need explicit information about what is not grammatical in the L2 (Lightbown & Spada, 2006).

Those varieties of research studies have shown the result of the application of collaborative writing in the western context. The context particularly takes place in the area where L2 students are among foreign students using English as a second language. It is still less known, in the field of writing skills, especially collaborative writing which takes place in Indonesian contexts in which English is used as a foreign language. Moreover, the integration of the current approach on writing is still new, so that it could be a brand new notion to improve students' writing skills through the implementation of integrated approach on collaborative writing.

In conclusion, a research study showing students' writing skills development was needed to be conducted, especially the one that provided collaborative writing as a technique to improve students' writing skills. This research, hence, attempted to give a clear objective of how students could improve their writing skills through integrated approach of collaborative writing technique implemented in the classroom. It was conducted in one of the private universities in Indonesia and applied on L2 students at the English Department of a teachers training and education faculty as the participants. It was different from many other research studies which mostly investigate the students from the context in western countries which may be different with Indonesian context. Further, this study could answer the problems in the field, especially in motivating and improving students' writing skills.

## 2. Method

This study was conducted by using the principles of classroom action research. It is a form of self-reflective investigation undertaken by participants in social situations in order to improve the rationality and justice of their own social and educational practices (Carr & Kemmis, 1986). Its major focus is on concrete and practical issues of immediate concerns to particular social groups or communities (Burns, 1999). In addition, action research can provide the teacher to develop their professional competence as well as improve students' learning through action research (Whitehead & McNiff, 2006). Besides, action research emphasizes its potential to empower and emancipate participants through cycles of reform based on reflection and action (McDonough, 2006).

Since it engages the participants of a certain environment to involve in solving the issue, the collaboration among the participants is possible to happen through several steps to be taken. That is the reason why action research becomes a collaborative approach to inquiry

that provides the participants with the means to get involved in systematic action to resolve specific problems (Stringer, 2007).

The aim of this study was to describe the process of the improvement of students' writing skills which would be completed in two cycles. The researcher and the English lecturer as a team research worked collaboratively in conducting the research by using the values of integrated approach for collaborative writing. Therefore, to meet the aim of this study, there were some steps taken, namely planning, action, observation, and reflection (Kemmis and McTaggart cited in Burns, 2010).The participants of this study were the third semester English Department students in a private university in Yogyakarta, Indonesia. The study highly focused on the development of the students' writing skills through collaborative writing technique in order to overcome their problems on L2 writing. The writing process on collaborative activities was seen through the steps in action research. This study was conducted by using the principles of action research because it attempted to find out the self-reflective investigation in social contexts and in order to improve the rationality of educational practice through each cycle of the research. The cycle of action research included the following steps: planning, action, observation, and reflection.

The instruments used were writing tasks, observation, and interview. These instruments were expected to give a clear description and information of students' writing skills development through an integrated approach for collaborative writing on each cycle of action research.

This study had some benefits in the English teaching learning process, especially in improving writing skills. There were three pedagogical significances in this research: (a) The result of the study would give a clear description on the implementation of the integrated approach for collaborative writing in improving students' writing skills. (b) The result of improving students' writing skills through integrated approach for collaborative writing could be used as a reference for English teachers in general and for English lecturers in the university level to improve students' writing skills. (c) The result of learning through the integrated approach for collaborative writing could be useful for the students in improving their writing skills.

Based on the backgrounds of the study, the research seeks answers to this question, "What is the nature of integrated approach in L2 students' writing skills through collaborative writing?"

To collect the required data, this study attained the data from the following resources. First, the source came from the classroom observation. The English lecturer as the collaborator and the researcher observed the teaching and learning process and students' progress in writing. For the collaborator, observation sheets were also used in this process to see whether the researcher applied the whole steps in the technique conducted. Second, it was obtained from documents. The documents in this study were of several types, such as: the course overview, lesson plans, students' writing, classroom materials/ texts, and assessment tasks/texts. The course overview or syllabus was based on the one that was used by the institution in which the research took place. Then, the researcher developed the lesson plans based on the course overview. The classroom materials and texts were also included along with the lesson plans. In addition to those types of document, the writing tasks produced by the students were also included. Students' writing tasks were given twice, at the beginning and at the end of the research. Those writing tasks were equally similar in terms of the content, length, and the genre of the text to make sure that the students' performance to write the text would improve.

The data in this study were qualitative in nature and supported by quantitative data.

To obtain the qualitative data, the researcher described the process during the action, interview transcripts, observation and students' writing. Firstly, the researcher looked up at the findings as genuine data, in this case, the observation during the teaching and learning was implemented. It was done to meet the process validity. Additionally, the researcher and the lecturer shared their own opinions, ideas, and comments about the implication of the action research. It was useful to avoid subjectivity in analyzing data and getting trustworthiness. To attain the quantitative data, the researcher applied a writing test in the end of each cycle. The scores from the test were used to acquire the data by comparing the mean scores of students' writing on each writing aspect.

## 3. Findings and Discussion

There are qualitative and quantitative data. The qualitative data have something to do with the general findings of the research on each cycle, whereas the quantitative data show the students' results on their 1st and 2nd tasks.

The teaching and learning process of the integrated approach for collaborative writing incorporated the insights of the product, process, and genre approaches. It started by adapting the genre approach, moved to the process, and finally the product approach. To solve the problem, for example, in the process approach which lacked of input, the integrated approach for collaborative writing of this study then provided the students with the group work in which they could receive the input from other students. As mentioned by Badger and White (2000), the adaptation of the three approaches could possibly help the development of the writing classroom. It also seemed that writing was further seen as the skill which could involve the knowledge about language as in product and genre approaches, knowledge of the context where writing process occurs as in genre approach, and skills in using language as

in process approach. Therefore, in this study, prior to the process of writing, the students were prepared to understand the text type being written.

Meanwhile, this study found that the activity of the integrated approach for collaborative writing provided the students a chance to work collaboratively with their peers. Previous studies also revealed that group works could make the process of teaching and learning more engaging to them and altered their behavior toward the process (Johnson and Johnson, 1998; Swain, 1999; and Rollinson 2005). This was probably an effect of the interaction among the students in a group that help them sharing their understanding during their collaborative activity (Scheuer, 2011; and Chen; 2013). However, in the first cycle there were still students who could not participate well when they were trying to do group work. It was because the instruction of the class was delivered in English. Meanwhile, their ability to understand classroom English was still limited. Therefore, to solve this problem, the approach was then designed to overcome the constraint by using code switching between students' L1 and L2. In respect to this adjustment, the application was then altered in the next cycle by implementing the suggestions from the collaborator in the reflection section of the action research.

Furthermore, regarding the process approach which was inserted in the teaching and learning process, there were much discussion had been presented about the approach in which product and process approaches have always dominated much of the teaching of writing that happens in the EFL classroom (Badger and White, 2000). According to Badger and White (2000), writing in the process oriented approach mainly concerns linguistic skills, like planning and drafting and unlike the traditional product approach, there is much less emphasis on linguistic knowledge, like knowledge of grammar and structure of the written text. The

process approach writing class also operates on the principle that the students develop their writing skills unconsciously rather than learning the skills formally. Likewise, the integrated approach for collaborative writing in the present study also supported this finding based on the interview and classroom observation. Therefore the role of the teacher would be to facilitate the students' writing and to draw out their potential rather than to provide input or stimulus.

In addition to the process of writing that could help students' improving their writing skills, it was found that the integrated approach for collaborative writing considered and combined some practical steps under the theory of sociocultural perspective, so that it could blend together to help students gain both linguistic knowledge and skills. The result of this study was also in line with the sociocultural theory and previous studies, for example, the theory of sociocultural perspective introduced by Vygotsky (1986) which states that human learning is described through a social process in which the interaction can possibly occur. It means that the sociocultural interaction among students could help them to achieve the development of language skills, especially writing skills. Lightbown and Spada (2006) also state that sociocultural theory sees the interaction as a great importance when teaching and learning occurs in the classroom. The typical interaction of the students came from the feedback when they did group work. The effective feedback in improving students' writing skills was also found by Al-Nafiseh (2013). The study was carried out to investigate the effect of collaborative writing and peer editing on students' writings. The result showed that the technique could improve students' writings by raising their awareness on a text that the students chose.

However, the implementation of the approach in two different cycles was by no means without improvement and adjustment to the way it solved the problem in the field. In terms of equality of the students' contribution toward group activity, there was a problem like when older or more highly motivated students were thrown together with immature students. The immature students were willing to have their friends do the work, but the older student soon learned to avoid the load. It seemed that the students were not able to put the same weight on their writing, but actually it was wrong to doubt their ability. To avoid this constraint, the researcher tried to convert competition into contribution and it must also be considered that the students could get the value of their own individual work and expect to be credited for it. Therefore, giving the students opportunities to evaluate their own work permitted the students to drop one grade for their friends' contribution in the group activity. Although this strategy would not make the problem totally disappear, it could, at least, reduce the degree that problems hide the collaborative efforts.

Another problem was the adjustment in terms of delivering the material and instruction in the end of the cycle I. Since the study took place in EFL an context in which the students were still in their effort to understand English, the typical problem was that the teacher should deliver their instruction in both L1 and L2 (Kobayashi et. Al., 2002). It would be better for the researcher to make instruction in a meaningful way that the students could easily understand.  Based on the reflection in the first cycle, the researcher needed to alter the way she delivered the instruction or explained the materials. The researcher, then, did code switching from students' L1 and L2 to make them easily comprehend the explanation and instruction related to the materials during the teaching and learning process. It was done to help students who were still struggling to comprehend classroom English. The result of this action research can be summarized in the Table 1.

Table 1:
*Research Results Writing Aspects Pre-Condition Cycle I Cycle II*

| Writing Aspects | Pre-Condition | Cycle I | Cycle II |
|---|---|---|---|
| Content | The students had no knowledge and did not understand the components, the purpose and the language features of an argumentative text. | Some students could get the point of the components and the purpose of an argumentative text. | Most students had greater knowledge of the components, the purpose and the language features of an argumentative text. |
| Organization | The students could not identify parts (generic structure) of an argumentative text whether it was the introduction, body, and conclusion. | Some students were able to identify the generic structure of an argumentative text. | Most students could identify and recognize each part of generic structure on an argumentative text. |
| Vocabulary | Vocabulary mastery of the students was still low. They had limited vocabulary to be used in the sentences and it was still inappropriate. | Students' vocabulary mastery increased. Some of the students could use appropriate words when they wrote sentences. | Students' vocabulary mastery increased. Almost all of them could write the appropriate words when they wrote sentences. |
| Language Use | The students found it difficult to write a sentence in a good order. | Some students could produce sentences in the simple sentence form and wrote the sentences in a right structure. | Most students were able to produce sentences using the simple sentence. Most of them could write the complex sentence properly and make the sentences in a good structure. |
| Mechanics | Students' hand writing did not meet the rule of punctuation. Most of them failed to put full stops, commas, and capital letters in their writing. | Some students could reduce the number of punctuation mistakes. | Most students could use correct punctuation when they wrote sentences. |

*Students' Score*

In this section, the researcher presents the students' writing score: 1st task on pre-condition stage, 2nd task after the implementation of the study. The explanation has something to do with the students' mean score in five aspects

of writing, which are: content, organization, vocabulary, language use, and mechanics. Tables 2 show the mean score of each aspect of writing.

Table 2
*Students' Mean Score in the Content Aspect*

| Component | Pre-Test | Post Test |
|-----------|----------|-----------|
| Content | 19.40 | 22.85 |

Table 2 presents the mean score in the content aspect attained by the students. It shows that the students' mean score in this aspect increased as the tasks given in each cycle. In the pre-test, the students' mean score in the content aspect is 19.40. Meanwhile, the mean score in the post test is 22.85. The gain score is obtained by comparing the mean score of the pre-test and post test, which is 3.45.

Table 3
*Students' Mean Score in the Organization Aspect*

| Component | Pre-Test | Post Test |
|-----------|----------|-----------|
| Organization | 16.37 | 18.12 |

Table 3 shows the students' mean score in terms of organization aspect. The students' mean score increased as shown in the pre-test and post test. The main score of the pre-test is 16.37 and 18.12 in the post test. The gain score attained from the pre-test and post test is 1.75.

Table 4
*Students' Mean Score in the Vocabulary Aspect*

| Component | Pre-Test | Post Test |
|-----------|----------|-----------|
| Vocabulary | 16.8 | 18.01 |

Table 4 shows the students' mean score in terms of vocabulary aspect. In the pre-test the students' mean score is 16.8 and the main score in the post test is 18.01. The gain score which is obtained by comparing pre-test and post test is 1.3.

Table 5
*Students' Mean Score in the Language Use Aspect*

| Component | Pre-Test | Post Test |
|-----------|----------|-----------|
| Language Use | 17.67 | 19.68 |

Table 5 shows the students' mean score in the aspect of language use. On each task, the students' main score increased as shown in the pre-test and post test. In the pre-test the mean score is 17.67, while the main score in the post test is 19.68. The gain score attained from pre-test and post test is 2.1.

Table 6 presents the mean score in mechanics aspect obtained by the students. It shows that the students' mean score in this aspect increased as the tasks given in each cycle. In the pre-test, the students' mean score is 3.15 and in the post test the mean score is 3.90. The gain score is obtained by comparing the mean score of the pre-test and post test, which is 0.75.

Table 6
*Students' Mean Score in the Mechanics Aspects*

| Component | Pre-Test | Post Test |
|-----------|----------|-----------|
| Mechanics | 3.15 | 3.90 |

According to the discussion above, students' writing skills in the five aspects of writing, which are content, organization, vocabulary, language use, and mechanics increased after the actions during the research were implemented. The students' gain score compared from the pre-test and post test in content aspect is 3.45; in organization aspect is 1.75; in vocabulary aspect is 1.3; in language use aspect is 2.1; and in mechanics aspect is 0.75.

The general finding of students' score of five writing aspects which was obtained in  the pre-test and post test can be summarized in the Table 7.

Table 7
*General Finding of Students' Score from Pre-Test and Post-Test*

| Score | Pre-Test | Post Test |
|---|---|---|
| Mean score | 73.38 | 82.77 |

Table 7 gives the information of the value of the students' mean score in the five aspects of writing. It was obtained from the pre test and post test respectively. In the pre-test, students' mean score is 73.38. It increased in the end of the research up to 82.77. The highest and the lowest score of students' mean score in five aspects also rose from the first task to the latest task. It can be wrapped up that the application of integrated approach of the collaborative writing can improve students' writing skills.

In this part, the researcher provides the analysis of the finding attained in Cycle I and Cycle II of the research. The purpose is to present the result of the process during the research whether the integrated approach of collaborative writing improves the students writing skills or not. The early observation had been done before the research was started. The observation was aimed to get preliminary information of students' problems in writing a text especially writing an argumentative text of comparison and contrast. To overcome the problems found during the class observation, the researcher applied two cycles in this research.

It was discovered that the implementation of the actions which were done in two cycles brought the improvement on students' writing skills on argumentative texts. The students produced better writing after they did the steps on the integrated approach of collaborative writing: planning, drafting, editing, and final drafting which were done in group. Their individual works which were held in the end of each cycle also showed the improvement in the five aspects of writing namely content, organization, vocabulary, language use, and mechanics. The gain scores for each writing

aspect were obtained from the Pre-test and Post-test. In content aspect, the gain score reached 3.45; in organization aspect 1.75; in vocabulary aspect 1.3; in language use aspect 2.1; and in mechanics aspect 0.75. The value of mean score of those five aspects of writing also increased from pre test and post test. The result of the students score analysis showed that the mean score in pre-test is 73.38 and it reached into 82.77 in post-test. The gain score of the average score of all students is 9.39.

The improvement in students' writing skills was also considered as the effect of the process of peer writing and editing included in the integrated approach of the collaborative writing technique. It became effective in raising students' awareness of important organizational and syntactical elements that they might not notice on their own. It was also because the students got more productive feedbacks during the writing process which helped them to be more independent when they worked individually.

Based on the explanation above, it can be concluded that the improvement of students' writing skills on argumentative texts in the classroom was achieved by the application of the integrated approach of collaborative writing. The activities done during the writing process provided them with a classroom interaction which lively helped them to work better. It also motivated them that writing a text especially an argumentative text was not quite difficult since they knew how to deal with generic structure and language features of the text. Besides, the adequate knowledge of the students on argumentative texts was in line with their writing skill improvement in terms of organization, language use, content, vocabulary, and mechanic.

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