

# **THE EFFECTIVENESS OF COLLABORATIVE LEARNING FOR DEVELOPING THE WRITING SKILL IN ENGLISH OF HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS**

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## **Abstract**

The main purpose of the study is to study the effectiveness of collaborative learning for developing the writing skill in English of high school students. The effectiveness of collaborative learning in English teaching was tested in two high schools in Mandalay Region. The design adopted in this study was one of the true experimental designs, namely, the pretest-posttest control group design. The students from two sample schools from Mandalay Region were selected by simple random sampling method. The randomly assigned experimental group (n=60) was instructed based on collaborative learning and the control group (n=60) was taught by traditional method. The instruments used in this study were a pretest and a posttest. Research findings proved that collaborative learning has positively contributed to the improvement of English teaching at the high school level and could reinforce the improvement of the students' writing skill.

**Keywords:** collaborative learning, process approach, effectiveness, writing skills

## **Introduction**

Language is the system of communication in speech and writing that is used by people use of a particular country or area (Hornby, 2015). Although English is not the language with the largest number of native or first-language speakers, it has become a lingua franca. Therefore, it is important to learn English if students want to communicate with other people around the world. When students learn English, they learn to communicate with other people: to understand them, talk to them, read what they have written, and write to them.

English language teachers in Myanmar face many difficulties in teaching the four skills of English. However, learners find writing skill is difficult. This issue generally arises from incompetence in syntax, coherence, idea expression, content selection, topic sentence, rhetorical conventions, mechanics, organization, lack of vocabulary, and inappropriate use of vocabulary (Fareed, Asharf & Bilal, 2016). The process approach can solve this issue to some extent.

According to Badger and White (2000), the approach includes linguistic writing skills, namely planning, revising, drafting, and editing, rather than linguistic writing knowledge, namely structure and mechanics. In order to teach students for developing writing skill through process approach, collaborative learning is appropriate. Collaborative learning refers to a group of writers working in small groups as a team to produce and complete a shared piece of writing. In collaborative learning, students can work together cooperatively to accomplish shared learning goals, share one's ideas with another, check each other's mistakes, and produce more efficient learning outcomes (Li & Lam, 2013). According to the benefits of collaborative learning, this study was carried out to see whether collaborative learning is effective in developing the writing skill of high school students.

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### Purposes of the Study

- To study the theoretical considerations of collaborative learning
- To express the steps of the process approach to writing in English
- To compare the English writing skill of students who are taught by collaborative learning with those who are not taught by collaborative learning, and
- To provide suggestions and recommendations based on the results of the study

### Research Questions

- (1) Are there significant differences between the English writing skill of the students taught by collaborative learning and those who do not receive it?
- (2) Are there significant differences between the achievement of the students taught by collaborative learning and those who are not in relation to focus and details criteria of the essay?
- (3) Are there significant differences between the achievement of the students taught by collaborative learning and those who are not in relation to organization criteria of the essay?
- (4) Are there significant differences between the achievement of the students taught by collaborative learning and those who are not in relation to voice criteria of the essay?
- (5) Are there significant differences between the achievement of the students taught by collaborative learning and those who are not in relation to word choice criteria of the essay?
- (6) Are there significant differences between the achievement of the students taught by collaborative learning and those who are not in relation to sentence structure, grammar and spelling criteria of the essay?

### Definitions of the Key Terms

**Collaborative Learning:** Collaborative learning is an umbrella term for a variety of educational approaches involving joint intellectual effort by students, or students and teachers together (MacGregor & Smith, 1992).

**Process Approach:** Process approach includes linguistic writing skills, namely planning, revising, drafting, and editing, rather than linguistic writing knowledge, namely structure and mechanics (Badger & White, 2000).

**Effectiveness:** A measure of the match between stated goals and their achievement (Fraser, 1994).

**Writing Skills:** Specific abilities which help writers put their thoughts into words in a meaningful form and mentally interact with the message (Harmer, 2007).

### Scope

The following points indicate the scope of the study.

- (1) The study is geographically restricted to Sinkgaing Township, Mandalay Region.

- (2) Participants in the study are all Grade-Nine students from the selected schools during the period within the academic year 2017-2018.

## **Review of Related Literature**

### **Writing Approaches**

Although there are many approaches to teaching writing, the following three are the most adopted; (i) the product approach that is concerned with the form, (ii) the process approach that concentrates on the writer, and (iii) the genre approach that pays attention to the reader (Raimes, 1983). Since this research aimed to study the influence of collaborative learning in improving English as a Foreign Language learners, the main focus is on the process approach to writing, which consists of the pre-writing, drafting, revising, and editing stages and the activities associated with these stages.

The writing process usually involves several steps. A typical sequence is comprised of three steps: pre-writing, drafting, and revising. Some sequences, however, use four steps, such as pre-writing, drafting, revising, and editing, while others use five steps; pre-writing, drafting, revising, editing, and evaluating. According to Badger and White (2000), the process approach to writing also places more emphasis on writing skills (planning, revising, and drafting) than on linguistic knowledge (spelling, grammar, punctuation and vocabulary). Therefore, students have to be taught writing through its process and stages such as planning, drafting, revising, editing, and publishing in order to write freely and arrive at a product of good quality.

### **Theoretical Framework of the Collaborative Learning**

The main theory that underpins collaborative learning refers to social constructivism advanced by Lev Semyonovich Vygotsky (1896-1934). He considered that the roles of culture and society, language, and interaction are important in understanding how humans learn. Vygotsky assumed that knowledge is cultural; he took a socio-cultural approach in his study with children. This approach can be briefly described as cooperative and cultural. One of the most important theories of Vygotsky involves the zone of proximal development. He proposed that children, in any given domain, have actual developmental levels, which can be assessed by testing them individually. He further contended that there is an immediate potential for development within each domain. The difference between the two is called the zone of proximal development.

### **Meaning and Nature of Collaborative Learning**

Collaborative learning is a kind of teaching strategy that is commonly used in the classroom. Sometimes it refers to as cooperative learning. The term collaborative learning refers to an instructional method in which students of different ability levels learn together in a group where each group member is responsible for his own progress and the progress of other members in the group towards a common goal. In other words, in a collaborative learning environment, the success of a person in the group will support the other members to succeed together (Gokhale, 1995 cited in Togatorop, 2015). Since collaborative learning gives the chance to each member to share his or her own perspective and to receive the other members' viewpoints that may lead to enriching each one's own horizon (Kolodner & Guzdial, 1996 cited in Togatorop, 2015). Lisi and Golbeck (1999 cited in Togatorop, 2015) agreed with the idea that each individual in a collaborative group may distribute significant value that is beneficial to all members. Such kind

of process will give the students communication experiences that lead to the improvement of their thinking skills and metacognition.

### **Advantages of Collaborative Learning**

Collaborative learning (CL) is supported by one of the strongest research traditions in education, with thousands of studies conducted across a wide range of subject areas, age groups, ability levels, and cultural backgrounds. The results, in general, suggest that CL develops high-order thinking skills, enhances motivation, and improves interpersonal relations as well as enhancing motivation and peer relations (Salvin, 1985, cited in Li & Lam, 2013). Students can be learning-independent and can learn how to by their own groups. Most important is that CL exploits the diversified abilities of students to increase their cognitive, psychological, and social performance, and as such, it is an effective way to address the problem of individual differences.

### **Limitations of Collaborative Learning**

One of the greatest challenges of CL is its reliance on a positive group dynamic to function at its highest efficiency. The conflict between individuals can diminish or stall a group's ability to work together, which raises a significant problem when group members are too young to have fully formed conflict-resolution skills. According to Bartsch (2015), beyond personality conflicts, CL can also result in an uneven distribution of the workload. While many of CL's limitations affect the students, the strategy can also provide difficulties for educators. For students to work together, they must talk to one another. Any teacher who has managed a classroom of 20 to 30 students knows that children with permission to converse with one another invariably speak increasingly louder, which can become a distraction from the learning process. It is also impossible for one teacher to constantly monitor each group, which can result in off-topic chatter.

## **Research Method**

### **Subject**

The required sample schools were selected by using simple random sampling method. The sample schools were Basic Education High School, Paleik, and Basic Education High School (Branch), Seywa. The sample size for two selected schools was presented in Table 1.

**Table 1.** Population and Sample Size

<b>Name of School</b>	<b>No. of Population</b>	<b>No. of Subject</b>
BEHS, Paleik	303	60
BEHS (Branch), Seywa	100	60

### **Design**

The design used in this study was one of the true experimental designs, via, the pretest-posttest control group design (see Table 2).

**Table 2.** Research Design

Group	Assignment	No. of subjects		Pretest	Treatment	Posttest
		School (1)	School (2)			
Control	Random	30	30	Writing Skill	Conventional Method	Writing Skill
Experimental	Random	30	30	Writing Skill	Collaborative Learning	Writing Skill

### Research Instrument

The pretest and posttest were used as instruments for this study. The pretest was conducted to measure the basic writing skill of the students. The posttest was conducted to measure the development of the students' writing skill. Both of the tests consisted of an essay topic. The allocated time for each test was thirty minutes, and given marks were 20. To establish the reliability of the instrument, a pilot test is administered to forty Grade-Nine students from Practising High School of Sagaing University of Education. To show the internal consistency of the test, the reliability coefficient Cronbach's Alpha was computed. Its value is 0.783.

### Procedure

First of all, the permission of headmistresses was requested and English teachers who teach Grade Nine were discussed to carry out the research work. After that, pilot testing was conducted in Practising High School of Sagaing University of Education. Then, the pretest and posttest were constructed. The main study was conducted in Basic Education High School, Paleik and Basic Education High School (Branch), Seywa in November, 2017. Both experimental and control groups were administered a pretest before the treatment was provided. The pretest was conducted to measure the basic writing skill of the students. After that, the experimental groups were given treatment by using collaborative learning while the control groups were taught by the traditional method. The procedure for the control group was first the teacher introduced the four stages of the process approach and asked each student to write an essay they would like to write. The students got ninety minutes to write the essay through the stages of the writing process. In the pre-writing stage, the students got thirty minutes to brainstorm and collect ideas, collect appropriate vocabulary, and produce outlines for essays. In the drafting and writing stage, the students got thirty minutes to write their essays. In the revising stage, the students had fifteen minutes to read what they had written during the drafting stage. In the final stage, the students got fifteen minutes to edit their drafts. The teacher provided positive feedback and reinforcement for students. The procedure for the control group was first the teacher introduced the four stages of the process approach and then the students were divided into small groups. Each group got ninety minutes to write the essay they would like to write through the stages of writing. In the first stage, each group got thirty minutes to discuss their ideas, appropriate vocabulary and organize their ideas, and produce outlines for the essay. In the second stage, each student wrote their own essay for thirty minutes without asking the other member of the group for help. In the third stage, each group had fifteen minutes to revise their essays collaboratively. In the final stage, the students were allowed fifteen minutes to edit their essays collaboratively. The teacher provided positive feedback and reinforcement for each group. The treatment period lasted two weeks and instructional time was five hours per week in each school. The groups of students

were taught according to the lesson plan. One period lasted one hour. Therefore, the total time taken for the treatment was ten hours in each school. At the end of the treatment period, both groups were also administered a posttest.

### Data Analysis

The quantitative data were analyzed by using Statistical Package for the Social Science (SPSS) by using descriptive statistics, mean, standard deviation, and independent samples *t*-test.

## Findings

### Findings of Pretest

**Table 3.** The results of *t*-test for Independent Samples on Pre-test

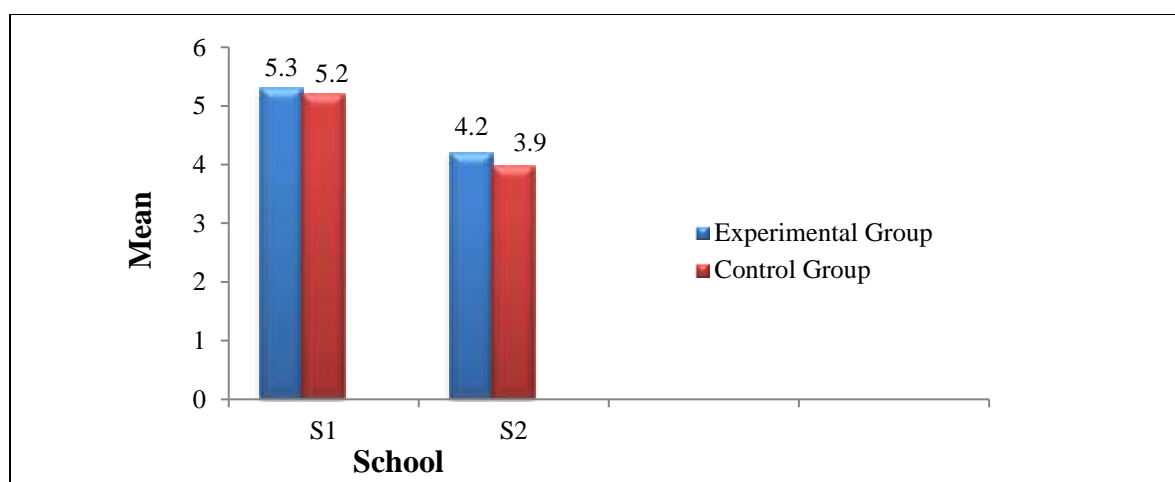
School	Group	N	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>MD</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>df</i>	Sig. (2-tailed)
S1	Experimental	30	5.3	2.06	0.1	0.26	58	.791
	Control	30	5.2	2.72				(ns)
S2	Experimental	30	4.2	1.21	0.3	0.59	58	.557
	Control	30	3.9	1.79				(ns)

Note. ns = not significant

S1 = BEHS (Paleik)

S2 = BEHS (Branch), Seywa

According to the results, the mean scores of the pretest were 5.3 for the experimental group and 5.2 for the control group in S1 and 4.2 for the experimental group, and 3.97 for the control group in S2. So, the means of the experimental group and control group were nearly the same. The probability (*p*) values were .791 and .557 (see Table 3). These data showed that there were no significant differences between the experimental group and the control group in English writing skill before the treatment. This means that the two groups were equivalent. They are shown graphically in Figure 1.



**Figure 1.** The Comparison of Means on Pretest

**Findings on Research Question (1)**

**Table 4.** The results of *t*-test for Independent Samples on Post-test

School	Group	N	M	SD	MD	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
S1	Experimental	30	9.8	2.00	4.1	9.90	58	.000***
	Control	30	5.7	1.09				
S2	Experimental	30	7.2	1.91	3.1	8.11	58	.000***
	Control	30	4.1	0.77				

Note. \*\*\*  $p < .001$

According to the results, the mean scores of the pretest were 9.8 for the experimental group and 5.67 for the control group in S1 and 7.2 for the experimental group, and 4.13 for the control group in S2. The mean score of the experimental group is higher than that of the control group in both schools (see Table 4). The results show that there were significant differences in the writing skill of the students between the experimental groups and the control group. The results can be interpreted that the use of collaborative learning positively contributed to the writing skill of high school students. They are shown graphically in Figure 2.

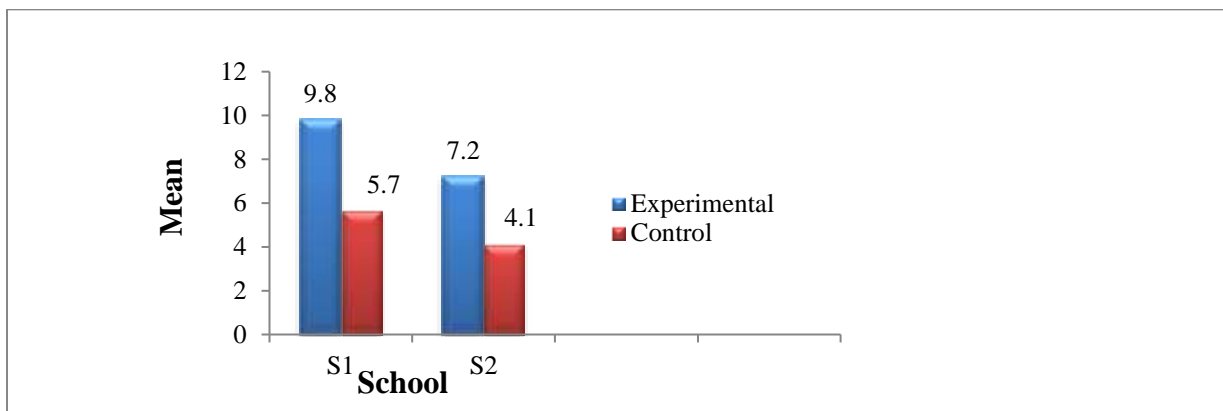


Figure 2. Comparisons of the Mean of the Two Groups on the Posttest

**Finding on Research Question (2)**

**Table 5.** The results of *t*-test for Independent Samples on Focus and Detail Criteria

School	Group	N	M	SD	MD	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
S1	Experimental	30	2.2	0.46	0.9	7.65	58	.000***
	Control	30	1.3	0.45				
S2	Experimental	30	1.8	0.61	1.0	7.58	58	.000***
	Control	30	0.8	0.43				

Note. \*\*\*  $p < .001$

According to the results, the mean scores of the pretest were 2.17 for the experimental group and 1.27 for the control group in S1 and 1.8 for the experimental group, and 0.77 for the control group in S2. The mean score of the experimental group is higher than that of the control group in both schools (see Table 5). The results show that there were significant differences between the experimental groups and the control group. It can be interpreted that collaborative learning could bring the students' achievement on the focus and detail criteria of the essay. They are shown graphically in Figure 3.

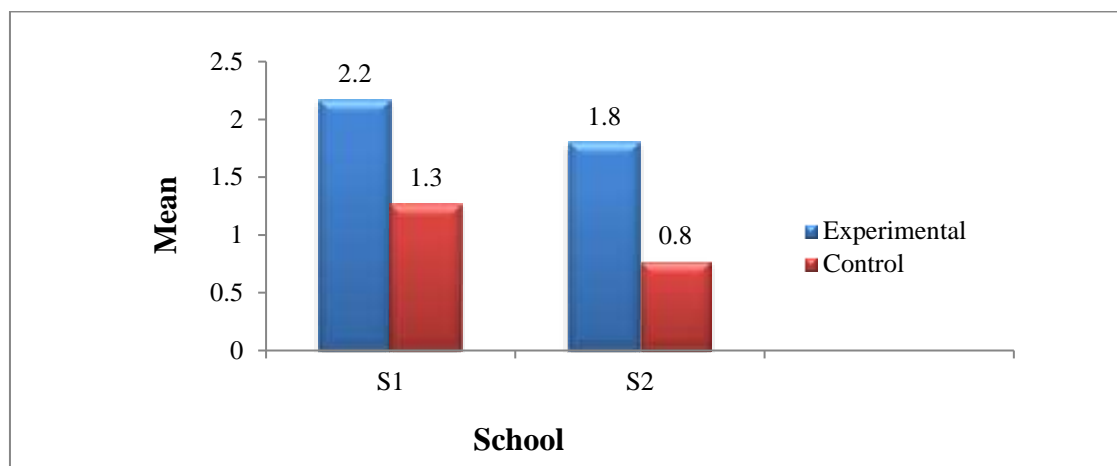


Figure 3. Comparisons of the means of the Two Groups on Focus and Detail Criteria

### Findings on Research Question (3)

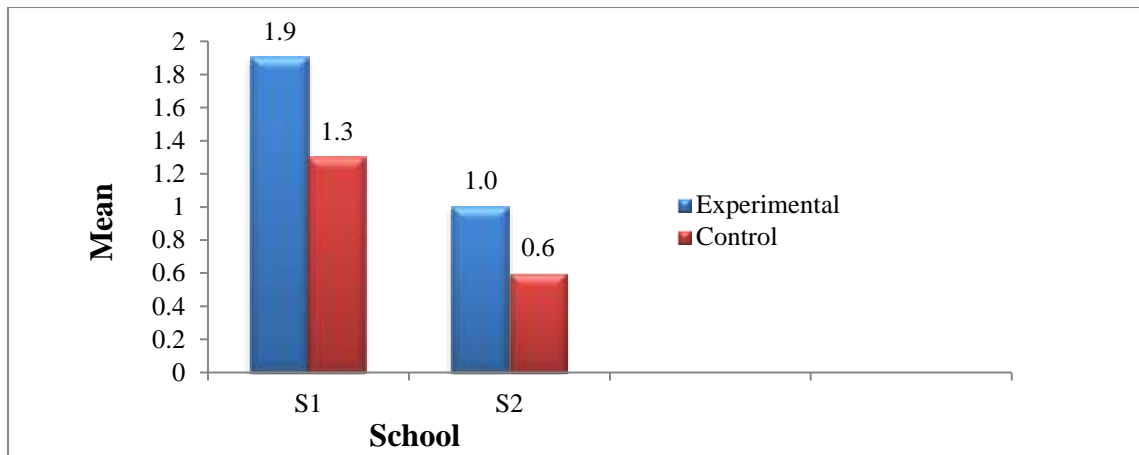
**Table 6.** The results of *t*-test for Independent Samples on Organization Criteria

School	Group	N	M	SD	MD	<i>t</i>	<i>df</i>	Sig. (2-tailed)
S1	Experimental	30	1.9	0.71	0.6	5.76	58	.000***
	Control	30	1.3	0.41				
S2	Experimental	30	1.0	0.74	0.4	2.45	58	.017*
	Control	30	0.6	0.49				

Note. \*\*\*  $p < .001$ , \*  $p < .05$

According to the results, the mean scores of the pretest were 1.9 for the experimental group and 1.3 for the control group in S1 and 1 for the experimental group, and 0.6 for the control group in S2. The mean score of the experimental group is higher than that of the control group in both schools (see Table 6). The results show that there were significant differences between the experimental groups and the control group. It can be interpreted that the use of collaborative learning positively contributed to the organization criteria of the essay. They are shown graphically in Figure 4.





**Figure 4.** Comparisons of the Means of the Two Groups on the Organization Criteria of the Essay

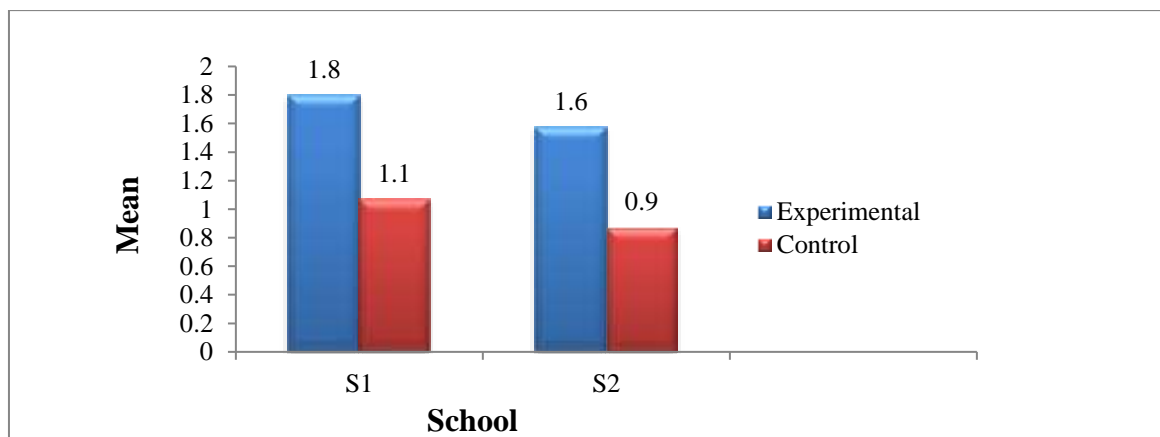
**Findings on Research Question (4)**

**Table 7.** The results of *t*-test for Independent Samples on Voice Criteria

School	Group	N	M	SD	MD	t	df	Sig (2-tailed)
S1	Experimental	30	1.8	0.55	0.7	5.64	58	.000***
	Control	30	1.1	0.45				
S2	Experimental	30	1.6	0.56	0.7	5.03	58	.000***
	Control	30	0.9	0.50				

Note. \*\*\*  $p < .001$

According to the results, the mean scores of the pretest were 1.8 for the experimental group and 1.07 for the control group in S1 and 1.57 for the experimental group, and 0.87 for the control group in S2. The mean score of the experimental group is higher than that of the control group in both schools (see Table 7). The results show that there were significant differences between the experimental groups and the control group. It can be interpreted that collaborative learning could bring the students' achievement on the voice criteria of the essay. They are shown graphically in Figure 5.



**Figure 5.** Comparisons of the Means of the Two Groups on the Voice Criteria of the Essay

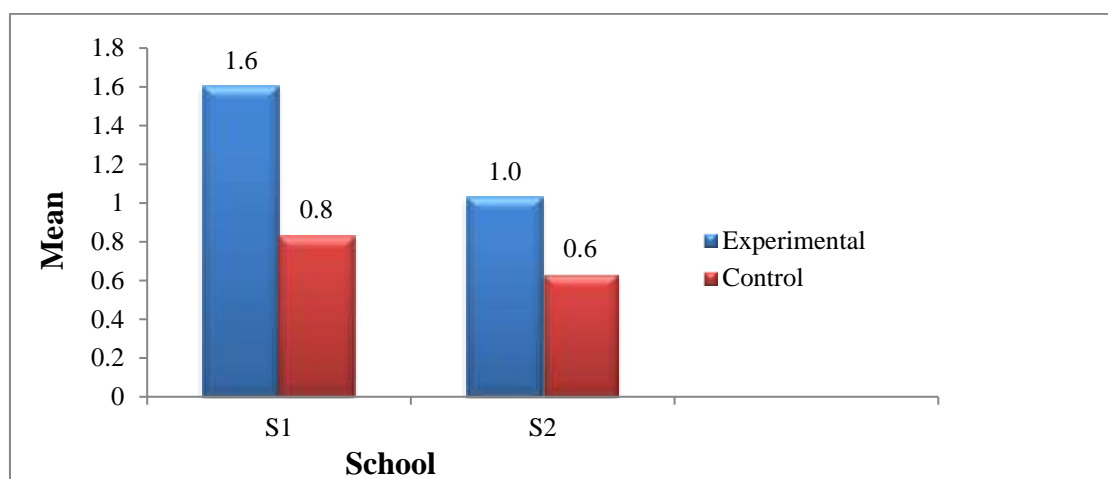
### Findings on Research Question (5)

**Table 8.** The results of *t*-test for Independent Samples on Word Choice Criteria

School	Group	N	M	SD	MD	<i>t</i>	<i>df</i>	Sig. (2-tailed)
S1	Experimental	30	1.6	0.49	0.8	4.89	58	.000***
	Control	30	0.8	0.69				
S2	Experimental	30	1.0	0.49	0.4	3.16	58	.003**
	Control	30	0.6	0.49				

Note. \*\*\*  $p < .001$ , \*\*  $p < .01$

According to the results, the mean scores of the pretest were 1.6 for the experimental group and 0.83 for the control group in S1 and 1.03 for the experimental group, and 0.63 for the control group in S2. The mean score of the experimental group is higher than that of the control group in both schools (see Table 8). The results show that there were significant differences between the experimental groups and the control group. It can be interpreted that collaborative learning could bring the students' achievement on the word choice criteria. They are shown graphically in Figure 6.



**Figure 6.** Comparisons of the Means of the Two Groups on the Word Choice Criteria

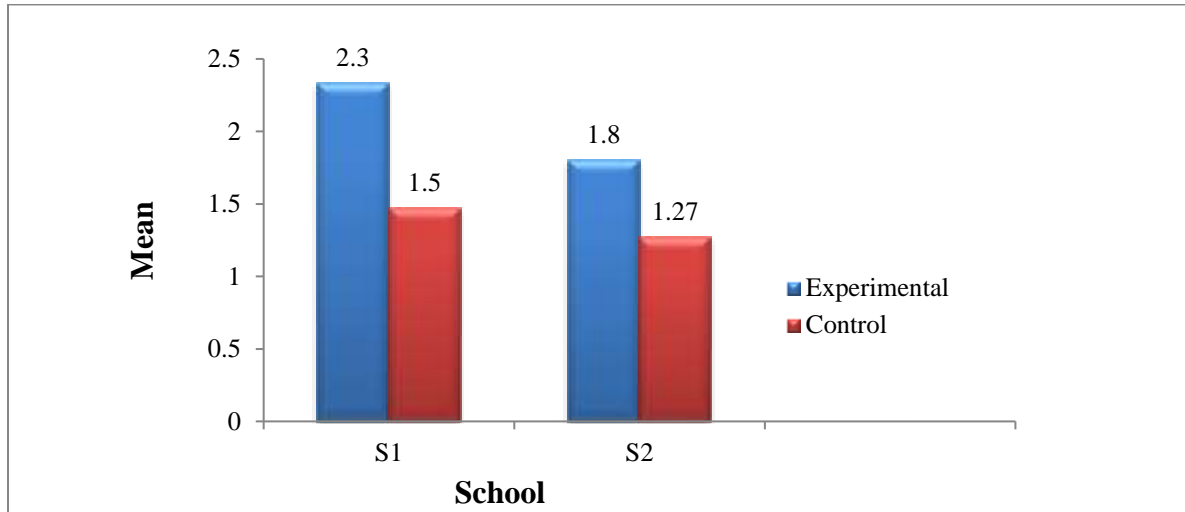
### Findings on Research Question (6)

**Table 9.** The results of *t*-test for Independent Samples on Sentence Structure, Grammar, and Spelling Criteria

School	Group	N	M	SD	MD	<i>t</i>	<i>df</i>	Sig. (2-tailed)
S1	Experimental	30	2.3	0.60	0.8	6.00	58	.000***
	Control	30	1.5	0.51				
S2	Experimental	30	1.8	0.66	0.5	3.46	58	.001**
	Control	30	1.3	0.52				

Note. \*\*\*  $p < .001$ , \*\*  $p < .01$

According to the results, the mean scores of the pretest were 2.33 for the experimental group and 1.47 for the control group in S1 and 1.8 for the experimental group, and 1.27 for the control group in S2. The mean score of the experimental group is higher than that of the control group in both schools (see Table 9). The results show that there were significant differences between the experimental groups and the control group. It can be interpreted that collaborative learning could bring the students' achievement on sentence structure, grammar, and spelling criteria. They are shown graphically in Figure 7.



**Figure 7.** Comparisons of the Mean Scores of the Two Groups on the Sentence Structure, Grammar, and Spelling Criteria of the Essay

## Discussion and Suggestions

### Discussion

The present study examined the effects of collaborative learning in developing the writing skill of high school students. There were two groups in each school: the experimental group where students were taught by collaborative learning and the control group where students were not taught by collaborative learning. The independence samples *t*-test was used to find the differences between the achievements of the two groups.

The results of the research indicated the effectiveness of collaborative learning. According to the findings, the values *t*-test revealed that there were significant differences in the writing skill of the students between the experimental groups and control groups in all the selected schools on the post-test. The students in the experimental group have the chance to interact with each member of the group and discuss the topic. Hence, they have the opportunity to get many ideas for writing the essay. The students in the control group have to think about the topic individually. Therefore, it can be concluded that collaborative learning is effective for the development of writing skill. This result supports research question No. (1). This result is consistent with the findings of Albasher: collaborative learning is more effective for the development of writing skill. According to the findings, the values of *t*-test pointed out that there were significant differences between the experimental groups and control groups in all the selected schools in relation to the focus and detail criteria of the essay. The students in the experimental group revise together all the drafts produced by each member. Therefore, they can discuss the appropriate ideas and suggest a more efficient way to use these ideas. Hence, it can be

interpreted that collaborative learning is effective for collecting and generating ideas. This result supports research question No. (2). This result is consistent with the findings of Storch: collaborative learning enabled the students to collect and generate ideas and use them effectively.

Based on the results of the finding, the value of *t*-test showed that there were significant differences between the experimental groups and control groups in all the selected schools in relation to the organization criteria of the essay. The students in the experimental group are allowed to discuss how to organize their ideas and produce an outline for the essay. The students in the control group have to organize and produce an outline individually. Therefore, it can be concluded that the organization of the essay of the students in the experimental groups is better than that of the students in the control groups. This result supports research question No. (3). This result is consistent with Albeshier's findings: the organization in the essay of the students in the experimental groups is better than that of the students in the control groups. According to the findings, the value of *t*-test showed that there were significant differences between the experimental groups and control groups in all the selected schools in relation to the voice criteria of the essay. The students revise together the consistency of the sentences of the essay in the experimental group. Therefore, they can criticize and suggest better ideas to present their voice more clearly. Hence, it can be concluded that collaborative learning is effective for expressing the voice clearly. This result supports research question No. (4). This result is consistent with the findings of Amel: collaborative learning could bring the students to express their voices more clearly.

Due to the results of the findings, the means of the students who are taught by collaborative learning is significantly higher than that of students who are not in relation to the word choice criteria of the essay. The students in the experimental group are brainstorming together to collect ideas and vocabulary and words that could be used in their essays. The students brainstorm and collect appropriate vocabulary and words individually. Therefore, it can be concluded collaborative learning can help students to improve their vocabulary. This result supports research question No. (5). This result is consistent with Albeshier's findings: the vocabulary used in the students' essays will be significantly different after their involvement in collaborative learning. According to the findings, the means of the students who are taught by collaborative learning is higher than that of students who are not taught in relation to sentence structure, grammar, and spelling criteria of the essay. The students in the experimental group revise together to correct inappropriate vocabulary and reorganize and rearrange any unclear sentences and paragraphs. Therefore, it can be concluded that collaborative learning can bring students to produce better-written texts. This result supports research question No. (6). This result is consistent with the findings of Storch: collaborative learning could help students to produce accurately written texts more than working individually.

This study showed that the achievement of the students taught by collaborative learning is better than that of students who are not. Therefore, it can be generalized that collaborative learning is more appropriate than traditional methods. Thus, English language teaching teachers should not only use traditional methods but also use collaborative learning in the classroom.

## **Suggestions**

In this study, the sample schools were restricted to two high schools in Sinkgaing Township, Mandalay Region. Therefore, further research should be conducted in other regions to be more representative. As this study was carried out over two weeks, the duration was too short to be able to yield reliable and valid results. Therefore, further research should be carried out over a longer period to validate the results. Further research should be investigated both the students' and teachers' attitudes toward the effectiveness of collaborative learning. The sample size limits the extent to which conclusions can be generalized. Therefore, further research should be carried out with a large sample.

## **Conclusion**

The main purpose of this study was to study the effectiveness of collaborative learning in developing the writing skill of high school students. The quantitative research method was used to compare the students' writing skill between the two groups. The design used in this study was one of the true experimental designs, namely, the pretest-posttest control group design. The instruments for this study were pretest and posttest. Independent samples *t*-test was used to examine whether there were significant differences between the two groups. By these results, interpretations were made whether there were significant differences between the two groups. Based on the findings of the research, the English writing skill of the high school students taught by collaborative learning was better than that of students who were not taught by it. Therefore, it can be concluded that collaborative learning can significantly improve the English writing skill of high school students.

Writing in a foreign language is one of the most challenging skills for almost all learners. Developing the writing skill is thought to be highly complex if not the most complex in comparison to listening, speaking, and reading. What makes writing a very troublesome task for English as a foreign language learner is the fact that it requires some criteria of acceptability relative to different aspects of writing which include content, organization, vocabulary, language use, spelling, punctuation, and actual capitalization and paragraphing (Hamadorche, 2010 cited in Sheir, Zahran & Koura, n.d.). In order to solve these problems, the teacher must consider using the process approach to writing in the classroom.

Moreover, by cooperating with the process approach and collaborative learning in the classroom, it can improve the students' writing skill to some extent. Johnson and Johnson (1999 cited in Tuan, 2010) contend that collaborative learning is the instructional use of small groups so that students work together to maximize their own and each other's learning. According to the benefits of collaborative learning, this method is mostly used in language teaching. Therefore, English language teachers should use collaborative learning in their classrooms in order to improve their students' writing skill.

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