COLLABORATIVE WRITING WITH TECHNOLOGY AMONG ESP STUDENTS

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Nowadays humans live in an age of globalization, where English has become the language of international communication. With advanced technologies everyone engages in written communication more than ever before.

Teaching writing in English is a complicated task for both a teacher and a learner. This difficulty is especially increasing when speaking about teaching writing to university students majoring in certain subjects.

In this case a teacher needs to achieve three aims at a time: to teach writing, which is actually one of the most complicated language skills, to focus students' attention on the register, styles and genres their texts will be written in as the educational process takes place in the university environment, and to stick to the learners' speciality through the English for Special Purposes class.

One of the methods that can successfully be implemented into teaching writing in University ESP Classes is collaborative writing.

The aims of this article are as follows:

1. To explain the important role of writing in general and collaborative writing in particular;
2. to present the projects performed by ESP students of the Academy of Public Administration under the aegis of the President of the Republic of Belarus through collaborative writing involving more than two non-native English speaking writers working within a shared Web-based document;
3. to analyse the students' reflection papers in order to distinguish the results and skills gained by them through collaborative writing activities.

Writing allows students to apply their passive knowledge of vocabulary and grammatical forms that they have learned in lessons and textbooks into active use of language structures. Moreover, while writing students can always go back and see what they produced on paper or a computer screen to self-analyze, self-assess, and detect the language problems or language misuse that they need to be working on [3, p. 10].

Writing is not about the result as the vast majority of people used to think. Writing is a process which requires multiple drafts from students. It is also the process of developing

a particular writing assignment consisting of multiple phases such as a planning process, a drafting process, revising, editing and proofreading [3, p. 13].

Collaborative writing projects involving two or more people into their activities have many language and non language benefits for the learners. The theoretical basis for these projects largely rests on the work of L. S. Vygotsky with his emphasis on the role of social interaction in learning [4, pp. 163–182] and on the concepts underlying the communicative approach in L2 learning [2, pp. 91, 96–102].

As more and more students tend to communicate online, collaborative writing with technology can be quite successfully implemented into ESP classes. Further we will present the two projects performed by the students of the Academy of Public Administration within the English course aimed at developing the language competence of future public administrators.

The first teaching context is presented by six second-year students majoring in Public Administration and Economics. This category of learners study the discipline "Business Foreign Language (English)" for two years out of a four-year complete course at the Academy: as a part of the second and the third course Academy educational programme. Actually, the discipline "Business Foreign Language (English)" is the continuation of the discipline "Foreign Language (English)" taught to the first-year students in the Academy. On average, their language level is B2. The social context for second-year students is mostly public administration, and one of the topics of the discipline is "Decision Making".

Taking into account the teaching and social context the students were offered to work online using Google Docs in order to create the topic "Decision Making Process".

The learners were offered certain roles, but each of them had an opportunity to choose among the following roles: an initiator (1 participant), a topic facilitator (1 to 2 participants), a content facilitator (1 to 2 participants), and an outlining Facilitator (1 to 2 participants).

Each of these roles had its functions. An initiator created the document "Collaborative Topic Writing" and shared it by e-mailing to the group members, and the course teacher. At this stage it was important to initiate this collaborative work by asking all group members to share their opinions about the components of the topic and inform all group members that the group could choose a combination of ideas. Also, an initiator had to ask for feedback, and contributed by helping keep the group motivated and engaged until that collaborative writing task was finished.

A topic facilitator was responsible for finalizing the group consensus about the content of the topic "Decision Making Process" so that the whole group could start brainstorming ideas about it.

A content facilitator had to initiate and share content suggestions with other group members through sharing topic paragraphs, and to provide constructive comments on the

relevance of your group members' ideas, and help group members connect their ideas to the topic.

Finally, an outlining facilitator was in charge of the outline of the topic including introduction, body, conclusion, and active vocabulary.

Besides, all group members performed the role of a reviewing and editing facilitator by initiating and sharing the review and editing with all group members. One of the group members had also to volunteer to use the on-line source Grammarly for editing the work they had collaboratively written [1].

The second project on collaborative writing with the use of Google Docs was offered to thirteen third-year students studying the discipline "Business Foreign Language (English)" as well, but with another social context – Economics, with the English language level of B2-C1. The common topic for this writing activity was "International Economy".

As a group of six or seven students they represented the company trading internationally and collaboratively wrote a letter to a governmental institution in order to request for some financial support. The roles, their functions, and the procedure were the same that in the first project.

Both projects had a recommended timeline for the completion, but the students had an opportunity to adjust that timeline to their daily and weekly timetable. At the same time, the deadline was clearly defined for both projects by the course teacher.

After finishing the collaborative writing each student also wrote a reflection paper that covered the following questions:
1. What contributions did you make for the collaborative writing?
2. How was your collaborative writing experience?
3. What do you think was successful?
4. What do you think was not successful?

Having analysed 19 students' reflections on both projects – writing collaboratively the topic "Decision Making Process" by second-year students, and composing a request letter to a governmental institution by third-year students the following contributions can be distinguished (see Table 1).

Table 1 – **Collaborative Writing Contributions**

Contribution description	The number of students who mentioned it	The percentage score of students who mentioned it
Language relation contributions		
Editing skills, including grammar correction	8	42 %

Contribution description	The number of students who mentioned it	The percentage score of students who mentioned it
Opportunity to communicate through writing	5	26 %
Knowledge in text structure	2	11 %
Improving communication skills	2	11 %
Active vocabulary revision	1	5 %
Non-language relation contributions		
Working as a team	16	84 %
Generating new ideas and sharing opinions	12	63 %
Learning new technologies (Google Doc, Grammarly)	10	52 %
Negotiating and support	9	47 %
Task distribution	8	42 %
Time management skills	7	37 %
Critical thinking and constructive commenting	5	26 %
Development of creativity	4	21 %
Time-saving	2	11 %
The common goal as a value	1	5 %

At the same time, there were some areas for improvement mentioned by the participants of both collaborative writing projects. Almost 26 % of the students noted that it was difficult to adjust to the timetable of other participants of the activity. 21 % or 4 people of all the groups accentuated that there were too many people in a group, and offered to minimize the number up to four learners. The same number of people said that it is easier for them to work on writing individually as they can rely only on themselves. Over 16 % or 3 people supposed that it is easier to memorize in English the text written individually. Two students (11 %) stated that they faced difficulties because different people have different writing styles, and two more (11 %) characterized collaborative writing as time demanding.

To summarize, collaborative writing with technology, e.g. Google Doc, Grammarly among ESP students can be used in an educational process to develop the learners' language competence. This activity stimulates students to perceive writing as a process involving many stages from defining the topic and structure to editing and reviewing. Besides developing language-related skills collaborative writing motivates learners to work at developing their soft skills.

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