

CHAPTER TWO : THEORETICAL UNDERPINNINGS AND LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

In investigating the effects of collaborative learning on the individual's writing ability as well as its effects on learners of varying language proficiency, it is pertinent to review the concept of collaborative learning and its related theoretical underpinnings such as Vygotsky's theory of cognitive development and Piaget's social cognitive theory. This is followed by a review of the two major aspects of writing, language and content. The researcher will also examine related research studies, both in other parts of the world and in Malaysia in order to contextualize the present study.

2.2 The Writing Process

Writing is a process through which meaning is created. The processes of generating, formulating and refining one's ideas are important aspects of the writing process. In addition to the production of content, the process of writing involves the knowledge and use of linguistic knowledge such as vocabulary, syntax and cohesive devices (Pincas 1982). Over the last twenty years, both product and process approaches have dominated the teaching of writing in the English language classrooms. The former focuses on the final product (including accuracy of language) while the latter places greater emphasis on the process of writing. According to Hedge (2005), there are many different process

approaches to writing, but all of them involve planning and drafting. There is less emphasis on linguistic knowledge, be it grammar or text structure.

There are different views on the stages that the writers go through in producing a piece of writing. Tribble (1996) contends that there are four stages, which are prewriting, composing or drafting, revising and editing. Students start with prewriting and brainstorming to generate ideas and activate their schemata (background knowledge) before moving on to the composing or drafting the text. The process approach emphasizes revision and feedback from other students; therefore, students may produce many drafts with changes made to both language and content.

The process writing approach provides opportunities for students to develop ideas to write about, draft sections of what needs to be written, revise these based on feedback of different kinds and to continue with the drafting and revising process until they complete the final version of their composition. The process approach gives less importance to the final product.

An important dimension of the writing process is the pre-writing stage, when students get the ideas to start their writing. If students do not have ideas to communicate, they will not be able to write. As such, collaborative learning can help students to formulate ideas. During collaborative learning, students brainstorm ideas pertaining to the essay topic and discuss these in groups before writing. This will help students gain ideas for the content of their written texts, and in the process of discussion the students will be able to improve their linguistic skills.

2.3 Collaborative Learning and Vygotsky's Theory of Cognitive Development

The theoretical underpinnings in this study are related to Vygotsky's (1978, 1986) perspectives of learning, which stresses the importance of social interaction in the process of learning. The principal theory underlying collaborative learning is based on Vygotsky's view that cognitive development results from social interaction. The social constructivist view is based on the idea that knowledge is constructed by the interaction of individuals within a society and that all thoughts are social in nature (Vygotsky 1986). Vygotsky's socio-cultural views on language learning provide a psycholinguistic explanation of the socio-cultural circumstances and processes through which pedagogy can foster learning that leads to language development (Nassaji & Cumming 2000). The basic theme of the Vygotskian socio-cultural perspective is that knowledge is social in nature and is constructed through a process of collaboration, interaction and communication among learners in social settings (Vygotsky 1978; 1986).

Vygotsky (1978:104) stresses that "learning awakens a variety of internal developmental processes that are able to operate only when a child is interacting with people in his environment and in co-operation with his peers". The socio-cultural perspectives, deriving from the concepts of Vygotsky (1978), illuminate the role of social interaction in creating an environment to learn language. This perspective examines interaction within a broad social and cultural context. In a socio-cultural view of language learning, learners are seen as 'active constructors' of their own learning environment (Mitchell & Myles 1988:162). In Vygotsky's view, human learning and development are bound up in

activity, which is purposeful action initiated through various tools, one of which is language.

All higher order functions develop out of language-based social interaction. Vygotsky (1978:163) claims that “every function in the child’s cultural development appears twice: first, on the social level, and later, on the individual level; the first between people (inter-psychological), and then inside the child (intra-psychological)”. He stresses that language acquisition is related to cognitive development. He says that an individual initially begins with inter-psychological functioning, and later moves on to intra-psychological functioning which is the individual’s consciousness. These two functions are combined through communication. Thus, communication takes place between an individual and another and this involves socialization. Therefore, the positive effects of social interaction and language acquisition lead to cognitive development.

In the process of cognitive development, language is an important tool. According to Vygotsky, the cognitive skills and patterns of thinking are determined through activities practiced in the social institution where an individual grows up. He believes that in promoting cognitive growth, the society and culture play an important role. Adults in a society are crucial as they foster children’s cognitive development. This is done by providing children with opportunities to engage in meaningful activities which are challenging. These challenging tasks promote cognitive growth in a child. Through interaction with the society, children will be able to develop socially and cognitively. As such, thinking processes have their roots in social interactions. He further argues that

children talk with adults and other knowledgeable individuals and in the process they engage in meaningful discussions. Thus, the interaction with others is an essential condition for promoting cognitive development, and this can be achieved through collaboration. This is in line with the concept of collaborative learning where students use social interaction to enhance knowledge acquisition.

Vygotsky (1978) claims that collaborative learning, among students or between students and a teacher, is essential for assisting each student in advancing through his or her own zone of proximal development, that is, the gap between what the learner could accomplish alone and what he or she could accomplish in cooperation with others who are more skilled or experienced. The zone of proximal development is the place where learning and development come together through social interaction. Vygotsky stresses that it is “under guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers” that learners move from one lower level to a higher level. This guidance or collaboration is called “scaffolding”.

Doise (1990:46) claims that “it is, above all, through interacting with others and coordinating his or her approaches to reality with those of others that the individual masters new approaches”. Even when learners are grouped according to similar levels of proficiency, the chances of having one or two members who have significantly higher proficiency levels compared to the others is undeniable. At times, some students can speak well compared to writing and vice versa. Therefore, when students are grouped

according to their abilities, there might be one or two students who are more vocal than other members in the group. The range of performance that exists between the students in the group will enable a student “to raise himself to a higher intellectual level of development through collaboration, to move from what he has to what he does not have through interaction” (Vygotsky 1978:126). By establishing a supportive environment, students will be able to cooperate and collaborate in a social discussion group. In collaborative learning, students work together to solve a problem and work towards achieving a goal.

2.4 Collaborative Learning and Piaget’s Social Cognitive Theory

The Piagetian socio-constructivist theory (1969) purports that social factors within groups is necessary for the development of logical thinking as children progress from a purely egocentric world view to one that allows for comprehension and deductive reasoning. According to Piaget, cognitive conflict refers to the condition in which a person holds beliefs or perceptions that are contradictory and thus requires assistance. Piaget claims that because of the “the shock of our thought coming into contact with that of others”, (Piaget 1969:204), be it working in pairs or in groups, students will benefit by overcoming the conflict. Apparently the learning process is more progressive when peers with different cognitive levels engage in direct and meaningful conversation by working together (Doise & Mugny 1984).

Piaget claims that social interaction is important because it stimulates cognitive conflict. Cognitive conflict occurs when a student’s perception is inconsistent with the thought of another peer. This is prevalent in collaborative learning as learners are bound to possess

different points of views and ideas during discussions. The divergent opinion creates conflict. Therefore, in collaborative learning, the students have to negotiate and substantiate their points of view to resolve the conflict. The Vygotskian's perspective focused on the process of collaboration while Piaget (1969) found that the ability to consider and to argue points of view is a key factor in cognitive development. Therefore, from Vygotsky's social cognitive theory and Piaget's theory on cognitive conflict, it can be concluded that social collaboration and conflict is important in cognitive development and this can be attained through collaborative learning.

2.5 Collaborative Learning

Collaborative learning is an invaluable tool in the teaching and learning process. The term "collaborative learning" is a teaching strategy used in classrooms by teachers to enable students to interact and work together in small groups. Bosworth & Hamilton (1994:10) claim that collaborative learning is an umbrella term which involves an array of educational strategies and approaches involving teachers and students through joint intellectual effort. It encompasses the entire spectrum of learning activities during group work among students. In the process of collaborative learning, students collectively process and solve problems and work towards a joint outcome. According to Dillenbourg (1999), when members in a group work together in collaboration, shared goals can be partially set at the outset, but the onus is on the members to negotiate and interact during the process of collaboration. There is a notion of having a sense of 'togetherness' in completing a given task.

Another element of collaborative learning that should be noted is effective interpersonal communication (Wiersema, 2000) which is in line with the “smart school” concept which was discussed in Chapter 1, Section 1.2. Effective interpersonal communication refers to group members staying in contact with each other regularly, making sure that their communication is clear and to the point. These inter-personal skills which are shared among group members are part of the interaction which takes place during collaborative learning.

There are four essential elements in the collaborative approach. First, collaborative learning encourages participants to talk. (For the purpose of this study, they are required to use English during interaction). Active engagement promotes learning as a variety of skills are involved during interaction such as clarification, explanation and expression. Second, collaborative learning, which is based on the social constructionist theory as discussed in Section 2.4 encourages participants to work towards a common goal as they work on the same material. Third, there is a shift in the locus of authority whereby participants of a group have control over their discussions. The participants negotiate and come to a consensus during discussion with minimum assistance from the teacher. Fourth, through collaborative learning, participants are exposed to critical discussions as they exchange ideas and negotiate differing opinions. All these processes of interaction prepare learners for future communicative interaction.

Gerlach (1994:9) contends that “collaborative activities are both socially and emotionally demanding and most often require students not only to articulate their own points of view but also to listen to the views of others”. This can be seen in a writing lesson when students voice their ideas, negotiate and argue. The students have to be attentive listeners to comprehend the other members’ ideas and to further the discussion. Gokhale (2004) contends that group interaction helps students to enhance interactive skills such as analyzing, synthesizing and evaluating one another’s ideas constructively. This facilitates critical thinking as students are able to give reasons, make judgements, scrutinize opinions, and thus become better writers. She concludes that collaborative learning fosters the development of critical thinking through discussions, clarification of ideas and evaluation of others’ ideas.

2.5.1 Social interaction

Language learning proceeds from the social to the individual. Students learn language through interaction with their parents, siblings, family members, friends, peers, caregivers and people around them. Horwitz (1997:520) claims that “collaborative learning appears to have affective benefits in language learning”. As collaborative learning is based upon a philosophy of working together, students are engaged in social interaction which impacts the process of learning. The basic idea of collaborative learning is social interaction. The process of social interaction involves collaboration among group members during discussions and joint negotiation which later leads to the establishment of shared understanding of the task. Therefore, it is necessary for learners to engage in social abilities to gain communicative skills. When learners are placed in

groups, their social skills are enhanced through learning activities, thus promoting social interaction.

Communicative interaction among peers is important in the development of language. In collaboration, interaction is essential as learners construct shared understanding through negotiation, thus developing a positive language learning environment. This is particularly applicable in the ESL context. Interaction among peers in small groups enables learners to mediate and negotiate meaning throughout the tasks. As such, interaction among peers is important as it involves constructing ideas during communication (Lantolf, 2001). Swain & Miccoli cited in Horwitz (1997) attest that “a number of studies find that collaborative learning can enhance the linguistic interaction encountered by students in the L2 classrooms” (p.84).

Johnson and Johnson (1989) outline four elements necessary for effective collaborative learning:

1. Positive interdependence.

There must be a clear structure to ensure that the group works together and understand what it is to accomplish.

2. Face-to-face interaction.

This is referred to as “eye-to-eye and k-to-k (knee to knee)”. In other words, students must sit looking at and facing one another.

3. Individual responsibility

Although the entire group learns collaboratively, each student must be responsible for some task. At times, one or more students may not contribute.

4. Appropriate interpersonal skills.

The teacher should not assume that students know how to communicate in groups. Students need to be taught interpersonal skills such as paraphrasing, clarifying, listening, responding, agreeing, and disagreeing.

Collaborative learning provokes active engagement among group members allowing them to integrate the various stages in the learning process in a holistic way. The group interaction promotes opportunities for learners to improve their cognitive and linguistic levels in English. This is in line with Vygotsky's (1978) view where social interaction is fundamental to every human as the characteristics, performance and achievement that one attains is a result of social interaction. He further reiterates that cognitive development and social interaction complement each other when learners interact with their peers in meaningful contexts. Similarly, Krashen (1987, 1981) has argued that through

interaction, second language learners obtain “optimal input” that is, input which is likely to lead to further acquisition. According to Krashen’s input hypothesis, language acquisition takes place during human interaction in an environment of the foreign language when the learner receives language input that is one step beyond his/her current stage of linguistic competence. If the learner is at stage “i”, then maximum acquisition takes place when he/she is exposed to “comprehensible input” that belongs to level “i+1”.

Interaction among peers in small groups enables learners to mediate and negotiate meaning throughout the tasks. Long and Porter (1985) favour small group interaction as “it increases language practice opportunities, improves student talk...motivates learners to learn” (cited in Ellis 1986:598). Johnson (1991) states that group work fosters exchange of ideas, inculcates generation of knowledge and creates participation in the decision making process. Research reveals that group work increases the intellectual and emotional participation of students and combines “most effectively all aspects of communication in the most integrated, non-threatening and flexible mode of class organization available to the teacher” (Bruffee, 1980:77).

Interactive learning further contributes to critical thinking. During the process of interaction, students are able to construct and reconstruct their understanding of the information discussed by interpreting, analyzing, inferencing, evaluating, explaining and self-regulating their learning. The context for learning is optimum as students are able to listen, contribute and refine their ideas. The process of communicating and collaborating instills and encourages a more proactive and cognitive effort by the learner to access,

evaluate and employ strategies to achieve his writing goals. As such, students will be able to produce more coherent and cohesive pieces of writing.

2.5.2 Collaborative Learning and Writing

Collaborative learning plays a prominent role in the ESL classroom as students learn in a non-threatening environment. Since the 90's, the use of collaborative learning and group activities have been playing a prominent role in the English language classroom as they have been utilized extensively in the teaching of writing during English lessons.

The supportive environment during collaborative learning will create opportunities for students to collaborate and exchange ideas. As such, in a writing class, students work in groups and exchange ideas during the process of discussion. The knowledge thus gained is incorporated into further discussion, and in this way learning is consolidated. The ideas gained are then further expanded upon in their individually written essays.

According to Kumpulainen & Kaartinen (2003:333), "peer collaboration can be defined as a coordinated activity during which participants collectively process and solve problems towards a joint outcome". Students who are initially passive will become motivated to learn as they are surrounded by peers who collectively work towards a joint venture in the process of learning.

In collaborative learning, brainstorming is the core of learning as students work towards achieving a common goal which is accumulating view points, suggestions, constructive ideas and feedback for the writing component. Rao (2007) claims that brainstorming during collaborative learning stimulates thinking and enables students to create and organize ideas in an orderly manner. He reiterates that before students start writing, they should be given an opportunity to activate their prior knowledge and skills. This can be done through pair work or group discussion as interaction with peers will enable students to socialize. In a writing lesson, as students brainstorm, they gain invaluable information pertaining to the essay topic. Brainstorming not only encourages students' active involvement during discussion but also helps to cultivate the linguistic and communicative competencies as students are required to express themselves during interaction. In the case of this study, as it is related to the teaching of English, students were required to interact in English during collaborative learning.

2.6 Language and Content in Writing

As in most instances of assessing writing ability, the assessment of the essays for the MUET writing sections are based on two aspects - language and content. In the writing of essays, presenting relevant ideas and providing adequate content for the topic is greatly emphasized. Students should be able to show excellent understanding of the topic and develop ideas and present their viewpoints effectively in their writing pieces. In

doing so, they should also be able to display a very confident control of language. This is a clear indication that a learner's language proficiency will have an impact on his/her essay scores. In other words, even if one has excellent and relevant ideas, it does not necessarily mean that he or she will be able to express these ideas effectively. This is because the student may not have the appropriate language to do so. This is apparently more prevalent among learners who learn English as a second language compared to learners whose first language is English. Learners whose mother tongue or first language is English seldom have problems in using English as they are proficient in the language. L1 users of English are able to express ideas clearly in writing as they have sufficient and varied vocabulary compared to second language learners. The L1 learners think and write in English, and as such they do not encounter as many difficulties as they have a better command of the language. However, they may not have adequate content for essay writing, and this may hamper the quality of their essays.

On the other hand, students who learn English as a second language may face problems in both content and language. As mentioned in Chapter 1, Section 1.1, one of the reasons for the lack of English proficiency is lack of practice in reading and speaking. Learners whose first language is not English have a tendency to think in their mother tongue and translate these ideas to English while writing. During this transaction process, the grammar and linguistic forms are all confused; eventually their writing will display a poor control of language. As such, these learners may not only have problems with language but content as well.

As Cantoni (1987:18) puts it, “The first language is always acquired in the natural and usually nurturing home setting, whereas a second language is often learned in the somewhat artificial classroom environment”. Furthermore, first language acquisition begins during infancy and it accompanies the development of cognitive, social and psychomotor skills and interacts with learners. Therefore, second language learners need sufficient exposure to the language to enable them to be confident in using the language. One such means of exposure is through collaborative learning. In collaborative learning, learners will be able to use the language through interaction with their group members, and indirectly learners are exposed to a variety of language structures which will in a way enable them to improve and practice the different language skills, including writing.

2.7 Communicative Functions

One element of collaborative learning which is vital is effective interpersonal communication (Johnson & Johnson 1989). Effective interpersonal communication refers to group members who always ensure their communication is clear and to the point during collaborative learning. Roschelle and Teasley (1993) see collaborative learning as taking place in a negotiated and shared conceptual space which is constructed and maintained via a shared language (in the case of this study, the English language). Consequently, collaborative learning is viewed as a social meaning-making activity interdependent with cognition and social relations. In the process of learning, students are exposed to various views, explanations and arguments. Thus, during collaborative learning, learners must make deliberate efforts to coordinate their language and activity

towards a shared understanding (Kumpulainen & Kaartinen 2003:336). This is done through interaction during discussions in collaborative learning. Damon & Phelps (1989) claim that the benefits of peer collaboration are seen in the co-construction of knowledge, realized by the collective sharing of ideas and views between the participants which takes place during interaction. From this perspective, social and verbal interactions are important for the construction of shared understanding.

In collaborative learning, the contribution of each member in the group is very important as each needs to be alert to understand what is going on in order to produce immediately a relevant response. A groups' understanding of a problem will not come about if members are not skillful at communicating information with each other. This would involve the use of arguments and other communicative skills to convince the less knowledgeable members to accept the views of more knowledgeable members. To enable members to advance the groups' line of thinking, communicative skills such as providing information, elaborating and asking for clarification are necessary to give effective feedback or information in the process of learning.

2.8 Previous studies on Collaborative Learning

Research into collaborative learning has flourished over the years and most of the researchers found collaborative learning very effective in the teaching and learning process. Many researchers who conducted studies on collaborative learning found that the achievement gains were larger for students who were involved in collaborative learning compared to gains achieved by students using the traditional and individual learning

approaches. Gokhale (2004) contends that collaborative learning is beneficial as it fosters the development of critical thinking through discussion, clarification and evaluation of ideas from group members. Bruffee's (1984, 1999) research on collaborative learning suggests that conversation in its most literal sense is crucial for the transmission of societal knowledge. This is in line with Vygotsky's view as mentioned in Section 2.5 that knowledge is social and is constructed through a process of interaction.

Research studies conducted locally also show collaborative learning in a positive light. Sim Gek Ngoh (1998) carried out a study to examine the role of peer interaction in an ESL writing class. It was a case study conducted in a secondary school among a group of four intermediate low proficiency students. The study was based on aspects of the role of peer interaction during collaborative planning and composing of texts, the relationship between peer interaction and the individual texts produced, and the contextual factors that affected peer interaction. The results showed that through peer interaction, students were able to generate ideas, construct sentences, provide assistance to one another and discuss text structures pertaining to the writing task. The study showed that the four students showed remarkable improvement in their essays which were written individually. The students showed improvement in their writing skills as they were able to form grammatically correct sentences. Students were also able to expand on the ideas related to the essay topic. The communicative functions revealed in their participation during discussions were those of questioning, elaborating, repeating and suggesting.

Mahaletchumy (1994), in her study on collaborative writing, examined how members in a collaborative writing group developed ideas during interaction, and their perceptions of collaborative writing. Data was obtained from audio recordings, videotaping and interviews of three students from an undergraduate English Language proficiency class from Universiti Putra Malaysia. The data was analyzed for patterns of idea development. Her findings revealed that students were actively engaged in productive interactions throughout the discussion sessions prior to writing. They actively contributed ideas, gave alternatives and managed conflict situations very well. The findings from her study indicate that the cooperative writing sessions created a positive social environment for language learning. It should be noted that in this study, students co-authored the essays, that is, the group as a whole produces one essay. All the group members contribute ideas and one of the members writes the essay before submitting it to the teacher.

Chandrika (2001), who conducted a study on group writing focusing on the effectiveness of cooperative learning in a Form One writing classroom, found the process writing approach together with cooperative learning skills to be effective in upgrading students' writing and social interactive skills. Markanthan's (2005) study of Form Six MUET students found positive benefits of peer group discussions. From his research, it was found that students performed better in writing after peer group discussions compared to writing without discussions. The students showed remarkable improvement in content, use of vocabulary, articles, conjunctions, prepositions, tenses, rhetorical organization and mechanics; the total score, too, improved. A similar study conducted by Foong (2005)

revealed that 15 and 16-year old students who worked in pairs during collaborative learning showed remarkable improvement in their written essays. She claims that collaborative learning contributed greatly in terms of length and the quality of the students' essays. She further says that pair work during collaborative learning helped students to generate ideas as well as exchange ideas and knowledge, and in the process of doing so, students were able to increase the length of their essays and widen their vocabulary.

Vimala Devi (2005) conducted a study of 20 students at Universiti Teknologi Malaysia in Malacca. Her study was based on the use of visual stimuli and collaborative discussions in improving students' writing skill. Students worked in pairs with the help of video films as visual stimuli and collaborative discussions among students in pairs to gather input for writing purposes. The major findings of her study reveal that "collaborative discussions played a role in instilling students' thinking skills during the drafting process in writing" (Vimala, 2005:67). According to her, the scores derived from the pre and post tests for essay writing showed an improvement in terms of ideas, content and argumentation and the use of adjectives. Students were able to go beyond mere sentences by generating ideas through visualizing, reasoning out their ideas, presenting information, elaborating logically, deducing and analyzing during their drafting sessions during collaborative discussions. Her findings indicate that there was a significant improvement in the students' final scores for their essays, as they were able to produce better, well-organized essays. Though her study indicates that with the use of visual stimuli students were able to watch, discuss and produce better essays, the

patterns of discussions among pairs were not analyzed. As students were allowed to select their partners, the criteria for pair selection to determine the level of students' proficiency prior to the study were not carried out for grouping purposes.

Lim (2004) conducted a case study on students at the pre-university level in a private institution to examine how expository writing skills could be developed among students. Students were asked to read and gather information related to the essay topic. They wrote their first draft individually after group discussions and handed in their drafts. Then, a model text of the essay was distributed to each student. This was then followed by a class discussion and emphasis was given to organization and language patterns. Students were asked to identify the theses statement, topic sentence, supporting sentences and concluding sentences. Later on, students were asked to revise their first drafts based on the model essay provided, after which peer editing was carried out before the submission of final drafts.

In her study, all the subjects interviewed mentioned that 'content' was the major problem in writing. On the other hand, the researcher felt that poor command of the language rather than lack of ideas hampered their writing performance. This was evident in the learners' essays where content was sufficient, but the linguistic errors made by the learners in the process of writing impeded reading. The researcher acknowledged that due to the students' language proficiency, they were unable to expand their ideas in their essays. Therefore, the researcher felt that by getting students to study a model essay based on the same topic, students would be able to accumulate enough content and ideas

to be included in their essays. In the process of reading, students are exposed to a variety of sentences and varied vocabulary. However, making students read a model essay to gain ideas for content may result in students reproducing essays that were too similar with the model essay. The tendency for students to regurgitate ideas and content, and copy phrases and sentences is high. The speaking skill is not utilized as only the reading and writing skills are involved. Students need to speak to voice opinions and thoughts and at the same time exchange ideas with peers.

A recent study by Nazeera (2007) on the effectiveness of collaborative learning in an ESL classroom claims that there were significant differences in students writing performance after collaborative learning had been carried out. Students obtained higher scores for content, language and organization, and, of course, the overall scores were also high. Nazeera claims that collaborative learning is an effective approach in improving students' writing performance as her students produced essays with higher scores after engaging in collaborative learning before writing their essays individually. In her study, despite conducting a pre test before introducing collaborative learning to determine the students' scores for their essays, the researcher did not group her students according to their proficiency level but instead gave students the freedom of choice by allowing them to choose their group members. As such, there were four to five members working in each group.

In the studies conducted by Vimala (2005) and Nazeera (2007), the researchers did not place students in heterogenous or homogenous groupings but instead allowed students to

choose their partners or group members. The selection of group members is important as the findings obtained in the study would be more reliable and valid. Another issue that these two researchers overlooked is the patterns of interaction during collaborative learning. Both the researchers only focused on the essay scores obtained towards the end of collaborative learning. The individual writing scores for the post test was compared to the pre test scores. Both studies found a significant improvement in the scores obtained by students before and after collaborative learning was introduced. However, the interaction patterns involved during collaborative learning was not analyzed.

Having reviewed the literature on collaborative learning and writing, the researcher has attempted to study some of the issues which other studies, especially the local ones, have not addressed. The present study investigates the effects of collaborative learning on individual writing performance. Students engage in discussions in groups but the essays are written individually. This individual writing allows students to gather input during collaborative learning discussions and later organize the input and write their individual essays. The researcher was not in favour of collaborative writing where learners write their essays in groups because in examinations, students are required to write essays individually. Therefore, by encouraging students to write individual essays, students will be trained to practice their writing skills.

This research also goes beyond comparing the students pre and post-test essay scores; it attempts to study the patterns of interaction that occur during collaborative learning discussions so as to discover how precisely collaborative learning aids writing. Finally,

this study has incorporated language proficiency as a variable: this is to ascertain how students of differing language proficiency perceive the effect of collaborative learning on their writing performance.

2.9 Conclusion

This chapter has attempted a comprehensive review of some of the major studies and research trends in the field of collaborative learning and writing. Having the benefit of previous researches, this study hopes to gain more insight on how collaborative learning can impact the teaching of the writing skill, especially among ESL learners.