

Exploring Students' Challenges and Strategies on Collaborative Academic Writing

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Abstract

Collaborative academic writing plays a vital role in helping students enhance their academic writing skills. However, the students face challenges in utilizing collaborative academic writing. This study aims to explore the students' challenges and strategies on collaborative academic writing. Grounded in a qualitative case study, this study took five months for the investigation in an academic writing class. Data was collected through learning artifacts and semi-structured interviews. The data were analyzed using a thematic analysis. The findings reveal that students have cognitive, social, logistical and organizational, and linguistic and proficiency-specific challenges. In addition, the study underscores key strategies to cope with the challenges, for instance, having clear roles in writing, optimizing practical communication tools, using structured timelines for writing, leveraging digital writing tools ethically, and conducting peer review processes. The findings provide valuable insights for educators and students to improve collaborative writing experiences, enhance writing performance, and foster better teamwork. This study contributes to developing the body of knowledge in collaborative writing and academic writing pedagogy.

Keywords: academic writing; collaborative writing; writing challenges; writing pedagogy; writing strategies

INTRODUCTION

In higher education, collaboration ability is recognized as an important 21st- century skill, as Mahmud and Wong (2022) found that collaboration ability positively influences employability. Parallel to this, academic writing remains a fundamental medium for knowledge construction, critical thinking, and scholarly communication. The interplay of collaboration and academic writing has given rise to collaborative academic writing. Collaborative writing transforms writing from a solitary task to a social and interactive one, with the goal of crafting more complete and richer written works. The collaborative writing tasks feature in group tasks, collaborative research projects, and collaborative reports designed to mirror the cooperative nature of modern research and workplace settings. Collaborative writing has been studied in the English for Foreign Language (EFL) context due to its benefits. The use of collaborative writing can develop the performance of students' writing (Chu, 2025) and enhance students' writing skill (Valizadeh, 2022; Wonglakorn & Deerajviset, 2023). Collaborative writing has a positive impact on students' learning outcomes (Truong & Tran, 2023). Pardede (2024) highlighted that collaborative writing can overcome students' writing anxiety and improve students' writing competencies. In line with Chu (2025) and Pardede (2024), Aldossary (2025) revealed students can enhance their writing development, structure, and lexical choices by experiencing collaborative writing. By utilizing collaborative writing, students can transfer what they have learned, were more motivated, read critically, shared their thoughts in discussions, and had positive attitudes toward writing together (Al-Makhmari, 2024).

Albeit collaborative writing provides virtues in writing instruction; its implementation is somewhat complex. Collaborative writing requires intricate planning, meaning-negotiation, goal-sharing, and interpersonal dynamics management. Students voice that they meet challenges of collaborative writing in the aspects of collaboration and communication (Roxas, 2023). When the implementation of collaborative writing uses a digital tool such as Google Docs, the students experience that they have an internet connection issue as a challenge (Sa'diyah & Nabhan, 2021). Alkhalaf (2020) found that the problems of utilizing collaborative writing cover assessment, time management, and students' behaviour. These complex challenges may obstruct the learning process and undermine the quality of the final written output. In facing students' challenges of collaborative writing, some strategies can be utilized. The identified coping strategies encompass the cultivation of a positive mindset, the pursuit of assistance from

others, the establishment of effective communication, the exploration of spiritual guidance, and the implementation of breaks to effectively manage stress (Roxas, 2023).

Based on preliminary research in collaborative writing learning environment, students faced several problems in experiencing the collaborative writing activity. The problems included miscommunication, unequal participation among group members, and a conflicting schedule to discuss the collaborative writing task. The shared problems had an effect on students' writing performance. Dealing with the academic writing as the genre in this study, crafting academic writing in EFL (English as a Foreign Language) setting has hurdles for students because the students must follow all required writing conventions. Students face academic writing challenges in the aspect of vocabulary and grammar (Asaad & Shabdin, 2021), developing writing ideas (Rustipa et al., 2022), plagiarism (Toprak & Yücel, 2020), and time management in implementing writing process stages (Wang & Xie, 2022). Existing literature on collaborative academic writing shed light on many domains, covering the virtues of collaborative writing (Aldossary, 2025; Al-Makhmari, 2024; Chu, 2025; Pardede, 2024) and the use of technology or artificial intelligence to support collaborative writing (Arifin et al., 2024; Bai & Nordin, 2025; Ebadijalal & Moradkhani, 2023; Nguyen et al., 2024).

Prior studies are mainly concerned with the general challenges of group work or with the isolated strategies for enhancing writing skills. However, a critical gap remains in the depth exploration of the detailed challenges students experience during collaborative academic writing and the strategies that the students develop to overcome collaborative academic writing problems. Grasping this dynamic interplay between problems revealed and proposed solution is pivotal for creating meaningful pedagogical support. This study aims to fill the gap by conducting an in-depth exploration of students' experiences with collaborative academic writing. It attempts to identify the most prominent obstacles students face during the different phases of the collaborative academic writing process and to document the strategies that students implement to pave the way for the challenges. Therefore, this study is guided by the following questions.

1. What are the primary challenges students face when engaging in collaborative academic writing tasks?
2. What strategies do students employ to mitigate these challenges and facilitate effective collaboration?

METHODS

Informed by the interpretivist paradigm, the current study adopted a case study to explore students' challenges and strategies on collaborative academic writing. Case study provides accessible accounts of real individuals and situations, capturing their uniqueness, complexity, and situatedness, and contribute to action (Cohen et al., 2018). Before conducting the case study, the researchers negotiated to the research context by asking permissions from the relevant institutional authorities. Besides, they obtained writing informed consent from all prospective participants to fulfill the research ethics requirements. The context of the study was in an academic writing class in English Education Department of one of the states universities in Central Java. The research context was chosen because it represented an authentic setting where the key learning objective is collaborative academic writing and a nuclear pedagogical challenge, thereby providing an information-rich case for in depth investigation.

The participants in this study were forty students in academic writing class in the academic year of 2024/2025 who engaged in collaborative academic writing activities. Since the students wrote collaboratively, there were twenty groups in the class. Based on the course description of academic writing class, the students were asked to write a research article that would be submitted in accredited national journals or in international journals. This study was conducted for five months by obtaining data through semi-structured interviews and learning artifacts. Semi-structured interviews were conducted due to gather data on intangible aspects such as values, assumptions, beliefs, and problems using open-ended questions (Cohen et al., 2018). Learning artifacts refer to any document, object, or digital creation produced by students in their learning process that show their understanding, skills, and progress. This study's learning artifacts covered classroom Google Drive documentation, signed collaborative writing commitment forms, and documents on collaborative writing processes.

In collecting the data, the researchers used written informed consent to get participants' voluntary agreements to participate in the study. After obtaining the informed consents, the semi-structured interviews were conducted to get data from twenty groups (all groups in the class). This study used ten groups, each group consisting of 2 members. After conducting the interviews, the researchers obtained the data from students' learning artifacts to strengthen and validate the students' responses in the interview session. In analyzing the data, this study used thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006),

including “familiarizing the data, generating initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing, defining, naming, and producing the report (p.87). By following the stages of thematic analysis, it was found the students’ challenges and strategies on collaborative academic writing. The process of thematic analysis started with understanding the data by reading all data set. The next stage was identifying the initial codes for the supported data. After generating the initial codes, it was the steps of finding the themes. After finding the themes, it proceeded to the steps of reviewing, defining, and naming the themes. The last stage was producing the report by documenting all processes.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The present study explores the challenges and strategies faced by students in collaborative academic writing. Based on the semi-structured interview and learning artifacts, it is found that there were four challenges and four strategies on collaborative writing.

Findings

Challenges on Collaborative Academic Writing

The findings reveal four challenges on collaborative academic writing: including cognitive challenges, social challenges, logistical and organizational challenges, and linguistic and proficiency-specific challenges. The following table is the recap of students’ interviews.

Table 1. Challenges on collaborative academic writing

No	Challenges	Groups	Percentage (%)
1	Cognitive challenges	1, 2, 6, 11, 16, 17, 18	35
2	Social challenges	4, 7, 10, 14	20
3	Logistical and organizational challenges	5, 9, 12,	15
4	Linguistic and proficiency-specific challenges	3, 8, 13, 15, 19, 20	30

Table 1 presents the number of groups and the percentage for each challenge. The highest percentage dealt with cognitive challenges at 35%, while the lowest was logistical and organizational challenges at 15%. Groups 1, 2, 6, 11, 16, 17, and 18 were recorded as faced with cognitive challenges. Cognitive challenges are related to the cognitive work of writing and managing the task. The students had cognitive challenges, such as having different writing styles and voices, a diversified way of generating writing ideas, maintaining writing consistency, and uneven content knowledge. The following excerpts 1, 2, 3, and 4 presents that the groups experienced hurdles related to writing styles, idea generation, consistency, and content knowledge. These challenges can hinder collaboration and affect the writing quality.

Excerpt 1. Interview with Group 1 (Cognitive challenge on different writing styles and voices)

We found it most challenging to blend our writing styles into one voice. We struggled because one of us wrote with complex formality while the other preferred simple directness. This created an inconsistent report, so we had to spend extra time rewriting everything to sound uniform.

Excerpt 2. Interview with Group 6 (Cognitive challenge on diversified way of generating writing ideas)

Our biggest challenge was that we all generated ideas in completely different ways. One person wanted to just talk everything out in a free-flowing meeting, and I just wanted to look at examples from other papers. It felt messy and inefficient at first because we weren't syncing up, and we worried some good ideas were getting lost. We eventually had to combine our methods, we did a quick talk, then everyone made their own mini-outline, and then we shared them, to make sure we were all on the same page.

Excerpt 3. Interview with Group 2 (Cognitive challenge on maintaining writing consistency)

Maintaining consistency was our most difficult challenge. Our individual writing styles were so different that the final paper felt choppy and poorly connected, rather than like one cohesive document.

Excerpt 4. Interview with Group 16 (Cognitive challenge on uneven content knowledge)

Our main problem was that I knew a lot more about the topic than my partner. I had to keep explaining things, and they were often unsure of what to write. This made it difficult to keep our sections consistent, as my part was very detailed while theirs was more general and simpler.

Another challenge, social challenges related to students' dynamic of working in a group. The challenges consisted of free-riding or social loading, dominating members, conflict management, and fear of criticizing peers. The following excerpts are the interview responses dealing with social challenges.

Excerpt 5. Interview with Group 4 (Social challenge on free-riding or social loading)

In the first brainstorming stage of my collaborative writing, my partner didn't do their share, so I had to do all the work myself.

Excerpt 6. Interview with Group 7 (Social challenge on dominating members)

My partner wouldn't listen to any of my ideas and made all the decisions alone.

Excerpt 7. Interview with Group 10 (Social challenge on conflict management)

When we disagreed, we didn't know how to fix it, so we just got frustrated with each other.

Excerpt 8. Interview with Group 14 (Social challenge on fear of criticizing peers)

I was afraid to tell my partner their work wasn't good because I didn't want to make things awkward

The next challenge on collaborative academic writing was logistical and organizational challenges. It dealt with practical obstacles that related to work coordination. The challenge included scheduling conflicts. Below are the examples of interview responses.

Excerpt 9. Interview with Group 5 (Logistical challenge on scheduling conflict)

With our packed schedules and other assignments, we were too busy to meet in person, so we could only try to work together online, which was difficult

Excerpt 10. Interview with Group 12 (Logistical challenge on scheduling conflict)

With our packed schedules and other assignments, we were too busy to meet in person, so we could only try to work together online, which was difficult

The last challenges in implementing collaborative academic writing are the linguistic and proficiency-specific challenges. The challenges related to students' language barriers due to the varying levels of language skills. The challenges covered uneven English proficiency, first language interference, lack of academic vocabulary, and writing anxiety and lack of confidence. Below are samples of interview's responses.

Excerpt 11. Interview with Group 3 (Linguistic and proficiency-specific challenges on uneven English proficiency)

Our challenge is grammar, we tend to focus more on grammar, so we often lack time in writing because we always check the grammar to make well-structured academic writing.

Excerpt 12. Interview with Group 8 (Linguistic and proficiency-specific challenges on first language interference)

In my group opinion, the challenge is at first our writing tends to sound Indonesian language, we write it in Indonesian language first then translate it in English, so perhaps it gives effect to our writing.

Excerpt 13. Interview with Group 13 (Linguistic and proficiency-specific challenges on lack of academic vocabulary)

I think my group's challenge is sometimes we lack academic vocabulary, so it gives effect to my group collaborative writing. Sometimes, we are late submitting the collaborative writing progress because of this challenge.

Excerpt 14. Interview with Group 14 (Linguistic and proficiency-specific challenges on writing anxiety and lack of confidence)

In my opinion, I am not confident enough in writing my part because my English is not good enough.

The challenges on collaborative academic writing, including cognitive, social, logistical and organizational, or linguistic and proficiency-specific challenges give effect to students' discipline in submitting their collaborative academic writing progress. Below is one of the pieces of evidence when the lecturer of academic writing class reminds indiscipline students in the classroom WhatsApp group.

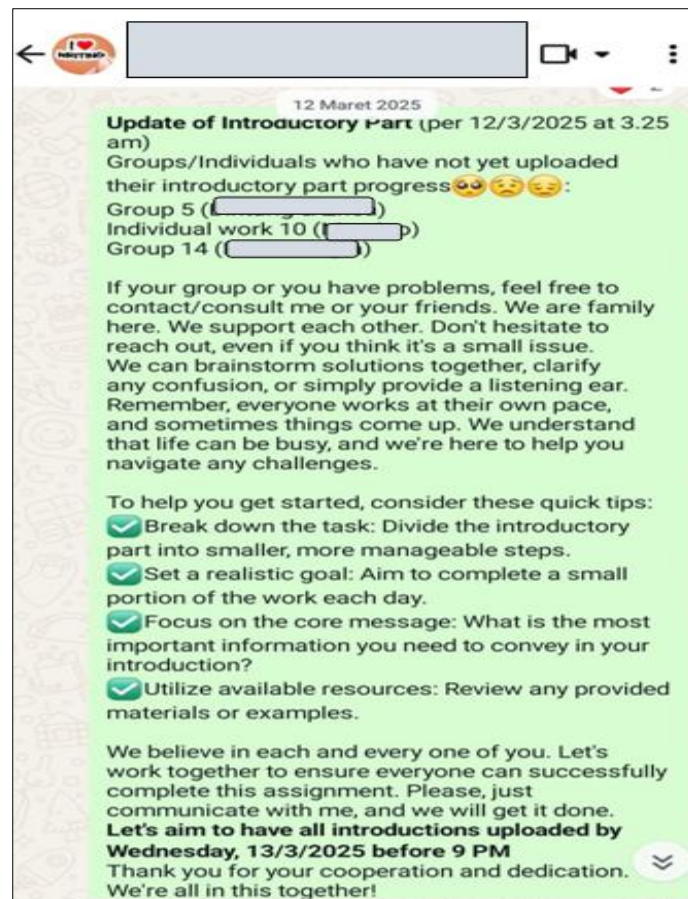


Figure 1. The evidence of reminding the indiscipline group in classroom whatsapp group

Figure 1 presents that the lecturer reminds group 5 and group 12 that miss the deadline of uploading the introductory part progress. It happened due to the members facing challenges in doing collaborative academic writing. The lecturer also encouraged the groups members to give tips for finishing the introductory writing. In addition, the lecturer also reminded the group members who did not submitted yet their group's task in their folder in Google Drive by uploading the file namely "It's important". Below is the proof of the lecturer's reminder.

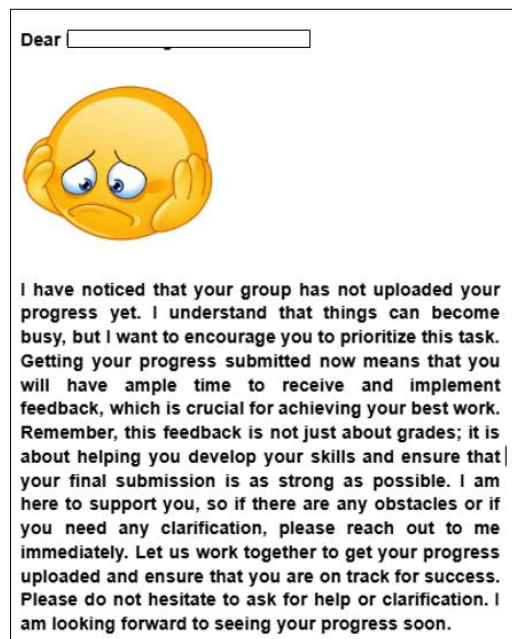


Figure 2. The Evidence of Reminding the Indiscipline Group in Classroom Google Drive

Furthermore, some groups did not follow the writing conventions because of students' challenges in collaborative academic writing. For instance, the students did not write the correct references for APA 7th edition references in their collaborative academic writing. It could be seen from the students' learning artifact as follows.

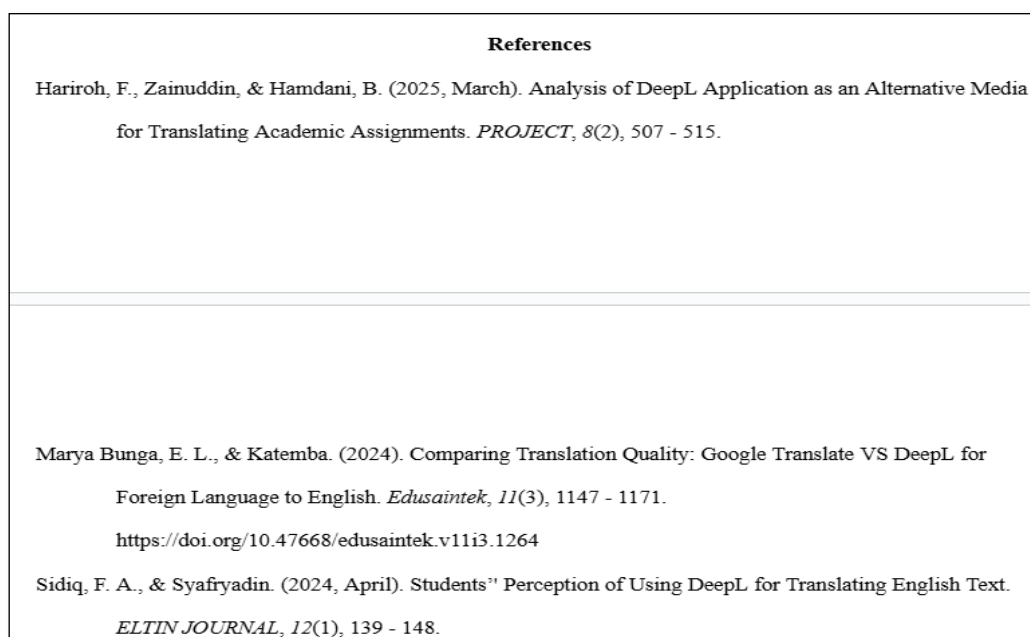


Figure 3. Evidence of students' mistakes in writing references

Strategies on Collaborative Academic Writing

Implementing the strategies on collaborative academic writing provided valuable solutions to cope with groups' challenges. Based on the interview session, the students shared their strategies to solve the problems. The strategies can be seen in the following table.

Table 2. Strategies to Cope with the Challenges in Collaborative Academic Writing

No	Challenges	Strategies
1	Cognitive challenges	Structured planning and outline development, divide clear role, synchronous and asynchronous editing
2	Social challenges	Optimizing group contracts/collaborative writing commitment form, using digital communication channels
3	Logistical and organizational challenges	Optimizing the use of Google Docs, creating a shared timeline with micro-deadlines, flexible and hybrid meeting formats
4	Linguistic and proficiency-specific challenges	L1-L2 code-switching for brainstorming ideas, peer-teaching and collaborative learning, the use of digital writing tools, seeking external resources

Table 2 displays that each challenge has a strategy that assists students to do collaborative academic writing successfully and meaningfully. For instance, the strategies for social challenge were optimizing group contracts or collaborative writing commitment form. The students of group 7 highlight that they optimized their collaborative work by rechecking the agreements in the collaborative writing commitment. The following excerpt is the proof of students' viewpoints.

Excerpt 15. Interview with Group 7 (Optimizing collaborative writing commitment form)

In the beginning of writing the introductory part of the mini research article, my group has a problem in the member who dominate in writing. So, I share this problem with my partner. Then, we decided to recheck the collaborative writing commitment form that we have agreed and signed in the first meeting before starting collaborative academic writing.

Excerpt 15 underscores the importance of rechecking the collaborative writing commitments form to ensure each person has already implemented their roles effectively. The collaborative writing commitment form consisted of several parts, including course's identity, group's identity, the statements that the group's member committed to fulfill roles and responsibilities, the roles and responsibility in each writing stage, signatures section, and date of the commitment. To validate the student's interview response, below is the proof of group's collaborative writing commitments form.

COLLABORATIVE WRITING COMMITMENT FORM

Course : Academic Writing
Class :
Lecturer :

Assignment: Writing a research article to be submitted in a targeted journal

Group Members:
1. Student A :
2. Student B :

We, the undersigned, commit to fulfilling the following roles and responsibilities in the completion of this collaborative writing assignment:

Pre-Writing Phase:

- All members: Collaboratively analyze the assignment, choose the writing topic, brainstorm ideas, and organize them into an outline.

Drafting Phase:
(Give a ✓ in the columns of Student A or/and Student B based on their participation in each aspect of the drafting phase. If both students participated equally, you can put a ✓ in both columns)

No	Aspects	Student A	Student B
1	Finding the targeted journal	✓	✓
2	Finding the research topic	✓	✓
3	Navigating the sources for the literature review	✓	✓
4	Writing the introduction	✓	✓
5	Writing the literature review	✓	✓
6	Writing the methodology	✓	✓
7	Writing the finding	✓	✓
8	Writing the discussion	✓	✓
9	Writing the conclusion and suggestion	✓	✓
10	Writing the references	✓	✓
	Writing the abstract	✓	✓

Revision and Editing Phase:

- All members: Participate actively in rewriting and revising the first draft, providing constructive feedback, and ensuring clarity, coherence, and adherence to the assignment requirements.


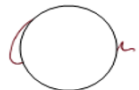
Finalization and Submission:

- All members: Collaborate on crafting the final draft, incorporating all revisions and edits.
- All members: Review and approve the final draft before submission.
- Designated member: Submit the final draft on behalf of the group.

We further commit to:

- Open Communication: Maintaining open and respectful communication throughout the writing process.
- Active Participation: Contributing actively and meaningfully to all stages of the project.
- Time Management: Adhering to agreed-upon deadlines and completing tasks in a timely manner.
- Mutual Respect: Respecting each other's ideas, opinions, and contributions.
- Academic Integrity: Upholding the principles of academic honesty and ensuring that all work is original and properly cited.

Signatures:

- Student A:

- Student B:


Date: February 19th, 2025

Figure 4. Students' collaborative writing commitment

Another strategy is to solve the logistical and organizational challenges by utilizing flexible and hybrid meeting formats, in this case, the group used WhatsApp to check their collaborative writing's progress. The group members used their first language and mother tongue in communication to avoid misperception. The following figure shows the ways of communication.

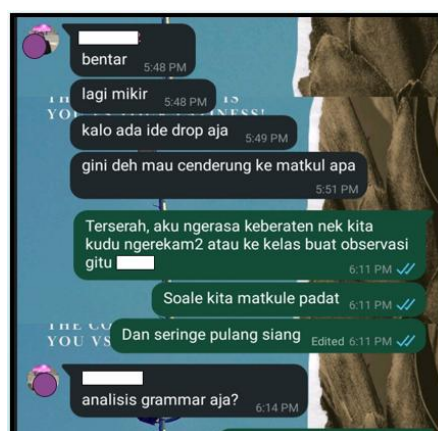


Figure 5. Group members' communication in WhatsApp

Figure 5 shows that there are two students who communicate using code mixing of their first language and mother tongue. The first student opened the conversation by informing her that she needed to think first and suggested if her friend got a writing idea to share it directly. She asked to decide what course they would conduct their mini research for their collaborative writing project. Then, the second student replied that their course schedule was very packed and they often went home in the afternoon, implying time constraints and fatigue. Besides, the first student suggested how if they analyzed the grammar for their writing project. In short, the picture captured a group of students trying to collaboratively decide on a feasible research topic for an assignment while considering their busy schedules.

Discussion

The study reveals that students face a multifaceted set of cognitive, social, logistical and organizational, and linguistic and proficiency-specific challenges when engaging in collaborative academic writing. These challenges contribute to students' collaborative writing performance. It can be inferred that many factors influence the successful implementation of collaborative writing. In EFL context, students struggle to do collaborative writing since they need to master lexical and grammatical knowledge, manage turn-taking, negotiate meaning, construct coherent and cohesive writing, provide constructive feedback, manage group dynamics, and use communicative skills. Collaborative writing requires "complex and multidimensional task in which various factors and variables interplay with the nexus of the interaction patterns' framework" (Alsahil, 2024, p.2248).

The findings show that the highest percentage of challenges found is cognitive challenges (35%), then followed by linguistic and proficiency-specific challenges (30%), social challenges (20%), and logistical and organizational challenges (15%). Cognitive challenges deal with cognitive work of writing and managing the task. Cognitive challenges cover inadequate mastery of writing structure, lack of critical thinking, and insufficient feedback from instructors or peers (Wang & Said, 2024). Dealing with social challenges and logistical and organizational challenges, the students experience those challenges because they lack collaboration and communication. In line with the findings found by Roxas (2023), that students meet challenges of collaborative writing in the aspects of collaboration and communication. Furthermore, the problems of utilizing collaborative writing cover assessment, time management, and students' behavior (Alkhalaf, 2020). The challenges of collaborative writing relate to the insufficient student engagement, lack of technology skills, and the difficulty in real-time collaborative writing (Chanwaiwit & Inpin, 2021).

To mitigate the collaborative writing challenges, students implement several strategies, including structured pre-writing scaffolding, clear role assignment and group contracts, flexible hybrid collaboration modalities, strategic use of digital tools, and supportive peer-learning techniques. As Roxas (2023) reveals that the identified coping strategies encompass the cultivation of a positive mindset, the pursuit of assistance from others, the establishment of effective communication, the exploration of spiritual guidance, and the implementation of breaks to manage stress effectively. The findings reveal that the students use WhatsApp to communicate with their peers as one of strategies in doing collaborative academic writing effectively. Alsahil (2024) reports that students utilize WhatsApp, a widely used instant messaging service, to facilitate task organization and collaboration, for instance planning the assignment, providing feedback, and discussing the task requirements and deadlines.

CONCLUSION

This study aims to discover the students' challenges and strategies on collaborative academic writing. Collaborative academic writing presents several challenges that hinder students' collaborative writing performance, including conflicting schedules, uneven contributions, logistical issues, poor communication, and integrating diverse writing styles. Collaborative writing performance in all stages of writing process is hampered by synchronizing brainstorming, drafting, revising, and editing efforts across multiple writers. In coping with the challenges, students are as active recipients who develop and implement several strategies that effectively are targeted solutions to mitigate each specific challenge. Successful and meaningful collaborative writing are about the group members' proficiency in managing the meta-process of collaboration. This study provides theoretical, practical, and pedagogical implications. Theoretically, the study's findings contribute to the existing body of knowledge of collaborative writing, academic writing, writing challenges, and writing strategies. Practically, this study can serve as a valuable source for writing lecturers and students to clarify the challenges and strategies on collaborative academic writing. Pedagogically, the study provides pivotal insights for lecturers and students to consider the challenges and strategies on collaborative writing utilization to create meaningful collaborative writing environments. However, this study is limited by the study's specific research context, small sample size, which restricts generalizability to broader study context. For future researchers, it is suggested to conduct multiple case studies, auto-ethnography, and narrative inquiry across different contexts of study and diverse disciplines that focus on challenges and strategies in implementing collaborative writing to enrich the research findings and implications.

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