



Moroccan EFL Students' Attitudes toward Collaborative Learning in Argumentative Writing

Mohamed Choujaa

Chouaib Doukkali University, Eljadida, Morocco

Email: choujaa.mohamed@ucd.ac.ma

Nadia Hellalet

Chouaib Doukkali University, Eljadida, Morocco

Mouhssine Echcharfy

Chouaib Doukkali University, Eljadida, Morocco

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Abstract

In response to the restrictions of the teacher-centred approach, collaborative learning has been introduced as a more inclusive pedagogy that can promote students' classroom interactions, active engagement, and learning satisfaction. Based on this, the current study seeks to explore Moroccan EFL public high school students' attitudes toward collaborative learning in argumentative writing. In light of a mixed-method approach, the study employed a questionnaire to gather data from 158 students across three public high schools in Casablanca. This is followed by a semi-structured interview with 12 participants for a deeper understanding of the issue. The results displayed that participants held an overall positive attitude toward collaborative writing, which they mainly attributed to its effectiveness in providing a space for sharing opinions, exchanging feedback, and forging meaningful relationships. However, low levels of English language, noise, and unequal participation were identified as key barriers to effective group argumentative writing. These results suggest that collaborative writing must be effectively integrated into Moroccan EFL classes to enhance students' argumentative writing performance.

1. INTRODUCTION

Argumentative writing has been regarded as a requisite skill for students to attain success in educational and professional contexts. According to the guidelines for English language in Moroccan secondary schools, it is crucial for teachers to devote sufficient attention to honing students' ability to construct and defend an argument in both spoken and written forms (MNE, 2007). In fact, English as a foreign language (EFL) students have acknowledged the significance of argumentative writing in their academic, professional and personal lives (Khairuddin et al., 2021). Because argumentative writing is central to critical thinking, it is what students should be equipped with to be able to successfully analyse and evaluate information, allowing them to make informed decisions (Hillocks, 2011). The ability to create written arguments can additionally provide students with knowledge

construction and persuasive communication skills, which are key abilities to resolve differences of opinion (Andrews, 2009). Hence, argumentative writing is an indispensable competency that must be effectively promoted among students.

Notwithstanding the importance of argumentative writing, it is a writing genre that remains underdeveloped among Moroccan EFL students. Research showed that when Moroccan EFL high school students came to university, they exhibited a poor level of higher-order thinking skills in argumentative writing (Hellalet, 2021). This indicates that the training they received during high school concerning argumentative writing, if any, was insufficient.

Students' low argumentative writing performance can be attributed to the limitations of the traditional way of teaching as the dominant practice in Moroccan EFL secondary school classrooms (Ghaicha & Mezouari, 2018). In light of the traditional approach to writing instruction, students are mostly asked to work alone inside the classroom to produce an argumentative essay. This, according to Abouabdelkader and Bouziane (2016), creates disequilibrium between the reality of EFL writing practices in Moroccan high schools and effective strategies that are grounded in research findings. Hence, it is unsurprising that EFL students still encounter many writing problems, especially at the level of coherence and cohesion (Benzizoune, 2022). This suggests that the traditional methodology of teaching writing is hindering Moroccan EFL students from effectively fostering their argumentation skills in writing.

Conversely, collaborative learning has started to gain considerable attention in the Moroccan educational landscape in recent years. On the one hand, recent reforms have emphasized the necessity to promote collaboration and leadership practices among students for the sake of ensuring high-quality education and meeting students' diverse needs (MENPS, 2022; MNE, 2007; SCDM, 2021). On the other hand, research conducted within the Moroccan context has shown that EFL high school teachers recognise the importance of collaboration in promoting students' higher-order thinking skills and learning engagement (Khalil & Hellalet, 2024; Laabidi & Laabidi, 2023). Hence, it can be concluded that there is a willingness to embrace more innovative approaches in Moroccan secondary school education for better learning outcomes.

Given that the traditional approach to argumentative writing instruction has failed to uphold the quality of Moroccan high school EFL students' texts, its shortcomings may therefore be mitigated by employing collaborative learning. Internationally, collaborative learning has been shown across various studies to effectively enhance EFL students' argumentative writing performance by enabling them to reflect on their writing, exchange peer feedback, and actively engage in discussions (Anshu & Yesuf, 2022; Masuara & Widiati, 2020; Moonma & Kaweera, 2021). A collaborative writing strategy may then be useful in improving Moroccan EFL public high school students' argumentative writing performance.

In light of this background, the central objective of the present study is to explore Moroccan EFL public high school students' attitudes toward the significance of collaborative learning in argumentative writing. For the purpose of obtaining a more refined perspective, the research also seeks to investigate the underlying factors shaping students' attitudes. A recent study discovered that Moroccan EFL public high school teachers held optimistic perspectives concerning collaborative learning in argumentative writing (Khamouja, 2025). Providing insights into students' outlooks becomes therefore necessary to ensure a balanced perspective. The study also offers EFL teachers recommendations for effective integration of collaborative writing. The research questions are:

1. What perspectives do Moroccan EFL public high school students hold regarding collaborative learning in argumentative writing?
2. Which underlying factors shape students' attitudes toward collaborative writing?

2. REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

2.1. The Social Constructivist Theory

One effective way for teachers to cultivate adolescent students' higher-order thinking skills is by facilitating more language interactions in the classroom. This notion is supported by Lev Vygotsky, who argued that actual learning, which is capable of activating cognitive development, primarily stems from social interactions through language (Vygotsky et al., 1978). Jean Piaget, on the other hand, rejected this notion as he believed that development precedes learning and both are mainly shaped by an internal cognitive process (Pakpahan & Saragih, 2022). While Piaget places less emphasis on the role of language and social interactions in influencing learning and development, several studies have shown that interaction with more capable peers stimulates higher-order thinking skills and increases performance.

In light of the social constructivist theory, collaborative learning emerged as a powerful pedagogical approach that has the capacity to offer students a milieu to engage in the sort of interaction necessary for deeper learning. Provided that it is effectively deployed by the teacher, collaborative learning holds the promise of activating students' higher-order thinking skills in argumentative writing.

2.2. Collaborative Learning

Collaborative and cooperative learning share several characteristics, but they are also different in some ways. The two teaching approaches require that students work in small groups toward the same purpose, but the way students work makes the difference. In collaborative learning, students are asked to work together (Laal & Ghodsi, 2012), implying that they can interact and help each other throughout the learning process. In contrast, students in cooperative learning are required to work in groups where each one of them is deemed responsible for the completion of a specific part of the problem (Johnson et al., 2014).

Collaborative learning is more focused on the process than the outcome, facilitating peer feedback and exchange of ideas among students as they seek to solve the problem together (Azar et al., 2021). Since collaborative writing is mostly process-oriented, it is well-suited for students within the context of argumentative writing. It provides them with sufficient time to interact, practice and hone their ability to express opinion, support it with relevant reasons and evidence, and refute counter-arguments.

2.3. Process-based Writing

Process-based writing, which is defined as a systematic undertaking that encompasses pre-writing activities (e.g. planning and identifying the audience), drafting, and revising (Goldstein & Carr, 1996), has been proven more effective than product-based writing across several studies. Research indicated that teaching writing as a process had a massive impact on Moroccan EFL students' argumentative writing skills (Kadmiry, 2021). Irrespective of whether process-based writing is conducted in groups or individually, it significantly improved EFL students' argumentative writing performance (Dokchandra, 2018; Wonglakorn & Deerajviset, 2023).

However, certain stages in process-based writing have been shown to be more effective than others when carried out in groups. For instance, students reported that reviewing, planning,

and brainstorming were more effective than researching, editing and drafting (Hlatshwayo, 2024). Experimental research further demonstrated that brainstorming, planning and reviewing have the potential to efficiently boost students' writing performance when performed collaboratively (Landrieu et al., 2024).

2.4. Students' Attitudes of Collaborative Argumentative Writing

One of the major contributors to the success of collaborative writing in the classroom is the way in which it is viewed by students. This is inevitable because attitude shapes and influences intention and behaviour (Ajzen et al., 2018). This suggests that the teacher must develop awareness of the students' affective dimension in order to successfully foster their social and cognitive involvement in classroom tasks.

Internationally, previous research has shown that students' attitudes toward collaborative learning, especially in argumentative writing, are generally positive. For example, a study demonstrated that English language students held a positive attitude toward collaborative learning in argumentative writing (Masuara & Widiati, 2020). According to another study, 14 Chinese as a foreign language university students highlighted that collaborative writing boosted their motivation and confidence (Zhai, 2021). This result is concomitant with Vorobel and Kim's (2017) study, where 4 English as a second language secondary school students pointed out that they enjoyed group writing. Collaborative writing was also reported by Palestinian EFL students to promote exchange of ideas, new ways of supporting views, writing performance and critical thinking skills (Farrah, 2011).

In Alsehibany's (2024) study, Saudi EFL university students underscored the significance of peer feedback in improving their awareness of writing pitfalls. Additionally, Thai EFL secondary school students showed an overall positive view of collaborative writing in argumentative paragraphs (Wonglakorn & Deerajviset, 2023). Moreover, Moonma and Kaweera (2021) found that most students believed that collaborative writing improved their analyzing, evaluating and creating skills. Beniche (2023) showed a significant positive correlation between Moroccan EFL university students' performance in argumentative writing and their critical thinking skills.

In light of the findings presented above, students tended to attribute their optimistic outlooks mainly to the power of collaborative writing in providing a platform that allows for active participation, brainstorming, exchanging ideas and peer feedback (Farrah, 2011; Moonma & Kaweera, 2021; Wonglakorn & Deerajviset, 2023; Zhai, 2021). Chen and Yu (2019) found that students' attitudes of collaborative writing were primarily shaped by their beliefs regarding the value of collaborative writing activities, assistance from peers and group friendships.

Although many students have expressed favourable attitudes, some have suggested that collaborative writing can be challenging. Students in previous studies reported difficulties including insufficiency of time, low level of English, and poor communication (Alsehibany, 2024; Nešić & Hamidović, 2016; Wonglakorn & Deerajviset, 2023; Zhai, 2021). Other research revealed concerns about unequal participation, conflicts and absence of a relaxed atmosphere (Farrah, 2011; Nešić & Hamidović, 2016). Furthermore, some EFL students in Kuwait favoured individual work over collaborative work because they felt more at ease and focused working alone (Taqi & Al-Nouh, 2014), and Storch (2005) found that some students preferred writing alone due to discomfort and fear of criticism.

Nationally, the importance of a collaborative learning approach in English language teaching has been recognised among Moroccan EFL/ESP public high school teachers and university

students (Ait Hattani, 2024; Ghaicha & Mezouari, 2018; Laachir, 2019). Additionally, collaborative learning, particularly in argumentative writing, has recently been emphasized by Moroccan EFL high school teachers as a very valuable strategy for promoting active learning, motivation and exchange of feedback among students (Khamouja, 2025). Nevertheless, the significance of collaborative learning in argumentative writing has not yet been explored from the standpoint of Moroccan EFL public high school students, which is the gap this study addresses.

3. METHOD

3.1. Research Design

The current study seeks to gauge Moroccan EFL public high school students' attitudes toward collaborative learning in the context of argumentative writing. At the same time, it also aims to uncover the underlying factors shaping the students' attitudes. With these aims, the study follows an explanatory sequential mixed-methods research design. It relies on a questionnaire to identify students' perspectives of collaborative writing, while it uses follow-up interviews to gain deeper insights into the factors underlying the students' perspectives.

3.2. Instruments

In order to collect data, the study relied on a 5-point Likert scale questionnaire and a semi-structured interview. The questionnaire included students' demographic information, namely gender, age and major. Additionally, it consisted of 10 items that examined the perspectives of students regarding the value of collaborative learning within the scope of argumentative writing. Participants were asked to respond to 5-point Likert scale statements (1 = strongly disagree; 2 = disagree; 3 = neutral; 4 = agree; 5 = strongly agree). A semi-structured interview was also developed for the purpose of uncovering the underlying factors behind students' perspectives. The interview includes five closed- and open-ended questions that are followed by probes to provide richer data.

3.3. Validity and Reliability

The validity and reliability of both instruments were ensured in the current study. The two instruments underwent editing by the researchers to ensure face and content validity. With respect to the construct validity of the questionnaire, an exploratory factor analysis (EFA) was run, and all the items loaded within one single factor, surpassing the required threshold of 0.40. Cronbach's Alpha was used to examine reliability, revealing a coefficient of 0.874, which suggests a high internal consistency among the scale items. Table 1 shows the coefficient is higher than 0.70.

Table 1: The assessment of internal consistency of the instrument

Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
0.874	10

3.4. Participants

By means of convenience sampling, a total of 158 Moroccan EFL baccalaureate students were recruited in the present study, including 55 males and 103 females. Participants were selected from three public high schools in Casablanca, and their majors were arts, science and economics. Their ages ranged between 17 and 22 years. Although convenience sampling limits generalizability, it is useful when selecting participants based on their willingness and availability in order to explore their attitudes.

Purposive sampling was utilised to select 12 participants for follow-up semi-structured

interviews. Informed consent was collected from all participants. The respondents were told that the anonymity and confidentiality of their data were strictly maintained in the investigation.

3.5. Procedures

Participants were asked to respond to the questionnaire items and the interview questions based on their previous experience with group-work especially in argumentative writing. The questionnaire was first translated into Arabic to ensure that all participants could understand its content and answer correctly. After signing a consent form, participants completed the questionnaires inside the classroom. From these participants, 12 were then selected for follow-up semi-structured interviews according to their good level of English.

3.6. Data Analysis

In order to answer the first research question, data obtained from the questionnaire were analyzed in SPSS using descriptive statistics. Because thematic analysis is flexible, it was used to analyse data collected from the interviews to gain a deeper understanding of students’ perspectives (Braun & Clarke, 2006). This made it possible to identify recurrent themes and subthemes within the data and to answer the second research question.

4. RESULTS

4.1. Students’ Attitudes of Collaborative Learning in Argumentative Writing

The questionnaire examined the extent to which Moroccan EFL public high school students are willing to engage in collaborative learning in argumentative writing. Table 2 displays the results. Concerning item 1, most participants 39% “agree” and 28% “strongly agree” that they enjoy working in groups on writing tasks. With respect to item 2, the majority 46% “agree” and 31% “strongly agree” that their classmates’ feedback helps them improve their argumentative writing. As for item 3, 42% “agree” and 20% “strongly agree” that they feel more confident after working with their peers. Item 4 shows 36% “agree” and 27% “strongly agree” that they feel more motivated when they work in a group.

As regards item 5, 44% “agree” and 32% “strongly agree” that they find it easier to generate ideas in a group setting. Concerning item 6, 41% “agree” and 45% “strongly agree” that working in groups helps them understand different perspectives. For item 7, 45% “agree” and 27% “strongly agree” that working in groups helps them develop stronger arguments. Item 8 shows 42% “agree” and 22% “strongly agree” that group work improves their ability to structure an argumentative essay. For item 9, 48% “agree” and 27% “strongly agree” that their critical thinking skills improve through group discussions. Only 11% think that group work is a waste of time, whereas 72% oppose that statement.

Table 2: Students’ Attitudes toward Collaborative Learning in Argumentative Writing

Items	N/%	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
1. I enjoy working in groups on writing tasks.	N	5	16	30	62	45
	%	3%	10%	19%	39%	28%
2. My classmates’ feedback helps me improve my argumentative writing.	N	4	10	20	74	50
	%	2%	6%	12%	46%	31%
3. I feel more confident in my writing skills after working with peers.	N	4	17	37	67	33

Moroccan EFL Students' Attitudes toward Collaborative Learning in Argumentative Writing

	%	2%	10%	23%	42%	20%
4. I feel more motivated when I work on a writing task in a group.	N	5	16	36	58	43
	%	3%	10%	22%	36%	27%
5. I find it easier to generate ideas in a group setting.	N	6	12	17	71	52
	%	3%	7%	10%	44%	32%
6. Working in groups helps me understand different perspectives.	N	0	7	14	65	72
	%	0%	4%	8%	41%	45%
7. Working in groups helps me develop stronger arguments.	N	3	14	26	72	43
	%	1%	8%	16%	45%	27%
8. Working in groups improves my ability to structure an argumentative essay.	N	3	16	36	67	36
	%	1%	10%	22%	42%	22%
9. My critical thinking skills improve when I engage in group discussions.	N	3	15	37	60	43
	%	1%	9%	23%	38%	27%
10. I find group work to be a waste of time.	N	39	77	24	8	10
	%	24%	48%	15%	5%	6%

4.2. Factors Shaping Students' Attitudes of Collaborative Writing

The semi-structured interviews aimed at gaining deeper insights into the underlying factors shaping students' attitudes of collaborative writing. The findings paved the way for the emergence of two major themes: Factors Shaping Students' Favourable Attitudes of Collaborative Writing and Factors Underlying Students' Unfavourable Attitudes of Collaborative Writing.

The first major theme is Factors Shaping Students' Favourable Attitudes of Collaborative Writing. Participants expressed admiration toward group writing mainly because of its effectiveness in facilitating a space where students share ideas, exchange feedback, forge meaningful relationships and feel satisfied, comfortable, confident, and motivated. This is highlighted in the instances below.

Student 1: "We can share ideas. I can express my opinion. I can learn from others because in life we can always learn from each other."

Student 2: "It's a beautiful experience because we work with each other, we get to know each other more and we also create beautiful memories together."

Student 3: "I feel satisfied when I work with other people."

Student 4: "As you know, working with my friends makes me more confident, [and] more comfortable."

Student 5: "I feel when working in group motivation."

The second main theme centers on Factors Underlying Students' Unfavourable Attitudes of Collaborative Writing, divided into two subthemes. The first subtheme is Problems Faced in Collaborative Writing. Within this subtheme, a few participants revealed that they did not appreciate collaborative writing as a result of noise and feelings of anxiety in the presence of

strangers. Other respondents stated that they sometimes find collaborative writing to be difficult mainly because of fear of making mistakes, low level of English, and unequal participation.

Student 1: "I don't like to work in a group during writing classes because it makes the area noisy."

Student 2: "Like when the group has strangers, it is social anxiety."

Student 3: "Maybe I don't like people who disturb me, or I don't like committing mistakes."

Student 4: "Maybe when I'm speaking English and somebody cannot understand me."

Student 5: "When you work with strangers, you don't feel comfortable. And if they were not motivated, they'll let you do all the work by yourself."

The second subtheme is Reasons Influencing Students' Preference for Individual Writing. Participants stated that they sometimes favour individual writing over collaborative writing because individual writing can make them feel more at ease and improve their organisational skills, concentration and productivity.

Student 1: "Sometimes I feel more comfortable, and I focus more [working alone]."

Student 2: "I like being and working alone better than a group. I could be more organized when I am working alone."

Student 3: "Sometimes I prefer individual work when I am confident in my idea or when I need to focus and express myself more freely."

Student 4: "I can be more creative while writing by myself. I can produce more ideas."

5. DISCUSSION

The study sought to reveal Moroccan EFL public high school students' perspectives toward collaborative learning in argumentative writing and to uncover the underlying factors shaping those attitudes. Descriptive statistics plainly illustrated that most Moroccan EFL public high school students exhibited a positive perspective of collaborative learning in the context of argumentative writing.

Based on thematic analysis of the interviews, three core factors underlying students' favourable outlooks were highlighted: sharing ideas, exchanging peer feedback and building friendships. On the other hand, unfavourable views were influenced by the problems respondents encounter in collaborative writing (e.g., noise, anxiety, unequal contribution, low English language level and fear of making mistakes). These unfavorable views were also shaped by some participants' interest in individual writing, which they perceived as making them more comfortable, organized, concentrated and productive.

The principles underpinning the social constructivist theory emphasize that learning is a deeply social process (Vygotsky, 1978). In accordance with this, Moroccan EFL public high school students underscored the importance of collaborative writing in increasing their learning satisfaction and productivity. They admitted that it can offer them a space where they can discuss ideas, exchange feedback and get to know each other more.

The findings of the study are consistent with those of Masuara and Widiati's (2020) study in that English language students reported that they enjoyed collaborative writing. In congruence with Alsehibany (2024) and Wonglakorn and Deerajviset's (2023) findings, EFL students recruited in the current study emphasized that collaborative writing involving peer feedback plays an important role in enhancing their writing performance. In the present

research, participants also asserted that group writing made them feel more motivated and confident, similar to the results of Zhai (2021) and Vorobel and Kim (2017).

The findings of this inquiry are also in accordance with those of Farrah (2011) and Moonma and Kaweera (2021). In the present study, Moroccan EFL students recognized the value of collaborative writing in enabling them to generate more ideas, understand opposing views, write stronger and well-structured argumentative essays and hone their critical thinking. Corroborating Beniche (2023), these results underscore the necessity for students to master argumentative writing so as to sharpen their higher-order thinking skills.

Remarkably, most participants agreed that group writing is by no means a waste of time. This echoes the findings of Farrah (2011). Conversely, the results do not resonate with McLeish's (2009) inquiry, in which most students negatively viewed group work due to fear of getting low grades. These results denote that while many students appreciate group writing, others develop negative attitudes toward it because of ineffective implementation.

The findings drawn from the follow-up interviews showed that students' attitudes of group writing varied depending on their beliefs and experiences, in compliance with Chen and Yu's (2019) results. With regards to participants' favourable stance, it was primarily ascribed to the effectiveness of group writing in facilitating an environment where students share ideas, exchange peer feedback and build meaningful connections (Moonma & Kaweera, 2021; Wonglakorn & Deerajviset, 2023; Zhai, 2021).

Concerning the dislike for group writing expressed by some participants, it was mostly associated with noise, anxiety, low level of English, fear of making mistakes and unequal participation. These results align with the studies of Alsehibany (2024), Nešić and Hamidović (2016), Wonglakorn & Deerajviset (2023) and Zhai (2021). The findings also align with Storch's (2005) finding that a major obstacle for some students in collaborative writing was fear of peer criticism.

Moreover, the interviews indicated that some Moroccan EFL students sometimes felt more concentrated, organised, comfortable and productive when writing individually, backed up by findings of Taqi and Al-Nouh (2014) and Dobao and Blum (2013). This suggests that it is essential for the EFL teacher to enhance students' experience regarding collaborative writing through efficacious implementation, where students are trained to help each other, accept opposing views and see their mistakes as learning opportunities.

6. IMPLICATIONS AND CONCLUSION

It is very unlikely for the teacher to ensure a meaningful application of collaborative writing while being unaware of its merits among students. The current study has sought to probe the extent to which Moroccan EFL public high school students are willing to engage in collaborative learning in argumentative writing. Interestingly, participants held an overall positive attitude of collaborative writing, highlighting its role in creating a safe platform where opinions and peer feedback can be shared.

In this spirit, the current study provides several important implications for policymakers, curriculum designers and teachers. To facilitate the effectiveness of collaborative writing interventions, policies are indispensable to address the shortage of resources and overcrowded classrooms. Regarding EFL textbooks, they should be updated by including more activities that target critical thinking and require students to work in groups. It is equally crucial to allow students to take some of their summative assessments collaboratively so as to boost their confidence, motivation and performance. Moreover, the EFL teacher must be provided with professional development on effective ways to

implement collaborative writing.

When implementing collaborative writing, the teacher should ensure that individual disparities among students are equally distributed across groups. Although students in previous research have tended to prefer friends and same-gender-based groups (Bui et al., 2024; Shaberina et al., 2023), prior experimental studies have shown that heterogeneous groups actually outperformed homogenous groups in EFL writing achievement (Ghanbari & Abdolrezapour, 2020; Hansen et al., 2006; Hassaskhah & Mozaffari, 2015; Saleh et al., 2005). Group roles should be assigned voluntarily to ensure equal participation and reduce conflicts. The teacher also needs to train students on how to work effectively in groups.

The current study is not without limitations. It focused only on Moroccan EFL public high school students' attitudes in Casablanca and did not consider the perspective of private high school students. Additionally, female participants are nearly twice as many as male participants, indicating that gender can influence students' attitudes.

Future investigations are required to address these limitations. They could look into the impact of gender on students' attitudes of group work, include perspectives of public high school students from different areas in Morocco, and conduct comparative studies that include both private and public high school students. Ultimately, experimental research should measure the effect of collaboration on students' argumentative written texts.

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Moroccan EFL Students' Attitudes toward Collaborative Learning in Argumentative Writing

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