

## **Peer Feedback use on Collaborative Essay Writing within Project Based Learning: University Students' Perceptions and Experiences**



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**ABSTRACT:** This article makes use of information gathered through questionnaires and documents that were conducted as a part of a bigger study and specifically describes students' perspectives and experiences of project-based learning and collaborative essay writing in the Essay Writing Course and investigates students' perspectives and experiences of peer feedback use in collaborative essay writing. The study used a classroom action research (CAR) design and involved a group of 42 English Language Education Study Program students from Khairun University who were enrolled in the "Essay Writing" course during the academic year 2021–2022. The findings show that all the students were enthusiastic and active in collaborative essay writing. The findings also show that in collaborative essay writing, the students prefer group members and essay topics determined by their lecturer. The students viewed that peer feedback is important to improve group essays and the same is the feedback from their lecturer. In the introductory essay writing collaboratively, for instance, they experienced difficulties in providing peer feedback on focus, purpose, and thesis statement. This was revealed in their essay task completion that two of nine groups of students had the completed elements of the essay introduction (initial sentence that indicates the general topic, background information to the topic, thesis statement, and sub-topics to be included) throughout the seven tasks. Four other groups lacked thesis statements and subtopics to include in their essay introductions. The remaining three groups missed the thesis statement and sub-topics to be included in one or some of the seven essay tasks.

**KEYWORDS:** Collaborative essay writing, peer feedback, project-based learning, students' perceptions and experiences

### **I. INTRODUCTION**

The 21st century requires developing skills and abilities related to teamwork, digital literacy, critical thinking, and problem-solving, which calls for employing cutting-edge teaching strategies. According to Ananiadou and Claro (2009), these 21st-century aptitudes and competencies demonstrate the need for an existing economic and social growth paradigm. Nowadays, educators look for a better learning environment and a positive attitude toward learning English and it would be fostered by project-based learning (PjBL), which is recognized as a practical approach that supports a learning-by-doing strategy (Puangpunsi, 2021). It is argued that when students participate in learning by doing, they learn most effectively (Devkota, Giri, & Bagale, 2017).

Educators all over the world are creating projects for their students because they foster a passion for learning that extends to both students and teachers, foster a variety of skills (such as time management, collaboration, and problem-solving) that students will need in college, university, and the workplace, and can be modified to meet the needs of students with a variety of abilities and learning needs (Patton, 2012). As such, project-based learning is considered one of the methods that meet 21st-century learning because it develops the skills as requested. Patton (2012, p. 13) further indicated that in PjBL students design, plan, and complete a lengthy project that results in a publicly displayed output, such as a product, publication, or presentation. It is, therefore, advised that teachers implement PjBL learning to assist EFL students with problem-solving, decision-making, problem-analysis, and investigation of potential solutions. PjBL enables students to work largely independently over a prolonged period of time in order to produce realistic products or presentations as a result. Teachers then take on the role of facilitators and do not actually give students the right answers; instead, they just direct them through the learning process and provide feedback. Thus, PBL appears to be a respectable substitute for including 21st-century abilities in the teaching of English (Albahlal, 2019)

Learning to write English needs to be done collaboratively because, in the early stages, it needs a process to do pre-writing, while writing, and post-writing. Collaborative learning is proven to significantly improve students' abilities (Alwasilah, 2001). This collaborative learning provides opportunities for students to express their ideas and opinions, and ask each other for suggestions. At the same time, peer feedback can be done between learners. Traditionally, the only source of feedback students

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could rely on in writing classes was the teachers' comments. Peer feedback, which is viewed as a form of social contact, is argued to be able to enhance EFL writing motivation and result in beneficial learning results. According to Nelson (2000), collaborative learning in writing focuses on the process of problem-solving and thinking together. Collaborative learning provides opportunities for students who are skilled in writing (sometimes undetected) to share the knowledge of others. In addition, Nelson (2000) believes that collaborative learning improves students' communicative abilities and automatically enhances their positive social attitudes in learning and in their lives. Learning Essay Writing courses using PjBL are expected to maximize student activity in collaborating and providing peer feedback to maximize learning achievement in the form of essay writing expected in learning objectives.

Furthermore, as recommended in Main Performance Indicator number 7 (IKU7) at State Universities (Direktorat Jenderal Pendidikan Tinggi, 2021), which are *Collaborative and Participatory Classes*, incorporating the project-based method in the "Essay Writing" course, encourage learning that not only collaborative and participatory, but is also anticipated to maximize the attainment of essay writing. This study attempts to look into how project-based learning in the essay-writing course might improve essay-writing skills. The specific goals are to: 1) describe students' perspectives and experiences of project-based learning and collaborative essay writing in the essay writing course; and 2) investigate students' perspectives and experiences of peer feedback use in collaborative essay writing.

## II. LITERATURE REVIEW

### A. Project-Based Learning

Project-based learning (PjBL) is seen as a teaching strategy in which students learn by spending a lot of time researching and responding to a challenging, interesting, and authentic question, problem, or challenge (Buck Institute for Education, 2020). A student's autonomy, productive investigation, goal-setting, collaboration, communication, and reflection within real-world practices are characteristics of PjBL, which is an active, student-centered approach to instruction. It involves posing problems or putting students in specific situations and encouraging them to find and apply solutions. It gives students chances to complete educational tasks by working on group projects (Guo, Saab, Post, & Admiraal, 2020; Markula & Aksela, 2022; Puangpunsi, 2021). PjBL involves a number of phases, including choosing a project area, developing a plan, deciding on a timeline, monitoring the projects, evaluating the results, and reflecting on the experience (Sudadi et al., 2021). In their study, Fadilah, Sudjarwo, & Habsari (2023) found that the majority of students had favorable opinions about the use of PjBL and the use of PjBL in educational activities might boost their motivation and improve their writing ability (Fadhillah et al., 2023; Syarifah, 2018).

### B. Collaborative Writing and Essay Writing

The term "collaborative writing" refers to a learning activity where students work in small groups to create and write a text together, participate equally in the text's creation, and take responsibility for completing the assignment equally. To do this, they share ideas, plans, and suggestions for the joint text's composition and work together to solve any problems that arise as they write (Nykopp, Marttunen, & Erkens, 2019). The Sociocultural Theory of Vygotsky (1978), cited in Le (2021), is crucial to language learning in general and collaborative writing in particular. Collaborative writing is usually considered an important activity for the students at the tertiary level (Pham, 2021). Pham's (2021) study findings showed that students' writing fluency was improved through collaborative writing, as evidenced by the number of words in both their group- and solo-written papers. Additionally, the students' attitudes toward collaborative writing were favorable because they benefited from these group essay. The students added more valuable ideas to the essay as well. They were also able to learn from one another's writing styles, which improved their own. Collaborative writing may also serve to motivate students in the writing classroom.

An essay is defined as a brief literary work on a subject that expresses a personal opinion and it consists of the introduction, body, and conclusion. The introduction of an essay contains purpose, thesis statement, and focus. More specifically, the essay introduction should have initial sentence that introduces general topic, back information to the topic, thesis statement, and sub-topics to be included in the essay. The body of an essay discusses the sub-topics that have been pointed out in the introduction. The conclusion fulfills two distinct purposes, that is, to summarize the essay's main points without reiterating them, and to offer the reader a pertinent conclusion regarding what the author wants the reader to do, think, believe, or comprehend (Dewi, Faridi, Saleh, & Fitriati, 2021; Ibnian, 2011; Oshima & Hogue, 2007).

### C. Peer Feedback

Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory, which emphasizes that learning is not an individual activity but rather a cognitive activity and that the nature of learning shifts the focus on learning from individual to interaction within a social context, and provides an explanation for the rationale behind peer feedback (Bijami, Kashef, & Nejad, 2013), which similarly applies in collaborative writing. Bijani et al. (2013) have highlighted the benefits of peer feedback, such as encouraging students to participate in class activities and reducing their passive reliance on the teacher; increasing students' engagement and time spent on-task; resulting in less writing anxiety and more confidence; creating a social context for writing; encouraging students to think critically, develop

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their learner autonomy, and engage in social interaction; and enabling students to receive more individualized feedback. The drawbacks of peer feedback have also been highlighted by Bijani et al. (2013), including the likelihood that some peers would point out superficial mistakes and offer revision-unhelpful suggestions, as well as the fact that many others tend to focus on local rather than global errors at the sentence level.

To mention some, studies revealed the benefits of peer feedback on students' writing. Uymaz's (2019) study findings demonstrated that the participants benefited from peer feedback, and it was discovered that doing so reduced their writing anxiety. Sukumaran & Dass (2014) found that the participants of the study had a positive perspective on the use of peer feedback. Keskin's (2022) findings supported the value of the collaborative learning hypothesis by showing that students' writing improved after getting peer feedback.

### **III. METHODOLOGY**

This study used a classroom action research (CAR) design with a mixed approach of quantitative and qualitative data collection, a survey with a questionnaire, and documents to gather data (Burns, 2010; Creswell, 2012; 2014). The study employed two cycles of classroom action research (Burns, 2010; Creswell, 2012; 2014), with each cycle going through the processes of planning, implementing, observing, and reflecting. At the planning stage, students were interviewed and observed in class to determine the problem's sources and potential solutions. After identifying the issue's root cause, the researchers developed a plan of action to address the issue at hand. In this instance, the researchers developed essay-writing classes utilizing the project-based method, collaborating on writing. The students in the Essay Writing class were divided into nine groups, each consisting of four to five students. In Cycle I, the lecturer allocated the group members based on the name list's serial number. Each group similarly selected solely the lecturer-provided writing topics. Cycle I took place during meetings I to meeting VIII (mid-semester). In Cycle II, however, each group chose its own writing topics and group members. Cycle II took place from meeting IX to meeting XVI (final semester). Each cycle's preparation step included instruction on how to produce effective essays beginning with the introduction, body, conclusion, and references. Additionally, the student groups received training on how to give useful peer feedback based on the essay assessment criteria.

At the implementation stage of the CAR, each group of students started writing an essay in accordance with the lecturer's topics (Cycle 1) and the topic selected by each group (Cycle 2), beginning with the preliminary and final drafts of the Introduction, Body, and Conclusion within the time allotted in Cycles 1 and 2. At the observing stage, patterns of group collaboration and peer feedback were monitored in order to figure out how well the Project Based Method was being used. At this point, the introduction, body, and conclusion of each group's essay were monitored, along with how each group's members offered feedback on their essay writing. Finally, each group of students used the reflecting stage to consider their written essays and the feedback they received, and the lecturer used it to respond to the writings and feedback from the students. Each group had a chance to ask the lecturer questions and obtain answers. The lecturer answered their questions aloud in front of the class and gave feedback on frequent mistakes in their essays before students submitted their final essays to the lecturer.

This study involved a group of 45 English Education Study Program students from a state university who were enrolled in the "Essay Writing" course during the academic year 2021–2022. Questionnaires and documents were used to collect data. Questionnaire data concerning students' perceptions and experiences were obtained through the Google Form at the end of the semester. Meanwhile, document data sources in the form of group essay writing, both draft and final, were collected from the beginning to the final meeting of the Essay Writing course. Descriptive statistics that were created automatically by the Google Form were used to examine the data collected through questionnaires. As advised by Miles and Huberman (1978), the data gathered through papers (drafts and final essays written at each meeting) were thematically examined.

### **IV. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION**

#### **1. Students' perspectives and experiences of collaborative essay writing within the Project Based Learning**

Of the 42 respondents who responded to the poll, 22 (52.4%) preferred working in groups whose members were selected by the lecturer based on the attendance list. However, 18 (42.9) respondents stated that they preferred working in teams where each member was selected on their own. Only two respondents (4.8%) did not appreciate writing essays in groups who were either selected by their lecturer or fellow students.

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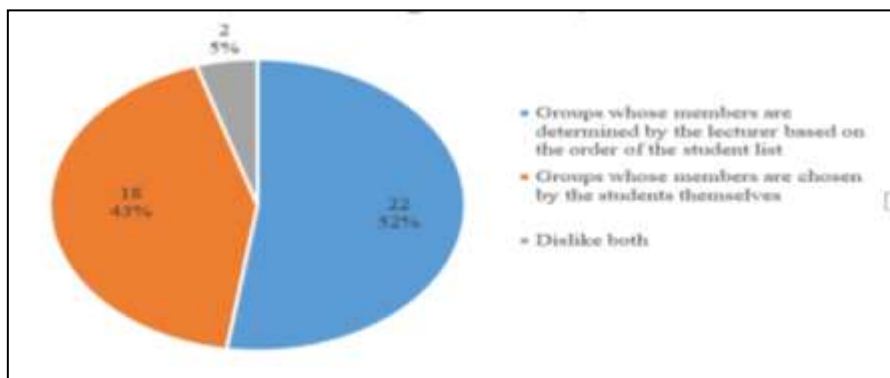


Figure 1. Students' perspectives and experiences of group member selection

Students argued that group projects chosen by the lecturer based on the attendance list were preferable because they felt more impartial and that other participants could accept them as more neutral or balanced than groups chosen by the students themselves because they only choose their friends, and friends who are more engaged or intelligent, willing to collaborate with anyone's friends, more organized, and who avoid misunderstandings among other group members. The students can prevent this, though, if they form their own group and do not limit it to their closest friends. They notice that when placed in the lecturer's chosen group, participants may collaborate without depending on one another, and since no one objects, if the buddies chosen by the lecturer are not their favorites, they can be more responsible with their lecturer's assigned homework and encourage group members who are not close to one another to get to know one another better. Students who prefer working in self-selected groups report being more focused, having more freedom in selecting their group mates, and finding it less difficult to discuss discoveries with people they know.

When working together to produce essays, there is a fair amount of balance between those who prefer that the topic be decided by the lecturer or selected by the students themselves. For instance, 18 (43%) respondents preferred the lecturer's suggested topics, whereas 24 (57%) preferred the subjects picked by the students.

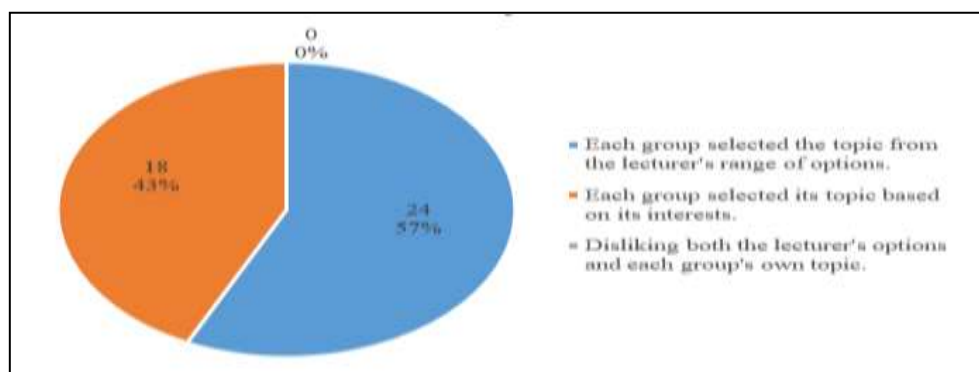
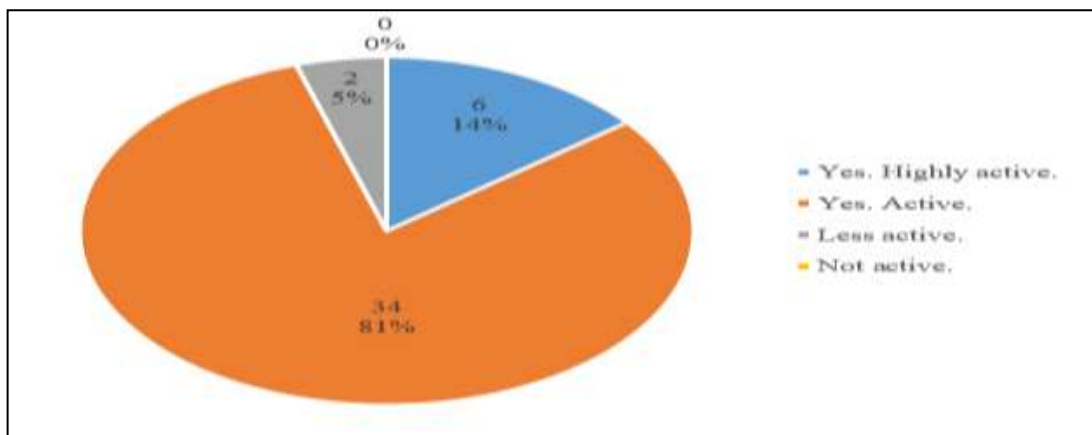


Figure 2. Students' perspectives and experiences of essay topic selection

Those who prefer that the lecturer choose the topic see that they no longer need to look for the topic, but it is more challenging. Those who prefer to choose their own topics claim that doing so makes it simpler for the group to enjoy leisure activities at their own discretion, better adjusting their interests, easier to write titles that are of interest and self-chosen, easy to understand the topic, according to the abilities of the group members themselves, and approved by each group member.

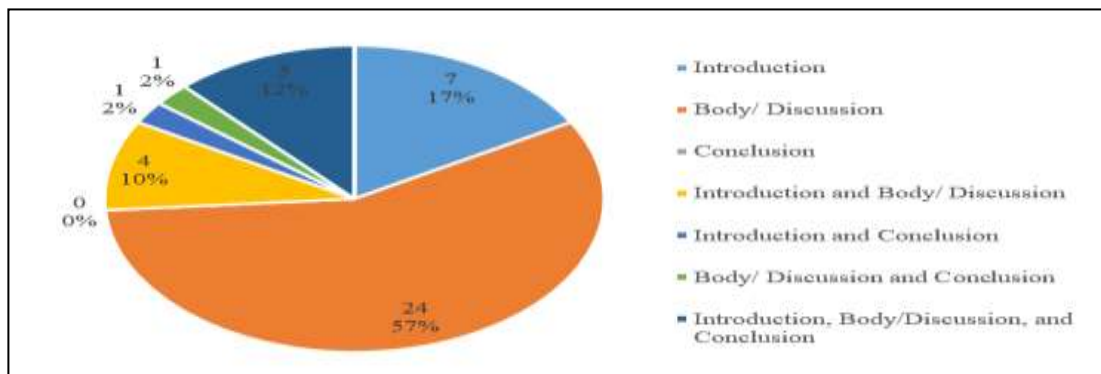
Regarding the group's participation in essay writing, 34 (81%) respondents took part actively, with 6 (14%) reporting that they were very active and 2 (5%) reporting that they were less active.

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**Figure 3. Students' participation in collaborative essay writing**

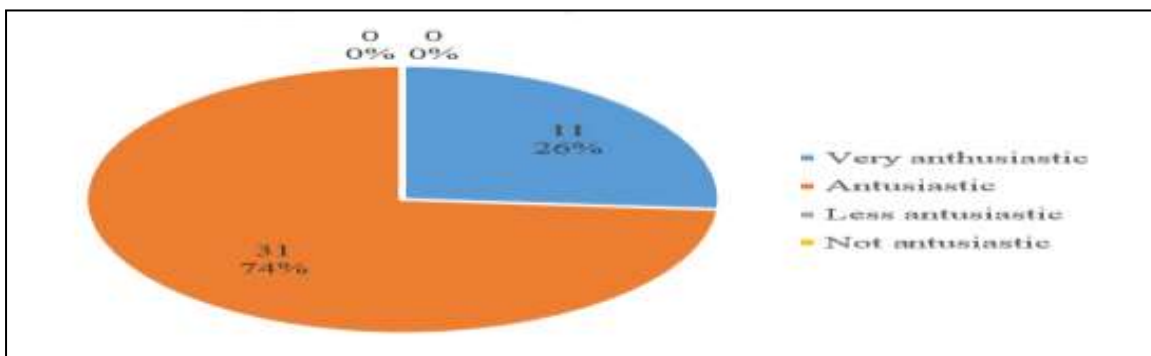
In writing essays collaboratively in groups, 24 (57.1%) considered that writing in the content section was the most difficult, followed by the introduction (seven respondents or 16.7%) and only five respondents (11.9%) stated the three sections (introduction, content, and author) were considered difficult.



**Figure 4. Students' experiences of difficulties in collaborative essay writing**

**2). Students' Perspectives and experiences of collaborative essay writing and peer feedback within the Project Based Learning.**

Data from the questionnaire revealed that of the 42 respondents, 11 (26.2%) were very excited and 31 (73.8%) were enthusiastic about taking part in the Project-Based Learning for Essay Writing.



**Figure 5. Students' perspectives of project based learning for collaborative essay writing**

They believed that by using the project-based learning approach to study the essay writing course, they would be able to comprehend essay writing more quickly, gain a fundamental understanding of how to write an article or journal correctly and accurately and enjoy learning how to write.

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Data from the questionnaire reveals that 42 respondents strongly agreed (52%) and agreed (48%) with the peer feedback given by each group member.

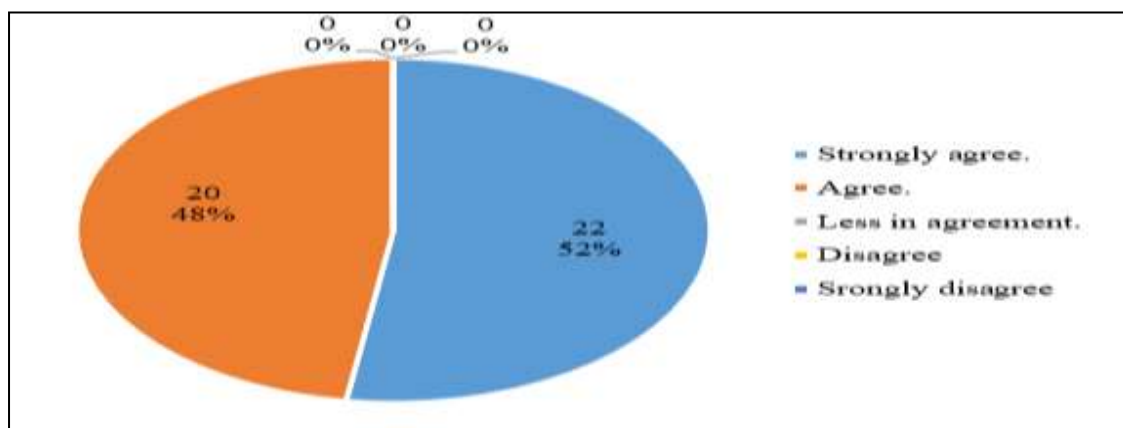


Figure 6. Students' perspectives of peer feedback in collaborative essay writing

They argued that by providing peer feedback, among other things, they could identify essay writing mistakes and then fix them, all group members could make revisions to the essays that were created, and all group members would become involved in creating essays and learning from one another.

Regarding the feedback from the lecturer, all 42 respondents believe that feedback is essential to improve student groups' essays. This demonstrates that they truly needed it.

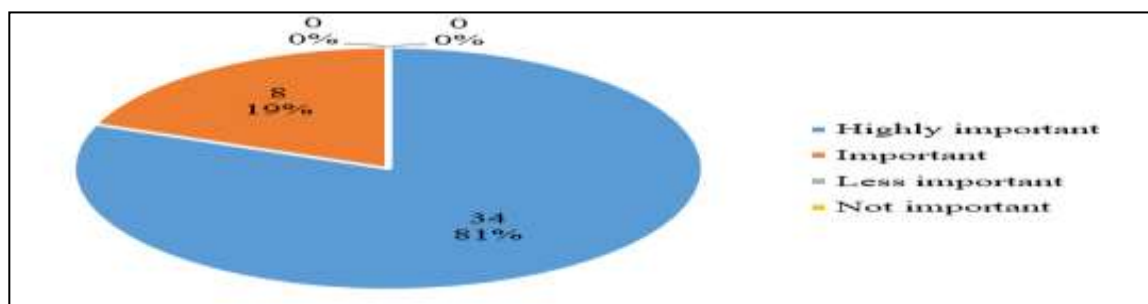


Figure 7. Students' perspectives of lecturer's feedback in collaborative essay writing

The reason is that besides being able to find mistakes to correct them, also because there are many aspects that students do not know and are only known by the lecturer, and can motivate students to write essays.

### 3. Lecturer feedback and peer feedback during collaborative essay writing within the Project Based Learning

The respondents realize that all facets of feedback from the lecturer are something that students truly require. However, when considering every aspect of the feedback, it becomes clear that 30 respondents, or 73.2%, feel that the aspects of focus, purpose, and thesis statement are the most in need of improvement. These respondents were followed by 18 respondents (43.9%) in the aspects of ideas, support, development, and sentence structure (grammar), respectively, and by 11 respondents (26.8%) in the aspects of structure, organization, and vocabulary. In contrast, seven respondents (17.1%) indicated that they felt the necessity for audience, tone, and point of view, and the same number of respondents in the aspects of proper mechanics and presentation.

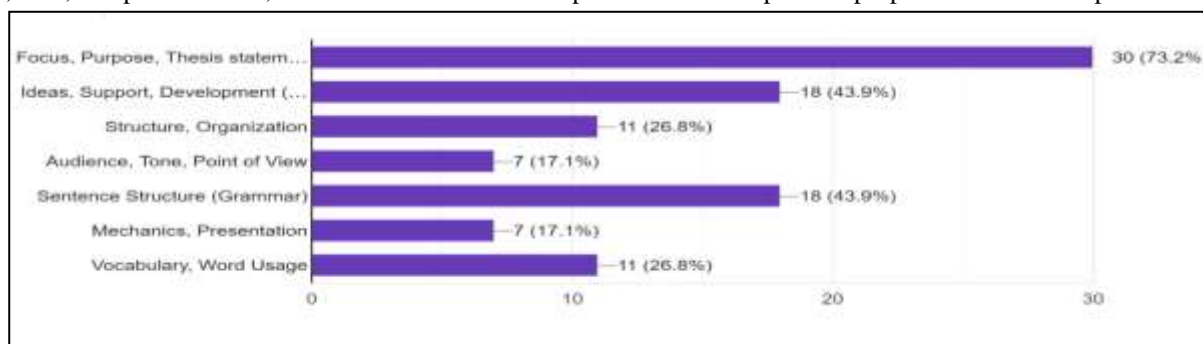
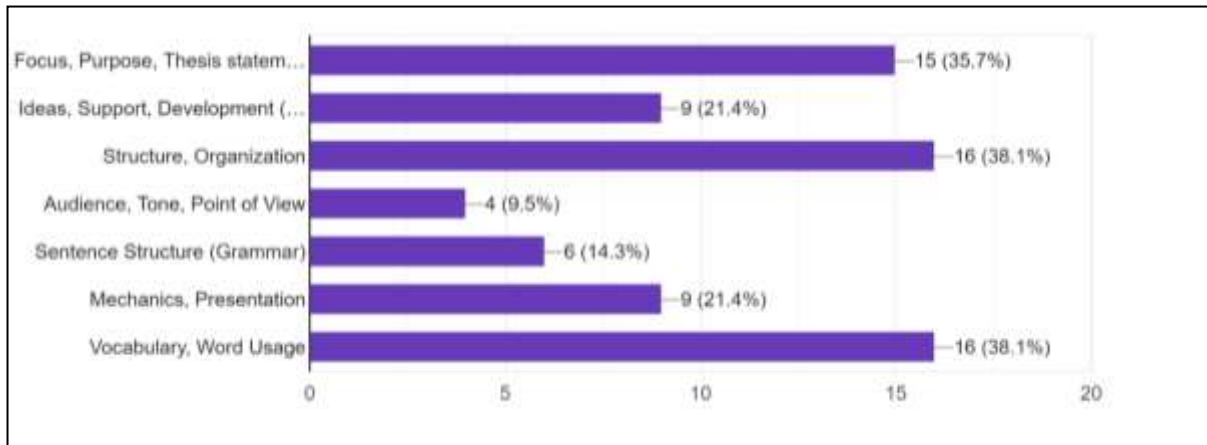


Figure 8. Students' need of lecturer's feedback on parts of collaborative essay writing

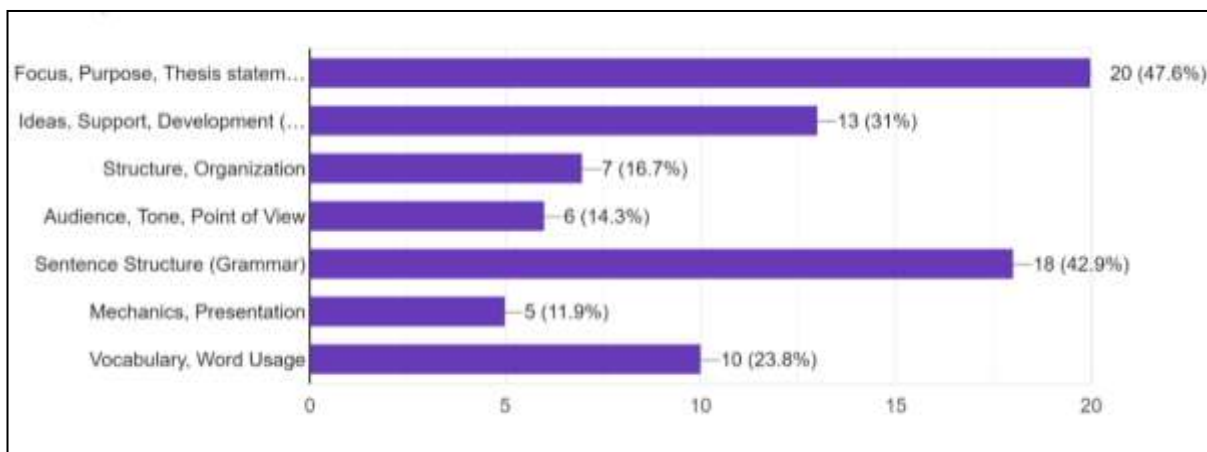
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Even if not every student is able to take part in each peer feedback component, students can still provide peer feedback to their groups in all areas. For instance, 16 respondents (38.1%) responded to each of the three aspects of structure, organization, and word usage, while 15 respondents (36.7%) and 9 respondents (21.4%), respectively, responded to the three aspects of focus, purpose, and thesis statement. Peer feedback on the grammar and sentence structure components was only provided by a small of students (six respondents or 14.3%), as well as the audience, tone, and point of view aspects (four respondents or 9.5%).



**Figure 9. Student's abilities in providing peer feedback on the collaborative essay writing**

Additionally, students acknowledged that it was difficult for them to provide peer feedback on particular aspects of their group essays. For instance, 20 respondents (47.6%) said that the features of focus, purpose, and thesis statement were challenging, followed by 18 respondents (42.9%), 13 respondents (31%), and 10 respondents (23.8%) who said that the aspects of sentence structure (grammar), ideas, support, and development were challenging. Fewer than 20% of respondents—seven respondents (16.7%), six respondents (14.3%), and five respondents (11.9%)—said the presentation, organization, audience, tone, point of view, and mechanics were crucial.



**Figure 10. Student's difficulties in providing peer feedback on the group essay writing**

This condition corresponds to the students' tasks in the introductory part of their essay. Only two groups of students (groups B and F) have complete elements of the essay introduction (initial sentence that indicates the general topic, background information to the topic, thesis statement, and sub-topics to be included) throughout the seven tasks. Group G's essay introduction lacked the thesis statement and sub-topics required for Task 1, but did include the thesis statement and sub-topics required for the remaining tasks (Tasks 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, and 7). For group C, however, the thesis statement and subtopics are absent from the essay introduction in Task 1, but they are present in Tasks 2, 3, and 4, are absent from Task 6, and are eventually included in Task 7 (the final task). In Group H, the thesis statement and the subtopics that should be included in the essay introduction are only included in Tasks 2 and 5, respectively, whereas they are absent from the other Tasks. Four of the groups (groups A, D, E, and I) lacked thesis statements and subtopics for their essay introductions. This suggests that these four student groups struggle, especially when it comes to creating thesis statements and subtopics for the introduction, and that they truly need some feedback

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**Table 1. Students' writing experiences of essay introductions**

No	Group	Tasks	Introduction			
			Initial sentence that indicates the general topic	Background information to the topic	Thesis statement	Sub topics to be included
1.	A	1	√	√	-	-
		2	√	√	-	-
		3	√	√	-	-
		4	√	√	-	-
		5	√	√	-	-
		6	√	√	-	-
		7	√	√	-	-
2.	B	1	√	√	√	√
		2	√	√	√	√
		3	√	√	√	√
		4	√	√	√	√
		5	√	√	√	√
		6	√	√	√	√
		7	√	√	√	√
3.	C	1	√	√	-	-
		2	√	√	√	√
		3	√	√	√	√
		4	√	√	√	√
		5	√	√	√	√
		6	√	√	-	-
		7	√	√	√	√
4.	D	1	√	√	-	-
		2	√	√	-	-
		3	√	√	-	-
		4	√	√	-	-
		5	√	√	-	-
		6	√	√	-	-
		7	√	√	-	-
5.	E	1	√	√	-	-
		2	√	√	-	-
		3	√	√	-	-
		4	√	√	-	-
		5	√	√	-	-
		6	√	√	-	-
		7	√	√	-	-
6.	F	1	√	√	√	√
		2	√	√	√	√
		3	√	√	√	√
		4	√	√	√	√
		5	√	√	√	√
		6	√	√	√	√
		7	√	√	√	√
7.	G	1	√	√	-	-
		2	√	√	√	√
		3	√	√	√	√
		4	√	√	√	√
		5	√	√	√	√
		6	√	√	√	√
		7	√	√	√	√
8.	H	1	√	√	-	-
		2	√	√	√	√
		3	√	√	-	-
		4	√	√	-	-
		5	√	√	√	√
		6	√	√	-	-

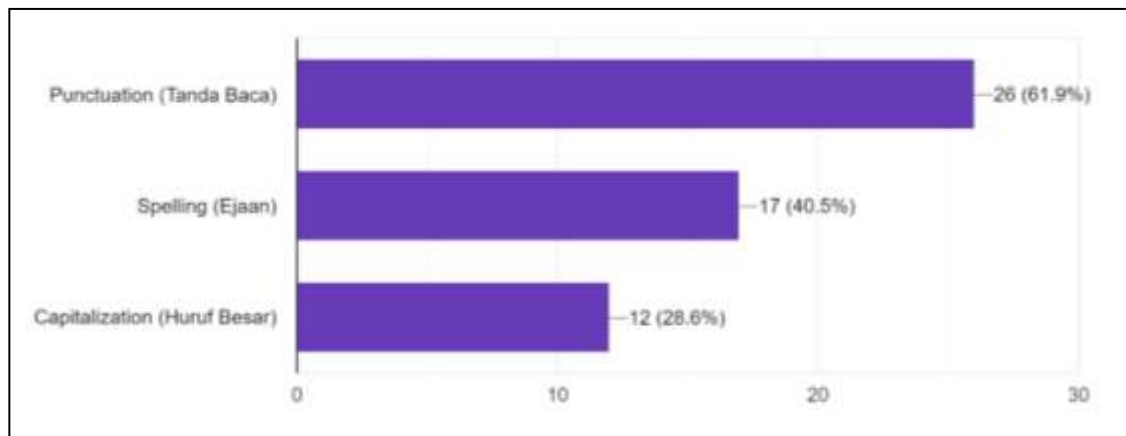


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		7	√	√	-	-
9.	I	1	√	√	-	-
		2	√	√	-	-
		3	√	√	-	-
		4	√	√	-	-
		5	√	√	-	-
		6	√	√	-	-
		7	√	√	-	-

Note: √ = available; - = missing

The respondents acknowledged using mechanics (punctuation, spelling, and capitalization) incorrectly. Punctuation mistakes were made by 26 respondents (61.9%), followed by spelling mistakes by 17 respondents (40.5%), and capitalization mistakes by 12 respondents (28.6%).



**Figure 11. Students' experiences of using mechanics and its mistakes**

Though there is no statistically significant difference, the study's participants preferred having their lecturer choose the group members over they did themselves. This is comparable to their essay topics, where the students preferred the topic options the lecturer provided rather than those they chose themselves. The reason for having their group members determined by their lecturer is because they felt more impartial and that other group members could accept them as more neutral or balanced. The findings of this study confirms the rationale of PjBL (Guo et al., 2020; Markula & Aksela, 2022; Patton, 2012; Puangpunsi, 2021; Saud Albahlal, 2019) and collaborative writing (Le, 2021; Nykopp et al., 2019; Pham, 2021) that both PjBL and collaborative writing allow students to become active and participate in essay writing activities. This study findings are also in line with the studies related to PjBL (Fadhillah et al., 2023; Syarifah, 2018) and collaborative writing (Pham, 2021) that both PjBL and collaborative can motivate students in essay writing classes.

The results of this study support Sukumaran & Dass' (2014) finding that all students had favorable opinions of peer feedback and agreed that it was important for them to improve their writings. However, this study findings challenged the findings in Keskin's (2022) study that peer feedback significantly improved students' writing. It is evident in this study that in terms of writing the essay introduction, only two of nine groups of students had complete elements (initial sentence that indicates general topic, background information to the topic, thesis statement, and sub-topic to be included). This is because the students found it challenging to provide peer feedback on whether the essay introduction's components were all present and correct. This is consistent with the findings of peer feedback by Bijani et al. (2013), who found that students are likely to prefer focusing on small, localized mistakes versus larger, systemic ones.

**CONCLUSIONS**

In conclusion, the use of PjBL and collaborative writing in the Essay Writing class has demonstrated that it motivates the students to study writing collaboratively and makes them active participants. All students have favorable opinions about peer feedback and agree that it is important for them to improve their writing. It is clear that only two of the nine student groups who wrote essay introductions included all the necessary components (a broad topic expression, background information, a thesis statement, and any necessary subtopics). This is due to the fact that the students found it difficult to give peer feedback on whether each component of the essay introduction was present and in order. This is in line with earlier research on peer feedback, which suggested that students would probably prefer to concentrate on tiny, localized errors rather than more significant systemic ones. The use of peer feedback to assist students in producing better essays may not be successful. This is consistent with the previous

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studies of peer feedback that students are likely to prefer focusing on small, localized mistakes versus larger, systemic ones. This suggests that the use of peer feedback to help students write better essays may not be successful. Students must receive the appropriate training in order to give effective peer feedback.

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