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A Collaborative Approach in Teaching Descriptive Text Writing: A Study on Grade 10 Students of ESTV-IT 28 Novembro Dili Timor Leste

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Abstract: This study aims to explore the implementation of a collaborative approach in teaching descriptive text writing to grade 10 students in one of the public schools ESTV-IT 28 Dili Timor Leste. The problem behind this study is the students' low ability to write descriptive text effectively, which is characterized by a lack of ideas, poor paragraph structure, and weak use of vocabulary. The collaborative approach is believed to address these problems. by providing space for students to discuss, give feedback, and build mutual understanding in the writing process. This research used a qualitative approach with a case study method. Data were collected through classroom observations, in-depth interviews with teachers and students, and document analysis in the form of student writing results and learning tools. The results show that the implementation of collaborative approach can increase students' involvement in the learning process, strengthen critical thinking and cooperation skills, and produce more structured and expressive writing. Despite challenges such as unequal participation in groups and time constraints, teacher mentoring strategies and the use of peer feedback proved effective in supporting the collaborative process. This study makes an important contribution to the development of collaboration-based writing teaching strategies, especially in descriptive text learning. The results of this study are expected to be a reference for teachers in designing learning that is contextual, participatory, and in accordance with the needs of 21st century students.

Keywords: Collaborative Approach, Descriptive Text Writing, Indonesian Language Learning

INTRODUCTION

Writing is an important skill in language learning, particularly in learning Indonesian as a foreign language. In the context of secondary education, this ability not only reflects mastery of grammar and vocabulary but also demonstrates critical thinking capacity, creativity, and the ability to convey information systematically (Harmer, 2007). One form of text taught in the high school curriculum is descriptive text, which aims to describe objects, people, places, or events in detail so that readers can imagine the object in question (Hyland, 2004). Furthermore, This study is grounded in the social constructivist philosophy proposed by Lev Vygotsky, which

emphasizes that knowledge is built through social and environmental interactions (Vygotsky, 1978). In writing learning, interaction between students through group work and discussion allows for the formation of a zone of proximal development (ZPD) where more capable students can help other students develop. The collaborative approach is also based on humanistic philosophy, which views students as active individuals who have the potential to develop optimally if placed in a supportive, open, and participatory learning environment (Rogers, 1983). Furthermore, this research is also relevant to the democratic educational paradigm that positions students as partners in the learning process, not merely passive recipients of knowledge.

However, in reality, the process of learning to write descriptive texts often faces various challenges, especially in grade 10. Many students experience difficulty developing ideas, using appropriate vocabulary, and constructing logical paragraph structures. This is often caused by individualistic, teacher-centered learning, which provides little space for students to share, discuss, and learn from one another (Richards & Renandya, 2002). Therefore, a learning approach is needed that can create a more interactive learning environment and support the development of students' writing skills. One approach that can address this challenge is the collaborative approach. This approach emphasizes cooperation among students in planning, composing, and revising their writing. Through group discussions, peer review, and teamwork, students not only receive feedback from their peers but also develop a sense of responsibility and confidence in their writing (Storch, 2005). Furthermore, a collaborative approach enables students to learn socially and actively, aligning with the principles of constructivist learning that position students as the subjects of learning (Vygotsky, 1978).

This research is relevant in the context of 21st-century learning, which emphasizes collaboration, creativity, and communication. Theoretically, this study enriches the literature on collaborative writing instruction in secondary schools. Practically, the results are expected to serve as a reference for teachers in designing contextual and participatory learning strategies and supporting the implementation of the Independent Curriculum which positions students as active learning subjects. This research offers novelty by incorporating a collaborative approach into the context of teaching descriptive texts, a field that has not been explicitly studied. This research also not only assesses the final product of students' writing but also explores the interaction process and dynamics of collaboration, including how students provide feedback and how that process influences the quality of their writing. With this approach, this study provides new insights into the importance of social learning processes in developing effective writing skills.

Although the collaborative approach has been widely studied in the context of language learning in general, there is still little research that specifically examines the implementation of this approach in teaching writing descriptive texts to 10th grade students at the high school level, especially in the context of Indonesian. Most studies focus more on other types of texts such as narrative or exposition, as well as at higher levels of education (Mahmud, 2019). Thus, this research fills an important gap in the discourse of collaborative learning on descriptive text types in secondary education environments. The research objectives were formulated as follows: (1) How is the implementation of the collaborative approach in teaching writing descriptive texts to 10th grade students (2) What are the challenges and strategies faced by teachers and students during the collaborative learning process.

METHOD

This research uses a descriptive qualitative approach with the type of case study method. This approach was chosen to explore in depth the process of implementing a collaborative approach in teaching descriptive text writing, as well as the dynamics of student interaction in group writing activities. The case study design allows researchers to understand phenomena

holistically within their real contexts, especially in the learning environment of 10th grade students of ESTV-IT 28 Dili Timor Leste (Creswell, 2012).

To support this research, the data collection techniques used include in-depth interviews, classroom observation, and document analysis. In-depth interviews were conducted to understand students' and teachers' perceptions of collaborative learning and its impact on students' writing skills. In the interview, the researcher used semi-structured questions that allowed for openness from the informants, so that the information obtained was more detailed and in-depth. Teachers and students at ESTV-IT 28 Dili Timor Leste were selected as the main informants in this interview, with the aim of getting representative views on their experiences in implementing collaborative learning in the classroom.

In addition, direct observation was conducted in the classroom to directly monitor the dynamics of interaction between students, the learning patterns applied, and students' participation in collaborative learning. Observation allows the researcher to see how students work together in groups, how they give feedback on classmates' writing, as well as students' responses to the given writing task. This includes observing the process of group discussion, idea generation, revision, and presentation. Through observation, researchers can get a more realistic picture of the effectiveness of collaborative learning in improving students' writing skills (Pugu et al., 2024). Document analysis technique was also conducted by examining students' writing before and after the implementation of collaborative learning. These documents include writing tasks completed by students in Indonesian language classes, and is analyzed to see changes in the aspects of grammar, vocabulary, and writing structure. This document analysis serves as additional data to verify the results of interviews and observations, as well as to see if there is a significant improvement in the quality of students' writing after the application of collaborative methods. Data obtained from interviews, observations, and documents were analyzed using thematic analysis techniques, namely by identifying the main themes that emerged from the data (Rifa'i, 2023). This technique allows researchers to identify important patterns related to the effect of collaborative learning on students' writing ability. In the analysis process, each collected data was organized and categorized based on relevant themes, such as "group interaction", "peer feedback", and "motivation in writing". Each theme was analyzed comprehensively to gain a thorough understanding of the effectiveness and challenges of collaborative learning in improving Indonesian writing competence in grade 10 of ESTV-IT 28 Dili Timor Leste. The validity of the data in this study was maintained through triangulation of data sources, namely by comparing information obtained from interviews, observations, and documents to ensure the consistency and validity of the findings. Triangulation is important in a qualitative approach to reduce bias and strengthen the validity of research results. By using various data collection techniques as well as in-depth analysis, this research is expected to provide a comprehensive insight into the application of collaborative learning and its role in improving the writing skills of SMK/ESTV students, especially in the 10th grade students of ESTV-IT 28 Dili Timor Leste.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

The results of this study indicate that the application of collaborative learning has a positive impact on students' Indonesian writing competence. Based on the analysis of data collected from observations, interviews, and document analysis in class 10 ESTV-IT 28 Dili Timor Leste. The following are the results of the research as follows:

a. Implementation of Collaborative Approach in Learning Descriptive Text Writing

The implementation of the collaborative approach in learning to write descriptive texts for grade 10 students is carried out through four main stages, namely group formation, discussion and idea generation, writing and revision, as well as presentation and reflection. Data

from 20 students and 4 people were obtained through learning observations, interviews with teachers and students, and document analysis of group writing results. The following is a description of the implementation results as follows:

1. Group Formation and Topic Determination.

At the beginning of the learning process, the teacher forms small groups of 4 to 5 students heterogeneously based on writing ability and activeness in class. The teacher said that each group would write a descriptive text with a certain theme chosen from the prepared list, such as "Favorite Tourist Attractions", "Inspirational Figures", and "Traditional Cultural Objects". Observation showed that the group formation process went smoothly. Students seemed enthusiastic about group activities. The teacher provides written guidance on the role of each group member, the main writer, idea recorder, grammar checker, and presenter.

2. Discussion and Idea Generation

At this stage, each group brainstorms ideas based on the chosen topic. Students discuss the characteristics of the object of description, key words, and paragraph structure. The teacher provides a brainstorming worksheet that helps students develop a descriptive paragraph outline consisting of: 1). Main sentence, 2) general description sentence, 3) physical/specific details, and, 4) short conclusion.

The observation showed that the discussion process in the group was active. Some students with better writing skills helped explain vocabulary to their groupmates. The teacher occasionally provided support with triggering questions and guidance in choosing the right sentence structure.

Interviews with students showed that they felt more confident when conveying ideas in groups compared to having to write individually from the beginning. One student stated:

"I usually don't know where to start, but during the discussion I know what to write."

3. Collaborative Text Writing and Revision

After developing an outline, the group begins to write a descriptive text in a collaborative task sheet format. One person is in charge of writing (taking turns), while the others help to organize sentences, choose words, and check for errors. The teacher introduces the peer-editing technique, where each group exchanges their writing for revision by the other groups using a simple scoring rubric.

The results of the documentation study showed an improvement in the quality of the writing structure compared to the previous individual assignment. The writing became more coherent, the paragraphs were logically arranged, and the use of vocabulary became more varied. Interviews with teachers showed that the process of joint revision and peer feedback helped students pay attention to aspects of grammar and text cohesion that were previously often overlooked.

4. Presentation and Reflection

Each group presented their writing in front of the class. This activity aims to train confidence, as well as provide space for other students to give feedback. After the presentation, the teacher asked students to do a written reflection on their learning experience during the collaborative process. Most students revealed that group work made them feel lighter in writing. They also learned from their friends' way of thinking. However, some students admitted that there were still group members who were less active, even though the teacher had tried to divide the roles fairly.

Based on the results of the research on the implementation of a collaborative approach in teaching descriptive text writing to grade 10 students successfully created an active, communicative, and student-centered learning atmosphere. Collaboration encourages student

participation in all stages of writing, from planning to revision. In addition to improving the quality of writing, this approach also strengthens students' communication skills, empathy, and responsibility towards the group learning process. Although there are still some challenges such as uneven participation, this approach generally shows high effectiveness in the context of descriptive text-based writing learning.

b. Challenges and strategies faced by teachers and students during the collaborative learning process.

1. Challenges faced by teachers and students during the collaborative learning process.

Based on the results of classroom observations, in-depth interviews, and teachers' reflective notes, a number of challenges emerged during the implementation of the collaborative approach. These challenges came from 20 students and 4 teachers, which can be seen in Table 3.1 as follows:

Table 3.1. Challenges faced by teachers and students during the collaborative learning process

No.	Aspects	Challenges Faced
1.	Student participation in the group	Inequality of contribution between members; active students dominate, while others are passive
2.	Student collaborative skills	Not yet accustomed to expressing opinions, giving constructive criticism, and resolving conflicts in groups
3.	Time management	Collaborative activities (discussion, writing, revision) took longer than planned
4.	Dependence on the teacher	Students tend to wait for the teacher's direction in determining ideas, words, and sentence structure.
5.	Inequality of supporting technology	Some groups are not used to using digital tools such as Google Docs to write together
6.	Domination of outstanding students	More advanced students often control the content unilaterally without healthy negotiation.

Source: Data processing results, 2025

Based on the results of the research analysis above in the table above shows that of the 20 students more confident and fluent in writing tend to dominate the discussion, while other students become passive and just follow the flow without making meaningful contributions. This shows the low level of collective awareness and fair division of roles in teamwork. This situation has the potential to undermine the essence of collaborative learning which actually demands equal involvement from all group members. As for the next challenge, students lack collaborative skills because they are not accustomed to expressing their opinions effectively, rebutting politely, or providing constructive feedback. The lack of ability to resolve minor conflicts within the group is also an obstacle. This shows that collaboration is not just about working together, but requires social and emotional skills that need to be explicitly trained.

The collaborative process (brainstorming, co-writing and revising) is proven to take longer than individual learning. Teachers recognize that collaborative learning cannot be completed in one meeting, especially when students need to go through an in-depth discussion and revision process. Although collaborative learning is designed to develop independence, some students still show high dependence on the teacher. They wait for instruction or validation from the teacher before taking a step in writing, whether in choosing words, constructing sentences, or designing paragraphs. This is an indicator that the transition process from teacher-centered to student-centered still needs time and pedagogical reinforcement. Students with higher academic abilities often organize the content of the writing unilaterally without opening

up space for discussion. This creates discomfort for other group members who feel underappreciated. This kind of domination can erode the participatory spirit in the group and, if not intervened, lead to pseudo-collaborative learning.

2. Strategies faced by teachers and students during the collaborative learning process.

Tabel 3.2. Strategy Implemented Observation and Interview Results

No.	Strategy Implemented	Performers	Observation and Interview Results
1.	The teacher assigns rotating roles in the group (writer, proofreader, speaker, etc.) so that all students actively participate.	Teacher	***Observation Results:*** In the implementation of learning, the teacher actively applies the role rotation system. In each writing session, students in the group are assigned different responsibilities: as the main writer, idea generator, grammar checker, and sentence structure rewriter. The teacher monitors and records the group dynamics and encourages students who seem passive**.** *"Today you are the writing part, and the others help with ideas and check grammar. Take turns tomorrow," the teacher said to one of the groups during observation "(2nd Meeting).* ***Teacher Interview*** *"If the roles are not divided, usually only one or two children work. I use a turn system, and I also evaluate their contribution. That's enough to help equalize participation."* (Indonesian Language Teacher, Interview 1)
2.	Teachers conduct mini trainings on discussion etiquette, conveying ideas, giving and receiving constructive criticism	Teacher	***Observation Results:*** At the beginning of the lesson, the teacher inserted a mini-training session on how to discuss, give feedback, and convey ideas politely. The teacher also gives examples of simple English expressions for giving feedback such as: *"I suggest we add more adjectives here" or "Can you explain why we use this structure?".* ***Student Interview:*** *"At first I was confused about what to say. But after being given the example sentences, I became more courageous in giving my opinion to my friends."* (Class Students 10 ESTV-IT 28 Dili Timor Leste)

3.	Learning is divided into structured stages (brainstorming → writing → revision → presentation) and managed with strict time management.	Teacher & Student	***Observation Results:*** The teacher divides the writing process into four structured stages: brainstorming, writing a draft, group revision, and presentation of results. Each stage is allocated time and the teacher displays a timer on the board. This helps students focus more and not spend too much time just discussing initial ideas. ***Student Interview:*** *"Writing together is fun but long. If it's not timed, they can get engrossed in conversation. That's why I create stages with a certain duration."* (Indonesian Language Teacher, Interview 2).
4.	The teacher gives general instructions but encourages students to solve writing problems independently in groups	Teacher	***Observation Results:*** The teacher limits direct intervention in the content of the writing. When the group asks for help, the teacher provides prompting questions for students to find their own answers, rather than directly providing solutions. *"If you want to describe a place as beautiful, what adjectives can you use besides 'beautiful'?" - (Teacher to one of the groups).* ***Student Interview*** *" I used to ask the teacher directly for the right word, but now I'm told to discuss it with my friends first. So we learn together."* (Class Students 10 ESTV-IT 28 Dili Timor Leste)
5.	Students use simple tools such as Microsoft Word or handwriting, while being guided through Google Docs step-by-step.	Students (with teacher guidance)	***Observation Results:*** Most of the groups were not used to using Google Docs. The teacher gave the alternative of handwriting on paper first, then transferring to Google Docs for revision. The teacher also assigned one student per group as a "digital typist". ***Student Interview*** *"I have never used Google Docs. But because there was one friend who could, we learned together and started using it in the third meeting." ."* (Class Students 10 ESTV-IT 28 Dili Timor Leste)

6.	The teacher monitors group dynamics and gives individual reflective assignments to foster awareness of equal roles.	Teacher & Student	***Observation Results:*** The teacher monitors groups that appear to be dominated by one student. The teacher then separates the roles of idea creator and editor in the group so that not all control is held by the strongest student. The teacher also gives individual reflection assignments at the end of the writing session, to encourage awareness of equal collaboration. ***Student Interview*** *: "Smart children sometimes unconsciously dominate. I give them reflection tasks and grade the process, not just the product, so they learn to appreciate the contributions of others."*(Indonesian Language Teacher, Interview 3).

Source: Results of Research Data Analysis, 2025

Based on the results of observations, interviews, and field documentation, it can be concluded that the implementation of a collaborative approach in teaching descriptive text writing to grade 10 students presents various complex challenges, both from academic, social, and technical aspects. To overcome these strategies, teachers and students implemented various adaptive and contextual strategies. The teacher acted as an active facilitator by designing a role rotation system, providing collaborative skills training, dividing the learning flow into structured stages, and using the trigger question technique to reduce student dependency. On the other hand, students began to show initiative in using supporting technology, dividing tasks based on the strengths of each member, and building more open communication within the group.

These strategies proved effective in encouraging active participation, improving collaborative writing skills, and establishing a participatory and reflective learning environment. Collaborative learning not only contributes to the quality of the descriptive texts produced, but also strengthens 21st century skills such as cooperation, communication, empathy, and problem solving. Thus, it can be concluded that the success of the collaborative approach in learning to write depends largely on the design of appropriate strategies and consistent support from teachers and students throughout the process.

Discussion

The results showed that the implementation of a collaborative approach in learning to write descriptive texts for grade 10 students had a positive impact on students' writing skills. Through group discussion activities, idea sharing, and peer feedback, students showed improvement in terms of paragraph structure, vocabulary choice, sentence cohesion, and grammar.

According to Storch (2005), collaboration in writing is not simply working together physically, but includes co-constructive interactions, where group members influence each other in linguistic decision-making and text organization. This process allows students to develop metacognitive awareness of their writing process, particularly in constructing accurate and interesting descriptive sentences. In the implementation of collaborative learning, descriptive text writing is done through several stages: brainstorming, drafting, peer feedback-

based revision, and reflection. Each of these stages contributes to the improvement of text quality in terms of content, structure, cohesion, and grammatical accuracy (Li & Zhu, 2013). In addition, the quality of descriptive text can be assessed from several main indicators, namely: (1) Clarity of Object Identification: how the object being described is specifically introduced, (2) Use of Descriptive Adjectives and Phrases: the extent to which the text describes the object with sensory or emotional details, (3) Coherence and Cohesion: the relationship between sentences and paragraphs, (4) Structural Regularity: the organization of the text follows a general descriptive pattern (identification - detailed description), and (5) Grammatical and Spelling Accuracy.

In collaborative learning, the improvement of descriptive text quality is reflected in the group's success in composing more complex and varied descriptive sentences. This is in line with Hyland's (2004) view that the writing process carried out together allows for a broader exploration of language forms due to the exchange of knowledge between members. A study by Wigglesworth & Storch (2009) also showed that students who wrote collaboratively produced better texts in terms of grammatical accuracy, lexical variety, and structural complexity than students who wrote individually. One important aspect of the collaborative approach is the peer feedback-based revision phase. In the context of descriptive texts, students give each other feedback on clarity of description, choice of adjectives, and effective use of phrases. This process stimulates students to re-evaluate their writing and opens up room for improvement that might otherwise be overlooked in individual work (Rollinson, 2005). In addition, discussions on vocabulary, sentence structure, and the logical order of paragraphs help to increase students' linguistic awareness. This is important in descriptive texts that demand precision and richness of detail. The collaborative approach not only affects the academic aspect of the text, but also strengthens the social dimension of learning. Through group work, students learn to listen, respond to ideas and build linguistic consensus together. This process enriches the content of the text as it reflects collective perspectives and knowledge.

According to Vygotsky's (1978) Sociocultural Theory, language develops through social interaction, and collaborative activities such as group writing create natural scaffolding that enables students to engage in tasks more complex than those they could achieve individually. Thus, in the context of descriptive text writing, collaboration is not only a means of task sharing, but a joint process to refine the quality of the final writing product through cognitive and social exchanges.

In addition, a study by (Amiruddin, 2019) revealed that collaborative learning can motivate students to learn. The findings of this study corroborate the theory, where students in grade eleven showed higher motivation and participation compared to students in other grades. This increase in motivation is most likely due to the sense of group responsibility and peer support. Johnson and Johnson state that collaborative learning creates a social dynamic where students feel valued and supported in the learning process, which in turn increases their desire to actively participate.

Learning helps improve students' critical thinking skills, the study also showed that group discussions allow students to think more deeply and develop their ideas better. This is important in writing, as critical thinking skills help students in structuring arguments, clarifying ideas, and organizing their writing. Furthermore, the implementation of collaborative learning is also proven to help students overcome anxiety in writing Indonesian, which is often a major obstacle for vocational students. Sarmin (2017) noted that peer feedback in collaborative learning can provide emotional comfort for students, where they feel more supported and less worried about criticism. In this study, students in the experimental class showed more active participation and higher enthusiasm in completing the writing tasks, which suggests that the collaborative learning atmosphere did help them to be more confident.

The findings of this study are also in line with the intrinsic motivation theory proposed by Sam (2024), which states that students' intrinsic motivation can be enhanced through a

learning environment that supports autonomy, competence and social connectedness. In the context of collaborative learning, students are given the opportunity to actively participate in learning activities, so they feel they have control over their own learning process. In addition, support from classmates and group responsibility create a sense of connectedness, which is an important factor in developing students' intrinsic motivation to learn and achieve.

On the other hand, the implementation of collaborative learning at ESTV-IT 28 Dili Timor Leste also faces certain challenges. For example, this study notes that the diversity of Indonesian language abilities among ESTV-IT 28 Dili Timor Leste students requires the teacher's role as an effective facilitator. In collaborative learning, teachers need to ensure that each student actively participates in the group and gets the opportunity to learn from peers. Wakhudin (2024) mentioned that in collaborative settings, the teacher's job is to manage group dynamics and facilitate constructive interactions among students. In the context of this study, the teacher's presence as an acilitator is crucial to ensure that students with lower Indonesian language proficiency do not feel left behind or isolated.

Overall, this study supports the view that collaborative learning is an effective strategy that can make students' Indonesian writing competence in grade 10 ESTV-IT 28 Dili Timor Leste. The findings are in line with existing literature and reinforce the argument that collaborative approaches not only in writing ability, but also provide additional benefits in terms of students' motivation, self-confidence and social skills. This research implies that to produce effective learning, schools need to consider integrating collaborative methods in the Indonesian language curriculum, especially at ESTV-IT 28 Dili Timor Leste which has its own challenges in foreign language learning.

CONCLUSION

This study shows that the application of a collaborative approach in teaching descriptive text writing to grade 10 students at ESTV-IT 28 Dili, Timor Leste is proven to make a positive and significant contribution to the approach of students' writing skills. Through a structured group work process including discussion of ideas, joint drafting, mutual revision, and presentation of results, students were not only able to produce richer, more systematic and coherent descriptive texts, but also showed improvement in the affective and social aspects of learning. In particular, the collaborative approach managed to improve key aspects in descriptive text such as vocabulary selection, use of sentence structure, clarity of ideas, and interparagraph cohesion. Students became more confident, active, and critical in writing because they felt directly involved in every process of composing the text together. Collaboration also encourages students to learn from peers, build mutual respect, and practice communication and teamwork skills. On the other hand, challenges such as participation inequality, time constraints, and students' lack of experience in group work can be overcome through adaptive pedagogical strategies. Teachers play an important role as facilitators by dividing roles within the group, providing work guidance, and assessing not only the final product but also the process of collaborative interaction. Considering the context of education in Timor Leste, this approach is in line with the need to develop young people with not only functional literacy skills but also social-emotional and cognitive skills. Therefore, the collaborative approach is worth recommending as a contextualized, participatory and relevant writing learning strategy to be widely implemented at the secondary school level in Timor Leste.

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