

The implementation of collaborative writing in EFL upper secondary school classrooms: A case study

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ABSTRACT

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Keywords:

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This single case study investigated the implementation of Collaborative Writing (CW) in an EFL upper secondary school classroom through the lens of Activity Theory (Engestrom, 1987). Data were collected from classroom observations and semi-structured interviews and analyzed to identify recurrent themes later mapped onto the activity system framework. The findings reveal that the teacher's active role in providing scaffolding and feedback is crucial in collaborative writing. Additionally, the strategic division of labor within student groups and the teacher's ongoing support significantly enhance the group's ability to meet the curriculum's educational objectives. The study further emphasizes the critical role of the classroom community, which is shaped by external factors such as academic policies, cultural norms, and students' language proficiency and attitudes toward learning. These factors necessitate the creation of an inclusive and supportive environment where clear rules, structured roles, and appropriate tools are aligned with the specific needs of the students. These findings suggest that for CW to be effectively implemented, teachers must consider these community-related factors and adapt their instructional strategies accordingly.

1. Introduction

Writing is an essential skill and often challenging for many English language learners. Thus, instruction holds a significant position in language teaching and learning (Javadi-Safa, 2018), and one way to improve the quality of teaching and learning of this skill, many researchers worldwide highly recommend EFL teachers use Collaborative Writing (CW) in their classrooms (Dobao, 2012; Storch, 2013).

Collaborative Writing (CW) originated from cooperative learning, rooted in the social constructivism suggested by Vygotsky (1987). It has been the topic of many published studies from which CW has been found to provide learners with productive feedback and critique as well as enhance learners' language accuracy, writing effectiveness, and student-centered teaching and learning (Storch, 2013; Sukirman, 2016; Wismath & Orr, 2015).

In Vietnam, in 2018, the Ministry of Education and Training in Vietnam introduced the 'New General Education English Curriculum' (GEEC), one of whose objectives is to promote interactive teaching methods that underscore the significance of collaborative learning in EFL classrooms (The Ministry of Education and Training, 2018). Following this, English language teachers in upper secondary schools have integrated CW activities into their lessons, enabling students to interact and work together on writing tasks effectively (Sousa et al., 2019; Yavuz & Arslan, 2018). However, the preliminary CW literature review indicated that CW research seems to primarily focus on the impacts of CW on learners' learning outcomes (Storch, 2013; Sukirman, 2016; Wismath & Orr, 2015; Zulfikar & Aulia, 2020) and learner's attitudes towards the use of WC (Alkhalaf, 2020; Anshu & Yesuf, 2022; Dobao & Blum, 2013) rather than how it is implemented in the classroom though those topics are equally important (Fraser, 2019). Furthermore, although CW has been implemented worldwide, very few studies have been conducted to investigate teachers' perceptions and implementation of CW teaching practices in Vietnamese EFL classrooms, especially in upper secondary school contexts. This shows the urgent need to explore teachers' actual implementation of this writing pedagogical method of CW in their EFL classrooms and their perceived challenges when doing this.

2. Literature review

2.1. Definitions of CW

According to Storch (2013), CW is an endeavor with a collective and mutually agreed-upon decision-making process and a shared obligation to produce a single text. Additionally, CW involves dividing the class into pairs or groups of students working together to jointly compose, edit, and draft a paper on their ideas (Barkley & Major, 2018). Similarly, Luna and Ortiz (2013) defined CW as a type of collaborative learning in which a student works with one or more peers to complete the writing process. More recently, Anggraini et al. (2020) provided a more comprehensive definition of CW as a collaborative learning activity that can be accomplished by students working together in pairs or groups, aiming to share their thoughts, teach one another, and provide suggestions to enhance the writing.

2.2. CW teaching practices in EFL contexts

2.2.1. CW task types

Storch (2013) stated that two main CW task types are used in EFL writing classrooms, including *meaning-focused tasks*, such as jigsaw and data commentary text, and *language-focused tasks*, like dictogloss and editing. However, other scholars (e.g., Al-Nafiseh, 2013; Mutwarasibo, 2013; Widodo, 2013) argued that workshops involving students collaborating in pairs or small groups to discuss concepts or find solutions to problems also represent a form of CW.

2.2.2. learner's grouping in CW teaching practices

According to Storch (2013), effective grouping should be based on students' English proficiency levels. She used three types of proficiency pairing: similar high EFL proficiency, similar low EFL proficiency, and mixed proficiency. Storch (2013) further stated that group size and group work distribution are pivotal for successful collaborative writing. Regarding CW group size, Storch reported that pairs are often preferred over small groups for CW tasks, which is different from the opinion of Dobao (2012), who indicated that small groups may offer greater language learning opportunities than pairs.

2.2.3. CW assessment

Evaluated aspects in CW include the assessment of students' CW outputs and their collaborative processes. Rubrics and peer assessment are commonly employed in evaluating the joint writing product (Challob et al., 2016; Vorobel & Kim, 2017). To assess the CW process, teachers can evaluate each writer's contributions (Alghasab & Handley, 2017), as well as their interactions and levels of collaboration in CW tasks (Chu et al., 2017). However, not all CW interactions are evident in the final written work (Alghasab & Handley, 2017; Storch, 2013). Thus, teachers should have clear, specific assessment criteria for the CW process and product (Storch, 2013).

2.3. The implementation of CW in EFL contexts

CW has gained widespread popularity in recent years as a pedagogical writing approach in foreign language education globally. Teachers have employed this CW teaching approach at different levels of education to enhance EFL learners' writing outcomes (Al Tai, 2015; Aldossary, 2021; Hsu & Lo, 2018) and improve their attitudes toward writing skills (Alkhalaf, 2020; Anshu & Yesuf, 2022; Dobao & Blum, 2013). The overall findings from the research have supported the positive impacts of the implementation of CW on teaching and learning writing in EFL contexts.

CW has become a practical pedagogical approach in Vietnam that has recently attracted many Vietnamese scholars and English language educators. Studies at the tertiary level (e.g., Pham, 2021; Pham & Nguyen, 2020) and secondary level (e.g., Nguyen & Phuong, 2021) have revealed students' positive effects and favorable attitudes towards CW.

2.4. Research gaps

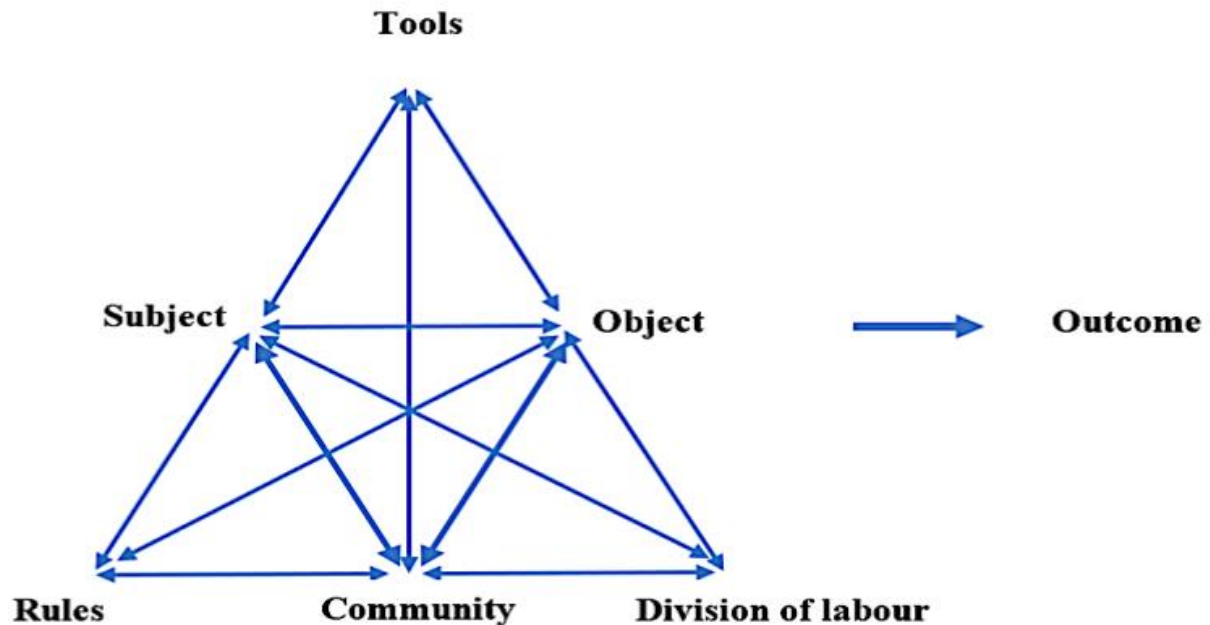
The findings from the reviewed research work underscore the value of CW as a valuable learning activity in writing instruction; however, there was a lack of studies on teachers' implementation of this teaching method. The present study was conducted to address the research gap and contribute to the existing knowledge, offering insights into how teachers have adopted this innovative CW approach within their teaching contexts and with the hope to provide valuable guidance for educators on the ongoing refinement of CW practices in EFL education. It sought to address the question:

How has the teacher implemented CW in his EFL upper secondary school writing classrooms?

2.5. Conceptual framework for the study

This study employed Activity Theory (AT) as a conceptual framework to investigate how an EFL upper secondary school teacher implements CW in the classrooms.

Activity Theory comprises six essential elements within an activity system (see *Figure 1*): Subjects, Objects, Tools, Community, Division of Labor, and Rules. Each of these six elements fulfills a unique purpose and synergizes with other components to establish an activity while interacting with one another (Engestrom, 1987).

Figure 1*Engestrom's Activity Triangle Model (Engestrom, 1987)*

Note. The data are from “Learning by expanding: An activity-theoretical approach to developmental research” by Y. Engestrom, 1987, Orienta-Konsultit

In this framework, *the subject* refers to the individual or group actively directing their actions towards the object. The subject is the teachers or the students (Huang & Lin, 2013). *The object* represents the aim of the activity within the system, the task that individuals aim to accomplish (Engestrom, 1987). This object can manifest physically or mentally, serving the activity's purpose (Ekundayo et al., 2012). A tool facilitates or influences the relationship between a subject and an object in an activity (Engestrom, 1987). *Tools* serve as mediating artifacts the subject utilizes to interact with the object (Daniels et al., 2010). These tools can be physical objects such as computers, textbooks, handouts, or pictures (Naidoo, 2017) or non-physical entities like thoughts, language, or signs (Huang & Lin, 2013). *The community* consists of one or more individuals who share the objective with the subject. Trust (2017) identified a community as like-minded individuals sharing common goals and values, such as facilitators and participating teachers, support staff, counselors, administrators, or the teacher and students within the community. *Rules* can be interpreted as principles governing control that encompass explicit and implicit regulations, norms, and conventions that limit actions and interactions within the activity system (Cole & Engeström, 1993). The *Division of Labor* pertains to organizing and distributing tasks and responsibilities within a community. This process is characterized by the roles teachers and learners assume (Cole & Engeström, 1993).

This case study investigated how an EFL upper secondary school teacher in Vietnam implemented CW in his classrooms. Under AT, the *subject* of the system was Trong (pseudonym), a male EFL teacher who applied CW in his class at an upper secondary school in Long An Province. The *object* was his implementation of CW. To attain the goal of implementing CW, Trong employed various mediational means as *tools*. The *rules* governed the system encompassed both teaching and the utilization of CW. The *community* involved the teacher and his students, each with distinct roles in the *division of labor*. The desired *outcome* was the creation of texts through the collaborative efforts of students.

3. Methodology

3.1. Research design

The study adopted a qualitative single case study research design based on the procedure described by Creswell (2018). Qualitative research design enables a more profound comprehension of participants' perspectives and experiences (Islam & Aldaihani, 2022), while a single case study provides a comprehensive exploration of a particular instance within its real-life context, yielding in-depth insights that can uncover unique phenomena and test theoretical assumptions (Yin, 2018).

3.2. Research setting

The study was conducted at an upper-secondary high school in Long An Province. The school is recognized as a national standard high school and stands out for its superior technological infrastructure. Nine EFL teachers are working as full-time staff at the school. The teachers fulfilled the CEFR English requirements for English language teachers. Each holds a Bachelor's or Master's degree in TESOL and has at least five years of teaching experience teaching at the upper secondary level.

There are 1,479 students in three grades, including grades 10, 11, and 12. Most students have learned English since grade 3, according to the 2018 National Curriculum of Viet Nam. They all study 03 English periods per week for 04 skills, including Listening, Speaking, Reading, and Writing.

3.3. Participant

The participant in this study is a male EFL school teacher, Trong (pseudonym), in an upper secondary school in Long An. He was purposefully selected for three reasons: (1) he had a passion for the implementation of CW in teaching Writing; (2) he is an EFL teacher responsible for teaching English to 10th and 11th graders of the school, according to the 2018 English National Curriculum at the time of the study; (3) he was willing to participate in the study.

3.4. Instruments

3.4.1. Classroom observation

The participant's classroom was observed to gather open-ended, first-hand information (Creswell, 2018). It was recorded with the participating teachers' consent and permission. Two 90-minute writing lessons, one in Week 1 and one in Week 2 were conducted using observational checklists and field notes. They were adapted from the Teaching Dimensions Observation Protocol (TDOP) (Hora, 2013), which covers six key components (i.e., tools, subject, object, rules, community, and division of labor) that are relevant to Activity Systems analysis (Hora & Ferrare, 2014). This allowed the analysis of the collected data within the context, including the participants (subject), the outcomes (object), and the rules and community involved (Jonassen & Rhrere-Murphy, 1999). The two observed sessions were video recorded.

3.4.2. Semi-structured interview

A semi-structured interview was employed, offering a balance between allowing the participant to respond openly and providing the researchers with control over the organization

of questions (Yin, 2018). The semi-structured interview was guided by questions and prompts developed by the key elements of the AT framework, namely Subject, Tools, Rules, Community, Division of Labor, and Object. It was audio recorded.

3.5. Data analysis

Data collected from classroom observation notes and semi-structured interviews were manually organized by MAXQDA software, facilitating comprehensive access to the data (Merriam & Tisdell 2015). The report is structured by six key analytical codes derived from Activity Theory: (i) subject (the teacher), (ii) tools (mediational means), (iii) object (CW - Collaborative Writing), (v) rules (rules governing teaching and CW usage), (vi) community (contexts), and (vii) division of labor (roles of teachers and students).

Constant comparative analysis was applied to discern patterns within the data and establish initial representative codes and categories (Yamagata-Lynch, 2010). The coding process followed a deductive approach guided by the research questions, emphasizing the abovementioned six thematic codes. Finally, the AT-driven theoretical framework was used to articulate the system.

3.6. Trustworthiness and ethical consideration

This study used various measures (e.g., triangulation, a code-recode process, member checks, and referential adequacy) to increase the study's trustworthiness (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). For triangulation, data were collected from classroom observations and semi-structured interviews. The researchers conducted a code-recode process to enhance the study's credibility (Krefting, 1991). Moreover, to minimize the influence of personal biases and viewpoints and ensure confirmability, member and participant checks were used before making decisions throughout the research process (Shenton, 2004).

Ethical considerations are paramount throughout educational research (Creswell, 2018). Once getting the participant's consent, we asked for permission from the school's principal where the participating teacher was working. The principal was provided with an information sheet stating the precise objectives of the study and a consent form. Before the interview, the participant received the interview questions in advance to ensure his comfort. He was also informed of his right to decline to answer any questions. Furthermore, participant's consent was obtained for video and audio recording. All data generated in this research were handled with utmost confidentiality.

4. Findings and discussion

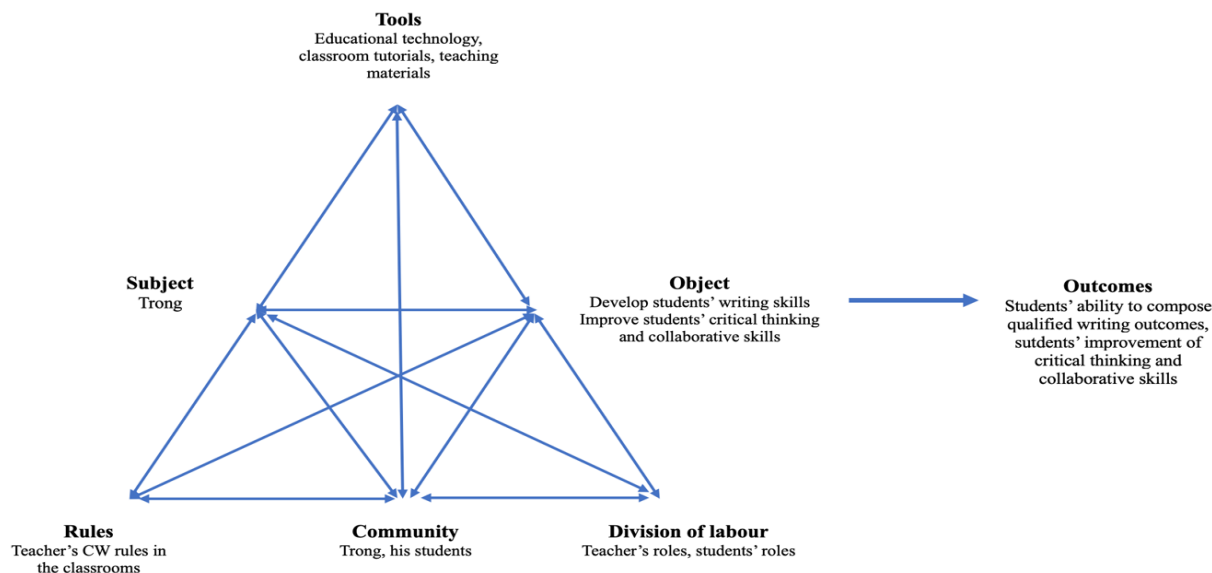
4.1. Findings

RQ: How has the teacher case implemented CW in his EFL upper secondary school writing classrooms?

The findings answering the research question were reported under six key themes according to the AT theory elements: *Subjects, Objects, Tools, Rules, Community, and Division of labor*. Figure 2 represents the AT system of Trong's implementation of CW.

Figure 2

Trong's Activity System for CW Implementation



Note. Data analysis result of the research

4.1.1. Subject

In this case, Trong was the subject of his activity system of CW implementation. Trong possesses an extensive background in TESOL. He earned a Master's degree in TESOL in 2015 and has served as an educator in the field of English language for twelve years. Trong's proficiency in the English language is certified at the C1 level according to the CEFR standards. Presently, he is pursuing a doctoral degree in a university in Vietnam. He has been employing CW for four years in his teaching.

During the study, Trong was in charge of two 10th-grade classes. His role involved initiating and guiding the CW process. To him, CW can significantly enhance teachers' problem-solving skills within the classroom environment. When interviewed, Trong emphasized:

The initiative assists educators in gaining additional experience, facilitating and enhancing students' collaborative skills and their abilities to resolve conflicts within the classroom setting. (Trong, Interview)

4.1.2. Object

The motive for implementing CW was the object of Trong's activity system. Data analysis revealed two main teaching objectives behind the teacher's implementation of CW. The first objective was to develop learners' writing skills through CW. Elaborating on this objective, Trong explained:

I want my students, in groups, through communication, to brainstorm more ideas for their writing. Moreover, high English achievers will provide instant corrective feedback to lower English achievers, helping them improve their writing outcomes.

The second objective of Trong's CW teaching was to improve his students' critical thinking and collaborative skills. He confirmed the impacts of group discussion on such micro-skills. In his own words, Trong noted:

My students will exchange ideas and refine their thoughts through peer interaction. This process plays a significant role in developing their debating and argumentative skills, helping them think more critically about their perspectives and those of others.

The **Object** of the system represented the transformational **Outcomes** that Trong aimed to achieve. This was not merely the execution of CW exercises but the embedding of a collaborative ethos and skills set into the writing curriculum. The primary outcome of this activity system was the well-constructed paragraphs produced by each group, which were later presented and critiqued by their peers. The second was his students' improvement in critical thinking skills and their ability to work collaboratively in pursuit of creating the best writing pieces.

4.1.3. Tools

Trong employed various tools when teaching CW, including educational technology, classroom tutorials, and *teaching materials*.

Educational technology

First, Trong utilized PowerPoint slides and digital games to activate students' prior knowledge, give instructions, and run through the topic vocabulary of the writing task. Besides, the students were encouraged to use their smartphones to connect to the Internet to search for further information during the CW activities. When interviewed, Trong preferred implementing educational technology in teaching, especially in CW lessons. He expressed:

Smartphones or tablets enable students to find ideas more quickly. Additionally, these devices aid students with lower English proficiency in finding and contributing ideas to the group's writing. (Trong, Interview)

Classroom tutorials

Furthermore, Trong applied different teaching tutorials, including the teacher's instructions for writing, timely corrective feedback and scaffolding, and the students' peer feedback. Trong also utilized writing models in the pre-CW task (see Figure 3).

Figure 3

A Sample of a Paragraph about a Wildlife Organization (Classroom Observation 1)

SAMPLE

The Global Wildlife Conservation (GWC)

The Global Wildlife Conservation (GWC), a non-profit established in 2002 in Austin, Texas, is dedicated to protecting endangered species and habitats worldwide. Its primary aim is to prevent mass extinction events by fostering biodiversity and sustainable ecosystems. The GWC focuses its efforts on protecting critical habitats and endangered species, having supported over 100 conservation projects across the globe. These projects include the establishment of protected areas and wildlife corridors, as well as species recovery programs. The organization's work has led to significant positive impacts on wildlife preservation, directly aiding the survival of numerous species. Individuals interested in supporting GWC can do so by volunteering, donating, or participating in advocacy and outreach programs

Note. Data analysis result of the research

Another tool used in Trong's CW lesson was his timely corrective feedback. Below is an example observed from Trong's CW lesson 1.

Teacher: "Let's look at this sentence, 'The tiger has been protected.' Have or has'?"

Student: "Oh! 'has,' 'tiger' is singular".

Teacher: "Exactly! Always ensure the subject and verb agree".

(Trong, Classroom Observation 1)

Furthermore, when his students were working in groups, Trong always walked around, listened, and gave scaffolding to each group. Below is an example of the observed lesson 1:

Teacher: What do you know about WWF?

Students: Protect endangered animals.

Teacher: Correct! Can you name some animals they protect?

Students: Tigers, pandas.

Teacher: Why is it important?

Students: prevent extinction.

Teacher (begin the sentence): Exactly. The WWF helps etc.

Students (continue): to prevent the extinction of tigers and pandas.

Teacher: Great! Now, write the whole sentence.

(Trong, Classroom Observation 1)

The excerpt above shows that the teacher helped the students expand on initial ideas and organize thoughts into a structured essay format through his scaffolding.

Teaching materials

In employing teaching materials, Trong extensively used textbooks, handouts for content support, student guidance, and posters for students' writing. He highly valued using textbooks in the application of CW, particularly those designed per the 2018 curriculum. He said:

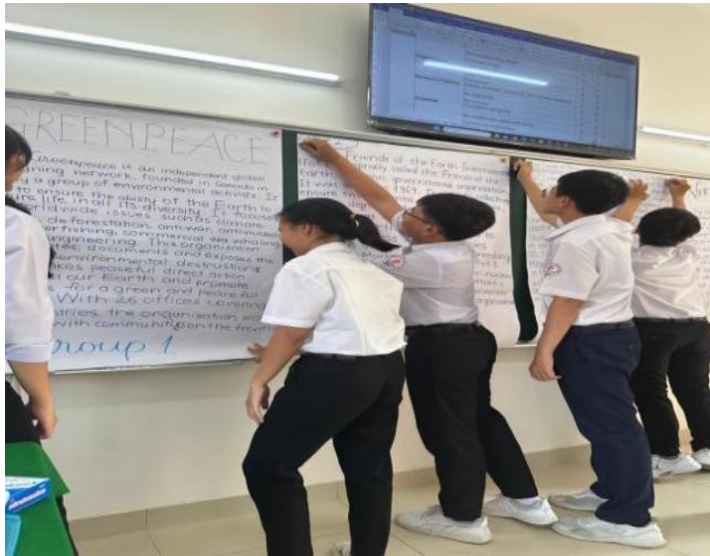
The textbooks provide reliable information; the writing tasks encourage student interaction and cooperation. (Trong, Interview)

Trong carefully designed handouts to support the CW process. He also provided specific guidelines and supplemental resources for each step in the CW process. In addition, he used posters for groups to present their final products. Despite the encouragement of using digital tools for group writing, Trong strongly appreciated the utilization of posters. He believed that these posters were not merely for showcasing the result but also served as a physical manifestation of the collective ideas and efforts of the students (see Figure 4). He said:

Posters made them use their imagination and think carefully. Using posters made their product something they could see and touch, ending with a display of what they all had worked on together. (Trong, Interview)

Figure 4

Students Stick Posters of Final CW Products on the Board (Trong, Classroom Observation 2)



Note. Data analysis result of the research

4.1.4. Community

The fourth element in Trong's activity system was the *Community*, consisting of the subject (Trong himself) and individuals (his students) who shared the CW. Talking about his students, Trong confessed:

Most students often hesitate to speak up, partly because they are shy and fear that speaking incorrectly or making mistakes will lead to ridicule. Additionally, most high school students tend to be passive. (Trong, Interview)

Therefore, he created a less threatening learning environment for them to encourage them to share ideas and collaborate with peers by walking around and supporting his students (see Figure 5). He said:

I want to improve my students' engagement and their willingness to contribute. So, I always provide a supportive and open atmosphere, encouraging them to share their ideas without fear of judgment, which is essential for successful collaboration. (Trong, Interview)

Figure 5

Trong was Supporting his Students (Classroom Observation 2)



Note. Data analysis result of the research

In short, the community, including himself and his students, was crucial to Trong's activity system. Trong fostered an inclusive, non-threatening learning environment that enhanced student interaction and mutual support within and between groups.

4.1.5. Rules

In Trong's activity system, the rules were set based on the curriculum objectives, the writing CW guidelines, and the writing rubrics. Trong believed that the effectiveness of his implementation was directly influenced by how he established these rules. He shared:

CW rules are fundamental. Without these rules (e.g., each student has to share their ideas and listen to their peers), high English achievers will dominate the conversations, the lower will always keep silent, it can be hazardous, and the group will not function effectively. (Trong, Interview)

Specifically, besides the writing performance, the CW products of each group were assessed on the extent of their collaborative effort. He said:

The 2018 program is designed to cultivate an environment that encourages independent learning and creativity and fosters collaborative skills among peers. Therefore, when I teach CW, I emphasize the spirit of teamwork. (Trong, Interview)

He integrated collaborative competence in the writing rubrics to improve the learners' collaborative learning. As excerpt three showed, the guidelines and writing rubrics were communicated clearly to the students.

Teacher: You'll work in groups, and each group will write a different organization. Remember, I'll grade you on how well you work together. Each group needs a leader and a secretary. (Trong, Classroom observation 1)

4.1.6. Division of labor

Division of labor in Trong's activity system reflected his roles and those of his students. Trong performed the role of a facilitator, adopting strategies to enhance participation among all students, especially those who were reticent. His approach entailed announcing the guidelines and rubrics for CW. He also visited each group, actively listening to the students' contributions, assessing the viability of ideas, and making adjustments as needed. Importantly, he actively solicited input from quieter students to foster a fully inclusive environment. Below is an example from the observed lesson 1, demonstrating his facilitator role:

Teacher: Group 2, which wildlife protection efforts are you diving into?

Student 3 (Group 2): Looking at 'Safeguard Habitats'.

Teacher: Kha, you've made some notes but haven't shared much. What part of their work stands out to you?

Kha (Group 2): Um, the ... protected areas?

Teacher: Yes, and what about those areas? Why is it important?

Kha (Group 2): They can ... live safe.

Teacher: Right, Kha. Safe habitats are crucial. Let's describe how 'Safeguard Habitats' has helped specific species.

(Trong, Classroom observation 1)

As Trong navigated through his facilitator role, he guided and empowered students to take ownership of their learning. He further shared in the interview:

I frequently interact with less vocal students, ensuring they are engaged. I evaluate the presented ideas, identifying what is reasonable and may need adjustment. I ask for the ideas of those who speak less, encouraging them to contribute to the discussion. (Trong, Interview)

In terms of the students' roles, they fulfilled the writing assignments as groups. Each group member had their duty. The teacher assigned groups in which students with different levels of English proficiency worked together to support, exchange, and give feedback effectively. He consistently emphasized the significance of collaborative efforts in CW. He highlighted, *"Everyone [every student] needs to interact, support, and respect each other throughout the CW process"*. (Trong, Interview)

The following excerpt is an example of one CW group discussion in the observed lesson 2:

Group Leader: Let's talk about 'Jungle Watchers'.

Student 1: They plant trees... 'reforestation'?

Group Leader: Uhm, 'reforestation.' please write that down.

Secretary: 'Reforestation'.

Student 2: They help local people 'educate'?

Group Leader: Right, 'educate'.

Secretary: OK, 'educate local communities'.

Group Leader: Anyone else? We're brainstorming.

Student 3: Protect animals from... săn trộm.

Group Leader: 'poaching'!

Secretary: 'Anti-poaching efforts.' OK.

(Trong, Classroom observation 2)

In the excerpt above, students contributed to the group's ability to perform tasks effectively. The group leader's encouragement of group brainstorming further illustrates the supportive atmosphere cultivated thanks to Trong's classroom management. Moreover, he particularly appreciated the role of group leader and secretary. He explained:

A secretary listens to all sides, synthesizing the key points sitting centrally to hear everyone better. A group leader with stronger language skills guides the group in the right direction, maintaining discussions on topics and assisting with language difficulties. Both have note-taking responsibilities. (Trong, Interview)

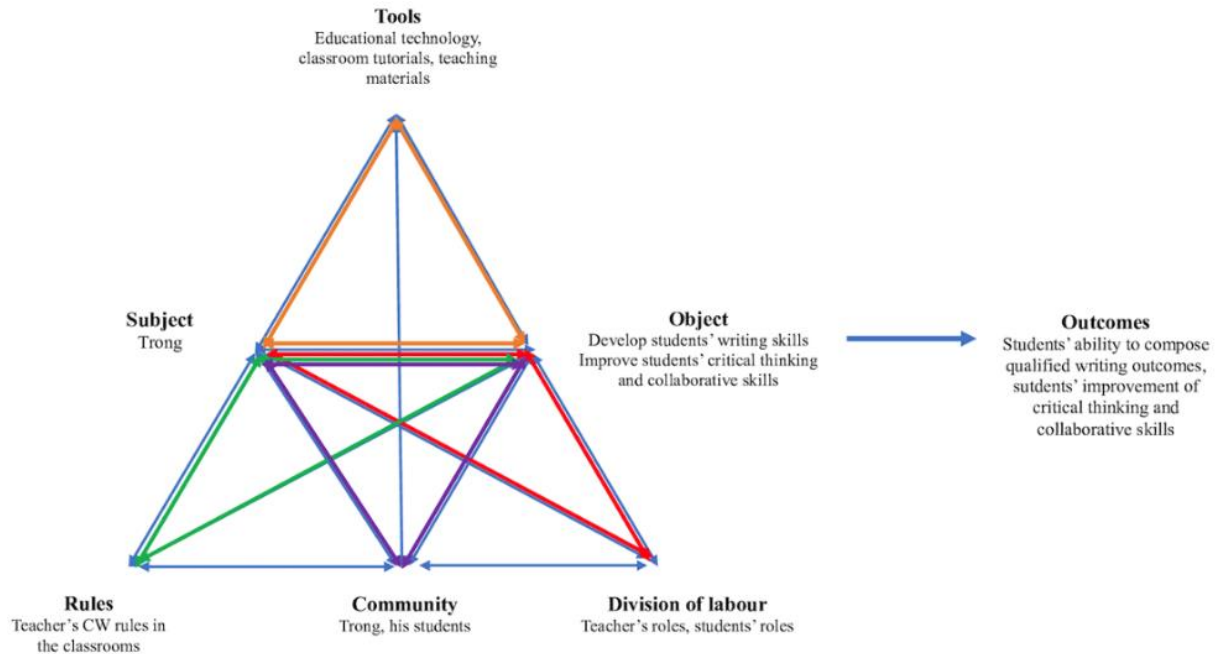
Together, the teacher's adept group composition and the distinct roles of the students facilitated a collaborative environment where diverse levels of English proficiency are not a barrier but a bridge to richer interaction and learning. This system reflects a deliberate pedagogical strategy where each member's contribution is valued and critical thinking is fostered, demonstrating the profound influence of teacher-guided task distribution in collaborative educational activities.

4.2. Discussion

Exploring Trong's perception and practice of CW and mapping them onto the AT revealed his implementation of CW in his EFL classrooms. The findings were discussed with a focus on the interactions among the components of the teacher case's Activity system: Subject-Tools-Object, Subject-Rules-Object, Subject-Division of Labour-Object, and Subject-Community-Object (see Figure 6).

Figure 6

The Teacher Case's Activity System



Note. Subject-Tools-Object

Subject-Rules-Object

Subject-Division of Labour- Object

Subject-Community-Object

Data analysis result of the research



4.2.1. Subject-Tools-Object

The orange triangle in Figure 6 represents the relationship among the Subject, Tools, and Object components. Central to this system is *the Subject*, Trong, an experienced EFL teacher with TESOL qualifications currently pursuing doctoral studies. With over a decade of experience in English language teaching, Trong has not only amassed extensive expertise but has also demonstrated a steadfast commitment to progressive educational ideals. He perceives CW, the *Object*, not merely as a teaching technique but as a vital strategy to meet the objectives of the English curriculum, enhancing students' writing skills, fostering their critical thinking, and developing their essential collaboration and communication abilities.

To interact with the *Object*, Trong (the *Subject*) employed various Tools, including educational technology, classroom tutorials, and teaching materials. Among such mediated artifacts, his classroom tutorials, particularly scaffolding, are key to facilitating the CW process. Specifically, to support students in structuring their writing and organizing their

thoughts, the teacher broke down tasks into manageable steps, provided them with writing models, and offered beginning sentences for their writing. These ensure that all students, regardless of their proficiency levels, can contribute to the writing process (Spycher, 2021).

Ultimately, using such tools and scaffolding directly contributed to the desired outcomes. These included well-structured paragraphs produced collaboratively and the improvement of critical thinking and communication skills. Through carefully using tools and teaching strategies, Trong successfully met the dual goals of enhancing students' writing competence and fostering a collaborative learning environment. This finding coincides with Al Tai (2015), Aldossary (2021), Hsu and Lo (2018), Pham (2021), and Nguyen and Phuong's (2021) results, which highlighted the positive impacts of this teaching method on enhancing EFL learners' writing outcomes at different level of education.

4.2.2. *Subject-Rules-Object*

The interaction among these components in the green triangle in Figure 6 indicates that the teacher's implementation of CW in his classrooms was influenced by the **Rules** (the curriculum objectives and CW rules in the classrooms). The teacher case emphasized the importance of the 2018 Vietnamese National English curriculum's goals, which focus on improving the learners' collaborative learning. Therefore, he integrated collaborative competence into the writing rubrics when setting the rules for CW tasks. This ensured that students were evaluated on their writing skills and teamwork. This dual focus is consistent with Vorobel and Kim's (2017) emphasis on using rubrics and peer assessments to evaluate joint writing products.

Additionally, to accurately capture individual contributions within group work, Trong applied rules such as assigning roles like leader and secretary, facilitating a more detailed assessment of each student's participation. This approach aligns with Alghasab and Handley's (2017) recommendation to assess individual contributions in CW, ensuring that each student's efforts are recognized and evaluated effectively.

4.2.3. *Subject-Division of Labour-Object*

The red triangle in Figure 6 illustrates the relationship between Trong's facilitative role (**Division of Labour**) and his objective of effectively implementing CW (**Object**). As the **Subject** in his activity system, Trong played a crucial role in shaping the dynamics of CW by strategically organizing the Division of Labour among his students. This approach enhanced participation and ensured meaningful contributions, directly supporting the Object of improving writing skills and collaborative competence.

Trong's facilitation involved guiding group interactions and actively encouraging input from all students, particularly those who were reticent. This inclusive strategy aligns with research that underscores teacher guidance's importance in maximizing collaborative learning's benefits (Storch, 2013). By assigning specific roles such as group leader and secretary, Trong effectively managed the Division of Labour, ensuring that students with varying proficiency levels could support each other, exchange ideas, and provide feedback. This method is consistent with literature suggesting that mixed-ability groupings can enhance learning by fostering peer support (Dobao, 2012).

4.2.4. *Subject-Community-Object*

The purple triangle in Figure 6 showcases the interaction among the Subject, Community, and Object components. Trong's position as the **Subject** in his activity system was instrumental in cultivating the **Community** necessary for successful CW. His students,

who often exhibited reticence and passivity, formed a learning community that required deliberate and thoughtful nurturing. Trong intentionally fostered a supportive and psychologically safe environment to overcome these challenges, enabling students to share their ideas without fear of judgment. This approach aligns with recent research underscoring the significance of a positive classroom community in promoting student engagement and enhancing learning outcomes (Kim, 2020).

The supportive atmosphere created by Trong was pivotal to achieving the **Object** of improving students' collaborative abilities and writing competencies. Through active facilitation, including real-time support and inclusive practices, Trong addresses the anxiety that can impede student participation. This is consistent with contemporary educational theory, which emphasizes the need for an inclusive and collaborative environment to optimize learning experiences (Reyes et al., 2012). Within this community, respect and constructive feedback are central, ensuring that the CW output reflects a truly collective effort rather than the contributions of a few dominant voices.

Overall, the **Community** in Trong's classroom was crucial to realizing the **Object** in CW. By transforming a hesitant and passive group of students into a cohesive, engaged learning community, Trong demonstrated the essential role of a well-supported environment in facilitating effective CW. This is corroborated by current academic discourse, which highlights the importance of community in fostering successful collaborative learning outcomes.

5. Conclusions & recommendations

5.1. Conclusions

This study has provided an in-depth analysis of how an EFL teacher at the upper secondary level implements CW in his upper secondary school classrooms. Through the lens of Activity Theory, it is clear that the effective implementation of CW hinges on several interrelated components: the teacher's role (**Subject**), the **Tools** used, the **Division of Labor**, the **Rules** established, and the dynamics within the classroom **Community**. The teacher's approach demonstrates that successful CW requires careful planning and execution, including selecting appropriate educational tools, clear role assignments, and consistent feedback mechanisms. These elements are vital in enhancing students' writing skills, fostering critical thinking, and developing collaborative competencies.

5.2. Recommendations

For CW to be successfully implemented in EFL classrooms, teachers must adopt an active and responsive approach to facilitating CW, providing tailored scaffolding and timely feedback to support students across varying proficiency levels. They must also ensure that all students can contribute meaningfully to the collaborative writing process. These can be carried out with (1) a well-structured division of labor that will enable each student to engage actively in the CW process, thereby enhancing the overall effectiveness of the group's collaborative efforts; (2) deliberate assignment of roles within student groups to maintain balanced group dynamics and ensuring accountability; (3) the selection and utilization of educational tools that align with curricular objectives and are responsive to the students' needs to facilitate a more organized and effective CW process; (4) formulation of clear and structured rules that emphasize collaborative competencies.

Furthermore, teachers should be informed that the community of students and teachers, which emerged as a particularly influential component in the implementation of CW, is heavily impacted by external factors such as educational policies, cultural norms, and the

student's language proficiency and attitudes toward learning. These external influences shape the classroom dynamics, making it essential for the teachers to create an environment that mitigates the challenges posed by these factors. To effectively teach CW, the teachers must foster a community that is inclusive, supportive, and conducive to collaboration. This involves creating a safe space where students feel comfortable sharing their ideas and adapting rules, division of labor, and tools to fit the specific needs and characteristics of the student body. Addressing these community-related factors, teachers can significantly enhance CW's effectiveness in achieving the English curriculum's educational objectives, ensuring all students benefit from this collaborative learning approach.

SCIENTIFIC CONTRIBUTION

The manuscript clearly identifies a research gap; the manuscript extends/refines existing theories; the manuscript offers policy/managerial/technological implications.

AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

CRedit: **Bui Thi Thuc Quyen**: Conceptualization, Formal Analysis, Validation, Writing - Original Draft, Writing - Review & Editing, Supervision; **Nguyen Thi Bao Tran**: Investigation, Formal Analysis, Visualization, Writing - Original Draft.

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All authors declare that they have no conflict of interest.

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