







# EFL Students' Perceptions and Challenges of Computer-Mediated Collaborative Writing in Academic Writing Courses at Van Lang University

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**Abstract.** The aim of the research is to discover the challenges regarding computer-mediated collaborative writing (CMCW) EFL learners encounter in academic writing courses and investigate their perceptions about CMCW activities via online applications. The researchers used qualitative and quantitative methods by carrying out questionnaires and interviews with 80 freshmen, sophomores, juniors, and seniors (interviews for 15 students) at the Faculty of Foreign Languages of Van Lang University (VLU) in Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam. The findings of the study suggest common difficulties EFL learners face when taking part in CMCW activities to help improve lecturers' teaching writing methods as well as students' writing performance during their learning process.

**Keywords:** academic writing · computer-mediated collaborative writing · challenges · perceptions · EFL students

## 1 Introduction

The English language is widely used to exchange ideas, data, and knowledge related to every aspect all over the world [5]. In Vietnam, this language is considered the core subject in education systems because of being taught and learned to help the Vietnamese interact with native speakers and experience new things [40]. When it comes to English skills, perhaps writing skills are the most challenging for individuals to master and teach [42]. Wee et al. [46] stated that notwithstanding the long process of studying English, learners or even EFL ones are more likely to make mistakes when writing. In order to reduce written errors as well as improve writing skills, EFL instructors have applied numerous teaching methods. One of the most effective ones is that students are allowed to work in groups and negotiate with their classmates. Also, the method is called “collaborative writing”, allowing students to share and do writing tasks together to make their writings more accurate and concise with peer feedback.

Each person has his or her own perspective, so it is thought that practicing writing is only suitable for working individually. Nonetheless, according to Vygotsky [44], learners can join hands with their tasks by talking about the topic, exchanging ideas,

and supporting each other to come up with more meaningful and fascinating concepts upon collaborating. As a result, collaboration is described as an advantageous way for students' learning process [30]. Except for collaborative learning, collaborative writing (CW) assists EFL students in improving their writing skills [17]. Besides, CW motivates learners to collaborate and discuss with group members during activities [29].

In recent years, the COVID-19 pandemic has had significant impacts on education across the globe. Hence, education systems must turn face-to-face classes into online ones [31]. Regarding online methods, e-learning applied at Van Lang University (VLU) is the best option in the pandemic. Studying from home makes learners use educational applications such as Microsoft Teams, Zoom, and so forth [9]. In terms of CW, EFL students have to become accustomed to computer-mediated collaborative writing (CMCW); therefore, it is essential for undergraduates to utilize online applications or social media, namely Facebook, Zalo, Microsoft Teams, Google Docs, etc. to create CMCW activities.

Some studies showed that CMCW has more merits than CW in some aspects. Compared with CMCW, students have limited time to finish their work in CW activities, but CMCW permits them to work together more freely [30]. Learners enhance knowledge construction [48], fluency, and grammatical accuracy [20] in online collaborative environments where they exchange information, share ideas, as well as have group discussions about writing assignments. Moreover, CMCW is reported to improve the accuracy of student writing and help learners to meet the accuracy criteria [6].

The research was conducted with two main purposes. The first one is to find out the challenges of online writing collaboration EFL students face to enhance their writing skills in academic writing classes. The second one is to discover their perceptions about using online platforms with a view to joining CMCW activities. The results of the paper recommend common difficulties EFL students overcome upon getting involved in CMCW activities so as to help educators build up more effective teaching strategies as well as improve learners' writing performance during their learning process.

## 2 Literature Review

### 2.1 Collaborative Writing

The significant role of writing skills is undeniable in academic success and professional fields [14]. There are several arguments about writing skills as a critical skill in academic and professional fields [28, 33, 36]. In most curriculum programs, writing assignments are especially focused on and utilized in most majors with the aim to help students practice their data analysis ability, information research skill, essay writing, argument construction, and several written tasks belonging to different particular subjects [47]. CW is the cooperation between two or more people in creating a writing text by the act of exchanging ideas and giving contributive opinions on the text so that they will have shared responsibility. Storch [38] defines CW as a writing text that is written by more than two people. The writing procedure can be conducted on online platforms that are equipped with technology tools and mediums.

According to Chapelle and Douglas [12], students' learning can be activated through the act of arguing about the content and ideas of the text. The empirical research of Vygotsky [44] suggests that critical thinking, solving skills, and language knowledge are

basically formed through daily talking, discussing, and argumentative activities. From that, CW is a proper study method that provides students with learning opportunities through discussing tasks. Besides, there are many constituents that affect CW such as differences in the abilities, English levels, and background of the student [21]. Moreover, Roberson [35] states that CW facilitated an environment suitable for the Communicative Language Teaching method for students as real English conversations are essential to CW.

Online collaborative writing (OCW) applications allow learners to join in an open online forum where they can discuss with multiple people to complete the joint writing task. However, learners cannot depend largely on these tools to achieve a successful project because there are many constituents that affect the learning such as their perspectives on OCW, their engagement in the work project, their connection between group members, and learning environments [7, 19].

## 2.2 The Effects of Collaborative Writing

A large number of scholars in the world discovered the positive effects of group interactive writing activities compared to individual writing ones. Most of them agreed that CW tends to be more positive than personal writing. Students joining CW can develop much better ideas, vocabulary, and accuracy [37]. Similarly, Kim [25] also agreed that students' vocabulary usage in collaboratively written products became superior in the posttests. Learners who discuss with group members to compose essays together learn a lot from others, leading to better results of posttests [18, 45]. Additionally, CW creates a supportive learning environment to improve learners' writing quality [39]. According to Hodges [23], CW can make students become active in learning and develop student creativity and ways to perceive an object. CW helps to develop learners' knowledge by learning from their peers [34]. Caspi and Blau [10] also say CW gives students opportunities to develop teamwork skills. Ellis and Goodyear [19] state that taking part in CW can make students more knowledgeable and professional.

Many researchers have pointed out the advantages of CW on students in academic writing performance. Students who get involved in CW platforms such as Google Docs are measured to have higher scores than those who work in groups in a real interactive classroom. Students' perceptions of the concept of CW are also positive [41]. CW promotes active learning by providing students with autonomous abilities for their learning and improving critical thinking skills on emerging issues when having a shared written text with the groups [41]. Social skills such as decision-making, group management, and interaction are increased in writing collaboratively. Students will verify their initial ideas before sharing them with other members of the groups. Through implementation and assessment of their peers, the initial ideas can be contributed to various aspects that are objective.

Villarreal and Gil-Sarratea [43] conducted a classroom-based study to discover the effects of CW on EFL settings in 2019. The participants of the study took part in two groups. The first one was the control group to write an argumentative essay individually, and the second one was the experimental group to work in pairs with the same task. They concluded that CW helps students produce more accurate and more lexically and grammatically complex essays to get higher scores in contents, structures, and organizations.

Moreover, CW brought students chances to collect ideas, consider the use of language carefully, and give others feedback.

In addition, Anggraini et al. [3] carried out their mixed-method study to investigate the influences of CW strategies on EFL students' writing skills and their perceptions of the strategies. The participants were 80 students from a public senior high school in West Sumatra, Indonesia. The researchers chose the samples categorized as the experimental and control class by using cluster random sampling. The students in the experimental class were taught by using CW strategies, and the students in the control class were taught by using conventional teaching strategies. After that, data collection consisted of writing tests and interviews to evaluate the students' writing skills and their perceptions of CW. The scholars pointed out that learners can generate their ideas and activate their background knowledge about the topics to develop their written products thanks to CW.

In 2021, Pham [32] investigated CW's effects on students' writing fluency. The participants of the study included 62 sophomore EFL students at a university in Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam. Collecting data was from students' pretests and posttests of both individually and collaboratively written essays and from semi-structured interviews. In particular, there were 27 students from the control group that wrote essays individually after discussing ideas with group members to make an outline, and there were 35 ones from the experimental group that wrote essays collaboratively. In addition, he suggested an efficient framework for CW activities lecturers teaching writing skills can apply to writing courses. The results of the research showed that CW can improve learners' writing fluency regarding the number of words in individually and collaboratively written papers.

Recently, Anshu and Yesuf [5] have examined the influences of CW on EFL learners' paragraph level writing performance with respect to the two aspects of writing: content and coherence. The researchers invited students at Felegebirahn Secondary School in Amhara Region, Ethiopia to participate in two groups (experimental and control) to gather data. The students in the experimental group were asked to practice paragraph level writing tasks collaboratively, whereas the rest in the control group were asked to practice the same writing tasks alone for 12 weeks. Anshu and Yesuf's data collection was paragraph writing tests and the participants' questionnaires and semi-structured interviews related to attitude towards CW. After the investigation, the results demonstrated that the learners joining CW activities had more significant improvements regarding the content and coherence of the paragraphs compared with the rest. In particular, CW activities in EFL classes improved learners' writing performance to develop relevant and coherent ideas when writing paragraphs. Also, the participants in the experimental group had positive attitudes towards CW. Specifically, they seemed eager to write in English owing to CW.

### **2.3 The Challenges of Collaborative Writing**

Although CW has benefits as well as positive impacts on students' writing skills, there remain numerous studies showing problems, difficulties, or challenges learners sometimes encounter during CW activities. Al Ajmi and Ali [1] and Ansarimoghaddam et al. [4] reported that learners had many different opinions about some problems in CW, so they might not get on well with others. Moreover, Al Ajmi and Ali [1] acknowledged

that unproductive or bossy group members and conflicting opinions affect students' CW experience. The causes of the problems might be due to members' language proficiency level, their personality, their cultural background, and their understanding of the CW tasks. Grimes and Gold [22] also showed some common challenges regarding CW: (1) problems scheduling regular times to brainstorm ideas and develop narrative, (2) issues among members in deciding who does what, (3) challenges from members understanding their action items and deliverables, (4) difficulties with members meeting deadlines, and (5) struggles with members feeling isolated and overwhelmed and thus losing writing momentum.

Alkhalaf [2] conducted a study to discover EFL students' attitudes towards CW and its challenges. The researcher applied the quantitative method to 50 Saudi female EFL learners. The results demonstrated that students' thoughts about CW are positive, but they faced problems regarding learners' behavior, assessment, and time management. Specifically, most group members' contribution is unequal because all of the members have the same score, which is unfair. Moreover, dominant members tend to control the group's discussion, and some of them decline other opposite perspectives. In spite of being EFL learners, students use their native language to express ideas during group work activities like CW, which may make them lose the opportunities to enhance their language skills. Concerning time management, 40% of the students agreed CW is time-consuming, whereas 38% chose "disagree". Alkhalaf [2] reported that students' attitudes about writing tasks can increase or decrease activities' time. For example, while passive students are likely to avoid collaboration and discussions, those who frequently spend more time are ready to discuss and share opinions.

In 2021, Chanwaiwit and Inpin [11] carried out their research to investigate EFL instructors' perceptions and challenges of teaching OCW with the solutions to the problems. The study applied classroom observations and interviews, including 24 participants (as well as EFL instructors) from 15 regional universities in Thailand to collect data. They acknowledged that teachers failed to motivate students to interact and collaborate with their partners due to the lack of online pedagogical and technological skills, giving rise to bad collaboration. The findings demonstrated that lecturers could not observe students' real writing performance. There is no doubt that it is simple for students to cheat or copy texts/essays from websites and online resources. Furthermore, the participants will fail to assess learners' writing performance and development accurately if students are allowed to work in groups. The scholars suggested that EFL lecturers should develop their teaching quality in terms of student engagement, goals, content, tools, classroom management strategies, instructor and student roles, CW activities, and assessment. According to Li [27], lecturers ought to utilize diverse synchronous learning technologies and teaching methods in pre-, while-, and post-writing activities to enhance their writing skills.

Furthermore, a study conducted by Bui [8] demonstrated the challenges EFL students at VLU faced when taking online writing courses via Microsoft Teams. She asked 96 third-year students from two online 10-week writing courses to complete a 10-item questionnaire. After gathering the data, she claimed that there were common challenges learners faced such as technical problems, lack of concentration, lack of interaction, time management, health problems, gaining knowledge, motivation, psychological problems,

and collaboration. In terms of writing collaboration, learners failed to work in groups with their classmates in online environments. Lecturers' and peers' feedback might be slow, and students lacked communication skills development in online writing courses. Besides, the students could not exchange with others, make friends or contact them in case they wish to ask about lessons.

#### **2.4 Students' Perceptions About Collaborative Writing**

In research done in Arab, Deveci [16] used the qualitative and quantitative model to investigate Arab students' perceptions of CW activities in the project-based course. The previous studies claimed that writers in fact have their own groups in which they can exchange ideas and interact socially with their peers during their writing process. Sixty-four students at Emirati university had participated in the research to give their opinions on CW in class using Project Based Learning. The survey found that students' attitudes towards CW are positive. Students agreed that CW is beneficial in improving critical thinking, teamwork skills, English learning, and technical ability during the process. Students have also realized the effects of CW on encouraging them to learn actively and be autonomous in learning.

Alkhalaf [2] used a quantitative model to interview Saudi female EFL learners about their experiences on CW and address the challenges they face during the process. In this study, 50 female EFL learners were asked to answer a questionnaire about their opinions on CW. The participants responded that they have positive attitudes toward CW along with some emerging obstacles they face related to behavior, assessment, and time management in the writing process. Participants all agree that CW helps promote motivation and develop communication skills, and critical thinking skills. Accordingly, 80% of learners agree that CW helps them practice analyzing the topic from multiple views. In addition, CW improves their grammar and enriched vocabulary. Consequently, EFL learners all recognized the crucial role of CW in their writing learning.

In another research done at Addis Ababa Science and Technology University, Lemma and Bogale [26] investigate the perceptions of 19 first-year engineering students towards the effects of using Wiki-based CW in EFL writing. A qualitative and quantitative model was used to study how students respond to this new CW tool. They found that 90% of students agree that CW helps them write more easily and productively. Moreover, 60% of students are aware that CW is useful for their writing learning such as enabling them to easily work in groups, receive encouragement in the process, and feel comfortable in the CW environment. Besides, the flexibility of allowing everyone to edit the writing text at any time is highly valued by students. Therefore, that leads to a better experience in comparison to face-to-face work. In conclusion, students have interested in using CW.

Nonetheless, there are still some difficulties when applying CW in practice. According to the research of Chen and Yu [13], the study explored students' attitudes toward CW implications in the classroom where students focus fully on their teacher. In this study, purposive participants are chosen, and the scholars gather information from a group of three learners with similar backgrounds. Several methods were conducted on students such as recordings, interviews, recall interviews, and response papers. The research reported that students agree that CW implication in the teacher-centered classroom is useful for learning writing skills, practicing organizing ability, reducing stress,

and building social relationships. However, the downside is that students are not facilitated to build confidence and lack chances to learn how to face struggles. In addition, it can cause stress when students engage in CW activities for the first time. They also feel shy, which causes inactive contributions. In summary, CW helps develop writing skills but gives limited chances for students to think and fix.

In Malaysia, Jalleh and Mahfoodh [24] used data collected from pre-university Chinese ESL students at a college to discover their perceptions of the practical CW implication on academic writing performance. The survey was conducted using a qualitative method. The research found that Chinese ESL students are aware of the critical role of CW, they consider CW as a supportive tool in which they can exchange ideas, improve and be confident about their writing. Moreover, the study found that the CW approach can be used to help students practice negotiating, and face different views and work-related problems. Nevertheless, students also identify some difficulties in the process of getting used to this new method. They have some worries due to not having enough time or having different levels. To sum up, they have positive opinions on CW, but they have yet to adapt to CW.

## 2.5 Research Gap

Although the previous studies examined the effects, challenges, and students' opinions of CW, there exist a few ones associated with the challenges and perceptions of EFL undergraduates when taking part in CMCW or OCW activities to date. The research aimed to fill the gap in order to discover EFL students' perceptions and challenges of computer-mediated collaborative writing in academic writing courses at VLU in Vietnam.

## 2.6 Research Questions

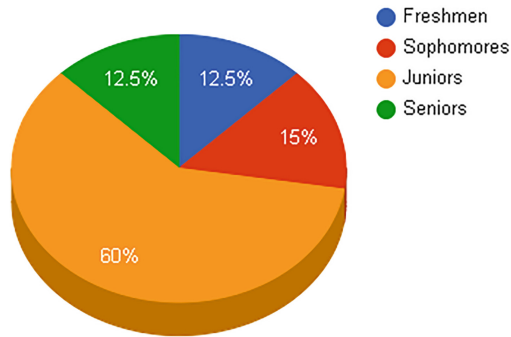
**Research Question 1:** What are the perceptions of EFL students about computer-mediated collaborative writing?

**Research Question 2:** What are the challenges EFL students face during computer-mediated collaborative writing activities?

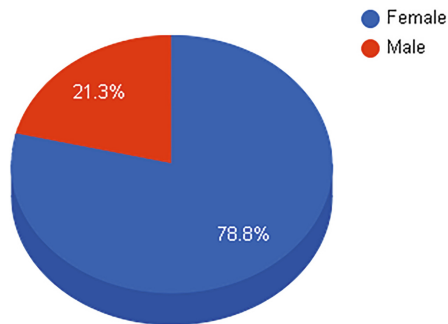
# 3 Methods

## 3.1 Pedagogical Setting and Participants

The study was carried out at the Faculty of Foreign Languages of Van Lang University, Ho Chi Minh City. The Faculty of Foreign Languages of VLU was established in 1995 with great success in education. At the Faculty of Foreign Languages, there are two main bachelor's programs: English Language and Chinese Language. With regard to the English Language, there exist five majors including English for Teaching, English for Business, English for Tourism, English for Translation and Interpretation, and English-Chinese for Business.



**Fig. 1.** Participants' year of study



**Fig. 2.** Participants' gender

The researchers chose 80 participants who were EFL freshmen, sophomores, juniors, and seniors at the Faculty of Foreign Languages of VLU in the academic year 2021–2022. Specifically, there were 63 female and 17 male participants (10 freshmen, 12 sophomores, 48 juniors, and 10 seniors). They also took online writing courses (Writing 1 to Writing 5) and joined CMCW activities in class. 80 participants were asked to fill in the surveys, and then the researchers selected 15 participants who volunteer to take part in the interviews (Figs. 1 and 2).

### 3.2 Design of the Study

With quantitative and qualitative methods, the researchers conducted semi-structured interviews and surveys to find out students' challenges and perceptions regarding CMCW. The participants were required to provide their personal information such as name, gender, and age. Their responses and data were used just for the purpose of the paper.

**Quantitative Research.** In terms of the quantitative method, the scholars used Google Forms to design online questionnaires with the 5-point Likert scale (SD = Strongly Disagree; D = Disagree; N = Neutral; A = Agree; SA = Strongly Agree). The study



aimed to conduct surveys with 80 EFL students at the Faculty of Foreign Languages of VLU. The participants had five to ten minutes to fill in the survey. The researchers spent about three weeks gathering sufficient responses from the participants.

**Qualitative Research.** The researchers invited 15 EFL students to join interviews to talk about their perceptions of CMCW as well as challenges they faced during CMCW activities. Because of technologies' convenience, online interviews were carried out rather than face-to-face ones. The participants had rights to choose online platforms they would like (Microsoft Teams, Zoom, Zalo, Facebook Messenger, etc.).

### 3.3 Data Collection and Analysis

In order to respond to the research questions, the researchers applied various ways to present the results of the study with comparing to other previous studies.

**Questionnaires.** The questionnaires were designed and delivered to 80 random participants. They had about ten minutes to finish their surveys. The questionnaire list included two parts: (1) *The perceptions of EFL students about computer-mediated collaborative writing* and (2) *The challenges EFL students face during computer-mediated collaborative writing activities*. After collecting enough data, the researchers created tables to summarize and present the findings from responses with percentages/numbers and explanations.

**Interview.** 15 students were chosen to be interviewed via online applications. Each online interview lasted about five to ten minutes and was recorded. During the process of the interviews, what interviewees said would be noted carefully. After that, all interview answers were presented with explanations. Here are the interview questions:

- 1) Do you think lecturers should apply computer-mediated collaborative writing more frequently during writing courses? Why?
- 2) Do you think you face more challenges when joining computer-mediated collaborative writing compared with face-to-face one? Why?

## 4 Results/Findings and Discussion

### 4.1 Results/Findings

**Research Question 1: What are the perceptions of EFL students about computer-mediated collaborative writing?**

*Quantitative Analysis (Research Question 1).* As shown in Table 1, the students' perspectives tend to be positive. From the student's perspectives in items 1 and 2, most students realized their positive change in writing performance with 57.5% of students assuming to get higher scores when working collaboratively. In addition, about 70% of students agreed that working in groups helps them have better ideas. Regarding students' perspectives on peer assessment in CW (items 3 and 4), most students agreed

**Table 1.** The perceptions of EFL students about computer-mediated collaborative writing

No.	Items	SD	D	N	A	SA
1	Many people make better decisions than a person in selecting suitable writing ideas.	0%	2.5%	27.5%	41.2%	28.7%
2	Collaboration can lead to a better score than working individually.	2.5%	5%	35%	37.5%	20%
3	Correcting others' mistakes helps you avoid those mistakes in the future.	1.3%	2.5%	22.5%	50%	23.8%
4	It's normal for group members to criticize your writing.	1.3%	5%	30%	45%	18.8%
5	Working in groups can create the environment where members support each other when having trouble, helping to enhance problem-solving skills.	1.3%	3.8%	25%	45%	25%
6	Working in groups can create the environment where members discuss or debate together, helping to enhance critical thinking skills.	0%	2.5%	23.8%	41.3%	32.5%
7	Working in groups can create the environment where members share opinions and listen to others, helping to enhance social skills.	0%	5%	25%	36.3%	33.8%
8	If your writing ideas are better, you will ignore others' ones.	20%	35%	22.5%	16.2%	6.3%
9	If your writing ideas are better, you will try to persuade others.	1.3%	8.8%	33.8%	38.7%	17.5%
10	Collaborative writing helps your writings be more accurate and complex	2.5%	6.2%	32.5%	38.8%	20%
11	Collaborative writing helps learning writing be less boring and motivates you to write.	3.8%	7.5%	28.7%	40%	20%
12	Collaborative writing helps you understand, consider, and deal with different perspectives on each particular topic	1.3%	5%	26.3%	35%	32.5%
13	Writing collaboration helps you improve writing abilities regarding many linguistic and writing aspects (such as vocabulary usage, grammar points, planning organizational skills, essay development, etc.)	0%	2.5%	28.7%	30%	38.7%

that giving or receiving feedback helps them improve their writing skills. Specifically, 73.8% of students in item 3 can avoid making mistakes and make progress by correcting others. Moreover, 63.8% of students felt comfortable when being criticized by the group members because they can know wrong things in their writing and remove them in the future (item 4). The results showed that participants find CW useful in enhancing

problem-solving skills (by assisting others in groups), critical thinking (by discussing and debating together), and social skill (by sharing ideas and listening to others) (items 5, 6, 7). In terms of contentment with other students, the findings indicated that students respect others' perspectives in CW even if they have better ideas (items 8 and 9).

In addition, the findings indicated that CW has a positive influence on students' writing skills. Students thought that peer assessment can help improve their linguistic and writing aspects. Specifically, 68.7% of students in item 13 agreed that they can learn from others about vocabulary, grammar, planning skills, and essay development. In fact, 58.8% of students thought they can write more accurately and complexly (item 10). 60% of students felt eager and less bored when writing collaboratively with others based on item 11. Furthermore, 67.5% of students in item 12 agreed that CW helps them understand, assess, and cope with multiple views on each topic.

### *Qualitative Analysis (Research Question 1)*

**Interview question 1:** Do you think lecturers should apply computer-mediated collaborative writing more frequently during writing courses? Why?

When asked about students' attitudes towards CMCW, most of the students agreed that they consider CMCW useful in various ways. These were identified as writing more convenient and productive. The following excerpts represented these perspectives.

#### **Convenient writing and assessment**

Many participants believed that CMCW is convenient to follow because members can be more comfortable regarding time and destinations. CMCW also gives teachers convenience to check groups' products and provide quick comments.

*Setting up online writing groups helps students take advantage of both study space and time, not only in class but can go home or go anywhere at any time. As long as you have the time and ideas to write by the deadline. Instructors can actively offer topics or support students anywhere and at any time, then evaluate your writings quickly and accurately, and give feedback as well as appropriate advice to help you improve your writing. (Student 6, interview extract)*

*Online collaborative writing has developed into a potential research area because of its writing interaction, composition reflection, and distinct differences in qualities. For example, one advantage of using tools like Google Docs is that you may complete the full writing process using them, including task negotiation, language use, text co-construction, revision, and editing, and creating the finished piece of writing. Online collaborative writing projects over a while, as opposed to face-to-face collaborative writing, also reflect a true group writing experience activity as in a real-life professional career. (Student 9, interview extract)*

*In my opinion, teachers should apply CMCW more often in writing classes because people can find materials quickly. Working where they want to be will lead to better results. Those who are afraid to meet face-to-face can also easily exchange ideas on the online platform. (Student 12, interview extract)*

*Personally, I totally agree that lectures should use modern machines for teaching writing frequently because it brings more convenience such as showing more sample essays, correcting students' assignments, etc. (Student 13, interview extract)*

*Lectures should apply computer-mediated collaborative writing more frequently during writing courses simply because teachers often don't have enough time to give assignments and correct students in writing classes. The application of computer-mediated collaborative writing makes it easier for students to exchange work and it also helps teachers to ensure that everyone's homework is corrected. (Student 15, interview extract)*

### **The development of teamwork skills**

With the use of digital tools, working in groups can be easier compared with traditional approaches. Moreover, CMCW makes students comfortable to work together, leading to high-qualified writings. If students' experience of teamwork is superior, they may enhance their teamwork skills.

*I believe CMCW helps students practice teamwork skills. Working in groups to do assignments in class is necessary because lecturers can observe the ways each student does or the ways leaders manage the group and divide the works. (Student 1, interview extract)*

*They can gain more experiences of organizing group work while working with each other. (Student 3, interview extract)*

*Working in an online writing group helps you improve your soft skills, increasing the likelihood of a student's job after graduation. (Student 6, interview extract)*

*Online collaborative writing projects over a while, as opposed to face-to-face collaborative writing, also reflect a true group writing experience activity as in a real-life professional career. (Student 9, interview extract)*

### **Avoiding unintentional mistakes**

Working in groups helps improve the quality of writing because each member will be responsible for the task, reducing unforeseen mistakes. Also, by working with others, students can learn a lot from their peers and develop their writing skills automatically.

*By doing this, learners can support each other more throughout the process. With many members, they can point out everyone's advantages and disadvantages, and from that make up for each other's flaws and improve themselves. (Student 3, interview extract)*

*Because I think the knowledge of every member in the group will be improved during the collaboration. Also, they may find out some unintentional mistakes of each other when learning writing together. (Student 4, interview extract)*

### **Sharing ideas**

Writing individually is a way to express the writer's own view. Nonetheless, depending on a view of a person is insufficient. Students also need partners to support each other. Particularly, they can discuss with others by sharing many opinions, which is a way to expand students' views.

*When teachers come up with any writing topics, we tend to get stuck. Grouping will help students discuss with their classmates and get better at writing. I'm not saying that we completely imitate other people's opinions. From those opinions, we can see more diverse opinions on the topic. (Student 10, interview extract)*

Besides, some participants demonstrated the challenges of CMCW. A greater part of the students encountered some challenges at different levels. These were recognized as obstacles related to behaviors. The following excerpts represented these perspectives.

### **Obstacles related to behaviors**

Working online is convenient, but some students still encounter negative things. For example, members tend to ignore their work; some members must finish others' work due to individual problems. Students' experiences are good or bad, relying on the peers whom they work with.

*I may become lazy if I just study online. For instance, my leader gives me a topic for an essay, I usually do it late, maybe near deadline. (Student 5, interview extract)*

*Although I have recently gradually accustomed to this manner of working due to the extended length of working from home, I still don't particularly enjoy working online. I feel like I get stuck physically and mentally. I don't want to remember those days. (Student 7, interview extract)*

*When it comes to my experience, my friend and I had to do the whole assignment by ourselves because all members ignore their responsibilities with the reason that is not knowing how to write. Moreover, each member only finishes a small part of the paper, then combines with other parts from other members. It means that the product of the whole group will contain not only good parts but also bad ones. (Student 8, interview extract)*

### **Obstacles related to teamwork**

Teamwork helps save students' time and effort to do writing tasks; however, perhaps it is challenging to unify plenty of views and make the right decision. Furthermore, the context of the obstacle is online collaboration, so working online might be harder for members to get on well with each other.

*Another problem is that no one is like-minded; everyone has a different way of approaching and writing. So computer-mediated collaborative writing is not recommended by me. (Student 4, interview extract)*

*I think lecturers should not apply CMCW because it affects learning styles, personalities, and each individual's differences. Also, it's difficult to unify members' ideas together. (Student 14, interview extract)*

## **Research Question 2: What are the challenges EFL students face during computer-mediated collaborative writing activities?**

### *Quantitative Analysis (Research Question 2)*

Based on Table 2, in item 1, most participants (57.6%) agreed that when working online, there were some members delaying their work, causing the slow progress of group work. This is a negative side of CMCW because leaders are unable to control the whole group and fail to remind irresponsible members to finish their work. Based on item 2, 50% of participants reported that they had difficulties in explaining to other members. Compared to face-to-face CW, writing online collaboratively might be hard for most students to adapt because members only use text languages to discuss without any chances to meet together in real life.

**Table 2.** The challenges of computer-mediated collaborative writing regarding interaction

No.	Items	SD	D	N	A	SA
1	Due to online collaboration, members respond slowly, which affects the progress of group work.	0%	13.8%	28.7%	33.8%	23.8%
2	It is hard to make others understand what you mean during online collaboration.	1.3%	17.5%	31.3%	33.8%	16.2%

According to Table 3, Another factor affecting the quality of collaboration is members. Dividing parts of the task can make leaders have difficulties deciding who will take responsibility for their work. Work division in writing tasks is not simple because not every learner gets a suitable level of writing. According to Table 3, 60% of participants in item 1 asserted that members' speed of working and levels of writing has impacts on the product of the whole group. If any members have limited writing skills, it means they make the small part of the essay unsuccessful. Everything can be fair if all people in a group are responsible and work together. However, item 2 showed some bad sides making group work unfair. 71.3% of participants claimed that there existed irresponsible members tending to ignore their duties because of being lazy or passive. The kind of people is also the main reason leading to conflicts and arguments in the group work relationship. Also, they must not be good members, and more importantly, they give rise to unfair teamwork and scores. When it comes to the same scores for teamwork, 53.8% of participants in item 3 described them as an unfair thing as all members do not make equal contributions.

Another problem exists in groups that have clear distinctions between low-level and high-level students. Item 4 demonstrated that most students depend on others thanks to the latter's good writing skills (63.7% agreed with the point). This problem happens when there exist low-level students who are bad at academic writing. Besides, high-level students are responsible for decision-making, which leads to good scores for the whole group. Nonetheless, this will be unfair as item 11 showed above. Moreover, item 5 showed that 51.2% of participants were nervous about conflicting opinions and disagreements in CMCW activities. When working in groups, students cannot avoid conflicts, arguments, or different ideas since everyone has their own concepts.

#### *Qualitative Analysis (Research Question 2)*

**Interview question 2:** Do you think you face more challenges when joining computer-mediated collaborative writing compared with face-to-face one? Why?

Online writing collaboration is popular among students at VLU as a result of its merits and convenience mentioned above; however, the students provided a myriad of drawbacks about CMCW based on their experience. After collecting answers from interviews, the researchers concluded that there exist diverse sorts of challenges in terms of interactions, motivation and duties, and concentrations.

### **Challenges regarding interactions**

Due to online collaboration, members tend to become more passive compared with

**Table 3.** The challenges of computer-mediated collaborative writing regarding members

No.	Items	SD	D	N	A	SA
1	Group members' different levels of writing and working speed can affect the group's papers.	0%	10%	30%	40%	20%
2	There are members who make huge contributions to the group, but members are lazy or passive and often avoid their responsibilities.	1.3%	7.5%	20%	33.8%	37.5%
3	It is unfair for all group members to get the same score because some of them do not contribute equally.	2.5%	8.8%	35%	22.5%	31.3%
4	Members usually depend mainly on the leader or high-level members when working collaboratively.	1.3%	10%	25%	35%	28.7%
5	You are worried about conflicting opinions and disagreement during collaborative writing process.	0%	17.5%	31.3%	37.5%	13.7%

face-to-face meetings. The problem regarding interaction is quite common in the online context.

*It must be mentioned that the lack of real interaction between the members in one group can somewhat affect the assignment. For example, some members might be less interactive online, and they rely too much on everyone else to do their tasks. (Student 3, interview extract)*

*We don't have a real interaction between members in the group. In addition, people may find it difficult to express their feeling about specific topics. (Student 4, interview extract)*

*I think offline CW is better than CMCW because I can have many chances to interact with members and learn more things. (Student 8, interview extract)*

*I believe face-to-face collaboration will be more successful. It's simpler to persuade folks. It can be difficult and ineffective to communicate over box chat on MS Team or Zoom when you're speaking with someone who disagrees with you. They could not be paying close attention to you or they might just be skimming what you've written. Trust cannot be established by text message. (Student 9, interview extract)*

### **Challenges regarding motivation and duties**

Another challenge is members' motivation and duties. Human factors always play a vital role in a task. A person is not responsible, which is a challenge for the whole group.

*...with a collaborative method, I may do worse, because if the task is divided into smaller parts for each member in the group, I may have done my part sketchily without fully understanding the topics. (Student 2, interview extract)*

*...I become passive when working online... (Student 5, interview extract)*

*It's very hard to contribute when members delay their writing. (Student 14, interview extract)*

### **Challenges regarding concentrations**

The online world is bound to bring everything that can make people lose their attention. Therefore, working online may be a challenge in concentration because members do not focus on their tasks completely, affecting the process of writing.

*...with an online writing task, it is impossible for me to actually focus on the task and easily distracts myself by games or social platforms. (Student 2, interview extract)*

*From my experience of Writing 5 courses in the previous semester, I would say yes because when combining writing with working in a group through online apps/webs, it is really tough, especially for ones who get struggled in paying concentration like me. I cope with the difficulty many times when trying to focus in the discussion with teammates; I would rather work alone than in a group through online. (Student 7, interview extract)*

## **4.2 Discussion**

Our study investigated the attitudes of students toward computer-mediated collaborative writing and the challenges they face in CMCW. The results showed that the participants' perceptions of CW are positive regarding convenient writing and assessment, students can utilize online features while teachers can support students anytime, and evaluate their writing quickly and accurately; teachers can also improve their teaching activities. This result was compatible with those of previous studies. Lemma and Bogale [26] conducted their study in contexts. Specifically, regarding convenient writing, our study showed that students can work in a group, and write more easily and productively, supporting the results of Jalled and Mahfoodh [24]. Both students and teachers can make full use of their time to develop learning and teaching activities.

In terms of knowledge improvement. The students recognized the value of CW such as improving writing learning through peer assessment, enhancing vocabulary, grammar, planning skills, essay development, and so on. This result was consistent with those of previous studies. Deveci [16], Lemma and Bogale [26], and Alkhalaf [2] conducted their research in ESL contexts (e.g. Malaysia, China, and Arab countries). Specifically, regarding knowledge improvement, our study showed that students can improve English learning, improve grammar, enrich vocabulary, and develop writing skills supporting the results of Alkhalaf [2]. They can improve their English knowledge through peer assessment.

When it comes to the development of teamwork skills. The students are aware of the chances to develop their problem-solving skills, critical thinking skills, and social skills through the activities of assisting others in groups, discussing, debating, sharing ideas, and listening to others. They recognize the opportunities to enhance their vocabulary, grammar, planning skills, and essay development. This result was compatible with those of previous studies. Deveci [16], Chen and Yu [13], and Jalled and Mahfoodh [24] conducted in ESL contexts (e.g. Malaysia, China, and Arab countries). Specifically, regarding teamwork skills, our study showed that CW improved some aspects of teamwork skills (critical thinking skills, technical ability, practicing organizing ability, building social relationships, practicing negotiating, and how to deal with work-related



problems), agreed by the results of Deveci [16], Chen and Yu [13], Jalled and Mahfoodh [24]. They can improve their teamwork skills by supporting each other.

In addition, CMCW also provides opportunities to enable peer assessment. They also appreciate that correcting others helps them avoid unintentional mistakes and make progress. Furthermore, some students also recognize the benefits of sharing ideas allowing them to get higher scores and practice analyzing the topic from multiple views. This result was compatible with those of previous studies. Alkhalaf [2] carried out a study in ESL contexts (e.g. Saudi countries). Specifically, regarding multiple views, our study showed that CMCW can make students face different views, supporting the results of Jalled and Mahfoodh [24], but not those of Chen and Yu's study [13], which showed that CMCW lacks chances for students to learn how to face struggles. Students writing collaboratively can face certain work-related issues.

Although there are great advantages of CMCW [2, 16, 26], this study revealed some concerns of the students in the ESL context. First, our study claimed that while CMCW improves teamwork skills, there occur some obstacles related to behaviors, for example, students become lazy, have mental breakdowns, lack motivation, and make few contributions to the sharing work. For instance, a student was not pleased to work with her teammate due to few contributions of the teammate to the writing leading to low scores. Students feel shy, which causes the least contributions in the group, supported by [13]. Unlike the previous studies [2, 16, 26] that focused only on the positive side of online CW, this finding emphasized that CMCW can cause obstacles related to teamwork owing to different writing levels, and the difficulty in unifying various ideas. Another concern revealed by our study was associated with the limited chances to think and fix. For example, writing individually can be useful for students as they have more chances to practice dealing with various problems occurring in the writing process. These findings reported that CMCW might provide few chances to think and fix.

When it comes to the challenges of CMCW, our research indicated that there remained many different kinds of challenges concerning interactions, members, concentrations, motivation and duties. Compared to the other previous studies, our study's findings were similar to a number of research papers. Alkhalaf [2] supported our result regarding members. Particularly, members do not contribute equally to the whole product during CW, but all of them still achieve the same score, which is unfair. Additionally, Alkhalaf [2] and our study agreed that sharing ideas might be tricky and cause conflicts for most students because each person has a distinct thought. Grimes and Gold [22] also shared the same result. They acknowledged that members are more likely to ignore their responsibilities and deadlines. Moreover, they claimed that students may be isolated and lose their mood when working online, advocating our finding. In terms of interactions, in the same context, Ms. Bui (2022) also carried out her research at VLU and agreed with our study that students lacked interactions in the virtual environment.

## 5 Conclusion

In summary, the study explored the perceptions of CMCW of EFL students at Van Lang University to improve their writing learning. CMCW could have merits and demerits simultaneously. Based on the findings, students perceived CMCW in their writing learning as applicable regarding convenient writing and assessment, skill improvement (like

problem-solving skills, critical thinking skills, and social skills), avoiding unintentional mistakes, and making progress. Furthermore, some students also recognized the benefits of sharing ideas which allows them to get higher scores and deal with multiple views. However, students also met obstacles related to behaviors such as lack of motivation and few contributions; obstacles related to teamwork caused by different levels, and difficulties in unifying various ideas; insufficient chances to think and fix. Besides, the research found plenty of challenges EFL students at VLU encountered, namely interactions, concentrations, members, motivation and duties. Our study will assist instructors and learners in finding out ways to have more effective learning and teaching during writing courses based on the challenges.

## 5.1 Limitations

The current study had limited participants, affecting the view of the whole population in EFL contexts. The methods used for the present research are not objective enough because the results rely heavily on students' opinions.

## 5.2 Suggestions

Future studies ought to be conducted with more participants. In addition, further studies related to collaborative writing can discover lecturers' perceptions and challenges when they apply this method in their writing courses; that is, the studies can be carried out with observations during the courses or lecturers will become participants.

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