

## Research Article

# The Effect of Different Pair-Work Types on Students' Writing Quality

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**Abstract.** Although the use of pair work in classrooms is relatively easy to employ, the pair-work technique has been attracting the attention of many researchers because this strategy is believed to be beneficial. This paper aimed to investigate the effect of different pair-work types (homogeneous, heterogeneous and randomized pairs) on students' writing quality. Each pair wrote a single text: an argumentative essay. The average writing scores of the individual performances of the participants from the homogeneous group (n = 18), the heterogeneous group (n = 23), and the randomized group (n = 23) were compared. The results revealed that the participants in the randomized pair had the highest score (mean = 68.87), followed by the participants in the homogeneous group (mean = 64.17), and the lowest mean score was found in the heterogeneous group participants (mean = 57.13).

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

Although the use of pair work in a classroom is relatively limited to employ [1], this strategy is believed to have beneficial points. Many studies revealed that pair work gave a significant effect or contribution to students' writing performance. In a study, collaboration was found to affect overall grammatical accuracy positively [2]. In another study, it was also found that pairs wrote shorter and better texts with more accurate grammar, linguistic complexity, and are simpler if compared to individuals [3]. They seem to do the tasks more competently. In a collaborative study, Wigglesworth and Storch (2009) found the positive impact of collaboration (pair work) on accuracy although it does not affect fluency and complexity [4].

Besides Storch, four other researchers also found the effect of pair work on students' writing performance. First, collaborative writing resulted in an overall significant impact on students' L2 writing [5]. However, the impact varied from one writing skill area to another. Specifically, the significant impact happened to content, organization, and vocabulary, but not to grammar and mechanics. Globally, her findings are the same

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as Storch's. However, she also found a different result from Storch's study (2005). Her finding showed that collaborative writing did not have a significant effect on grammar. Meanwhile, Storch found that pairs created shorter and better written work with greater grammatical accuracy. Although research findings by Shehadeh on grammar accuracy are different from Storch's, Shehadeh found the significant effect of pair work on some other aspects of writing. These aspects were found to be a problem for students working individually ([6], [7], [8], and [9]).

Then, the effect of pair work on students' writing performance was also discovered by [10]. Their finding was that students working in pairs got better writing accuracy than those working individually. This finding can enrich the theory on the merits of pair work found by [5] and [3]. In addition, this finding (students working in pairs had better writing accuracy) also has answered research findings by [11] and [12] that college students and university graduates were found to have low academic writing.

The third researchers who investigated the effect of pair work on students' writing performance are [13] dan [14]. They tried to investigate the benefit of collaborative writing viewed from students' voices. Their finding was that the students generally considered their collaborative writing experiences quite positive. Students thought that there were a lot of benefits of collaborative writing, ranging from opportunities to exchange ideas to the development of communication.

The next researchers are [15] who stated that writing in pairs increased the overall quality of the learners' writing productions even though the fluency of written texts did not change significantly. Students need to be encouraged to have good writing quality and this research finding has shown that pair works can meet the target. In other words, pair work can guide students to have high-quality writing.

At last, [16] found that collaborative work (pair work) could improve students' grammatical accuracy in their upcoming writings. Their findings meet what [2] has found about the effect of pair work on students' grammar in writing. Having grammatical accuracy is a must in writing activities because sentences with wrong grammatical patterns can mislead and will not be understandable. Working in pairs was found to be useful for students to improve their grammatical accuracy because writing activities in correcting each other and sharing ideas in pair work will guide students to better grammatical accuracy.

Pair work contributes to students' idea development. In a study, [3] found that collaboration gave students a chance to share ideas and give feedback to one another. This finding can be a solution and useful for EFL learners studying writing skills. Writing

requires students to develop ideas into a paragraph and an essay. Students often have problems fulfilling this requirement if they should write individually.

Pair work in EFL writing also can make students active. In another study, it was found that although no significant differences between the accuracy of tasks completed individually and those completed in pairs were available, most pairs engaged actively in discussing language. They tend to reach correct resolutions. Making students active in an EFL class is a must because if the students are active, the teaching-learning process will run well and the target expected can be achieved. Pair work, based on Storch's finding, can be one alternative solution to make it come true.

The next power of employing pair work in EFL writing is on language improvement. [17]states that writing tasks carried out in pairs provide learners an opportunity to discuss together the solution of their language-related problems, develop new language knowledge, and create linguistically many better-written texts. It seems that this finding provides more convincing evidence on the power of pair work in EFL writing because students get the merits of working in pairs.

Another advantage of employing pair work is that it can make students enjoy the learning. [5] found that most students in the pair work setting have a joyful experience. Making students enjoy the teaching-learning process is required because if students enjoy the class, the teacher can teach well and help students achieve the target of learning. Shehadeh's finding proves that the students enjoy the teaching-learning process by implementing a pair work strategy.

From the research findings on the effect of employing pair work in EFL writing toward students' writing performance and its power in several aspects, it can be concluded that writing in pairs is beneficial for students. Pair work in EFL writing enables students to produce good quality written texts. Then, the findings can minimize the belief that writing is a complicated and multifaceted task ([18], [19], and [20]). In addition, pair work can be one of the solutions for writing problems found by most students working individually as stated by some research findings ([11], [12], [21], [22], [23], [24], [25], and [26]).

Pair work in EFL writing can be conducted in three types: homogeneous, heterogeneous, and randomized pairs. In a homogeneous class, students having the same English proficiency level work in pairs to create written text. In a heterogeneous class, students work in pairs with partners who have a higher or lower level of English proficiency to produce a written text. Meanwhile, the randomized class is a condition in which the students assigned randomly worked in pairs to produce written texts in a classroom.

Unfortunately, the study on randomized pairs has not got researchers' much attention. It is hard to find the research findings on randomized pairs published either in journals or seminar proceedings. However, some researchers have paid their attention to investigate the effect of implementing the homogeneous and heterogeneous pairs on students' text quality.

[27] analyzed and measured the impact of the interaction of homogeneous and heterogeneous collaboration on the development of EFL learners' writing skills. Their research finding revealed that the two groups, very similarly, got significantly higher post-test grades in three writing tasks. [28] conducted a study on the effect of homogeneous and heterogeneous dyadic interaction on the development of EFL learners' writing skill. He did not find a statistically significant difference between G-Hom and G-Het participants in their progress from pretest to posttests. A significant difference among the scores obtained from the three posttest tasks was not found either. [29] also investigated the comparison of EFL writing achievement of high school students working in homogeneous and heterogeneous groups. In other words, he wanted to measure which one was better. He found that homogeneous pairs showed a better performance than heterogeneous ones. Based on the three studies stated above, homogeneous and heterogeneous groups have similar power to develop EFL learners' writing proficiency.

[30] conducted a study to know whether the homogeneous or heterogeneous group has the best result /educational outcomes. He found that students from the heterogeneous group performed better work than students from the homogenous group. His finding was supported by [31] who found the significantly better descriptive essays produced individually by the students from the heterogeneous group compared to ones from the homogenous group. What was found by [30] and [31] above means that heterogeneous group work gives a better effect than homogeneous group work on students' achievement.

In the previous paragraphs, the researchers have found the effects of pair work toward students' writing performance in general, several merits of employing pair work in EFL writing, and the effects of implementing homogeneous and heterogeneous pairs in EFL writing. However, what has not been discussed in their previous studies is whether different pair types will give different effects on students' writing quality. In addition, there was also controversial result in the previous studies on the effects of implementing homogeneous and heterogeneous pairs in EFL writing. Therefore, this study focused to investigate the effect of pair work types (homogeneous, heterogeneous, and randomized pairs) on students' writing quality.

In this study, the research problem is whether the means of writing quality among the students working with heterogeneous pairs, students working with homogeneous pairs, and students working with randomized pairs are significantly different.

## 2. METHODOLOGY/ MATERIALS

This study focuses on the impact of pair work types on students' writing performance. The independent variable in this study is pair work types (homogeneous, heterogeneous, and randomized pairs). Meanwhile, the dependent variable is the students' writing quality. This study is aimed to find out a cause-effect relationship. The causal relationship to be investigated in this study is the impact of pair work types on the students' writing performance. In other words, this study was aimed to investigate whether students working with different pairs would affect their writing quality significantly. Meanwhile, the students' writing quality investigated in this study is the students' idea development in their writing. The design of this experimental study is displayed in Table 1.

TABLE 1: Research Design

	Homogeneous pair (A1)	Heterogeneous pair (A2)	Randomized pair (A3)
Homogeneous pair (A1)		1	2
Heterogeneous pair (A2)	1		3
Randomized pair (A3)	2	3	

The subjects were given a pre-test for two reasons. The first was to know whether students' writing performances among the three groups are equal. The second was to put the students in pairs easily based on their writing performance (homogeneous, heterogeneous, and randomized groups). After being paired based on their pre-test writing performance, the students were given the same treatment of learning to compose texts in their pairs for three weeks. After completing the treatment, the students were given a post-test to be completed individually. The research took 6 weeks. In the first meeting, the students were exposed to the researcher's presentation on the basic concept of argumentative essays. In the second meeting, the students were given the pre-test. In the third meeting, the students were exposed to the concept of introductory paragraphs for an argumentative topic and then they were asked to work in pairs to develop the introductory paragraph of an argumentative topic. In the fourth meeting, they were

assigned to write body paragraphs and in the fifth meeting, they were assigned to write concluding paragraphs. In the sixth meeting, they were given the post-test.

This experimental study was carried out to the sophomores of the English Department of the School of English Language Teaching at Islamic University of Malang who were taking Writing III course in semester 3, 2016/2017. The sophomores were taking the third writing course to learn argumentative writing as one of the genres of writing. Six parallel sophomore classes (25-30 students in each class) were taking an Argumentative Writing course. Three classes (labeled as A, B, and C) were randomly selected to become the participants of this research. In class A the students were assigned to pair work in the homogeneous group, in class B they were assigned to pair work in the heterogeneous group, and in class C they were assigned to pair work in the randomized group.

To assess the writing quality for this study, a writing test was used. Three different topics were used, one topic for pre-test, one topic for research treatment, and one topic for post-test. Topics 1 and 3 were adapted from an IELTS preparation test. Meanwhile, topic 2 was adopted from the book "*Introduction to Academic Writing*" by [32].

### 3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Based on the result of data analysis, it was found that the three groups (Homogeneous pair, Heterogeneous pair, and Randomized pair) had different means. Individuals in the randomized group got the highest mean. Then, subjects in the homogeneous group got the higher mean than those in the heterogeneous group.

Previously, the studies on the effect of pair writing (focusing on homogeneous and heterogeneous pairs only) on students' writing performance showed three different results. Some researchers found that heterogeneous pairs performed better than homogeneous ones ([30] and [31]). Another researcher found that homogeneous pairs showed a better performance than heterogeneous ones [30]. There was a result of research finding that there was no significant difference between homogeneous and heterogeneous groups [28].

Many previous studies on pair work focused on homogeneous and heterogeneous groups and the findings still vary. This present study, using a randomized group compared to homogeneous and heterogeneous groups, revealed that the randomized group played a role to develop students' writing quality and helped the students more than homogeneous and heterogeneous groups. This finding implies that the randomized group technique is another potential pairing activity to develop students' writing quality besides homogeneous and heterogeneous ones.

The finding in this study supports the study by [29] who found that the achievement of students in the homogeneous group showed more improvement than the achievement of students in the heterogeneous group. In addition, this finding is also in line with the study by [33] who found that homogeneous ability level grouping was superior for promoting students learning outcomes. The findings of the current study and the previous studies by two other researchers indirectly emphasize that homogeneous groups also play an important role to develop students' writing quality.

Then, this study also reveals a finding that is different from the finding of previous studies ([30], [31], and [28]). This means that debate on the comparison between the effect of homogeneous and heterogeneous groups on students writing quality has not come to an end. In other words, there will be chances for the next researchers to verify the different findings.

The finding of this study indirectly enriches some of the previous research findings. The previous studies focused on comparing homogeneous and heterogeneous groups. This study involved randomized, homogeneous, and heterogeneous groups and showed that the randomized groups performed the highest.

#### 4. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

First, the conclusion is that the subjects in randomized pairs performed the highest score than the homogeneous and heterogeneous pairs. In addition, the randomized pairs performed a significantly better result than the heterogeneous pairs. This finding can be claimed as a new finding on pair work because previously the discussion on pair work relied on homogeneous and heterogeneous pairs only and the research finding on the two pairs still varies. Second, the difference between the performance of the randomized pairs and homogeneous ones is not significant. At last, the randomized pair-work strategy can be considered effective to develop the students' EFL writing.

Based on the conclusion made above, three recommendations are offered here. First, the randomized pair strategy can be used and applied in EFL writing classes because it had the highest score if compared to homogeneous and heterogeneous pairs. Second, further studies on pair work are recommended to compare if different time range for pair work gives different effects on the students' writing quality. Third, it is also suggested to use this three-group strategy in other genres (excluded argumentative text) to see the comparison of pair work effect.

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