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THINKING ALLOWED

# Research into practice: Collaborative writing in L2 contexts

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**Abstract**
To shed light on the dynamic interplay between collaborative writing research and its application in L2 contexts, this paper discusses three critical relationships. The first relationship focuses on research findings that have been reasonably well applied in practice, highlighting areas such as activity types and grouping strategies in collaborative writing, computer-mediated collaborative writing, and the impact of collaborative writing activities on student writing performance. The second relationship examines areas where research findings have not been sufficiently applied in practice, including the quality of student interactions, the emotional experiences of students during collaborative writing, and the long-term effects of collaborative writing on individual writing development. The last relationship identifies issues that are under-represented in research but are crucial in practice, such as feedback and evaluation practices, individual learner development, and pre-writing training in collaborative writing. For the second and third relationships, marked by mismatches between research and practice, implications are drawn to help teachers apply research insights and encourage researchers to address practical priorities. In conclusion, the paper provides suggestions to address each of the relationships to strengthen the research-practice link.

**Keywords:** collaborative writing; L2 learning; L2 teaching; research-practice analysis framework

## 1. Introduction

Collaborative writing, defined as the joint production of a single text by two or more writers (Storch, 2013), has attracted increasing attention in second language (L2) education over the past two decades. Its pedagogical value is grounded in several theoretical traditions, such as Vygotskian perspectives on learning, which emphasize the Zone of Proximal Development and scaffolding as key to learner progress (Vygotsky, 1978, 1981); communicative language teaching, which promotes authentic interaction as a means of developing communicative competence (Hymes, 1971; Savignon, 2005); and process-oriented writing pedagogies, which highlight the recursive nature of writing and the importance of peer collaboration (Matsuda, 2003; Susser, 1994). A substantial body of empirical research has further demonstrated that collaborative writing benefits L2 learners by enhancing their writing performance, refining their writing skills, and strengthening their communicative competence (Elabdali, 2021; Li & Zhang, 2023; Storch, 2011, 2013, 2019). Given the rise of artificial intelligence (AI)-assisted writing in language education, collaborative writing stands out for its abilities to foster authentic human interaction and provide learners with opportunities to co-construct knowledge with peers, rather than working alone or exclusively with AI tools.

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Although collaborative writing has been theoretically and empirically established as a potentially effective pedagogical activity for L2 learner development, several important aspects remain insufficiently explored. For example, in their review of the existing research landscape, Li and Zhang (2023) identified six key research directions for the investigation of collaborative writing in L2 classrooms, including the development of assessment practices and the examination of practitioners' experiences. Similarly, Zheng and Yu (2024), along with Zheng et al. (2021), noted a possible gap in the literature concerning teachers' implementation of collaborative writing across L2 settings, thereby highlighting the need for closer examination of teachers' actual classroom practices. Addressing this gap to some extent, Kessler and Casal (2024) examined English writing teachers' instructional practices and found that over 70% of their participants employed collaborative writing and freewriting activities. However, their findings also revealed that teachers overwhelmingly favored traditional, monomodal, and test-oriented writing genres over digital and multimodal ones. Taken together, these studies point to a particularly salient yet underexplored issue for both research and practice: the lack of systematic investigation into how research findings of collaborative writing are translated into real-world instructional practices.

Motivated by the need to connect research and practice, this paper employs a research–practice analysis framework to investigate which research insights have been taken up in classrooms, which remain underused, and where misalignments between research and practice occur (Banegas, 2022; Goh, 2017; Lee, 2013; Yu et al., 2024). This framework, commonly employed in the *Think Allowed* series in *Language Teaching*, offers an analytical lens for examining the dynamic relationship between empirical findings and pedagogical realities. Based on our experiences as researchers, teacher educators, and writing teachers in Chinese Mainland, Macao, and New Zealand, where we collaborate with language teachers in schools and universities, we focus on three key dimensions of the research–practice relationship in collaborative writing: (1) areas where research findings have been reasonably well applied, (2) areas where research findings remain insufficiently applied, and (3) areas that are underrepresented in the literature but central to practice. In doing so, we aim to integrate insights from applied linguistics, L2 writing, and language education to illuminate both convergences and gaps between research and practice in collaborative L2 writing.

## 2. Research findings that have been reasonably well applied

With the growing use of collaborative writing in L2 contexts, research and classroom practice have increasingly informed one another, with many empirical findings being meaningfully applied in instructional settings. This section highlights three areas where such reciprocal development is most evident: activity types and grouping/pairing in collaborative writing, computer-mediated collaborative writing, and student writing performance in collaborative writing.

### *2.1. Activity types and grouping in collaborative writing*

In L2 classrooms, collaborative writing is typically implemented in two forms: task-based and project-based (Zheng et al., 2025). Task-based collaborative writing, as advocated by researchers such as Storch (2011, 2013, 2019), typically consists of short-term, in-class activities that focus on meaning, language, or both. These activities are usually organized around small-scale tasks, such as jigsaw writing, data commentary, dictogloss, or editing, and aim to produce relatively short academic texts, including argumentative and compare-and-contrast essays (Zhang & Plonsky, 2020). In contrast, project-based collaborative writing, sometimes referred to as a "collaborative writing project" (Li, 2021; Zhai, 2021), is a longer-term endeavor spanning several weeks, integrating in-class and out-of-class work, and requiring students to complete a series of interconnected tasks that culminate in a comprehensive written product. Task-based and project-based collaborative writing differ primarily in scale and duration: the former is easier to integrate into classroom routines as short, self-contained

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activities, while the latter, though more demanding to design and manage, better reflects the complexity and authenticity of real-world writing. Despite these differences, both approaches share a focus on co-construction of text, peer interaction, and negotiation of meaning, thereby reinforcing collaboration as a key driver of both writing development and L2 learning.

In classroom practice, both task-based and project-based collaborative writing are employed (Zheng & Yu, 2024; Zheng et al., 2021) although L2 teachers may not always be explicitly aware of the distinctions between the two types of activities. Task-based collaborative writing activities, such as jigsaw writing, where each student writes a portion of a text before combining the pieces into a coherent whole, and dictogloss, where students reconstruct a text after listening to it, encourage learners to negotiate meaning, co-construct texts, and provide peer feedback, often resulting in both oral and written output (Storch, 2011, 2013). Their short-term nature allows teachers to incorporate multiple tasks within a course, creating frequent opportunities for manageable collaboration and focused language practice. For example, Fernández Dobao (2012) used a jigsaw task in a 15-minute grammar review lesson for Spanish as a foreign language students in the U.S., making the writing task a part of students' everyday class work. In contrast, project-based collaborative writing extends over several weeks and requires interconnected stages such as brainstorming, drafting, revising, and presenting. These projects often target academic genres such as research reports, argumentative essays, and other extended texts, thereby fostering deeper engagement with content and language while also developing higher-order skills like project management, role negotiation, and long-term collaboration (Zhai, 2021; Zheng et al., 2025). However, they place greater demands on teachers in terms of planning, monitoring, and assessment. For example, Zheng and Yu (2024) found that English-as-a-foreign-language (EFL) teachers in Chinese universities who guided their students with relatively higher English proficiency to work in groups to write a research report throughout a semester would utilize a variety of tools and measures to monitor students' writing process.

The issue of student grouping in collaborative writing is central to both task-based and project-based contexts, and has been explored in the literature from multiple perspectives. One strand of work has looked at how language proficiency shapes collaboration, investigating the effects of different proficiency pairings (i.e., high–high, low-low, and high–low) and students' perceptions of such arrangements (Niu et al., 2018; Chen & Lee, 2022). Another line of research has focused on the role of teacher-assigned versus self-selected pairs (Mozaffari, 2017) and the influence of peer familiarity (Liu et al., 2025). Studies have also compared pair work and group work to examine how these forms of collaboration may differently influence students' interactional patterns, writing outcomes, and overall attitudes toward collaborative learning (Fernández Dobao, 2014; Fernández Dobao & Blum, 2013; Wigglesworth & Storch, 2012). Other investigations have contrasted collaborative writing with individual writing to better understand its added value (Fernández Dobao, 2012; Wigglesworth & Storch, 2009). While these studies collectively aim to identify effective grouping strategies, many are based on small-sample experiments or narrowly defined contexts, which calls for caution in generalizing their findings.

The practice of grouping students for collaborative writing echoes research, with teachers using either pair work or group work. In doing so, teachers may consider factors such as students' language proficiency, willingness to be paired by teachers or to self-select peers, and familiarity with one another (Storch, 2013), as informed by research findings. Our observations and the experiences as L2 teachers also show that, in many cases, teachers resort to random or convenient grouping (e.g., pairing students who sit close to each other), especially when they lack background knowledge of students, are implementing collaborative writing for the first time, or have limited class time. Zheng and Yu (2024) and Zheng et al. (2026) reported that their teacher participants in Chinese universities generally had autonomy in determining grouping strategies for project-based collaborative writing, as universities or faculties rarely imposed specific requirements. Beyond research-based knowledge, teachers' grouping choices are also influenced by their prior experiences, intuition, and contextual constraints. For instance, Chinese EFL teachers in Zheng et al. (2021) who had prior experience

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with other forms of collaborative learning, such as group discussions or oral presentations, tended to transfer those practices to the organization of collaborative writing. Task-based collaborative writing, particularly when completed within a single class, may prompt teachers to rely on quick, convenient grouping. For example, Fernández Dobao (2012), in integrating a jigsaw task into a short grammar review as part of Spanish learners' regular classroom activities in the U.S., employed random group and pair formations. In contrast, project-based collaborative writing, which requires sustained interaction over weeks, often leads teachers to consider proficiency levels and peer familiarity to support smoother communication. For example, Chen and Lee (2022) adopted proficiency-based pairing when guiding EFL students in collaborative argumentative writing over a semester. In either case, classroom practices broadly align with insights from research on grouping in collaborative writing.

### 2.2. Computer-mediated collaborative writing

Computer-mediated collaborative writing (also known as computer-supported or computer-based collaborative writing) in L2 contexts refers to activities in which two or more learners use digital technologies to co-construct a text. A range of tools have been employed to facilitate such collaboration: (1) wiki platforms, which enable learners to co-author, edit, and revise a shared document, such as Google Docs (Z. Abrams, 2016; Z. I. Abrams, 2019) and Tencent Docs (Y. Li, 2023); (2) social networking platforms, which support interaction through commenting and chatting features, such as Facebook (Peeters, 2018); (3) digital communication tools, which provide real-time conferencing and interaction, such as WeChat (Z. Zhang et al., 2022), Zoom (Namkung & Kim, 2024), and Skype (M. Zhang & Liu, 2023); and (4) language editing tools, which assist learners in revising and refining their texts (Wiboolyasarin et al., 2025). Those digital tools share several common features, including a shared digital space for text co-construction, support for synchronous and/or asynchronous communication, and opportunities for iterative feedback and revision. Together, they enhance collaboration by enabling joint authorship, facilitating negotiation of meaning, and offering scaffolding for both language form and content development.

Computer-mediated collaborative writing can take various forms, including synchronous collaboration, where learners work together in real time using tools such as Google Docs or Zoom chat (M. Zhang & Chen, 2022); asynchronous collaboration, where learners contribute at different times through platforms like wikis or discussion boards (Abe, 2019); and mixed-form collaboration (M. Li, 2018), which combines face-to-face interaction with online co-authoring. Previous research has examined learners' experiences across different collaborative modalities, such as offline versus online writing and synchronous versus asynchronous collaboration (H. C. Hsu, 2022; M. Zhang & Liu, 2023), with the aim of identifying which modality more effectively supports learning and interaction. However, findings have been mixed, suggesting that no single modality is universally optimal and that more targeted empirical studies are needed to understand the affordances and constraints of each approach in specific contexts.

More recently, the rise of digital multimodal composing has expanded the scope of computer-mediated collaborative writing (M. Li & Zhang, 2023), as students are increasingly asked to integrate multiple modalities of communication, including written text, images, audio, and video, into cohesive digital projects such as video scripts, multimedia essays, or interactive presentations. Meanwhile, the emergence of AI tools for educational purposes introduces new opportunities and challenges for computer-mediated collaborative writing. These developments make the field a promising area of inquiry not only for L2 researchers but also for scholars in educational technology, multimodal communication, and related disciplines.

In practice, there has been a growing trend of integrating computer-mediated collaborative writing into L2 classrooms, driven by advances in digital technologies and the expanding body of research

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in this area (M. Li & Zhang, 2023). A range of tools are now commonly used, including wiki platforms, social networking sites, digital communication tools, and language editing applications, which allows teachers to guide students in synchronous, asynchronous, or mixed forms of collaboration. However, existing research on computer-mediated collaborative writing has been disproportionately concentrated in higher education, particularly within English learning contexts. Examples of this line of research include Abe's (2019, 2020) studies of Japanese university students using Quip, Chen and Lee's (2022) investigation of Chinese university students using Zoom, Cho's (2017) research on Facebook-mediated collaborative writing in Canada, Li and Zhu's (2017) study of wiki-based collaboration in the United States, and Peeters (2018) examination of Belgian students using Facebook for collaborative writing. In contrast, comparatively few studies have been conducted in primary or secondary school contexts. A similar pattern is visible in practice, as digital collaborative writing appears more prevalent in universities than in earlier stages of schooling, likely because university students generally have greater access to computers, mobile devices, and independent learning opportunities. While this resonance between research and practice highlights the promise of computer-mediated collaborative writing in higher education, it also exposes a critical gap: the relative neglect of younger learners may limit our understanding of how collaborative writing skills and digital literacies can be developed from an earlier stage.

### *2.3. Student writing performance in collaborative writing*

Research on student writing performance in collaborative writing settings has examined both the process of collaboration and the final written products (M. Li, 2018; M. Li & Zhang, 2023; Storch, 2011, 2019). With respect to the collaborative process, a substantial body of work has investigated students' behavioral engagement and interaction, often analyzed through language-related episodes (LREs; Storch, 2013) and, more recently, content- or organization-related episodes (H. C. Hsu, 2024). Additionally, engagement as an indicator of student writing performance has been operationalized more broadly to encompass affective, cognitive, and social dimensions of the writing process (Aubrey, 2022; Phan & Dao, 2023; Zheng et al., 2025). Regarding students' final products, researchers have explored whether collaborative writing enhances learners' writing skills (e.g., argumentation and communicative effectiveness; Lin, 2023) and language quality (e.g., accuracy, complexity, fluency; McDonough et al., 2019). Studies have also examined whether collaboratively composed texts outperform individually written ones (Ebadijalal & Moradkhani, 2023; Li, 2021; Sarkhosh & Najafi, 2020) and whether engagement in collaborative writing contributes to subsequent improvement in students' individual writing (H. C. Hsu & Lo, 2018).

The research on student writing performance in collaborative writing has not only advanced theoretical understanding but also shaped classroom practices, as many teachers now draw on this evidence to design collaborative writing activities. Informed by research demonstrating that collaborative writing can enhance both the writing process and the quality of written products, L2 teachers are increasingly recognizing its potential to support and improve students' overall writing performance (M. Li, 2018; M. Li & Zhang, 2023; Storch, 2019). In practice, some teachers integrate collaborative writing as a complement or alternative to individual writing tasks to make classroom activities more interactive and enhance student motivation, which in turn can lead to improved writing outcomes. For example, Villarreal and Lázaro-Ibarrola (2022) implemented model texts in collaborative writing among Spanish primary school EFL learners and found not only increased task motivation but also accuracy gains in text quality. Moreover, teachers have observed that collaboration supports weaker students through peer scaffolding while simultaneously challenging stronger students to articulate ideas more clearly and negotiate meaning, thereby fostering a reciprocal learning environment. Similarly, primary school teachers in Ruth's (2024) study reported that their EFL students benefited from collaborative writing through vocabulary expansion, improved writing skills, greater motivation, and reduced foreign language anxiety. This alignment between research

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and practice highlights how empirical evidence can empower teachers to implement collaborative writing more purposefully, with the dual goals of improving writing quality and cultivating students' collaboration and communication skills.

## 3. Research findings that have not been sufficiently applied

While research on collaborative writing in L2 contexts has expanded rapidly and yielded rich theoretical and empirical insights, many of its key findings remain insufficiently applied in classroom practice. A recurring theme across the literature is the persistence of research–practice gap: although studies have demonstrated the centrality of interaction quality, the critical role of students' emotional experiences, and the long-term developmental potential of collaborative writing, pedagogy often reduces collaboration to a means of producing written texts rather than a process deserving of its own instructional and evaluative focus (Wigglesworth & Storch, 2012). As a result, opportunities for fostering interactional competence, cultivating supportive emotional climates, and sustaining durable writing development are frequently overlooked or underutilized. This section reviews three domains where research has advanced compelling evidence, yet classroom application lags: (1) student interactions in collaborative writing, (2) students' emotional experiences in collaborative writing, and (3) the long-term effects of collaborative writing. Together, these strands of scholarship highlight not only what collaborative writing can achieve but also what is currently missing in pedagogical practice, underscoring the need to align classroom implementation more closely with research evidence.

### *3.1. Student interactions in collaborative writing*

A large body of research has demonstrated that student interactions during collaborative writing shape both learning and textual outcomes (e.g., H. C. Hsu, 2022; Cao et al., 2025; Li & Kim, 2016; Li & Zhu, 2013, 2017). Across contexts and modalities, these studies agree on a core finding: it is not the mere occurrence of collaboration but the quality of interaction that determines whether collaborative writing promotes joint learning or collapses into simple division of labor.

Empirical work highlights three major insights. First, students' interaction often gravitates toward content and task management rather than language or discourse. For instance, in a study involving 13 L2 undergraduates enrolled in an academic writing course at a university in New Zealand, Cao et al. (2025) reported that while most discussions centered on content, elaborate engagement among peers was an important factor of alignment between interaction and revisions. Second, modality influences interactional depth. Research with 22 Taiwanese EFL undergraduates (B2 CEFR level) co-writing on Google Docs by H. C. Hsu (2022) found that synchronous collaboration fostered reciprocal exchanges and collective decision-making, whereas asynchronous collaboration, despite generating more LREs, often fragmented into individual rather than joint work, with LREs remaining shallow. Third, group dynamics critically shape outcomes. Research on wiki-mediated collaborative writing, from studies with Chinese EFL students (Li & Zhu, 2013) to ESL learners in U.S. university English for Academic Purposes (EAP) courses (Li & Kim, 2016; Li & Zhu, 2017), consistently reveals patterned interaction, ranging from balanced, collective engagement to dominant – withdrawn or authoritative – responsive modes, with only the collective pattern leading to rhetorically coherent texts and sustained mutual scaffolding. These studies provide robust evidence that elaboration and reciprocity, rather than frequency of interaction alone, underpin productive collaboration.

Despite these insights, classroom pedagogy, based on our observations, often privileges the final product over the collaborative process. From this vantage point, we have noted that many teachers rarely monitor or scaffold how students engage with one another, leaving the quality of interaction to chance (Zheng et al., 2026). This misalignment is notable given repeated calls from researchers to treat interaction itself as a developmental target. Cao et al. (2025), working with L2 undergraduates in a New Zealand university academic writing course, highlighted how academic genre goals shape

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content-focused negotiation and emphasized the importance of scaffolding elaborative engagement and documenting joint decisions, whereas H. C. Hsu (2022) stressed the need for structured responsiveness in asynchronous contexts. Similarly, Li and Zhu (2017), who studied ESL students in a U.S. university using wikis to write research proposals, advocate holistic evaluation of collaboration (e.g., through edit histories), yet assessment in practice continues to center narrowly on the written text. Without attention to process, collaborative writing risks degenerating into divided labor, forfeiting its potential to cultivate collaborative competence.

To bridge this research–practice gap, two pedagogical implications could emerge. First, teachers may need to integrate process monitoring into instruction. Digital platforms already record detailed histories of contributions and revisions; these affordances can be harnessed for assessment, a strategy explicitly recommended by Li and Kim (2016) for transparent grading of peer engagement in wiki-based tasks. Requiring students to annotate links between discussion and revisions, or to submit reflection logs, can make interaction visible. Teachers can then monitor equality and mutuality of peer interaction through document histories and incorporate these dimensions into assessment criteria. In this way, process monitoring can be embedded within existing tools without imposing an unmanageable workload. Second, interactional competence should be explicitly scaffolded. Research consistently shows that productive collaboration does not arise automatically: students need guidance in building on peers' ideas, sustaining elaboration, and negotiating disagreement constructively (Cao et al., 2025; Li & Kim, 2016). Pre-task workshops can therefore introduce strategies such as consensus-building and elaborative feedback; teachers can model effective collaboration by sharing exemplars of successful interactional patterns (Li & Zhu, 2017). Reflection activities, both individual and group-based, further help students internalize these practices. Importantly, scaffolding should be modality-sensitive, which means that synchronous collaborative writing benefits from training in rapid deliberation, while asynchronous collaborative writing requires explicit norms for responsiveness and follow-up.

Taken together, the research highlights that collaborative writing is as much about cultivating collaborative processes as it is about improving L2 writing outcomes. By embedding process monitoring and scaffolding interactional competence, teachers can ensure that collaboration functions as a source of learning.

### *3.2. Student emotional experience in collaborative writing*

The role of emotions in collaborative writing has received empirical validation in recent L2 research. Findings consistently demonstrate that the affective dimension is central, not peripheral, to successful collaboration, shaping learners' engagement and outcomes through a complex interplay of positive and negative emotions. Students report feelings of enjoyment, pride, and satisfaction, but also experience significant anxiety, frustration, and discomfort during collaborative writing tasks (Alqasham, 2022; Zhang et al., 2021). Crucially, these emotions are not solely individual experiences but are socially constructed and negotiated in interaction, regulated through mechanisms of self-regulation, co-regulation, and socially shared regulation (Tao et al., 2022; Zhang et al., 2021). Evidence suggests that groups who effectively employ such strategies cultivate positive emotional climates that enhance both participation and writing performance.

Despite these robust research insights, their pedagogical application remains limited. This implementation gap is partly due to the inherent invisibility of students' internalized emotions and the insufficient monitoring of collaborative processes in classroom settings. As Zhang et al. (2025) found in their 17-week project-based study on Chinese EFL students, learners often suppress negative feelings such as anxiety or frustration to preserve group harmony, rendering these emotions undetectable to teachers. Compounding this, instructional attention frequently centers on evaluating final written products rather than observing the collaborative process, leaving socio-emotional dynamics

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largely overlooked (Alqasham, 2022). The result is that negative emotional spirals, triggered by technical difficulties, perceived unequal participation, or unconstructive peer feedback, may go unnoticed and unaddressed, eroding group cohesion and diminishing learning outcomes (Tao et al., 2022).

Comparative studies highlight the emotional climate as a key factor distinguishing high- from low-performing groups. Successful groups actively foster supportive environments through encouragement, humor, and empathy, thereby creating psychological safety that facilitates critical engagement and collaborative knowledge construction (Chiang, 2023; Tao et al., 2022). By contrast, struggling groups often fall into negative cycles of superficial agreement, disengagement, and exclusionary practices that undermine meaningful collaboration (Tao et al., 2022). Importantly, research also cautions against equating positive affect with improved outcomes. For example, Alqasham's (2022) study of 58 Saudi undergraduates using Blackboard chat box shows that enjoyment and satisfaction do not automatically yield better performance, underscoring the need for pedagogical mediation that explicitly links emotional engagement with writing development.

To address this gap, two pedagogical strategies are proposed. First, instruction could incorporate explicit training in emotional regulation and collaborative literacy. Rather than assuming students will pick up these skills during group work, teachers can provide pre-task workshops or structured roles that distribute both cognitive and emotional responsibilities (Robinson, 2013; Zhang et al., 2025). Such scaffolding equips learners with strategies for constructive feedback, conflict management, and effective online presence. Second, task design could intentionally integrate the emotional dimension of collaboration by leveraging digital tools while minimizing risks. For instance, affective supports, such as using emojis to provide positive, low-stakes feedback between peers (see Zhang et al., 2021), can normalize emotional expression, while clear feedback protocols can prevent harmful interactions like public shaming. Similarly, structured reflective activities such as guided debriefings or emotional journals can help externalize otherwise hidden feelings, enabling both peers and teachers to recognize and respond to emotional challenges in a timely manner.

The above insights suggest that emotions should be treated as a deliberate pedagogical focus rather than an incidental by-product of collaborative writing. By foregrounding the affective dimension, instructors can cultivate supportive collaborative environments that not only sustain learner engagement but also strengthen the developmental impact of L2 writing.

### 3.3. Long-term effects of collaborative writing

A body of research has empirically established that collaborative writing, when implemented effectively, can yield long-term improvements in L2 writers' individual performance. Across diverse contexts including face-to-face university writing classrooms (Chen, 2019; Chen & Yu, 2019; Davison, 2024), computer-mediated environments (Jiang & Eslami, 2022), project-based collaborations (R. Zhang et al., 2022), and task-based interventions (Gallego, 2022), studies converge on one key insight: collaborative writing is not merely a temporary aid to co-constructing texts but has the potential to foster durable improvements in individual L2 writing accuracy, fluency, grammatical development, and even syntactic complexity. While collaborative writing is becoming more prevalent in L2 instruction (e.g., Li & Zhang, 2023), a persistent challenge noted in the literature is that its implementation is not always sustained. In practice, it is sometimes treated as a contained pedagogical activity rather than a core, recurring component of the curriculum. This can prematurely cut short the process before its potential for fostering long-term individual development is fully realized (Chen & Yu, 2019; R. Zhang et al., 2022).

A first area of consensus in the literature is that collaborative writing contributes to sustained linguistic accuracy. Previous studies report that students who engaged in collaborative writing later produced more accurate texts in their individual writing, with reduced grammatical and lexical errors (Chen, 2019; Davison, 2024; Jiang & Eslami, 2022). Importantly, these gains are not fleeting. Chen's (2019) study of Chinese EFL undergraduates showed that accuracy improvements persisted even

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eight weeks after intervention, while Davison's (2024) research with 128 students in a United Arab Emirates (UAE) EAP program demonstrated similar long-term effects. The mechanism appears to lie in peer deliberation and LREs, which enable learners to internalize correct forms. However, not all areas of writing develop equally. For example, Chen (2019) observed that organizational gains from collaborative writing faded quickly without reinforcement, suggesting that different writing dimensions require sustained and differentiated scaffolding.

A second theme is that collaborative writing supports higher-order language development and syntactic sophistication when embedded in tasks that stimulate hypothesis-testing and negotiation. Gallego's (2022) study of 104 L2 Spanish learners showed that collaborative dictogloss tasks significantly enhanced learners' use of the subjunctive and promoted greater syntactic complexity, with gains enduring at delayed post-tests. Similarly, Jiang and Eslami's (2022) research with Chinese EFL students collaborating with native speakers via Microsoft Word and Tencent QQ found that native speaker–non-native speaker (NS–NNS) dyads in computer-mediated collaborative writing fostered global writing improvements, while NNS–NNS dyads promoted accuracy. These findings illustrate how task type, dyad composition, and duration all mediate the extent to which long-term effects emerge, reinforcing the need for careful pedagogical design.

Third, research highlights that the social and attitudinal dynamics of collaboration critically shape long-term outcomes. Chen and Yu's (2019) longitudinal case study of two Chinese university students demonstrated that learners' attitudes toward collaborative writing are not fixed but evolve over time, influencing interactional patterns and learning opportunities. Positive shifts in attitude fostered collaborative dialogue and an increasing number of successfully resolved LREs, while negative shifts undermined long-term benefits. Similarly, R. Zhang et al.'s (2022) study of five Chinese EFL undergraduates in a 13-week project-based collaboration documented fluctuating patterns of engagement in extended project-based collaborative writing, with some learners disengaging midway due to misaligned goals or unresolved conflicts. These studies indicate that the durability of collaborative writing benefits is contingent not only on linguistic scaffolding but also on sustained affective and social engagement.

While empirical research demonstrates that collaborative writing can yield durable gains, classroom practice in these contexts may not always capitalize on this potential. As noted in the literature, some teachers adopt collaborative writing only sporadically, often limiting it to a single formative assignment or a short-term trial (Chen & Yu, 2019; R. Zhang et al., 2022). For example, Chen's (2019) 16-week intervention demonstrated that as few as three collaborative tasks were sufficient to produce lasting gains in accuracy, yet many classrooms implement even fewer such tasks. In such cases, collaborative writing is treated as a novelty or supplementary activity rather than a systematically integrated pedagogical approach. As a result, benefits are either short-lived or fail to materialize at all, since the very conditions identified as crucial for long-term effects, such as repeated exposure, attitudinal cultivation, strategic grouping, and sustained scaffolding, are absent. For instance, Chen and Yu (2019) showed that negative attitudes developed over multiple tasks can derail collaboration, while R. Zhang et al. (2022) found that without ongoing monitoring, engagement patterns can fluctuate dramatically in longer projects.

To address this gap, two suggestions can be advanced. First, teachers could adopt a programmatic approach to collaborative writing, embedding it across multiple tasks and semesters rather than treating it as an isolated intervention. This would allow attitudes, engagement, and collaboration skills to evolve over time, enabling students to internalize linguistic gains and sustain them in individual writing. Second, pedagogical support could be multi-dimensional, targeting not only text quality but also social dynamics and reflective practice. Teachers could, for instance, provide structured opportunities for learners to articulate the value of peer support, monitor group dynamics, and intervene when negative attitudes threaten to derail collaboration. Such measures may help to activate the long-term mechanisms of collaborative writing documented in research, ensuring that classroom practices better align with empirical evidence.

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In sum, while a substantial body of research now attests to the long-term value of collaborative writing, practical application remains limited and inconsistent. Without sustained and strategically scaffolded implementation, collaborative writing risks being reduced to a short-lived experiment, undermining its transformative potential. The challenge ahead lies in bridging the gap between research findings and classroom practice so that collaborative writing can function as a durable engine of L2 development.

## 4. Areas under-represented in literature but essential in application

Although collaborative writing has been extensively studied in terms of group-level outcomes and general task implementation, several areas critical for effective classroom practice remain under-represented in the literature. We emphasize that this under-representation does not imply a complete lack of research, but rather reflects a persistent gap between frequent calls for investigation and the relatively limited empirical evidence. Key areas include (1) feedback and evaluation practices, (2) individual learner development, and (3) pre-writing training, each of which has been shown to substantially influence both collaborative processes and writing outcomes. While existing studies offer valuable insights, they are often contextually narrow, tool-specific, or short-term, leaving teachers with limited guidance for applying these strategies in diverse, real-world L2 classrooms. The following subsections review these three areas to highlight their importance for research-informed pedagogical practice and identify directions for future investigation.

### *4.1. Feedback and evaluation of collaborative writing*

Feedback and evaluation are indispensable to the success of collaborative writing in L2 classrooms, yet they remain relatively under-represented in the research literature compared to other areas of collaborative writing. While calls for more work on assessment and feedback practices are recurrent (Chen & Chen, 2025; Chen & Zhang, 2024; Cheung, 2023), empirical investigations remain sparse and disproportionately focused on computer-mediated contexts. This gap could be problematic because in offline classrooms, feedback is a primary pedagogical tool and an essential mechanism to ensure the quality of collaborative writing. Without clear guidance from research, teachers often lack strategies to evaluate group work or to provide feedback that supports both the collaborative process and the quality of the final product.

One important thread in existing research concerns the role of assessment design. A few studies (Chen & Chen, 2025; Chen & Zhang, 2024; Cheung, 2023) show that assessment schemes shape learner motivation, interaction patterns, and the opportunities for language learning within collaborative writing tasks. When collaborative writing is graded solely on the final product, learners tend to prioritize efficiency and correctness, often resulting in unequal participation and reduced collaboration (Cheung, 2023). In contrast, when process-oriented criteria such as mutuality and equality are explicitly incorporated into evaluation, students display greater accountability, more sustained collaborative engagement, and higher rates of correctly resolved LREs (Chen & Chen, 2025; Chen & Zhang, 2024). For example, Chen's and Chen's (2025) research with Chinese university students using the Shimo platform demonstrated that adding process criteria to a rubric significantly increased intrinsic motivation and doubled the number of correctly resolved LREs. These findings suggest that evaluation itself can act as a form of feedback, which signals to learners what aspects of collaboration and writing are valued. However, most of this work has been conducted in controlled, computer-supported settings, leaving open questions about how to implement process-oriented rubrics in offline, naturalistic classrooms.

Another line of work focuses on peer feedback and corrective feedback during collaborative writing. Research on peer feedback (e.g., Bueno-Alastuey et al., 2022; Díez-Bedmar & Pérez-Paredes, 2012) demonstrates that students can provide both socio-affective support and form-focused

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corrections in collaborative settings, but the medium shapes the type and uptake of feedback. For example, Díez-Bedmar and Pérez-Paredes (2012), in their study of 20 Spanish and British tertiary students co-creating tourist brochures on Moodle, found that forums primarily elicited affective support and task management moves, whereas wikis facilitated more direct linguistic corrections. Similarly, Bueno-Alastuey et al.'s (2022) research with second-year Spanish FL learners showed that peer feedback and collaborative writing can have complementary effects on subsequent individual writing: peer feedback was particularly beneficial for accuracy, while collaborative writing enhanced fluency and lexical variety. Yet, despite these promising findings, research remains highly tool-specific, and relatively little is known about how peer feedback is enacted in face-to-face collaborative writing or how teachers can scaffold peer response to maximize its effectiveness.

Teachers' written corrective feedback (WCF) has also been explored in limited ways in collaborative writing. Studies provide evidence that both direct and indirect feedback can facilitate linguistic and pragmatic development in collaborative writing contexts (Cho & Kim, 2022; González-Cruz et al., 2022; Kim et al., 2025). For instance, González-Cruz et al. (2022) showed that direct WCF combined with metalinguistic training using error logs significantly improved accuracy in revisions among 32 low-proficiency Spanish EFL adolescents. Cho and Kim (2022), working with beginner learners of Korean in a U.S. university, found that indirect WCF was equally effective for individuals and pairs in acquiring honorific forms, suggesting that collaboration did not necessarily amplify the effects of feedback. By contrast, Kim et al. (2025) demonstrated that synchronous teacher feedback during 44 Japanese EFL students' collaborative drama script writing on Google Docs improved learners' pragmatic appropriateness in complex contexts such as power-asymmetric complaints. These findings highlight that the effectiveness of feedback is contingent on factors such as the linguistic target and task type. However, systematic exploration of how feedback can be integrated into collaborative writing pedagogy beyond controlled experimental conditions remains lacking, especially in the offline classrooms where most teachers operate.

Taken together, the literature reveals a paradox. On the one hand, research consistently affirms that assessment and feedback critically shape collaborative writing processes and outcomes. On the other hand, studies remain confined to narrow contexts, leaving teachers with little guidance for applying feedback strategies in diverse, everyday classroom conditions. As a result, although feedback is central to writing pedagogy, its role in collaborative writing remains under-theorized and under-implemented.

To address the above gap, future research can expand in at least two directions. First, more work is needed in offline, naturalistic classroom settings where teachers commonly conduct collaborative writing but lack digital traces such as chat logs or revision histories to aid evaluation. Developing practical, classroom-friendly tools such as simplified rubrics, observation protocols, or reflective prompts would facilitate the dialogue between research and practice. Critically, researchers would need to partner with teachers to create feasible assessment strategies for large-class contexts, where managing large student groups present a major and underserved challenge. Second, studies can move beyond the current focus on computer-mediated corrective feedback to explore holistic feedback practices, including formative teacher feedback, structured peer review, and self-assessment. These approaches may provide a more sustainable model of collaborative writing feedback that balances attention to process, product, and learner development.

In sum, although research on feedback and evaluation in collaborative writing has begun to show the powerful impact of assessment design and feedback type, it remains under-represented compared to its central role in pedagogy. Investigating feedback in offline settings and broadening the focus to include formative, multimodal, and holistic strategies, future research can better support teachers in leveraging feedback to enhance the quality of collaborative writing in L2 classrooms.

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### 4.2. Individual development in collaborative writing

Although collaborative writing has been widely investigated for its group-level outcomes, such as the co-construction of texts and the quality of final products, its implications for individual learners' development remain under-represented. Much of the existing literature treats pairs or groups as the unit of analysis, overlooking learners' unique characteristics, needs, and growth trajectories. Even when studies attend to individual development (Davison, 2024; Zheng et al., 2025), they often limit their scope to short-term writing performance (e.g., accuracy gains measured in follow-up tests), while neglecting broader aspects of personal growth such as communicative skills, self-regulation, critical thinking, and emotional intelligence. This tendency has both research and pedagogical consequences. In practice, teachers may prioritize collective outcomes, leaving issues such as free-riding, uneven participation, or unacknowledged individual progress insufficiently addressed.

Emerging evidence suggests that collaborative writing fosters multifaceted forms of individual development, extending well beyond writing accuracy or textual quality. For instance, Abe (2020), in a study of upper-intermediate to advanced Japanese university students co-authoring essays asynchronously on the Quip platform over a 15-week semester, showed how L2 learners gradually developed interactional competence in asynchronous collaborative writing, learning to design their contributions so they were recognizable and accountable to peers. Over time, learners shifted from isolated contributions to more responsive, socially attuned participation, emulating peers' methods and refining pragmatic strategies such as making polite requests or signaling cohesion. This demonstrates that collaborative writing can nurture pragmatic awareness and interactional flexibility, skills critical for both academic and professional communication but rarely measured in writing assessments.

Similarly, research on transfer from collaborative writing to individual writing highlights several benefits. The seminal work by Bikowski and Vithanage (2016) provided early empirical support for this, demonstrating that L2 writers who engaged in repeated, in-class web-based collaborative writing tasks showed statistically greater gains in their individual writing scores over a semester than those who worked individually, despite starting at a lower proficiency level. This aligns with more recent findings. Davison (2024), working with 128 Arabic L1 undergraduates in a UAE university EAP program, and D. Li and Tang (2024), in their study of 56 intermediate Chinese EFL majors collaborating via Microsoft Word and WeChat, both found that learners in collaborative writing conditions improved their individual writing accuracy more significantly than peers working independently, likely due to the deliberation and feedback that occur in collaborative exchanges. However, these studies also revealed limitations: improvement in syntactic complexity was minimal, and gains in fluency were either equivalent across groups or context-dependent. D. Li and Tang's (2024) research specifically highlighted that while groups of four led to greater individual gains in accuracy and overall performance than pairs, neither group size fostered significant development in syntactic complexity over the 8-week intervention. These findings suggest that accuracy benefits most directly from peer collaboration, while complexity may require longer or differently structured interventions.

Other studies point to developmental domains often ignored in traditional collaborative writing research. Selcuk et al. (2019), in their research with Turkish high school EFL learners using Facebook groups to co-write short stories over 7 weeks, highlighted how emergent group leaders in web-based collaborative writing provided not only linguistic scaffolding but also affective and motivational support, enabling quieter learners to gain confidence and autonomy. Similarly, Zheng et al. (2025), in a 13-week longitudinal case study of five Chinese engineering undergraduates collaborating on writing a research report, revealed that participation in collaborative writing can foster emotional regulation skills, empathy, and accountability. Learners developed strategies to manage frustration, anxiety, and conflict while engaging in high-stakes collaborative writing tasks. These affective and interpersonal benefits echo the observations of Bikowski and Vithanage (2016), whose survey and interview data indicated that collaborative writing helped students form stronger bonds with classmates and develop

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greater comfort with giving and receiving peer feedback. In short, these findings underscore that collaborative writing, when carefully facilitated, cultivates interpersonal and intrapersonal growth, which are essential but often invisible dimensions of L2 development.

To sum up, this body of work underscores a key problem: while scholarship frequently calls for attention to the learner as an individual within collaboration, empirical research usually focuses on measurable writing performance, resulting in a partial understanding of collaborative writing's potential. In practice, teachers may replicate this bias by evaluating group products while neglecting individual experiences, contributions, and needs. These risk perpetuating issues such as unequal participation or overlooking growth in transferable skills like leadership, empathy, and problem-solving.

Two directions seem crucial for advancing both research and pedagogy. First, studies can adopt more holistic and longitudinal perspectives on individual development in collaborative writing. This means not only measuring short-term improvements in complexity, accuracy, and fluency, but also tracing how learners' pragmatic, emotional, and collaborative competencies evolve across tasks and contexts. Methodologically, approaches such as conversation analysis (Abe, 2020) or mixed-method designs integrating logs, interviews, and process data (Zheng et al., 2025) provide models for capturing such nuanced trajectories. Second, pedagogy may need to move toward balancing group outcomes with individual accountability. Teachers could provide individual reflection tasks alongside group writing, and give feedback that recognizes personal contributions and growth. Such strategies may not only mitigate free-riding or domination but also align collaborative writing practices with broader educational goals of fostering well-rounded communicators and collaborative citizens.

In short, while collaborative writing research has traditionally privileged collective products, a growing body of work reveals that individuals also undergo diverse forms of development. Recognizing and systematically investigating these dimensions is essential for bridging the gap between research and practice, and for ensuring that collaborative writing is not only a means of producing better texts but also of cultivating more capable, reflective, and resilient learners.

### *4.3. Pre-writing training*

The third underrepresented research area pertains to learners' preparedness for collaborative writing tasks. A recurrent concern in the literature is that students often enter collaborative writing tasks without the necessary awareness of collaborative processes, strategies, or goals, which can lead to unequal participation, superficial cooperation, or resistance to collaboration (Li & Zhang, 2023; Zhang & Plonsky, 2020). Scholars have repeatedly called for explicit pre-writing training to scaffold learners before they engage in collaborative writing tasks, yet empirical studies remain limited in scope.

A central problem is the mismatch between what collaborative writing requires and what students typically know how to do. Unlike individual writing, collaborative writing entails joint responsibility, co-regulation, and negotiation of meaning, which many learners have not previously experienced (Zhang et al., 2022). Without targeted preparation, learners often default to dividing tasks, avoiding negotiation, or privileging efficiency over mutual engagement (H. C. Hsu, 2024). The absence of training not only reduces opportunities for language learning, such as LREs, but also compromises the ecological validity of research, as most real classrooms provide some form of orientation before implementing collaborative writing (Zhang & Plonsky, 2020).

The few available empirical studies suggest that pre-writing training can substantially improve both collaborative processes and writing outcomes, though effects are uneven across dimensions. Chen and Ren (2022), in their quasi-experimental study of 40 intermediate-level adult ESL learners in a U.S. university's Intensive English Program, showed that explicit metacognitive training, which covers declarative, procedural, and conditional knowledge about collaborative writing, led to more accurate, fluent, and higher-quality essays, as well as more systematic planning, monitoring, and evaluation. Similarly, H. C. Hsu (2024) demonstrated that a web-based training intervention

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for Taiwanese EFL students transformed low-engagement, cooperative patterns into genuinely collaborative ones, with trained pairs generating more and better-resolved LREs and achieving greater gains in content quality and language accuracy. Other studies highlight broader benefits, such as increased learner accountability, reduced social loafing, and more positive attitudes toward collaborative writing (Li & Zhang, 2023). Zhang's (2021) research of Chinese EFL undergraduates in a hybrid writing course, which included five collaborative writing practices, underscored how pre-training familiarizes students with process and partner dynamics. Together, these findings suggest that pre-task training is not peripheral but central to unlocking the pedagogical potential of collaborative writing.

Despite these promising results, research remains limited in several ways. First, pre-writing training is chronically under-reported. In a large-scale review, Zhang and Plonsky (2020) found that only 18.1% of collaborative writing studies incorporated or even mentioned pre-task training. Second, most training interventions are short-term and narrow in focus, often targeting either general collaborative writing strategies (e.g., role assignment) or specific textual concerns (e.g., genre instruction), but rarely integrating both (R. Zhang et al., 2022). Third, while gains are consistently observed in accuracy and content, improvements in organization and linguistic complexity are less robust (Chen & Ren, 2022; H. C. Hsu, 2024). Finally, research tends to be restricted to university-level learners, with little attention to K-12 or diverse learner populations, limiting generalizability (Li & Zhang, 2023).

To address these gaps, two directions could be particularly urgent. First, research needs to move beyond proof-of-concept studies toward systematic investigations of training design. Comparative studies could test which elements (e.g., metacognitive instruction, modeling, coherence training, genre-based scaffolding) are most effective for different learner profiles and modalities. Longitudinal studies are also necessary to examine whether training effects persist over time and transfer to individual writing. Moreover, methodological transparency in reporting training protocols should become a norm, as the absence of such detail undermines replication and the accumulation of evidence. Second, pedagogy must integrate pre-writing training as a routine component of collaborative writing instruction rather than a one-off intervention. Practical steps include modeling effective collaboration through video demonstrations, providing revision and collaboration checklists. Teachers could also extend training beyond procedural knowledge to include affective and social dimensions, such as fostering trust, managing conflicts, and encouraging collective ownership of texts. Given the persistent challenge of limited improvements in organization and complexity, training could incorporate explicit instruction on rhetorical structuring and advanced language resources. Finally, teacher professional development is crucial as teachers themselves need support to design and facilitate training that balances writing goals, collaborative dynamics, and technological affordances.

In sum, pre-writing training is consistently shown to enhance collaboration quality, learning opportunities, and writing outcomes, yet it remains underutilized in both research and pedagogy. By investigating its design and embedding it into classroom practice, the field may better realize the potential of collaborative writing to promote not only higher-quality co-authored texts but also the sustainable development of learners' individual writing competencies.

## 5. Conclusion

To shed light on the dynamic interplay between collaborative writing research and its application in L2 contexts, this paper discussed three critical relationships. The first relationship focused on research findings that have been reasonably well applied in practice, highlighting areas such as activity types and grouping strategies in collaborative writing, computer-mediated collaborative writing, and the impact of collaborative writing on student writing performance. We suggested a wider use of research-informed approaches to maximize the potential of collaborative writing for L2 teaching and learning. Specifically, we recommended leveraging empirical findings on task-based and project-based collaborative writing, integrating computer-mediated tools effectively, and ensuring

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these practices enhance student engagement and learning outcomes. The second relationship examined areas where research findings have not been sufficiently applied in practice, including the quality of student interactions, the emotional experiences of students during collaborative writing, and the long-term effects of collaborative writing on individual writing development. For this relationship, we proposed enhancing interaction quality through structured activities, supporting emotional intelligence with targeted training, and conducting longitudinal studies to understand and sustain long-term benefits. The last relationship identified issues that are under-represented in research but are crucial in practice, such as feedback and evaluation practices, individual learner development, and pre-writing training. For these issues, we called for more comprehensive research to fill the gaps. Specifically, we urged investigations into the impact of feedback and evaluation methods, studies on individual development within collaborative contexts, and the development of effective pre-writing training programs to prepare students for collaborative writing tasks.

Of scholarly and practical value, this paper makes a contribution to the field of L2 writing by systematically mapping the critical gap between research and practice in collaborative writing. It moves beyond simply identifying this gap to proposing a clear, tripartite framework that classifies the dynamic interplay into three actionable relationships: well-applied findings, under-applied research, and under-researched practical issues. By synthesizing existing evidence and pinpointing areas for development from integrating technology effectively to addressing emotional experiences and feedback practices, the paper provides a roadmap for both practitioners seeking research-informed strategies and researchers aiming to conduct impactful, practice-oriented studies. This paper also offers a pathway to bridge the divide, potentially empowering educators to maximize the pedagogical value of collaborative writing and guiding future research to address the most pressing needs in the L2 classroom.

The above discussion of the three research–practice relationships should be interpreted with caution for two main reasons. First, the areas identified for each relationship inevitably reflect our own pedagogical and research interests, as well as what has been published and made accessible in the literature, particularly journal papers. Second, the practice-oriented insights we provide are drawn from our own knowledge of empirical literature and experience of implementing and supporting teachers in collaborative writing across the Chinese Mainland, Macao, and New Zealand, which may limit the generalizability of our observations to other contexts. Future research could address these limitations by incorporating more diverse geographical and educational settings, as well as drawing on a wider range of sources, including grey literature and classroom-based documentation, to provide a more comprehensive picture of research–practice connections.

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