

# *Teacher Perceptions of Collaborative Writing and Microsoft Teams: A Case Study from a Sino-British University*

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**Abstract:** This article explores EAP instructors' perceptions of collaborative writing (CW) and Microsoft Teams as a collaborative platform at a Sino-British university. Based on a mixed-methods study involving 36 surveyed and 10 interviewed lecturers, findings reveal a critical paradox: while teachers recognize CW's benefits for critical thinking and peer learning, there is still room for discussion about its impact on actual writing quality, due to students' "free-riding," superficial task division, and the tendency to displace Teams with L1-dominant platforms. Actionable pedagogical adjustments, including process-oriented assessment leveraging digital footprints, will be proposed to mitigate these practical challenges.

## **1. Introduction**

In tertiary education, collaboration is emphasised to prepare students for the future workplace, based on its established function as a driving force for productivity, creativity, and organisational resilience <sup>[1]</sup>. At the Sino-British university under study, all Year 1 students enroll in an English for Academic Purposes (EAP) course that incorporates a project requiring collaboration among small groups of three to four peers to produce a proposal, which is a new genre for the majority of students. The intention of involving teachers from all Year 1 modules in the research targets at exploring whether students' language abilities influence teachers' perceptions of collaborative writing (CW).

The rise of digital technology has facilitated more streamlined online collaborative writing processes for students, with Microsoft Teams serving as a prominent solution. Given this growing reliance, it is crucial to understand how EAP educators perceive both the collaborative pedagogy itself and the specific technologies employed. Therefore, this study addresses the following research questions:

- 1) How do teachers at the Sino-British university perceive the effectiveness of collaborative writing?
- 2) According to teachers, does Teams or other collaborative editing tools contribute to the efficacy of group work?

## 2. Literature Review

Computer-mediated collaborative writing has emerged as a transformative pedagogical approach in L2 contexts. A systematic review indicates that Web 2.0 technologies fundamentally reshape writing interaction by extending collaboration beyond the physical classroom [2]. Specifically, tools such as Wikis and Google Docs have been proven their effectiveness in enhancing writing performance by facilitating communication and version tracking [3]. It is also found that wiki-mediated collaboration, compared to face-to-face modes, significantly improves students' writing quality and self-regulation [4].

However, the impact of these tools relies heavily on teaching practice, which is shaped by teacher cognition. It is argued that teacher beliefs are central to how collaborative tasks are designed and perceived [5]. While teachers recognize the benefits of collaborative writing, such as increased student motivation [6] and vocabulary acquisition, they also report significant barriers. Researchers identify classroom management and assessing individual contributions as primary challenges that make teachers reluctant to adopt collaborative writing [7].

To address these challenges, a "process-and-product-based" assessment model is proposed, leveraging technology to track student contributions and ensure fairness [8]. Despite these developments, existing research largely focuses on Wikis or Google Docs within general EFL contexts. There remains a lack of research examining teacher perceptions specifically regarding Microsoft Teams within English for Academic Purposes (EAP) contexts [9]. Moreover, since Google Docs and Wikis are often inaccessible in the Chinese mainland, there is a pressing need to examine Microsoft Teams as an alternative, which remains largely unexplored in existing literature. Consequently, further investigation is needed to understand how EAP teachers at Sino-British higher education institutions perceive the effectiveness of Microsoft Teams for collaborative writing in the specific context.

## 3. Methodology

### 3.1 Participants

The study involved 36 teachers with varied teaching experiences, ranging from novice instructors to those with over five years of practice. They are both with and without prior experience of implementing CW. These teachers instructed Year 1 students across a range of language proficiency levels, from foundation to advanced (CEFR A1 to B2). Table 1 provides detailed information on the distribution of teachers according to their past experience with facilitating CW, their students' language proficiency levels, and their years of teaching experience.

Table 1: Teachers' distribution according to their past experience with facilitating CW, their students' language levels and years of teaching experience.

| Past Experience with Facilitating CW |                       | Students' Language Levels |                      |                       |                      | Years of Teaching Experience |                       |                      |
|--------------------------------------|-----------------------|---------------------------|----------------------|-----------------------|----------------------|------------------------------|-----------------------|----------------------|
| Yes                                  | No                    | Foundation                | Pre-intermediate     | Intermediate          | Advanced             | 0-2 Years                    | 3-5 Years             | Over 5 Years         |
| <b>24</b><br>(66.67%)                | <b>12</b><br>(33.33%) | <b>6</b><br>(16.67%)      | <b>8</b><br>(22.22%) | <b>18</b><br>(50.00%) | <b>4</b><br>(11.11%) | <b>5</b><br>(13.89%)         | <b>25</b><br>(69.44%) | <b>6</b><br>(16.67%) |
| Total: 36                            |                       | Total: 36                 |                      |                       |                      | Total: 36                    |                       |                      |

## 3.2 Instruments

### 3.2.1 Teacher Questionnaire

A total of 36 teachers participated in a survey conducted immediately after completing facilitating the CW project throughout a semester. The questionnaire comprised of 18 items, including 3 demographic questions and 15 efficacy evaluation questions. Of the 15 efficacy questions, 6 assessed teachers' perceptions of the effectiveness of CW, drawing on Coffin's framework <sup>[10]</sup>, while the remaining 9 focused on their experiences using Microsoft Teams as a tool for managing group progress.

Questions on the functionality of CW invite teachers to rate its impact on various dimensions, such as students' critical thinking, overall writing quality, engagement in class activities, and peer learning benefits. Additionally, the other questions evaluated the usability of Microsoft Teams and its effectiveness in facilitating communication within student groups.

### 3.2.2 Semi-structured Interviews

To obtain more in-depth insights, 10 teachers participated in individual semi-structured interviews. Inspired by Bryman <sup>[11]</sup>, the questions focused on three main areas: teachers' perceptions of factors contributing to students' positive or negative attitudes toward CW; how CW promotes greater student engagement in the writing process; and the influence of Microsoft Teams on group dynamics within student teams. All interviews were conducted online and video-recorded to ensure accurate data capture for subsequent analysis.

## 4. Results and Discussion

The survey questionnaire yielded quantitative data, while the interviews provided complementary qualitative insights. Together, these data sources addressed the two research questions: (1) how teachers perceive the effectiveness of CW, and (2) the extent to which teachers believe Microsoft Teams enhances the efficacy of group work.

### 4.1 Questionnaire

Table 2 presents teachers' perceptions of CW and Microsoft Teams. Regarding CW, most teachers agree it enhances critical thinking (72.22%), peer learning (69.44%), and writing engagement (63.89%). However, only 38.89% believe CW improves overall writing quality, with 47.22% remaining neutral and 13.89% disagreeing.

For Microsoft Teams, merely 30.56% agree it effectively enhances communication, compared to 33.33% neutral and 36.11% negative views. Conversely, teachers hold more positive views with 58.33% acknowledging sufficient functionality, 77.78% praising technical support, and 50% expressing overall satisfaction.

Table 2: General results of how teachers perceive the efficacy of CW and Microsoft Teams.

| Statements  | Strongly Agree | Agree | Neutral | Disagree | Strongly Disagree | Sub totals     |                |                |
|---|----------------|-------|---------|----------|-------------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|
|   |                |       |         |          |                   | SA + A         | N              | D + SD         |
| 5、 CW activities enhance students' critical thinking skills.  | 5              | 21    | 9       | 1        | 0                 | 26<br>(72.22%) | 9<br>(25.00%)  | 1<br>(2.78%)   |
| 6、 I believe CW improves the overall quality of students' writing.  | 4              | 10    | 17      | 5        | 0                 | 14<br>(38.89%) | 17<br>(47.22%) | 5<br>(13.89%)  |
| 7、 CW fosters greater student engagement in the writing process.  | 9              | 14    | 9       | 4        | 0                 | 23<br>(63.89%) | 9<br>(25.00%)  | 4<br>(11.11%)  |
| 8、 In the CW process, students benefit from peer-learning.  | 5              | 20    | 10      | 1        | 0                 | 25<br>(69.44%) | 10<br>(27.78%) | 1<br>(2.78%)   |
| 13、 MS Teams was used by students to enhance effective communication and provide timely feedback during group work. | 1              | 10    | 12      | 10       | 3                 | 11<br>(30.56%) | 12<br>(33.33%) | 13<br>(36.11%) |
| 15、 MS Teams offers adequate functions for students and teachers to use in this proposal writing project.           | 9              | 12    | 10      | 5        | 0                 | 21<br>(58.33%) | 10<br>(27.78%) | 5<br>(13.89%)  |
| 16、 There was enough technical support for teachers to use MS Teams for this proposal writing project.              | 5              | 23    | 5       | 3        | 0                 | 28<br>(77.78%) | 5<br>(13.89%)  | 3<br>(8.33%)   |
| 18、 Overall, I am satisfied with the use of MS Teams for facilitating the CW program.                               | 3              | 15    | 9       | 8        | 1                 | 18<br>(50.00%) | 9<br>(25.00%)  | 9<br>(25.00%)  |

## 4.2 Multifaceted Analysis

Tables 3-5 illustrate variations in teachers' attitudes toward CW and Microsoft Teams based on three variables:

**Prior CW experience:** Experienced teachers view CW more positively than inexperienced ones (45.83% vs. 25%). However, regarding Teams' communicative utility, inexperienced teachers show slightly higher confidence (33.33% vs. 29.17%).

**Students' language proficiency:** Confidence in CW improving writing quality decreases as student proficiency rises: 66.67% (foundation), 37.5% (pre-intermediate), 33.33% (intermediate), and 25% (advanced). Trust in Teams follows a similar declining trend, dropping from 37.5% to 25% across levels.

**Teaching tenure:** Teachers with 0–2, 3–5, and >5 years' experience report 60%, 32%, and 50% positivity toward CW's impact, respectively. Conversely, trust in Teams' communication capabilities grows with teaching experience, rising from 20% (0–2 years) to 33.33% (>5 years).

Table 3: Teachers' perceptions of CW and MS Teams according to prior experience with CW.

| Statement categories                           | Past Experience with Facilitating CW |         |          |          |         |          |
|--|--------------------------------------|---------|----------|----------|---------|----------|
|  | Yes                                  |         |          | No       |         |          |
|  | Positive                             | Neutral | Negative | Positive | Neutral | Negative |
| Collaboration's impact on writing quality (S6) | 45.83%                               | 45.38%  | 8.33%    | 25.00%   | 50.00%  | 25.00%   |
| MS Teams' effect on communication (S13)        | 29.17%                               | 33.33%  | 37.50%   | 33.33%   | 33.33%  | 33.33%   |

Table 4: Teachers' perceptions of CW and MS Teams according to students' language proficiency levels.

| Statement categories                           | Students' Language Levels |         |          |                  |         |          |              |         |          |          |         |          |
|--|---------------------------|---------|----------|------------------|---------|----------|--------------|---------|----------|----------|---------|----------|
|  | Foundation                |         |          | Pre-intermediate |         |          | Intermediate |         |          | Advanced |         |          |
|  | Positive                  | Neutral | Negative | Positive         | Neutral | Negative | Positive     | Neutral | Negative | Positive | Neutral | Negative |
| Collaboration's impact on writing quality (S6) | 66.67%                    | 33.33%  | 0.00%    | 37.50%           | 50.00%  | 25.00%   | 33.33%       | 44.44%  | 22.22%   | 25.00%   | 75.00%  | 0.00%    |
| MS Teams' effect on communication (S13)        | 33.33%                    | 33.33%  | 33.33%   | 37.50%           | 25.00%  | 37.50%   | 27.78%       | 27.78%  | 44.44%   | 25.00%   | 75.00%  | 0.00%    |

Table 5: Teachers' perceptions of CW and MS Teams according to years of past teaching experience.

| Statement categories                           | Years of Teaching Experience |         |          |           |         |          |              |         |          |
|--|------------------------------|---------|----------|-----------|---------|----------|--------------|---------|----------|
|  | 0-2 Years                    |         |          | 3-5 Years |         |          | Over 5 Years |         |          |
|  | Positive                     | Neutral | Negative | Positive  | Neutral | Negative | Positive     | Neutral | Negative |
| Collaboration's impact on writing quality (S6) | 60.00%                       | 40.00%  | 0.00%    | 32.00%    | 48.00%  | 20.00%   | 50.00%       | 50.00%  | 0.00%    |
| MS Teams' effect on communication (S13)        | 20.00%                       | 60.00%  | 20.00%   | 32.00%    | 24.00%  | 44.00%   | 33.33%       | 50.00%  | 16.67%   |

The findings indicate that teachers with prior CW experience are more confident in its ability to enhance writing quality. Similarly, those teaching lower-level students show greater trust in its effectiveness, while teachers with 3–5 years of experience appear least confident. Regarding MS Teams, neither prior CW experience nor students' language proficiency significantly influence teachers' confidence in its communication facilitation. However, confidence in the tool increases with greater teaching experience.

### 4.3 Interviews

Interviews with ten EAP lecturers (A– J) elaborated on the survey results.

Although lecturers acknowledged benefits like peer learning, they noted negative student attitudes; Teachers A, B, and D observed resistance to group work rooted in traditional learning habits. Teacher B specifically identified a "divide and conquer" approach – splitting tasks rather than co-authoring – which limited peer revision and writing quality. Furthermore, "free-riding" (Teachers I and J) raised concerns regarding fairness and assessment difficulty.

Feedback on Microsoft Teams highlighted both its potential and practical limits. While Teachers D and E praised its centralized storage for monitoring discussions, Teachers B and C noted system conflicts with Apple devices. Additionally, Teachers C, I, and J observed that students often relegated Teams to file storage, preferring WeChat for discussion. This displacement bypassed L2 (English) application, hindering improvements in linguistic proficiency and final writing quality.

## 5. Conclusion

This study examined university EAP instructors' perceptions of CW and the Microsoft Teams as a collaboration tool. The findings indicate that while instructors acknowledge the benefits of CW for fostering critical thinking, student engagement, and peer learning, significant reservations exist regarding its impact on improving the writing quality due to superficial task division, free-riding, and assessment complexities.

Regarding the platform, while Microsoft Teams was recognized for progress management, it was not perceived as effectively facilitating collaborative communication or feedback. A critical finding was its frequent displacement by familiar social platforms like WeChat. This shift often moves discussion into the students' first language, thereby reducing opportunities for target language practice and decreasing the transparency of the collaborative process for the instructor.

Instructors' backgrounds also influenced perceptions. Prior experience with CW correlated with greater confidence in its efficacy, whereas mid-career instructors expressed the most scepticism. However, confidence in the technological platform increased with overall teaching experience.

Based on the findings above, several pedagogical and institutional adjustments might be considered. First, to address "divide and conquer" tactics and "free-riding," evolving from a purely product-focused assessment to a process-oriented approach appears beneficial. Allocating sufficient class time for supervised collaborative writing could serve as a practical tactic. This controlled environment might facilitate genuine L2 negotiation, thereby minimizing students' tendency to revert to WeChat for mother-tongue communication. Furthermore, such supervision encourages deeper collaboration, naturally enhancing peer learning and critical thinking. Concurrently, educators could explicitly incorporate the collaborative "digital footprint" – such as Microsoft Teams comment threads and version history – into grading rubrics. This comprehensive, process-based evaluation not only ensures the platform serves its intended communicative purpose but also effectively mitigates free-riding by enforcing individual accountability. Furthermore, regarding technological infrastructure, the reported compatibility issues between Microsoft Teams and Apple devices suggest a need for enhanced institutional support. Ensuring a seamless user experience is essential to position Teams as a viable platform and prevent students from defaulting to less academically integrated tools. Finally, since data indicates that teachers with prior collaborative experience and those teaching lower proficiency levels hold more positive views, targeted professional development appears essential. The university could organize workshops where experienced instructors share strategies for managing group dynamics and scaffolding tasks. This would help bridge the confidence gap for mid-career teachers (3–5 years) and ensure effective collaborative writing implementation across all proficiency levels.

This study presents three main limitations. First, by relying exclusively on teacher-reported data, this study captures subjective educator perceptions rather than providing objective evidence of CW's actual impact on student writing quality or the pedagogical effectiveness of Microsoft Teams. Second, despite purposive sampling for diversity, the small sample size ( $N = 36$ ) limits the generalizability of conclusions regarding how specific variables influence teacher practices. Finally, the findings are contextually bounded to Year 1 instructors at a single university, potentially restricting their transferability to other educational settings, cultures, or student cohorts.

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