Use of collaborative writing strategy in teaching functional writing skills in English in secondary schools in Kiambu County, Kenya

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Abstract: Fuuctional writing is an important aspect in English that every person is required to develop and master for official communication in the society. It requires to be taught in a manner in which each and every individual is able to utilize it in every day to day life. Collaborative strategy is one of the strategies that scholars embrace in instruction, and especially handling crucial skills like creative and writing skills. This article makes an attempt to discuss the use of collaborative writing strategy in teaching of functional writing and its influence on the learners academic performance in secondary schools in Kenya. The area in focus is Githunguri Sub-County in Kiambu County, Kenya. The objective of the study was to investigate the extent to which teachers apply collaborative writing strategy in teaching functional writing skills in public secondary schools. Four public secondary schools were purposively selected for application of the strategy. The sample size comprised of 192 learners, 8 teachers, and 4 heads of English Language Department. Simple random technique was used to sample learners and purposive technique was applied for instructors and heads of English Language Department. The study used Solomon four group design, a type of quasi-experimental research design. This design was adopted to enable the researcher to apply pre-test and post-test to determine learners' performance in the skills. Data was gathered from learners using a test, and questionnaires, while teachers and the heads of the English Language Department were observed and interviewed using an observation guide and an interview schedule. SPSS version 21.0 computer software was used for data analysis. The findings indicated that teachers applied the use of collaborative writing strategy occasionally, and it is only applicable depending on the number of learners in a particular class. The study recommends that Ministry of Education provide continuous refresher courses, seminars and workshops on use of collaborative writing strategy in teaching and learning of functional writing skills the teachers need to embrace the strategy while teaching the language skills and especially functional writing to equip the learners with the right knowledge and develop the skill since its required in their day to day life.

Key words: collaborative writing strategy, English language and functional writing skills.

1. INTRODUCTION:

Writing has become an essential component of education for English language learners. The skill needs to be taught effectively to enable learners develop it for its daily use. According to Harlena, Mukhaiyar, and Hamzah (2020), teaching writing is the process of giving learners the skills and information necessary to convey their thoughts, feelings, and opinions in writing. In order to ensure that all learners participate fully, the researchers also highlighted how little focus is often placed on teaching writing skills. The researchers emphasized that a significant part of instruction is delivered via teacher-centered strategies. Furthermore, they discussed the value of using a collaborative writing style to teach

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writing skills because doing so increases learners' achievement levels when it comes to creating descriptive prose. They stressed that using a collaborative writing strategy gives learners a chance to practice their writing abilities. Similarly, Meixiu Zhang (2018) expounded that collaborative writing is frequently used to create engaging learning environments in second language classes. According to the researcher, one of the helpful educational activities in language lessons to improve learning chances is collaborative writing. Learners have numerous opportunities to show their command of the language through collaborative writing.

The teaching of functional writing skills is claimed to benefit from the collaborative writing approach (Chen, 2021). It helps learners to develop the teamwork and communication skills necessary to actively participate in coming up with, discussing, outlining, and arranging ideas in order to finish a writing task. According to Onchera and Manyasi (2013), functional writing skills are those that can be utilized to write a variety of documents, including memos, agendas, alerts, reports, and emails amongst others. Functional writing entails adapting writing to actual instances, events, and responsibilities; as a result, learners should be taught to develop and master the abilities so they may produce documents that are useful and relevant in their daily lives as well as in their workplaces after graduation.

The use of collaborative writing strategies helps learners write better because they frequently borrow ideas from friends, and find the writing process fun and memorable. As a result, it might be necessary that writing instructors concentrate on teaching and learning techniques rather than just teaching writing topics. It is suggested that students employ collaborative story writing as a suitable strategy for enhancing their writing skills (Muslim & Rohmah, 2022).

It takes a variety of strategies to teach writing in a way that encourages learners to use it for written communication. In order to get learners interested in writing, collaborative writing techniques can be used in pair or group discussions. This method can address learners' text-writing issues. Collaborative writing has several advantages, even though some teachers might not be aware of them. It enables learners to develop a spirit of teamwork, respecting others' views, learning lots of vocabulary from group members, developing critical thinking and good communication skills amongst others. So, teaching writing through group writing is a good way to help learners become better writers. Because every phase of the writing process can be followed by students more easily and adaptably, it can be utilized as a reference by the teacher to help students write better (Supiani, 2017).

Traditional method of teaching writing has been widely utilized by many teachers in South Africa. This teaching method has several difficulties for learners to develop effective functional writing skills as it seldom encourages learners' full participation in the class activities (Ngubane, Ntombela, and Govendorer, 2020). Therefore, it is suggested that teachers of English language employ collaborative writing strategies to encourage a full participation of learners in the class activities.

According to Ghufron and Hawa (2015), as opposed to the collaborative writing method, the majority of English language teachers use direct instruction while teaching writing. Findings of the study have indicated that collaborative writing strategies are thought to be more successful at teaching writing than direct instruction, which entails teachers doing the majority of the activities related to lesson presentation and demonstration. Due to the connection between teaching methods and creativity in writing instruction, the strategy is also considered to help learners develop their creative skills.

1.1. Objective:
The specific objective of this study was to investigate the extent to which teachers of English language use collaborative writing skills in teaching functional writing skills in secondary schools in Githunguri Sub-County, Kiambu County, Kenya.

1.2. Theoretical framework
The study is guided by Collaborative Learning Theory (1896–1934), which is based on Lev Vygotsky's idea of the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD). According to this theory, learners help each other to complete activities that they are unable to achieve on their own. Collaborative learning is essential for nurturing of learners' critical thinking skills since, in accordance with the ZPD hypothesis, group projects aid learners in remembering more material. As described by Marjan and Mozhgan (2011), collaborative learning is a method of instruction in which learners work in groups or pairs

to produce a piece of work. According to the collaborative learning theory, group learning helps learners acquire abilities such as leadership, self-management, oral communication, and higher-level thinking.

Conceptual framework
In this section, the study discusses independent, intervening, and dependent variables**.**
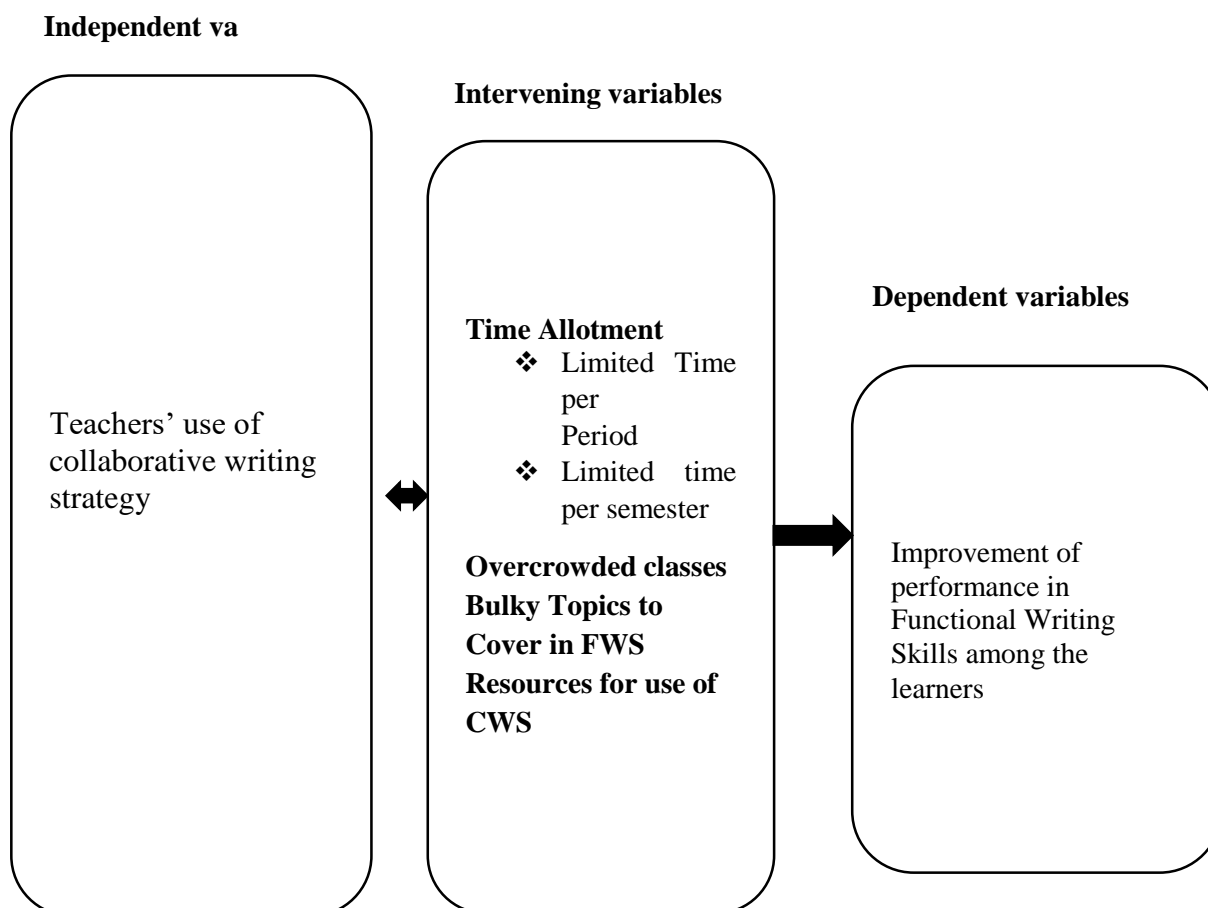

Figure 1.1: Relationship of independent, dependent and intervening variables

The independent variable in the above figure is teachers' use of collaborative writing strategy. When teachers of English language utilize CWS, it is said that the strategy increases learners' participation, communication, retention, critical thinking, collaboration, and understanding skills as the method enables learners to interact freely to acquire a lot from group members during discussions. In addition, the intervening variables of this study are limited time for teaching and learning of functional writing skills, overcrowded class size, many topics to cover for emphasis on functional writing, and lack of sufficient standard resources for teaching/learning of functional writing skills. The intervening variables hinder effective instructional activities of functional writing skills. Finally, the dependent variable of the study is improvement of learners' performance in FWS. Learners' performance in functional writing skills is influenced positively by use of CWS (Chen, 2020).

2. LITERATURE REVIEW :
The study reviewed related literature on use of collaborative writing strategy in teaching functional writing skills, and impacts of using the strategy to teach the skills. According to Supiani (2017), use of collaborative writing method is one of the writing techniques that assist learners to learn, and enhance their writing talents in order to address the difficult problems that Indonesian learners experience in writing. The study was motivated by earlier research that showed Indonesian learners still struggle with their writing abilities because they face a number of challenges in using proper grammar, word choice, concept generation, and organization of ideas into a clear and logical structure. According to the study's findings, developing writing abilities has turned into a difficult issue for many learners in Indonesia. The use of collaborative strategies by English language teachers in the Githunguri Sub-County, Kiambu County, was a major

concern in this study. According to the study's findings, the majority of teachers are unaware of the new strategy. As a result, they rarely use it when teaching writing skills.

Writing teachers are required to concentrate on teaching and learning methodologies necessary for the instruction of functional writing skills. An effective method for enhancing learners' writing skills is collaborative narrative writing. The finding of Muslim and Rohmah (2022) is support of teachers employing the collaborative writing technique to promote learners' collaboration, creativity, critical thinking, and communication skills in the classroom. Ahmad (2020) made a similar recommendation at the conclusion of his investigation of the impact of cloud-based collaborative writing on the quantity and quality of writing produced by EFL students.

In Githunguri Sub-County of Kiambu County, Kiriri (2019) conducted a study on teacher classroom practices and their effects on students' acquisition of functional writing skills. The study found out that majority of teachers' classroom practices were teacher-centered and geared towards memorization and recall; students spent most of their lesson time listening to teachers' talk—there was a little learner-teacher interaction. It was recommended for teachers to use a collaborative approach while teaching learners how to complete writing exercises as doing so could promote learners' full participation, the exchange of opposing viewpoints, and learners' cooperation. The findings have revealed that teacher of English language hardly apply the use of collaborative writing strategy when teaching functional writing skills, and that the approach is new to many instructors.

According to Ghufron and Hawa (2015), as opposed to the collaborative writing method, the majority of English language teachers use direct instruction while teaching writing. Findings of the study have shown that collaborative writing strategies are thought to be more successful at teaching writing rather than direct instruction, which entails teachers doing the majority of the activities related to lesson presentation and demonstration. Due to the connection between teaching methods and creativity in writing instruction, the strategy is also considered to help learners develop their creative skills. As seen by their increased writing scores, the students performed remarkably well in mutual engagement, negotiating skills, cognitive conflicts, shared knowledge, and balancing sections of speaking over the course of three meetings. As a result, it can be said that the collaborative approach is highly advised for a higher secondary level due to the scientific validation of its efficacy.

Similarly, this study revealed that when teaching functional writing skills in the Githunguri Sub-County of Kiambu County, teachers hardly use the collaborative strategy. This was discovered during the course of the study's investigation into the extent to which English language teachers use this strategy. The study also found that the strategy is new and that many teachers need to receive training before applying it effectively.

3. MATERIALS :
The study utilized these tools to gather data from respondents: questionnaires, test (pre-test and post-test) and interview schedule. Questionnaires and test were used for learners, and interview schedule was applied to teachers and heads of English language departments. The questionnaires provided options for learners to select from based on their experiences on benefits of use of CWS, and how often teachers utilize the strategy to teach functional writing. By pre-test and post-test, the research was able to assess learners' entry behavior on functional writing skills. Finally, use of interview schedule enabled the researcher to gather detailed information from teachers and HELDs on utilization of CWS and its benefits for teaching and learning functional writing skills.

4. METHOD :

Research Design
The design used by the researcher for this study was Solomon four. Solomon four-group design, a type of quasi-experimental research design, which is described by Choueiry (2023) as a sort of experiment in which participants are randomized at random to 1 of 4 groups that vary in terms of whether they get the treatment or not and whether the outcome of interest is measured once or twice in each group. In this study, the pre-test and post-test procedures for the Solomon 4 group design were applied. They were given to Form Three learners in the experimental and control groups at the four schools chosen to implement the collaborative writing strategy in the teaching and learning of functional writing skills in the Githunguri Sub-County, Kiambu County, Kenya.

Targeted population and sample size

38 public secondary schools, 38 Heads of English Language Departments, 76 teachers of English, and 10780 Form-3 learners formed the target population of this study. Therefore, the total was 10,894 participants. Purposive random sampling as well as simple random sample were chosen for this study. 192 Form-3 learners were chosen at random using a simple sampling technique, and four schools, eight teachers, and four heads of English Language Department (HELD) were chosen using a purposive sampling technique. The study's sample size was 192 learners, 8 teachers, and 4 HELD, totaling 204 participants, which was within the alpha value table's limit. As a result, the sample size was 1.7% (192 learners) of the target group of participants.

5. DISCUSSION :

The findings of this journal article are categorized into questionnaires for learners, test (pre- and post-) on topics taught for learners, and interview schedule for teachers and heads of English language deapartment.

A). Learners' responses towards use of CWS

Learners were asked to rate how often teachers of English language use group work and pair work when teaching letter writing, meeting minutes, reports, memoranda, announcement notices, and speeches.

<p align="center">Table1:1 Use of group and pair work when teaching and learning FWS.</p>

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly agree	Mean	Std dev
Teachers of English language always use group work and pair work when teaching letter writing, meeting minutes, reports, memoranda, announcement notices, and speeches.	23.4%	13.5%	53.1%	9.9%	2.5	1
In the writing class, teachers do most of the presentation and demonstration while learners listen keenly and copy notes from the board.	9.9%	6.2%	43.2%	40.6%	3.2	0.9
Teachers use guidelines and examples of functional writing skills to teach students in groups or pairs on the skills.	13.0%	9.9%	35.4%	41.7%	3.1	1
Teachers use sufficient time in teaching functional writing skills, and explain the benefits of learning the skills to learners	10.4%	5.7%	31.8%	52.1%	3.3	1

The study found that 53.1% of learners said teachers use group and pair projects to teach writing skills, while 40.6% consented that teachers use a teacher-centred approach, promoting memorization and recall. 35.4% agreed rules and examples are used to develop functional writing skills**,** while 31.8% of learners agreed that teachers of English language devote sufficient when teaching FWS.

B). Test (Pre-and Post-) on topics taught

<p align="center">Table 2 :1 Pre-test and post-test</p>

		N	Min	Max	Mean	Std. Deviation
Control group	Pre test	88	4	16	10.14	2.25
	Post-test	88	6	17	12.14	2.024
Experimental group	Pre-test	99	1	17	6.67	3.335
	Post-test	99	2	18	12.54	4.36

Table 1 shows that the control group performed better in the post-test, with a mean score of 10.14, while the experimental group performed better too with the mean of 6.67 improvement, indicating a clearer understanding of the topic during group discussions, boosting their performance. Learners in both control and experimental groups were tested on job

application writing before and after teaching. Control group learners repeated pre-test sentences and phrases, copying directly from textbooks.

The experimental group improved their job application letter writing skills by discussing ideas, improving grammar, mechanics, logic, vocabulary, transitional words, and proper placement of features of letters, aligning with Maharani's (2019) findings that collaborative writing enhances text writing abilities. Similarly, the study by Anggraini, Rozimela, and Anwar (2020) supports the impact of collaborative writing on EFL learners' writing abilities and perceptions. It found that collaborative writing encourages motivation, peer feedback, topic understanding, habit formation, and vocabulary expansion.

The independent t-tests results on differences in learners' performance by treatment groups are shown in Table 2.

Table 2:2 Independent T-Test; Groups and learners' performance (Pretest)

	Groups	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	F statistics		P value
Pre-test	Control Group	88	10.14	2.250	.240	3.241		0.000
	Experimental Group	99	6.67	3.335	.335			

The study shows a significant difference in learners' performance in functional writing skills between the control and experimental groups. The control group performed better than the experimental group, indicating that before the intervention, learners performed better in functional writing skills. This aligns with a 2020 study by Latifah and Ulfa, which found a collaborative writing strategy more effective than traditional teaching methods for senior high school learners.

The independent t-tests results on differences in learners' performance by treatment groups are shown in Table 3.

Table 2: 3 Independent T-Test; Groups and learners' performance (Post-test)

	Groups	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	F statistics	P value
Post-test	Control Group	88	12.14	2.024	.216	95.824	0.433
	Experimental Group	99	12.54	4.360	.438		

Table 4.11 shows no significant difference in learners' performance between control and experimental groups in functional writing skills post-test. The control group performed similarly to the experimental group, but after the intervention using a collaborative writing strategy, the experimental group's performance significantly improved, indicating a significant improvement. The result concurred with the study by Pham (2021) suggests that collaborative writing activities encourage learners to discuss sentence structure, punctuation, vocabulary, paragraph writing, and idea organization. Teachers should facilitate these activities to identify common errors and improve job application letter composition.

C). Teachers' use of CWS
The study found that teachers use collaborative writing strategies occasionally for teaching functional writing skills in both class and home assignments. These strategies are only applicable to specific class types, and therefore, teachers often use direct instruction, as per Njokl's findings (2014). Most teachers still adhere to traditional teaching methods, such as lengthy explanations and demonstrations.

D). Responses of heads of English language department towards use of CWS
The HELDs were asked to rate how much collaborative writing is used by teachers of functional writing skills to teach the abilities. According to findings, the HELDs expounded that teachers use collaborative writing strategies on occasion

and when appropriate. Similarly, the findings are in support of Au and Nyasimi's (2014) claim that teachers rarely use peer teaching, group collaboration, or role acting, all of which have been found to boost writing learning, among other things.

6. ANALYSIS :
Data was gathered from learners using questionnaires, pre-test and post-test, while teachers and the heads of the English Language Department were interviewed using an interview schedule. SPSS version 21.0 computer software was used for data analysis.

7. FINDINGS :
The findings of this study have revealed that collaborative writing strategy is occasionally applied by teachers for instruction of functional writing skills, and that the strategy is only applicable in less crowded classes. The strategy is only applicable to specific class types, and therefore, teachers often use direct instruction, as per Njokl's findings (2014). Most teachers still utilize the conventional teaching methods, such as lengthy explanations and demonstrations. The findings have also revealed that collaborative writing strategy promotes learners' communication, collaboration, grammar, vocabulary, writing, and critical thinking skills, enabling learners to complete writing exercises in groups properly. The result concurred with the study by Pham (2021), which suggests that collaborative writing activities encourage learners to discuss sentence structure, punctuation marks, vocabulary, paragraph writing, and ideas organization. By facilitating the method, teachers would create a learning environment where learners will be able to work in groups to identify common errors and improve writing exercises.

8. RECOMMENDATION :
As a new approach in teaching, collaborative writing strategy needs more attention to gain some relevance in the classroom when it comes to effective teaching strategies. Based on the findings of the study, it is so significant for Ministry of Education to organize continuous training and workshops aimed at equipping teachers with knowledge and skills on use of collaborative writing strategy in order to promote use of the strategy in teaching functional writing skills. In addition, more teaching facilities need to be built to accommodate more learners in order to reduce overcrowded class sizes for proper use of CWS. Reduction of class sizes will enable teachers to manage their class time effectively to reach all learners in groups and complete their lessons on time; that way, the number of learners will be less for teachers to complete their group activities within a given time.

9. SUGGESTION :
Without proper management of learners' behaviours, it becomes so difficult for teachers to implement CWS within a given class time. Lots of noise and other disruptive behaviours impede effective implementation of lessons when using CWS. For future research, it is, therefore, suggested for researchers to investigate behavioural management of learners when using collaborative writing strategy in teaching functional writing skills. Proper management of learners' behaviours may enable teachers to apply CWS effectively when teaching functional writing skills.

10. CONCLUSION :
Based on the findings of this study, it can be concluded that collaborative writing strategy is occasionally applied by teachers for instruction of functional writing skills, and that the strategy is only applicable in less crowded classes. Further, the study had discovered that there was a significant mean difference in regard to how the control and experimental groups performed in functional writing skills (pre-test). The control group performed significantly better as compared to the experimental group in the pre-test. Additionally, the study found that there was no significant difference in regard to how the control and experimental groups performed in functional writing skills (post-test). However, the experimental group had a higher mean score than the control group. This denotes a great improvement in the performance of the experimental group following the intervention (learning using the collaborative writing strategy).

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