

INTEGRATING LOCAL CULTURAL CONTENT TO ENHANCE EFL STUDENTS' COLLABORATIVE WRITING: AN EXPLANATORY SEQUENTIAL MIXED-METHODS STUDY

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Abstract

In EFL learning, collaborative writing is the joint production of a text in which two or more learners actively contribute to planning, drafting, and revising a shared written product. In multicultural settings such as Indonesia, integrating local cultural content is assumed to enhance engagement and collaboration; however, its effect on learners' collaborative writing performance within the Sasak cultural context remains underexplored. This study examined the impact of embedding local cultural content into writing instruction on EFL students' collaborative writing performance. Employing an explanatory sequential mixed-methods design, quantitative data were collected from 134 students in the Department of Computer Science at Bumigora University, and 20 students were purposively selected for semi-structured interviews to provide qualitative insights. Quantitative analyses indicated significant improvement in writing performance, with mean scores increasing from 66.62 to 72.01 ($p < .05$) and a strong positive correlation between pre- and post-test scores ($r = .736$, $p < .05$). The effect size, Cohen's $d = 0.84$, confirmed a large improvement. Qualitative findings revealed that cultural familiarity strengthened group engagement, boosted identity-based confidence, and facilitated idea generation. Students reported that working with culturally familiar themes encouraged inclusive participation, reduced communication anxiety, and increased motivation. These findings suggest that integrating local cultural content enhances both language development and collaborative processes. Two key implications emerge: (1) Curriculum designers should incorporate localized cultural materials to increase contextual relevance, and (2) Teachers should design collaborative activities leveraging learners' cultural knowledge to foster richer interaction, lower participation barriers, and improve overall learning outcomes.

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INTRODUCTION

Collaborative writing has increasingly gained attention as an effective pedagogical approach in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classrooms, enabling learners to co-construct texts, negotiate meanings, and share responsibilities throughout the writing process.

While prior research highlights benefits such as improved writing fluency, peer interaction, and higher-order thinking skills, challenges remain in sustaining equitable group dynamics, linguistic coordination, and engagement with meaningful content. In multilingual and multicultural settings like Indonesia, integrating local cultural content into writing activities offers a promising strategy to contextualize learning, foster authentic interaction, and strengthen collaborative engagement among EFL learners. However, most studies on collaborative writing have predominantly employed culturally neutral activities, which may limit students' identification with the content and reduce motivation, particularly in regions where cultural heritage plays a central role in social and educational life.

Existing studies on writing instruction in EFL contexts have predominantly relied on culturally neutral materials and pedagogical approaches, emphasizing genre-based models, process writing cycles, and task-based activities that focus on developing linguistic accuracy, text organization, and rhetorical awareness without reference to learners' cultural backgrounds (Thongchalermsri & Jarunthawatchai, 2020; Leotta & Ahmad, 2025; Wenjuan & Abdullah, 2024; Sundari et al., 2018). These approaches typically rely on universal themes and generic prompts that standardize instruction but provide limited space for culturally grounded meaning-making. While they have improved learners' writing performance, their dependence on non-localized content overlooks how cultural frames may influence engagement and authorial voice, thereby revealing a conceptual gap and the need to examine more context-sensitive, culturally embedded writing resources.

In addition, prior studies on technology-mediated writing have shown a strong emphasis on digital platforms such as wikis, Google Docs, and online peer-review tools. These studies have also largely concentrated on culturally neutral activities particularly those mediated by digital tools such as joint drafting, peer-assisted revisions, and technology-supported co-authoring, with a primary focus on how these activities enhance learners' accuracy, textual organization, and interactional support (Kafian & Esfandiari, 2025; Li, 2023; Valizadeh, 2022; Veddayana et al., 2025). Consequently, these studies largely ignored the role of cultural context in influencing how students integrate ideas and co-create written content in collaborative activities. This gap is particularly pivotal in culturally rich environments such as Lombok, where the Sasak cultural contents offers meaningful local narratives that may affect collaborative engagement and writing practices. The prior studies showed a critical gap, highlighting the need to examine how culturally embedded prompts impact collaborative writing performance.

The importance of culturally responsive pedagogy in EFL instruction has been increasingly recognized. Integrating local cultural content affirms that students' identities and challenges of the dominance of Western-centric educational norms, which often marginalize students' cultural capital (Yusniawati & Lestari, 2021). When such cultural dimensions are absent from classroom practice, students often find writing activities less meaningful and may struggle to participate fully in collaborative learning processes. Studies have shown that culturally sustaining pedagogies can enhance learning engagement, motivation, and character development (Tazhitova et al., 2022; Nguyen, 2017). Nevertheless, few studies have systematically examined the intersection of collaborative writing and local cultural content, particularly in underrepresented communities such as the Sasak.

To address the research gap by examining both the measurable outcomes and the collaborative processes involved in culturally integrated writing, this study aims to determine the effects of local cultural content on students' collaborative writing performance as well as to understand how such content is negotiated and expressed during joint composition. These objectives directly inform the direction of the inquiry. Accordingly, the following research question guides the investigation: (1). To what extent does the integration of local cultural

content affect EFL students' collaborative writing skills? And (2). How do EFL students incorporate of local cultural content in collaborative writing?

LITERATURE REVIEW

Sociocultural Perspectives on L2 Writing and the Role of Cultural Context

Sociocultural theory views L2 writing as a socially mediated activity shaped by interaction, shared tools, and culturally grounded practices (Slavkov, 2015; J. Lantolf et al., 2020; Lantolf & Poehner, 2023). Meaning-making emerges from collaborative engagement within culturally specific contexts rather than from individual cognition alone. Recent work underscores that cultural schemas influence idea generation, narrative structures, stance-taking, and identity negotiation in L2 writing (Küfi, 2023; Su & Chou, 2016; Zhang & Zhang, 2023; Wang, 2025). Studies have shown that culturally familiar themes promote deeper elaboration, higher motivation, and stronger authorial voice compared to culturally neutral prompts (Alzubi & Nazim, 2024; Ratri et al., 2025; Suhandoko et al., 2025). In Indonesian multilingual settings, cultural alignment enhances students' willingness to contribute and supports more equitable participation (Deiniatur & Hasanah, 2024). However, despite growing interest in culturally grounded L2 writing, limited empirical work has examined how specific local narratives such as the Sasak Princess Mandalika legend shape learners' engagement, group interaction, and writing outcomes in collaborative environments.

Collaborative and Process-Oriented Writing: Benefits, Limitations, and Gaps

Flower & Hayes, (1981) conceptualize writing as a recursive process involving planning, translating, and reviewing, operationalized through stages of pre-writing, drafting, revising, editing, and publishing. This process-oriented approach enhances metacognitive awareness, enabling learners to reflect on and improve their writing. In EFL contexts, process writing has been shown to support language accuracy, fluency, organizational skills, collaborative learning, and learner motivation, making it a pedagogically valuable framework for writing instruction. Collaborative writing has been shown to foster linguistic accuracy, idea development, and metacognitive awareness through collective scaffolding and dialogue (Sarkhosh & Najafi, 2020; Moonma & Kawera, 2021; Haidar et al., 2025). Process-oriented approaches emphasize iterative drafting, peer negotiation, and revision cycles that enhance fluency and text quality (Winarti & Cahyono, 2020). Meta-analytic evidence confirms that collaborative writing often outperforms individual writing on measures of complexity, accuracy, and organization (Elabdali, 2021). Nevertheless, persistent issues, uneven participation, dominance by high-proficiency members, and social loafing limit the reliability of outcomes (Anggraini et al., 2020; Cao et al., 2025; Masuara & Ajam, 2024). Topic familiarity also creates confounds: when prompts privilege one cultural group, contributions become imbalanced and cognitive load differs across members (Bu & Luo, 2021).

Culturally Responsive Pedagogy in L2 Writing and Its Relevance to Collaboration

This study adopts Culturally Responsive Pedagogy (CRP) as its theoretical framework, which emerged from asset-based approaches challenging deficit-oriented perspectives that have historically marginalized minoritized students (Harmon, 2012; Vavrus, 2008). CRP emphasizes leveraging students' cultural knowledge, lived experiences, and diverse ways of knowing to make learning more meaningful, effective, and affirming, thereby validating the identities and strengths of learners who have been traditionally underserved (Gay, 2018; Ladson-Billings, 2021; Paris, 2012). Culturally responsive pedagogy (CRP) posits that effective instruction should validate learners' cultural repertoires, foster inclusivity, and incorporate community-rooted knowledge into curriculum design (Jabar, 2025; Herda et al., 2025). In L2 writing, CRP has been associated with enhanced motivation, stronger identity investment, and improved textual quality when students draw on culturally familiar narratives

and semiotic resources (Anderson et al., 2025; Thapa & Basnet, 2025). Collaborative writing that embed local cultural content have also been shown to promote more balanced participation, deeper idea negotiation, and a stronger sense of ownership over group outcomes (Trüb et al., 2025; Siahaan et al., 2025; Warman et al., 2025).

RESEARCH METHOD

Research Design

This study adopted an explanatory mixed-methods design, in which quantitative findings were collected and analyzed first, followed by qualitative inquiry to explain and elaborate the statistical results to achieve a holistic understanding of the research problem (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). To empirically measure the effectiveness of this integration, a one-group pretest-posttest design was used in the quantitative phase to assess its impact on students' collaborative writing performance. The subsequent qualitative phase involved semi-structured interviews to explore learners' perceptions and cultural engagement during the collaborative activities. Integration occurred through joint displays, allowing quantitative outcomes and qualitative explanations to be compared and merged in a single analytic framework to produce coherent meta-inferences to deepen and support the quantitative findings.

Participants

The study involved a population of 201 third-semester EFL students from the Department of Computer Science at Bumigora University. All students were native to Lombok and shared the Sasak cultural background, ensuring contextual alignment with the study's focus on local cultural integration. Using Slovin's formula (5%), 134 students were selected through simple random sampling for the quantitative phase. This sample is statistically representative and sufficient for detecting effects of culturally embedded collaborative writing instruction. From the total sample, 33 students were purposively selected for semi-structured interviews based on their active engagement and ability to provide rich reflections. The qualitative sample size met the principle of data saturation, as no new substantive themes emerged during the final interviews (Benítez & Padilla, 2014). Table 1 presents the demographic distribution of participants, including gender, age ranges, and language proficiency levels across both quantitative and qualitative samples.

Table 1
Distribution of Questionnaire and Interview Participants by Classes

No.	Variable	Category	Sample (%)	Subject (%)
1.	Gender	Male	62 (46.27%)	15 (45.45%)
		Female	72 (53.73%)	18 (54.55%)
2.	Age	18-19	38 (28.36%)	9 (27.27%)
		20-21	71 (52.99%)	18 (54.55%)
		22-23	25 (18.66%)	6 (18.18%)
3.	Language Proficiency	Beginner (A1-A2)	29 (21.64%)	6 (18.18%)
		Intermediate (B1)	78 (58.21%)	20 (60.61%)
		Advanced (B2)	27 (20.15%)	7 (21.21%)

Instruments

Writing Test

The collaborative writing test was designed to measure students' writing performance both before and after the intervention. The instrument comprised five subscales: content, organization, vocabulary, grammar, and mechanics. Each subscale was scored using a four-point rubric, for instance, for content: 30-27 = Excellent to Very Good (4), 26-22 = Good to Average (3), 21-17 = Fair to Poor (2), and 16-13 = Very Poor (1). Scores from all subscales

were summed to obtain a total writing score for each student. Raters underwent training sessions to ensure consistent evaluation, including calibration exercises and discussion of sample essays. Interrater reliability was established using the Spearman-Brown split-half method and intraclass correlation coefficient (ICC), yielding high reliability (Spearman-Brown = 0.84; Split-Half = 0.81; ICC = 0.76). Item analysis confirmed the instrument’s validity with item difficulty indices of 0.60 (pre-test) and 0.68 (post-test), and discrimination indices of 0.44 (pre-test) and 0.51 (post-test).

Interview

The semi-structured interview was employed to explore students’ perceptions, experiences, and reflections on collaborative writing using local cultural content. The interview protocol was validated by two experts in applied linguistics and intercultural studies to ensure content relevance and clarity. Questions focused on students’ motivation, engagement, and identity development during collaborative activities. Data reliability was enhanced through triangulation, iterative coding, and rater training sessions to align coding decisions, with intercoder agreement assessed systematically. The qualitative instrument effectively captured rich insights into students’ experiences, complementing the quantitative assessment of writing performance.

Data Collection

Quantitative data were collected in two phases, pre-test and post-test, with measures taken to ensure comparability and reliability. The pre-test was administered at the outset to assess students’ baseline narrative writing skills, using a general prompt unrelated to cultural content. Following this, students participated in a series of culturally integrated writing activities in small groups, centered on the Sasaknese folktale Princess Mandalika. After the intervention, the post-test was administered individually to all 134 participants, using a narrative writing task similar in structure but distinct in content from the pre-test to avoid topic-familiarity bias. The post-test evaluated writing across five criteria: content, organization, vocabulary, grammar, and cohesion, using a validated and consistently applied rubric. Interrater reliability was ensured through rater training and blinded scoring. For the qualitative phase, semi-structured interviews were conducted with a purposive sample of 33 students who actively engaged during the intervention. Interviews followed a structured protocol, were audio-recorded with consent, transcribed verbatim, and analyzed thematically using a pre-established codebook, with intercoder agreement assessed to ensure reliability. The integration of both quantitative and qualitative data provided a comprehensive understanding of students’ writing development, engagement, and cultural awareness.

Table 2

Post-test Narrative Writing Instrument

Test Type	Narrative Excerpt	Writing Prompts
Post-test	Read the following excerpt adapted from a Sasaknese folktale of Princess Mandalika: “Long ago, in a village surrounded by mountains and sea, lived a wise elder known for his ability to resolve conflicts. One day, a dispute arose between two neighboring clans over land ownership. The elder stepped in, proposing a peaceful resolution rooted in ancestral values...”	Based on the excerpt above, write a narrative story by responding to the following prompts: 1) Expand the story by imagining what caused the conflict and how it affected the village. 2) Describe how the elder resolved the issue, incorporating Sasak cultural values such as harmony, community respect, and wisdom. 3) Conclude the story with a reflection or moral drawn from the resolution, highlighting the cultural significance of peace and unity in Sasak tradition.

Data Analysis

Quantitative data from the pre-test and post-test writing assessments were analyzed using a Paired Sample t-test to examine the significance of improvement in students’ collaborative writing performance following the integration of local cultural content. Assumption checks were conducted prior to analysis: normality was assessed using the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test (Asymp. Sig. = 0.617 > 0.05), confirming that the data distribution met the requirements for parametric testing, and homogeneity of variance and independence were also verified. Effect size was calculated using Cohen’s d, yielding a value of 0.842, indicating a large and meaningful improvement in writing performance, reflecting the substantial pedagogical impact of the intervention, thus in practical terms, the strength of this effect demonstrates that integrating local cultural content had a significant role in enhancing students’ collaborative writing outcomes, offering strong evidence of the intervention’s instructional effectiveness. Students’ writing was evaluated with a structured rubric covering five key aspects content, organization, vocabulary, language use, and mechanics rated on a four-point scale for both pre- and post-tests.

Qualitative data from semi-structured interviews were analyzed following Miles & Huberman (1994), the interactive model of data reduction, display, and conclusion drawing. A qualitative codebook was developed to guide coding, including definitions and examples for categories such as perceived learning gains, cultural awareness, engagement, motivation, and peer interaction, and intercoder agreement was assessed using Cohen’s κ, yielding a value of 0.87, which indicates almost perfect agreement and confirms the reliability of the qualitative coding process based on the pre-established codebook. The writing assessment rubric, adapted from Jacobs et al. (1981), was used to evaluate students’ narrative writing performance in both pre-test and post-test can be presented below:

Table 3
The Adapted Writing Assessment Rubric

Aspect	Level	Category	Criteria
Content	30-27	Excellent to Very Good (4)	Demonstrates strong knowledge of the Sasaknese story, substantive content, and thorough development of the narrative, fully relevant to the topic.
	26-22	Good to Average (3)	Shows some understanding of the story, adequate content range, limited narrative development, mostly relevant to the folklore theme but lacks detail.
	21-17	Fair to Poor (2)	Limited familiarity with the story, minimal substance, and inadequate development of the narrative elements.
	16-13	Very Poor (1)	Lacks knowledge of the story or topic, non-substantive, off-topic, or insufficient content to evaluate.
Organization	20-18	Excellent to Very Good (4)	Narrative flows fluently, ideas clearly stated and well-supported, well-organized events, logical sequencing, and cohesive storyline.
	17-14	Good to Average (3)	Somewhat disjointed, loosely organized plot but main ideas are evident, limited support, mostly logical sequence but incomplete
	13-10	Fair to Poor (2)	Lacks fluency, storyline appears confused or disconnected, weak sequencing and narrative development.
	9-7	Very Poor (1)	Fails to communicate a coherent story, lacks organization or too limited to assess.
Vocabulary	20-18	Excellent to Very Good (4)	Rich and precise word choice, effective use of idiomatic expressions and descriptive language suited for narrative style and cultural context.
	17-14	Good to Average (3)	Adequate vocabulary range, minor issues in word choice or usage, but meaning remains clear.

Aspect	Level	Category	Criteria
Language Use	13-10	Fair to Poor (2)	Limited vocabulary range, frequent errors in word use, affecting clarity and narrative expression.
	9-7	Very Poor (1)	Very poor vocabulary, literal translation, weak word knowledge for narrative writing, or too little to evaluate.
	25-22	Excellent to Very Good (4)	Effective use of complex structures with few grammatical errors, including tense consistency, article use, and narrative voice.
	21-18	Good to Average (3)	Generally effective grammar and sentence structure, occasional issues in tense, agreement, or sentence formation.
	17-11	Fair to Poor (2)	Major issues with grammar and sentence construction, frequent errors hinder narrative clarity.
Mechanics	10-5	Very Poor (1)	Almost no control over sentence structure or grammar rules, largely unintelligible or not assessable.
	5	Excellent to Very Good (4)	Minimal errors in spelling, punctuation, capitalization, and paragraphing; conforms well to writing conventions.
	4	Good to Average (3)	Some mechanical errors but they do not obscure meaning or interrupt narrative flow.
	3	Fair to Poor (2)	Frequent errors in basic mechanics and layout, which confuse or interrupt reading.
	2	Very Poor (1)	Dominated by errors in spelling, punctuation, or formatting; unreadable or insufficient for evaluation.

RESEARCH FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Research Findings

This section reports the quantitative and qualitative findings on the impact of local cultural content on EFL students’ collaborative writing. It highlights the pre- and post-test score comparisons and explores how culturally integrated activities enhance students’ collaboration and writing performance.

The Impact of Local Cultural Content on Students’ Collaborative Writing Outcomes

This sub-section addresses the first research question by examining how integrating local cultural content influences students’ collaborative writing performance. The quantitative analysis includes a correlation test, a paired sample t-test, and descriptive statistics to evaluate the relationship, significance, and mean differences between pre- and post-test scores. These analyses provide an empirical basis for understanding the effects of culturally integrated activities on students’ collaborative writing development in the EFL context.

Correlation between Pre-Test and Post-Test Scores

To investigate the consistency of students’ performance before and after the integration of local cultural content, a correlation analysis was conducted between the pre-test and post-test scores. The following table presents the correlation coefficient and significance level, indicating the strength and direction of the relationship between the two sets of scores.

Table 4
Correlation between Pre-test and Post-test Scores

Paired Samples Correlations			
		N	Correlation
Pair 1	Result of Pre- & Post-Tests	134	.736
			Sig. .000

The correlation analysis was conducted to examine the relationship between students’ collaborative writing scores before and after the integration of local cultural content. The

result shows a strong positive correlation ($r = 0.736, p < 0.001$) between pre-test and post-test scores. This indicates that students who performed well before the intervention tended to maintain or improve their performance after the culturally enriched writing activities. The statistically significant correlation suggests consistency in student performance and implies that the observed improvements in writing outcomes may be attributed, at least in part, to the instructional treatment that emphasized local cultural integration.

Pre- and Post-Test Score Differences in Collaborative Writing

To determine whether the integration of local cultural content had a statistically significant impact on students’ collaborative writing performance, a paired sample t-test was conducted. The test compared the mean scores of the pre-test and post-test to assess whether the observed differences were significant.

Table 5
Paired Sample t-test Result between Pre-test and Post-test Scores

		Paired Samples Test								
		Paired Differences						t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
		Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference					
					Lower	Upper				
Pair 1	Pre- & Post-Test	-5.39552	4.76519	.41165	-6.20975	-4.58129	13.107	133	.000	

The result of the paired sample t-test reveals a significant difference in students’ collaborative writing performance, as indicated by the Sig. (2-tailed) value of 0.000 ($p < 0.05$). This statistically significant result confirms that the integration of local cultural content had a meaningful impact on students’ writing outcomes. In pedagogical terms, the finding suggests that incorporating culturally relevant materials not only enriches the learning context but also enhances students’ engagement, group interaction, and sense of ownership in the writing process. Consequently, culturally integrated instruction can serve as an effective strategy to support collaborative skill-building and improve overall writing proficiency in EFL classrooms.

Descriptive Statistics of Pre-Test and Post-Test Scores

To support the inferential findings, descriptive statistics were used to compare students’ mean scores before and after the integration of local cultural content in collaborative writing activities. The mean scores provide a clear indication of performance improvement across the group.

Table 6
Descriptive Statistics of Pre-test and Post-test Scores

		Paired Samples Statistics			
		Mean	N	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Pair 1	Pre-test	66.6194	134	5.76846	.49832
	Post-test	72.0149	134	6.98224	.60317

The descriptive statistics show an increase in the mean score from 66.62 (pre-test) to 72.01 (post-test), indicating a notable improvement in students’ collaborative writing performance following the cultural integration. This increase of approximately 5.40 points suggests that students benefited from activities grounded in local cultural content, which likely enhanced their motivation, contextual understanding, and collaborative interaction. The rise in mean scores aligns with the statistical significance found in the t-test, further reinforcing the positive pedagogical impact of incorporating culturally relevant materials into

EFL writing instruction.

On the whole, the series of research findings showed a correlation value ($r = .736$), a very high significance level ($p = .000$), paired test t-value ($t = 13.107$), and a comparison of pre-test (66.62) and post-test (72.01) average scores are visually presented in Figure 1. This visualization provides a clearer picture of the improvement in students' collaborative writing performance after the implementation of locally-based material, while also strengthening the quantitative evidence that cultural integration has a positive impact on the development of their writing skills.

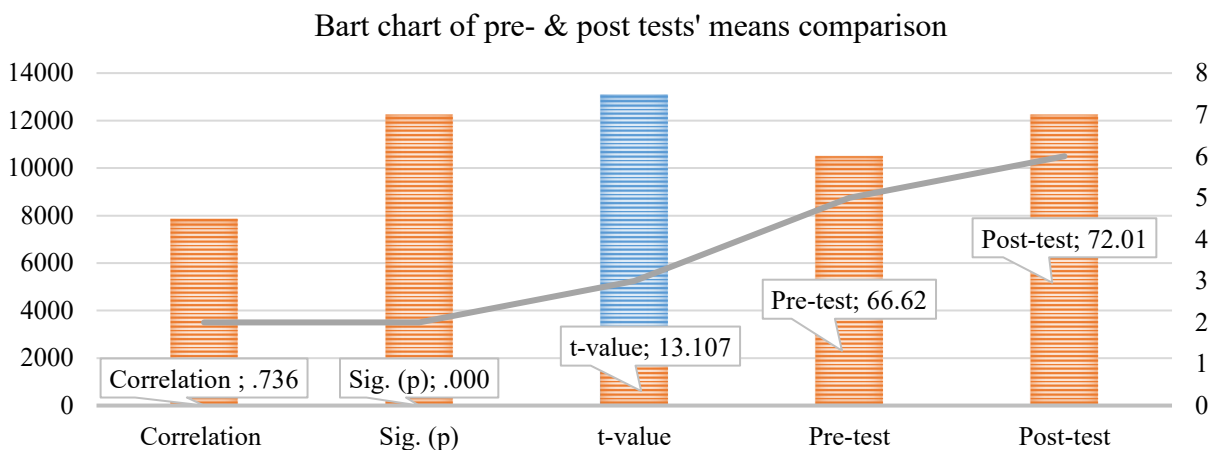


Figure 1. Analysis of Mean Gain and Score Correlation in Culturally-Integrated Writing

Learners' Views on Culturally Integrated Collaborative Writing

To address the second research question on students' perceptions, thematic analysis of interview responses identified three main themes reflecting their experiences with culturally integrated collaborative writing: (1) Enhancing group interaction and engagement, where students reported more active participation and idea negotiation within their groups; (2) Strengthening cultural identity and confidence, as learners felt more connected to their heritage and more assured in expressing their ideas; and (3) Improving content development through cultural familiarity, with students noting that drawing on familiar cultural narratives facilitated richer and more coherent story development. These themes illustrate how integrating local cultural content not only supported collaborative dynamics but also contributed to students' confidence and quality of writing.

Enhancing Group Interaction and Engagement

Students widely reported that culturally integrated writing activities encouraged more dynamic and inclusive group interaction. The use of familiar cultural contexts provided a common ground that facilitated communication among group members and reduced the hesitation often found in group collaboration. Rather than struggling to understand abstract or foreign topics, students could rely on shared knowledge to engage more meaningfully in the activities. This shared understanding not only increased participation but also created a more supportive group atmosphere where students were willing to listen to each other's ideas and negotiate meaning collaboratively. As cite from the interview excerpt, a student explained how cultural relevance helped foster balanced group engagement:

(1). "When the topic was about Sasak traditions, I felt it was easier to speak and share ideas because we all understood what we were writing about." (*Participant-7*)

Another participant emphasized how the cultural familiarity reduced the social distance among group members:

(2). "Usually in group work, only a few students talk a lot, but this time, almost everyone had

something to say because we all have experience with the topic.” (*Participant-12*)

These responses suggest that culturally integrated content creates a more equitable space for collaboration by enhancing student comfort and willingness to contribute. Rather than allowing group work to be dominated by stronger or more confident students, the shared cultural framework helped balance participation and foster genuine teamwork.

Strengthening Cultural Identity and Confidence

The second theme highlights the role of cultural integration in affirming students’ identities and increasing their self-confidence in collaborative writing activities. Many students indicated that writing about topics grounded in their own culture made them feel more valued and motivated to express their perspectives. This affirmation of identity not only elevated their confidence in using English but also fostered a sense of pride in representing their community (sense of belonging) through writing. Several students remarked on how personal and meaningful the writing process became when it involved their cultural heritage. One participant shared:

- (1). “I felt proud when writing about Sasak marriage ceremonies because it’s part of who we are. I wanted to describe it well in English.” (*Participant-3*)

Another student expressed how cultural content gave her courage to contribute more during group discussions:

- (2). “Before, I was shy to talk in English, but when the topic was about Sasak food, I felt more confident because I know the details and I can explain it better.” (*Participant-9*)

These narratives illustrate that culturally responsive instruction does more than support language skills it reinforces students’ sense of belonging and personal investment in the learning process. When learners are invited to draw upon their own cultural knowledge, their affective and cognitive engagement increases, ultimately contributing to a more empowering learning experience.

Improving Content Development through Cultural Familiarity

The final theme underlines the cognitive advantage students experienced when working with culturally familiar topics. Participants consistently reported that it was easier to generate ideas, organize their thoughts, and write cohesively when the content of the activities related to their everyday lives and cultural practices. This accessibility helped reduce their cognitive burden and allowed them to focus more on language production and collaboration. Students highlighted the practical benefits of writing with familiar content, as highlighted in the following excerpt:

- (1). “I didn’t have to think too hard about what to write because I already knew the story. It helped me write faster and clearer.” (*Participant-11*)
- (2). “Because we understand the topic deeply, like traditional ceremonies or local legends, we can write more details and make our writing interesting.” (*Participant-4*)

These responses demonstrate that integrating local culture in writing activities can improve students’ ability to develop rich, detailed, and coherent texts. The familiarity not only enhances fluency but also contributes to content quality by allowing students to draw from real-life experiences and prior knowledge. In collaborative settings, this shared cultural background also enables smoother coordination and content alignment among group members.

Discussion

The findings of this study indicate that integrating local cultural content into collaborative writing activities significantly improved students’ narrative performance, interactional quality, and learning engagement. These outcomes can be interpreted through sociocultural mechanisms in which culturally familiar narratives activate shared background

knowledge and reduce cognitive load, thereby enabling more efficient joint meaning-making (Aldossary, 2025; Lavrenteva & Orland-Barak, 2023; Liao & Li, 2023). When students collaborated around the Princess Mandalika story an account deeply rooted in their cultural experience the writing process became more purposeful and less hindered by the need for content clarification, allowing them to allocate greater attention to higher-level processes such as shaping narrative structure, negotiating stance, and refining language use. This demonstrates that cultural context is not simply an adjunct feature but a core dimension shaping how learners coordinate contributions, distribute cognitive effort, and co-construct text areas largely overlooked in studies employing culturally neutral or technology-focused writing activities. These interpretations are consistent with theoretical insights from sociocultural perspectives (Slavkov, 2015; Lantolf et al., 2020), process-oriented writing theory (Flower & Hayes, 1981; Vavrus, 2008) and culturally responsive pedagogy (Harmon, 2012; Vavrus, 2008), which collectively affirm the pivotal role of culturally grounded knowledge in facilitating effective collaborative writing.

It is noted to be compared with prior studies on collaborative writing, which mainly highlighted gains in accuracy, organization, and metacognitive growth through peer interaction and digital tools, the findings of this study show that these benefits can be strengthened when activities are culturally meaningful. Prior studies tended to rely on neutral prompts that ignored students' cultural backgrounds (Pardede, 2024; Chu, 2025; Helaluddin et al., 2023; Wang et al., 2025), whereas the present results indicate that cultural relevance plays a decisive pedagogical role by increasing engagement, balancing participation, and improving the coherence of group texts. This aligns with principles of culturally responsive pedagogy, which argue that learning becomes more effective when materials reflect students' identities and community knowledge (Jabar, 2025; Herda et al., 2025). The students' increased motivation, confidence, and sense of ownership observed in this study suggest that culturally familiar content supports collaborative writing not only by easing cognitive demands but also by fostering positive socio-emotional conditions for interaction.

Furthermore, evidence from student reflections further sheds light on these mechanisms. Participants reported that culturally embedded prompts facilitated smoother interaction and more balanced participation because shared schemas reduced the need for extensive coordination to establish narrative direction. These experiences reflect findings from CRP-informed studies showing that cultural alignment can mitigate dominance patterns and encourage more equitable contribution across group members (Monyai, 2024; Shagufa & Ali, 2025; Yuliantari & Huda, 2023). EFL Students also expressed increased cultural pride and emotional readiness to contribute, reinforcing arguments that culturally resonant content fosters psychological safety and strengthens learners' willingness to engage in collaborative meaning-making (Tu, 2021; Hossain, 2024). The convergence of quantitative improvements and qualitative perceptions thus suggests that cultural embedding influences collaborative writing through mutually reinforcing processes: it supports content comprehension, stabilizes group coordination, and enhances socio-emotional investment.

Likewise, there are other possible explanations that need to be taken into account. The improvement in performance may partly come from students becoming more used to the collaborative writing stages, not only from the cultural content. Similarly, the progress seen in one narrative genre might simply reflect students' growing familiarity with that specific genre rather than a wider development in their writing skills. A stronger research design such as comparing different levels of cultural familiarity or using multimodal data to track the writing process would help clarify how much each factor contributes, including cultural knowledge, group work, and procedural learning. These improvements would also help address several limitations of this study, the culturally uniform participant group, and the lack of detailed interactional data that could show how students build meaning together at a micro level.

Despite these limitations, the study provides strong evidence that culturally embedded prompts influence both how students work together and the quality of the texts they produce. When students draw on familiar cultural knowledge, interaction becomes smoother and less constrained, allowing them to engage more deeply and collaborate more evenly. As a result, their written work shows clearer ideas and stronger overall quality. For classroom practice, the implication is straightforward: incorporating local cultural narratives into collaborative writing activities can serve as an effective cognitive support and a shared reference point, helping groups work more efficiently and improving the overall success of collaborative writing in EFL settings.

CONCLUSION

The study concludes that incorporating Sasak local cultural content into collaborative writing meaningfully improves students' narrative writing performance, as reflected in measurable gains in text quality as well as richer interactional patterns during group work. The findings showed clear improvements as well as revealed that cultural familiarity reduced interactional barriers, encouraged more balanced participation, and strengthened students' sense of confidence and cultural pride. These combined effects indicate that cultural relevance enhances not only cognitive aspects of collaborative writing but also socio-emotional engagement, leading to more effective and equitable collaboration. Future studies should examine these dynamics across more diverse cultural settings and with designs that capture long-term and process-level development. On the whole, the findings highlight the value of culturally responsive pedagogy in fostering inclusive, meaningful, and contextually grounded EFL writing instruction.

Two key implications arise from these findings. First, curriculum designers should incorporate localized cultural materials to increase contextual relevance and ensure that learning resources reflect students' lived experiences. Second, teachers are encouraged to design collaborative activities that deliberately leverage learners' cultural knowledge to promote more balanced participation, reduce interactional barriers, and improve overall learning outcomes. These implications affirm the broader value of culturally responsive pedagogy in fostering inclusive and contextually meaningful EFL writing environments.

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INFORMED CONSENT STATEMENT

Participation in this study was voluntary. All participants were informed about the purpose, procedures, possible risks, and benefits of the study before taking part. They were also assured that their identities would remain confidential and that the information they provided would be used only for research purposes. Participants had the right to withdraw from the study at any time without penalty. Informed consent was obtained from all participants before their involvement in the research.

DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

The data used in this study are not publicly available in order to protect participant privacy and maintain ethical standards. However, the data may be made available upon reasonable request for validation or further analysis. Any request for access must receive approval from the appropriate institutional ethics review board and must comply with ethical guidelines and participant consent.

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