

## Online Collaborative Learning: The Good, the Bad, and the Purported in Thesis Writing

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### Abstract

The discourse on online collaborative learning in thesis writing has received less attention despite numerous studies which explored learning in the online milieu. Hence, this study aimed to fathom the Online Collaborative Learning (OCL) experiences in undergraduate thesis writing of Bachelor of Arts in Communication and English Language students in a prime state university in the Cordillera Administrative Region, Philippines. Notably, this study focused on undergraduate students' benefits, challenges, and suggestions. Employing qualitative phenomenological research, the data were gathered through semi-structured one-on-one in-depth interviews. They were analyzed following the phases of thematic analysis by Braun and Clarke (2006). Ergo, the following themes were generated. First, the benefits included joint responsibility, which envelopes (a) a divided workload and (b) shared ideas and flexible communication. Second, the challenges were composed of external problems that bracket (a) work and school demands, (b) vague instructions, and (c) limited access and member performance issues which involve background knowledge, low quality outputs, and a lack of participation. Finally, the suggestions were engagement particularly recognizing responsibility, group dynamics, and guidance. Based on the findings, recommendations are suggested for future research directions.

**Keywords:** Online collaborative learning, Undergraduate thesis writing, BA comm and BA EL students, Phenomenological research design, Thematic analysis

### Introduction

Online, e-learning, digital, or computer-based learning can be defined as instruction delivered on a digital device that supports learning (Mayer, 2018). On the other hand, collaborative learning is a teaching strategy where a small group of students collaborate and share information and skills to achieve a specific learning objective (So & Brush, 2008). With those established, Ku et al. (2013) stated that computer-mediated form of traditional in-class collaborative learning is called Online Collaborative Learning (OCL). On another note,

researchers have argued for the benefit of peer cooperation in response to the notion that writing a thesis is a solitary task (Miedijensky & Lichtinger, 2016). Writing collaboratively involves more than just people typing on a computer; it also involves a variety of additional artifacts and numerous facets of collaborative activity that co-writers must manage (Larsen-Ledet, 2020).

The qualities of online collaborative groups are the same as those of face-to-face groups, such as a common objective, organization, a sense of togetherness, efficient communication, and unity (Dincă et al., 2021; Ekblaw, 2016). They added that these have special qualities due to the unique aspects of online collaboration, like varied timetables and learning speeds, various e-learning platforms and programs, no face-to-face chances, safe file sharing, or various file formats. In future careers, employers anticipate new hires to have experience working in groups. They will look for proof of their capacity to cooperate, collaborate, and finish tasks with coworkers, whether remotely or at a distance (Stephens & Roberts, 2017). An academic avenue that requires online or onsite collaboration is thesis writing or research writing. Skills in researching are much needed to be enhanced significantly for the future. Wise and Van Luyn (2022) assert that one's ability to focus on a goal, gather relevant data, and communicate results to others is aided by her research skills. In every profession, research skills require keeping up with new information, using scientific reasoning to comprehend phenomena, and contributing to society as a knowledge creator (Murtonen et al., 2008).

Local studies have explored online learning, collaborative learning, benefits and challenges of collaborative learning, and other similar topics, but these were taken as separate studies (Arinto, 2016; Garcia, 2012; Ilagan et al., 2021). Garcia (2012) concentrated his research on online collaborative learning activities, while Arinto (2016) studied the problems and obstacles in Open and Distance E-Learning (ODEL) derived from the ODEL practitioners' points of view. Ilagan et al. (2021) fostered collaborative learning among corporations, instructors, and students. Most studies monitored specific group activities that their respective respondents had to complete, which served as material for their study and adapted mixed methods and quantitative designs (Dinca et al., 2021; Donelan, 2018; Koh & Hill, 2009; Sridharan & Boad, 2019; Wildman, 2021).

To date, a few studies have been conducted that focused on the experiences in online collaborative learning from students' perspectives. There is an absence of studies about online collaborative learning in thesis writing—only studies about other activities and from teachers' perspectives (Garcia, 2012; Zhu et al., 2010).

## **Literature review**

### **Thesis writing**

The thesis is a written product of an organized study from university-level, supervised research (Hashmi, 2022). In addition, Asisa (2010) stated that writing a thesis is a research study done by undergraduate and graduate students in a particular academic field. Students are typically given one semester or six months in their senior year of college to finish their theses, even though many students need more than six months in reality (Azmat & Ahmad, 2022). The

selection of the study topic and the subsequent steps leading to the thesis' final product are intricate processes (Wu & Buripakdi, 2022). It fosters scientific thinking and makes it easier to understand how to choose a research topic and problem, how to establish goals and questions for a research project, how to plan and carry out a study, how to handle and analyze data, and how to present a study (Tiwari, 2019). In academia, Quinto (2022b) surmised that it is challenging to dispute the crucial function of thesis writing that undergraduate students must overcome because the process is linked with its ineluctable difficulties.

### **Online collaborative learning**

Online learning is when students receive instruction online with some aspect of student discretion over time, place, path, pace, or online or face-to-face (Horn & Staker, 2011). On the other hand, collaborative learning, defined by Moore and Kearsley (2012), is a learning environment in which individual learners support and add to an emerging pool of knowledge of a group and emphasize peer relationships as students work together, creating learning communities. The mixture of both concepts is referred to as online collaborative learning, where collaboration between and amongst students is given collaborative tasks by teachers done in virtual or online environments (An et al., 2008).

### **Benefits of online collaborative learning**

Research studies taken before and during the Covid-19 pandemic have shown many benefits of online collaborative learning. The online learning approach gives students freedom in terms of not needing to attend classes in a specific physical location (Koh & Hill, 2009). The study results of Haugland et al. (2022) found that there was flexible organization among students in a group because the project was marked by shared accountability and featured a transparent structure and framework to encourage cooperation. In groups, students are better able to work together, share ideas, and gain knowledge on particular themes (Dimitropoulos et al., 2008). In addition, active communication with more efficient peers improves learners' cognition, allowing them to develop their conceptual capacity (Lin, 2015). Learners are allowed to receive and provide information (Roberts et al., 2004). Most of the participants in the study of Zhu (2012) indicated that building familiarity among group members, instructor's help with group formation, clear feedback, and guidelines regarding the group project is beneficial. Since not every collaborative activity leads to cooperation, most team activities are believed to stimulate social interactions as questions are asked, the reasoning is communicated, and disagreements are handled as content is developed. Therefore, knowledge is constructed (Lohmann et al., 2019).

### **Challenges of online collaborative learning**

Donelan and Kear (2018) postulated that successful collaborative working could be challenging to establish in a distance or online context. They added that students connecting and interacting with team members whom they may in person presents additional hurdles. In the study of Koh and Hill (2009), it was discovered that students in online collaborative

learning experienced the following: difficulties recognizing objectives, absence of a sense of belonging, communication difficulties, and insufficient responsibility. Furthermore, Wildman et al. (2021); Quinto (2021) found that groups working during Covid-19 faced issues such as increased unnecessary interruptions, forgetfulness, procrastination, navigating geographies, team member differences, and communication difficulties, competing demands from other classes, increased distractions, geographical disparities, and performance of team members.

Lei and Medwell (2021) explained that it is significant to note that some participant feedback emphasized the difficulties they encountered at the start of their collaborative learning, particularly their lack of familiarity with some group members and the worry that Online Collaborative Learning (OCL) would have a detrimental effect on their learning. In addition, students collaborating online are reported to have higher levels of undesirable emotions like fear and irritation (Donelan & Kear, 2018; Hilliard, 2017; Hilliard, 2019). Moreover, all ten participants in the qualitative study of Medaille and Usinger (2020) have shared discomfort towards collaboration with other people and described the process as “beyond discomfort.” Appravoo et al. (2019); Patricio (2022) determined that using an online learning mode could easily make learners feel alienated and miss out on the benefits of “gaining knowledge together.” The implemented method remained in the background, being ineffective, discipline and inspection issues, and the students remaining passive were also considered drawbacks (Erten et al., 2019). This was supported by Lee and Osman (2021) in their study of OCL in Korea and the United Arab Emirates. They expressed that both nations’ implementation of OCL needs thoughtful assessments that promote individual accountability and constructive group interdependence.

### **Suggestions for online collaborative learning**

Zutshi et al. (2012) recommended that team members identify roles and assign responsibilities as soon as possible to address potential problems. The study also suggested that positions should ideally be discussed and agreed upon at the start of a project, preferably in writing, comparable to a contractual agreement. Online course instructors should establish techniques to support the essential cooperation factors to increase the satisfaction level of online collaboration and provide formative feedback to students in synchronous classes (Quinto & Cacanindin, 2022). Teachers’ assignment of precise project descriptions and grading criteria can aid students in organizing their collaborative work (Wang, 2009). In response to whether or not Online Collaborative Learning (OCL) should be used in other classes, the study findings of Erten et al. (2019) revealed that it should be used only in theoretical and verbal courses.

### **Research queries**

Several studies have already been conducted on many aspects of online learning. In contrast, a few studies have explored students’ experiences in online collaborative learning in thesis writing. Hence, this study aimed to understand online collaborative learning experiences in thesis writing from the perspectives of undergraduate students in a state university in the northern Philippines. Specifically, the following research queries were addressed:

RQ1: What benefits do students identify in online collaborative learning in thesis writing?

RQ2: What challenges do students face in online collaborative learning in thesis writing?

RQ3: What suggestions do students have to make online collaborative learning better in thesis writing?

## **Materials and methods**

### **Research design**

This study employed a qualitative phenomenological research to better understand students' experiences in online collaborative learning in thesis writing (Ebardo & Wibowo, 2021).

### **Site and participants**

The study participants were senior students from Bachelor of Arts in Communication (BA Comm) and Bachelor of Arts in English Language (BA EL) in one prime state university in Cordillera Administrative Region, Philippines. These students were writing their theses during the conduct of the study. Purposive sampling was used to select the participants (Etikan et al., 2016). The researchers chose participants from the population of students who had successfully defended their thesis proposals because they had experienced collaborating with other students in writing their theses. Although Moser and Korstjens (2018) estimated that phenomenological studies require fewer than ten interviews, the researchers interviewed more people than what is advised. The target number of participants was originally 40, but data saturation had already been reached on the 26th participant. The researchers found no new information emerging during the interview with the 22nd until the 26th participant.

### **Instrumentations**

The researchers developed a semi-structured interview guide because it is more flexible adjusting the questions' order and allows for a more in-depth follow-up of participants' responses (Aung et al., 2021). The researchers followed the recommendations for drafting questions by Adams (2021). The recommendations include the following: budget enough time to carefully draft, edit, pretest, and polish the interview questions; decide in advance which questions are critical and the top priorities; use closed-ended questions since they can be ideal gateways to open-ended probing; use the everyday words of the target groups, while taking care not to talk down to them; think through the extent to which the draft questions may evoke pressure to give socially acceptable answers; and try to anticipate the most likely and smoothest sequence when drafting the tentative question order.

The interview guide comprised open-ended questions about online collaborative learning in thesis writing. There were 12 questions in the initial interview guide, but it became 13 after the expert validation. The interview guide was validated by an expert in the field of communication to guarantee that the researchers employed suitable data collection (Armour et

al., 2009). After the expert validation, one question was added. The guide, after that underwent pilot testing with one graduating student majoring in English who successfully defended her thesis proposal. A pilot test is carried out in any study to confirm instrument validity (Adams, 2015; Majid et al., 2017). The pilot testing ran precisely 50 minutes. Then, the researchers transcribed the recorded interviews and made necessary changes. Furthermore, the researchers created an aide memoire to better execute the semi-structured interviews (Warren, 1978).

### **Data gathering procedure**

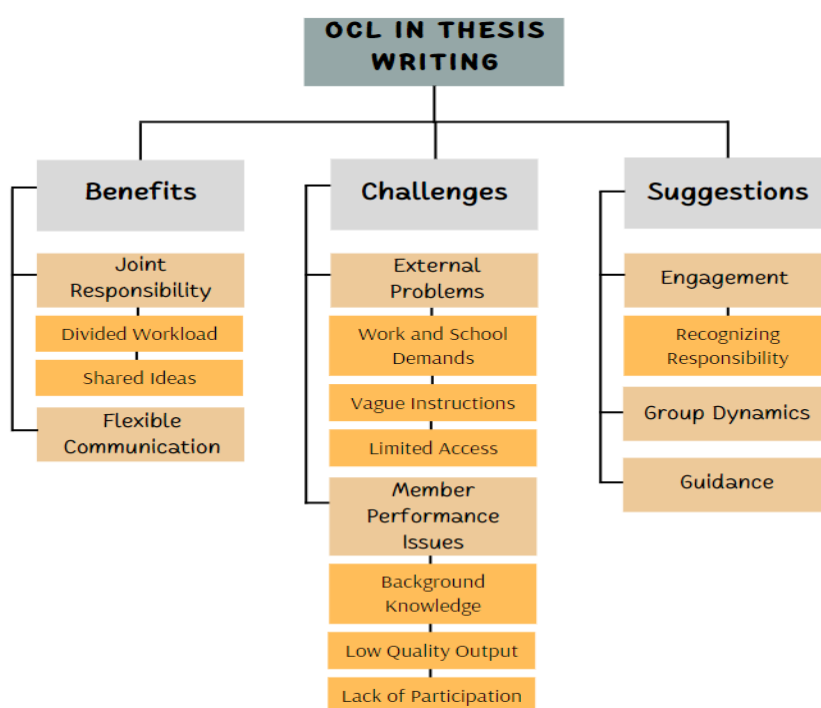
The data was extracted from separate one-on-one in-depth interviews because this allowed interviewees to provide accurate information at the individual level in online collaborative learning, which could be challenging to do so in focus group discussions where a few persons can dominate, data processing may take time, and a participant might be reluctant to open up about an experience when others are listening (Pacho, 2015). The interviews ran approximately 35 minutes, within the time frame prescribed by Moser and Korstjens (2018). The researchers received consent from all study participants. They ensured them that the data gathering would entail voluntary participation, anonymity, and confidentiality (Arifin, 2018). Prior to the interviews, the researchers established rapport by engaging with the participants, allowing them to clarify, ask, and refuse to answer questions or halt the interview.

### **Data analysis**

In analyzing the data, the researchers followed the phases of thematic analysis by Braun and Clarke (2006). The phases include familiarizing the data, generating initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing, defining, naming, and producing the report.

### **Results and discussion**

After the data harvest, the researchers developed the BCS in OCL in Thesis Writing, also known as the Benefits, Challenges, and Suggestions in Online Collaborative Learning in Thesis Writing, shown in figure 1. Under benefits, two themes are listed: (a) joint responsibility, which includes divided workload and shared ideas; and (b) flexible communication. On challenges, two themes are generated: (a) external problems, which include work and school demands, vague instructions, and limited access; and (b) member performance issues. Under suggestions, three themes are listed: (a) engagement which includes recognizing responsibility; (b) group dynamics; and (c) guidance.



**Figure 1** BCS in OCL in Thesis Writing

### **Benefits of online collaborative learning in thesis writing**

The benefits identified by the participants are the advantages that they experienced in online collaborative learning in thesis writing.

#### **Joint responsibility**

Joint responsibility in group activities means sharing duties while accomplishing the objectives of work, which are essential for a good flow of the writing process (Camarinha-Matos & Afsermanesh, 2008).

#### *Divided workload*

Members of the various groups in thesis writing shared contentment with fewer tasks in their theses. They distributed specific tasks for the thesis paper. Participant 18 made the statement:

“In collaboration, at least you can divide tasks, so the research is better because you are helping each other. It is easier to do it”. (P18)

Writing becomes less complicated if it is done in collaboration with other students. When working in a group instead of working alone, students gain more benefits when they share the workload (Yusuf et al., 2019). The participants emphasized that online collaborative learning is beneficial if all members do their tasks well and if they actively participate. Meanwhile, the relevance of task designation was brought up by participants as relationships were developed. Participant 19 explained:

“My co-researcher assigned tasks for me. She tells me what I should do, and it is helpful”. (P19)

Every member needs to have tasks assigned to them. Participants explained that they listed all the parts in the thesis paper and talked about it as a group before assigning what tasks each should do. In more effective partnerships, parties often take the time to clearly define the duties and responsibilities of each member while also recognizing the unique skills and resources offers to the task (Le et al., 2017). On the other hand, the participants of this study claimed that writing theses cost a lot. One benefit of having a member is to have someone to share the expenditure with. One participant conveyed:

“You can share expenses. Since our study needs a statistical treatment, we need to pay a statistician”. (P8)

Another student clarified that she wanted a partner because their study was expensive, especially with the printing. If projects feature cost-sharing, various students see collaboration as a solution to relieve budget pressure (Saunders & Corning, 2020), also applicable in thesis writing (Lieber et al., 2014).

#### *Shared ideas*

Various participants preferred collaborating with other students in writing theses because they had someone to brainstorm with, compare thoughts, and ask for help. Participant 17 supported:

“I like it better when I collaborate with others because there are parts that I do not know, so I need others to help or guide me.” (P17)

Instead of considering thesis writing a solitary endeavor, students could get mental and academic support from other group members. Gokhale (1995) concluded that collaborative learning might promote the development of critical thinking through debate, concept clarification, and idea appraisal from others. Students can take the initiative in thesis writing online by searching for various materials, communicating with other students in real-time and virtually, and reorganizing their understanding and communication (Kim et al., 2019).

#### **Flexible communication**

All participants prepared their thesis proposals during the second semester of their junior years. A few participants live far from the homes of the other participants in their groups. Since online learning bridges geographical separations, it allows collaboration to take place. In this context, participant 6 captured the following:

“The advantage of meeting online is that we do not waste time for commute just to meet each other. We can just chat immediately”. (P6)

The participants also mentioned that they communicate with their members online using computers or smartphones. Despite the distance separating them, they stated they could still communicate with other team members about their work. The existence of communication technology has replaced the obstacles to communication that result from difficulties in meeting



each other (Sumandiyar et al., 2021). Mukhtar et al. (2020) agreed that students are now independent and flexible learners who can learn anytime during the day.

### **Challenges of online collaborative learning in thesis writing**

The challenges identified by the participants are the stumbling blocks they experienced in online collaborative learning in thesis writing.

#### **External problems**

External problems impact students' collaboration and progress in online thesis writing. However, the problem sources from something other than stem from the students themselves.

##### *Work and school demands*

Several participants revealed that activities from other courses and other school-related activities competed with their thesis writing. One expounded:

"I can no longer focus on my thesis because there are too many activities in the college organizations, and I need to lead. I no longer consult with my partner because he is also busy with other requirements". (P25)

Contending demands from school disrupt the progress of thesis writing. The findings revealed that simultaneous activities from several courses and other curricular activities at school impacted their writing process. The analysis of the study of Beena and Sony (2022) and Kyndt et al. (2013) showed that students would struggle to succeed in online learning if activities were given simultaneously.

On another note, there were working students during the study. Notably, one participant is a member of a school organization, and another works part-time, while working together on their thesis writing. Participant 23 explained:

"My thesis partner works the night shift, while I am busy with school organizations in the daytime. Since our schedules do not match, replies usually take a long time". (P23)

Work affects progress in theses, making it challenging to find synchronous time to discuss their thesis papers. All interviewed working students confirmed that working had been challenging as they juggled their studies. Pusztai and Kocsis (2019) support this study by stating that work can hinder students' performance in school.

##### *Vague instructions*

Some participants needed to be more content with how their thesis papers were checked and how they were directed in the writing process. When asked if they were satisfied, they replied the following:

"Sometimes, I understand the instructions. Most of the time, I do not; that is why I have sought guidance from other instructors. It felt like what we want is different from what our adviser wants". (P18)

“Whenever we approach our adviser, she says we do this. After incorporating the suggestions, she says that the revisions are incorrect. Her line is ‘This is not what I told you to do’”. (P4)

Coll et al. (2014) postulated that there is a long-standing understanding that advisers need to provide students with high-quality feedback and responses. However, it is evident from the participants’ responses that they usually got confused about their thesis advisers’ ambiguous feedback (Budjalemba & Listyani, 2020; Rotas & Cahapay, 2020). Consequently, students need follow-up questions regarding their papers (Lopez et al., 2022). Mainly, students could hold back on asking questions or offering comments to their thesis advisers (Wut & Xu, 2021), which may result in poor performance in thesis writing (Feldon et al., 2015; van Leeuwen & Janssen, 2019).

#### *Limited access*

Comments from participants showed that they faced problems in their thesis writing because of poor internet connection resulting in a difficult time finding relevant information for their theses. One participant presented:

“One reason I cannot submit our manuscripts on time is I have a poor internet connection. Sometimes, I just rely on my partner to do the searching.” (P10)

Griffiths and Brophy (2005) reported that students encounter technical problems such as the slowness of the internet and sites taking too long to load, which may hinder the research process and the accumulation of related data for thesis students. Meanwhile, participants discussed having difficulties finding materials for their papers. A need for more resources, including people and information, can also bring about dissatisfaction.

“We have a hard time finding related literature, especially with Chapter 3, because we need to find supporting evidence. We have a hard time. That is why we are progressing very slowly.” (P5)

Finding relevant data for theses is difficult because resource availability depends on the chosen topic. Participant 10 mentioned that their topic was a culture in a particular place, and finding resources online for support proved challenging. Participant 21 added that their research interest could have been studied more, so they needed help finding related studies. Matin and Khan (2017) agreed that resources that are not available make it more difficult and time-consuming to maintain and produce content. If vital information is only available online, and access to it may be restricted depending on one’s knowledge of protocols, access to hardware and software, among others (Bhat & Mudhol, 2014).

#### **Member performance issues**

This challenge the participants encounter includes a lack of background knowledge in research, lack of participation, and low-quality output. This manner in how members are grouped connects to the stated challenge. The asserted manner of forming groups is the following; choosing own members, members being chosen by teachers, and random choice generated by online applications.

*Lack of background knowledge*

Concerning background knowledge in thesis writing, some participants claimed they knew nothing about theses. One researcher pointed out:

“Sometimes when we talk, we both do not understand research. Is it okay to do it like this or like that? We do not know what to do exactly”. (P3)

Despite taking similar courses in senior high school (Department of Education, 2013; Hashmi, 2022), the current study results showed that there are still a few who do not know how to begin writing despite having done research in senior high school because it is a complex process that includes steps from choosing the study topic to producing the thesis (Paltridge and Starfield, 2007; Wu & Buripakdi, 2022).

*Low quality output*

Most who revealed members’ performances were the acting leaders of the groups. One leader argued:

“My group member does her part in fulfilling the tasks I gave her, but I end up spending more time editing and revising her submissions to me due to poor quality”. (P22)

Low-quality outputs done by group members can lead to additional work for other members, which can sometimes delay them. These acting leaders expressed dissatisfaction with the quality of the task returned to them by their members and the lack of effort put into them. Elaborating on team member differences and performances, online students often complain that their peers are not doing their work well (Falls et al., 2014; Schneider et al., 2014). Bui et al. (2021) agreed that it might harm all members of a group if a member works inefficiently and ineffectively. Passive members seemed to agree with the acting group leaders in their dissatisfaction over their contributions to their theses. Participant 26 stated:

“I feel like I am contributing too little, or I feel like it’s not enough”. (P26)

Students become passive because they view their work as a weak contribution to group work. Legetter et al. (2010) explained that some research students need more confidence in their intellectual abilities. Their perception of being incompetent can result in a desire to avoid potential suffering or a feeling of powerlessness (Cherney et al., 2018).

*Lack of participation*

Lack of participation in this context means that members could be more responsive to the calls of attention of the working members. The comments revealed that the responsibilities of members who were appointed or given to them ended up being done by the other members. In this regard, participant 24 stated:

“I can say that I did almost all parts of our research with the additional burden of explaining the steps to my research partner. It feels like a double jeopardy on my part”. (P24)

Accounts of leaders revealed that they had problems with their passive members who did not participate and had no contribution to their theses, which also appeared in the study of

Bui et al. (2021), stating that groups encountered problems such as a lack of response from peers and dealing with inactive members. Similarly, most online students express displeasure with group work (Roberts, 2004). They frequently find various methods to turn what is meant to be a collaborative activity into individual efforts. In a different situation, some leaders acknowledged that they tended to forget or procrastinate. However, they insisted that their contribution was still present. One participant explained:

“I think there is also a problem with me because I get lazy, or I tend to delay paperwork since I have other school requirements and organizations to think about”. (P23)

Generally, students are frequently affected by the issue of procrastination (Kathleen & Basaria, 2021). Nonetheless, the participants assured that procrastination and forgetfulness delayed them, and they could still write their papers.

### **Suggestions to make online collaborative learning better in thesis writing**

With the challenges faced by the students, they made suggestions to improve online collaborative learning in thesis writing.

#### *Engagement*

Engagement is a positive work-related state that is characterized by dedication. It is considered beneficial for the members and the group as it is expected to influence how they do their work and fulfill their tasks (Bakker et al., 2012).

#### *Recognizing responsibility*

Students want their members to improve their participation in the writing process of their theses. This covers being responsible as a member of a group.

“For me, it is the initiative and responsibility as a student. We must contribute something because little things still matter in a group.” (P9)

Students must recognize their roles as members of a group or as a partner in the group to be balanced. Galati and Avraamides (2013) stated that people’s assessments of the other person’s capacity to participate in the shared spatial task are one type of social information that influences perspective-taking. Recognizing roles and responsibilities in a group can foster the knowledge of novel methods, products, and services by transforming new concepts and personal strengths (De Dru & West, 2001). Tosuntaş (2020) added that recognizing responsibility helps in group work, as members’ critical thinking is added.

#### *Group dynamics*

The attitudes and behavioral tendencies of a group were discussed in group dynamics as shared by the participants in the study. Group dynamics is how groups are created, structured, and operated (Aishwarya & Karuna, 2020). One thing covered in group dynamics, therefore, is the number of members involved in a group. The participants desired to increase the number of members because most were divided into dyads. Some of them shared:

“I want to collaborate with 3 or 4 members”. (P 15 and P17)

Cherney et al. (2018) suggested having 5 students allows individuals to contribute while still leaving the chance to learn from others’ contributions. Many participants in this study expressed a specific quantity close to what was suggested. On another note, several participants wanted to choose their members instead of their instructors. One participant expressed:

“Students’ opinions on group mates matter because students have more ideas on whether they can work harmoniously with certain people”. (P15)

The point-of-view of students should be considered if they will be grouped (Furberg & Silseth, 2022) because students in self-selected groups typically have fewer concerns about working in their groups and have marginally better group attitudes and outcome assessments than students who are randomly assigned to a group (Chapman et al., 2006).

### *Guidance*

The student-participants pointed out that they needed more knowledge on how to write their theses despite working in groups. Furthermore, students forwarded that they needed more background knowledge in thesis writing. Hence, students would like to request better guidance. Specifically, participant 4 stated:

“I think guidance does include not only modules and formats but also an explanation of specific parts of the research paper because not all students have the fullest capacity to write theses”. (P4)

The students will write better if advisers guide them well. Indeed, successful mentoring or guidance is crucial for academic and research achievement at all levels. Mentors or advisers must help research students to develop their research ideas (Bransford et al., 2005; Erickson, 2001; Quinto, 2022a). While several participants expressed appreciation for the effort of their thesis advisers, it is significant to point out that other participants sought better teaching guidance from their thesis advisers. On the other hand, it came out in the second research query in this study that students received vague instructions from their advisers. It is also discussed in that part of the second query that students needed more confidence to clarify these vague instructions. Hence, the guidance of advisers, which includes more precise instructions in thesis writing, must also be sought by students. Mbato and Cenra (2019) have emphasized that with the challenges that students face in OCL in thesis writing, they must be able to ask for assistance when they need it to complete their undergraduate theses.

### **Conclusion**

After one-on-one in-depth interviews with Bachelor of Arts in Communication and English Language students, the researchers were able to bring to the fore the benefits, challenges, and suggestions in online collaborative learning in thesis writing.

The benefits of online collaborative learning in thesis writing reported in the current study include joint responsibility, where the workload is divided, shared ideas, and flexible communication, which explains that students can communicate online anytime. Online collaborative learning makes writing theses relatively easier mainly because it lessens

expenses, tasks are assigned, students learn from other members, and less time and effort are spent when they opt to communicate online. Students' challenges in online collaborative learning in thesis writing involve external problems such as work and school demands, vague instructions, and limited access. Another challenge includes member performance issues such as background knowledge, a lack of participation, and low-quality outputs. External influences like work plus school demands, vague instructions, and limited access to resources hindered and slowed the progress of thesis writing. At the same time, member performance issues, such as needing more background knowledge make thesis writing difficult. Passive members' lack of participation and low-quality outputs added a burden and more work to active members or acting leaders of the groups. For online collaborative learning in thesis writing to improve, students gave the following suggestions: all members should have engagement, which encompasses recognizing responsibility in the group; group dynamics should be considered; and guidance from thesis advisers should be palpable. With the challenges faced in online collaborative learning in thesis writing, each group member should engage by recognizing their roles and initiating conversations in the writing process. Moreover, thesis advisers should consider students' opinions on forming groups and guide their students well by giving more precise instructions.

Based on the findings of this study, the following research directions can be followed. One possibility is that the benefits be discussed more profoundly, including the equality or inequality of the assigned workload. Another possibility is that future studies should focus on the challenges of online collaborative learning in thesis writing and find out the consequences of such obstacles, whether personal or academic. Despite the desire to focus on students' perspectives, the results may prompt others that there is also a necessity to fathom the teachers' perspectives.

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