



Collective Scaffolding, Intensive Mentoring, L1-mediation and EFL Learners' Paragraph Development: A Sociocultural Perspective

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Abstract

Many studies, today, support the position of Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory (SCT) and its promising contributions to the field of second language learning and teaching. Parallel to this line of inquiry, drawing upon three techniques grounded in the SCT, the present study investigated the relative effectiveness of collective scaffolding, intensive mentoring, and L1-mediation on EFL learners' paragraph development. To this end, 64 Iranian EFL learners in three experimental groups and one control group agreed to participate in an eight-week research study. The data obtained from the pretest and posttest were analyzed through ANCOVA, indicating that the learners in the experimental groups significantly outperformed their counterparts in the control group in terms of paragraph writing. Pairwise comparisons also showed that the learners who received collective scaffolding had more improvement in their writing, followed by L1-mediation and intensive mentoring. The results, thus, highlight the essential role of social interaction, scaffolding, mediation, and collaboration in language learning and teaching and suggest that taking advantage of SCT and its promising contributions such as collective scaffolding, intensive mentoring, and L1-mediation can improve the status quo and add more dimensions to the existing literature on language learning and teaching.

Keywords: Collective Scaffolding; Intensive Mentoring; L1-Mediation; Sociocultural Theory

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1. Introduction

The current upsurge and popularity of communicative-oriented classrooms has motivated many language teachers to try to establish a social and cooperative context in the classroom. Regardless of what the communicative-oriented classroom means, most of the interested teachers try to find new approaches to run their classes more effectively and to change the learners from a passive recipient to those who are actively and cooperatively involved in the learning process. Cooperative learning is a widely accepted teaching method that fosters learning and socialization across various subjects in education, from primary school to higher education. When students engage in cooperative learning and interact with one another, they learn to give and receive help, share their ideas, listen to different perspectives, resolve differences, and construct new knowledge. This process leads to improved academic outcomes and motivates language learners to succeed (Gillies, 2014).

A substantial body of research (e.g., Gillies, 2014; Loewen & Sato, 2018; Long, 1996; Mohammadzadeh & Saeidi, 2022; Sato & Ballinger, 2016; Sundari & Febriyanti, 2023; Van Patten, 2017) supports the usefulness of interaction and cooperative learning in second language acquisition. Both cognitive and sociocultural learning theories emphasize the importance of interaction in the social context (Falchikov, 2001). Vygotsky's contributions in education hold that learning is a social and cooperative process, where sociocultural factors play a central role in organizing the mind and learning. According to SCT, development does not unfold as an innate capacity, but rather as the transformation of innate capacities through socioculturally constructed mediational means (Vygotsky, 1978).

Considering the crucial role of the social interaction in the process of teaching and learning, the employment of the SCT and its promising contributions, as Ohta (2005, p. 505) put it, could offer a "productive and exciting bend in the road" for the teachers to have more interactive and communicative-oriented classrooms. Regarding this line of inquiry and drawing upon three techniques grounded in the SCT, this research explored the relative effectiveness of collective scaffolding, intensive mentoring, and L1-mediation on Iranian EFL learners' paragraph development. Previous studies have shown that learners often struggle with paragraph development, particularly in areas like organization, cohesion, and effective use of supporting details. These challenges can be attributed to the complexities of paragraph writing, which requires learners to not only understand grammar and vocabulary but also to develop higher-order thinking skills for structuring ideas and logical flow (Mohammad Hosseinpur & Kazemi, 2022). Traditional instruction that focuses solely on grammar and sentence construction may not provide sufficient support for learners to master these complex writing skills. Traditionally, teaching writing was confined to writing individually about



a topic under time constraint (Teng & Zhang, 2020). It is for some while that the process of writing has a drastic change from merely conveying the perceived information to a process of extending and creating meaning. According to Hayes and Flower (1983), the process of writing can be considered a cognitive process. Therefore, it seems that a sociocultural orientation and its potentials can be taken advantage of to share and distribute mental activities among the students (Lantolf, 2000).

2. Review of the Related Literature

2.1 Learning within the sociocultural theory

Sociocultural theory (SCT), rooted in cultural-historical psychology, was initially put forward by the Russian psychologist Lev Vygotsky in 1978 and later developed after his death by his students and colleagues. As one of the most famous and outstanding developmental theories in psychology, SCT holds that knowledge construction and learning is not bounded to the mind; rather, it is primarily co-constructed through social interaction between a more capable and a less capable individual (Lantolf, 2008). Walqui (2006, p. 160) outlines the key principles underlying SCT:

- Learning occurs before the development.
- Regardless of the significant role of the language for communication, it is the main tool of thought.
- Mediation furnishes the ground for learning.
- Learning and development cannot achieve without social interaction.
- Initially, learning occurs through social interactions with others, but as it progresses, it becomes a more internalized and individual process.
- Learners with the help of a more capable or knowledgeable person move one level beyond their present level (ZPD).

Contrary to the popular belief in the traditional psychology that assumes development of the mental functions precedes learning, the advocates of the SCT hold that social learning and challenges associated with it precede mental development. One of the key distinguishing features of SCT is its emphasis on the role of language in cognitive development. Although the proponents of the SCT hardly claim that thought does not exist before language, they assert that initially thought and language are not in one single system and that merge around the age of three and, in fact, the internalization of language leads to cognitive

development (McLeod, 2018). Social interaction is crucial for human cognitive development according to Sociocultural Theory (SCT). This theory suggests that cultural factors like activities (work, play, education), tools (physical like books or symbolic like language), and shared understandings all play a role in a guided learning process. Similar to Vygotsky's ideas, SCT emphasizes that interaction between people with different knowledge levels is key. This collaboration helps everyone involved learn and grow together (Ratner, 2002). The cultural development and learning initially happens in the social plane or stage and then it happens psychologically or within the person. In other words, it is first interpersonal and then intrapersonal.

Vygotsky's (1978) ZPD refers to the gap between a person's individual attempt and his attempt with the help of a more knowledgeable person. Considering the fact that ZPD incorporates all the aspects of the learning environment: the learner, the teacher, their shared experiences and their resources to facilitate learning, it is of vital importance in the process of learning.

Considering the growing recognition of the significant role of social and cultural variables in language learning and teaching, L2-oriented SCT and its contributions have received considerable attention by SLA researchers (e.g., Lantolf et al., 2021; Loewen & Sato, 2018; McLeod, 2018; Mohammad Hosseinpur, 2015; Poehner et al., 2018; Smagorinsky, 2018; Swain & Deters, 2007; Wang et al., 2023; Xi & Lantolf, 2020). L2-oriented SCT provides a ground for the L2 teachers and researchers to look at the SLA practice and theory from a different perspective and appreciate that social environment should not receive peripheral attention in the learning process; rather, it should be regarded as the main requirement for the learning and cognitive development. (Swain & Deters, 2007). Therefore, different techniques and inspirations of SCT such as collective scaffolding, intensive mentoring, and L1-mediation offer an effective means for L2 teachers to promote interaction, cooperation and learner involvement in the classroom context.

2.2 Collective scaffolding

Scaffolding, rooted in Sociocultural Theory (SCT), refers to the support and guidance within the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD). Vygotsky (1978) introduced the concept of ZPD as the distance between a person's current level and their potential with the help of a more knowledgeable person. Scaffolding is used in collaborative learning, where novices are supported by experts or peers to develop deeper understanding (Danli, 2011).

Peer scaffolding occurs in group/pair work, supported by psycholinguistic theory of interaction and sociocultural theory of mind (Long, 1996; Vygotsky, 1978). Collective scaffolding, proposed by Boblett (2012), involves individuals



joining forces to create a ZPD through collaborative interactions, allowing language learners to learn from each other and improve their knowledge (Shabani, 2016). Despite its significance, few studies have explored the impact of peer scaffolding on EFL learners' writing performance.

2.3 Intensive mentoring

Mentoring is a key component in professional development, offering ongoing support for novices. It can include counselling, supervision, consultation, and coaching (Johnson et al., 2007). The mentoring model, aligned with Vygotsky's ZPD, involves a novice interacting with an expert to facilitate developmental growth (Shabani, 2016). Both parties contribute to class activities, with the mentor providing guidance and support (Ohta, 2000).

Mentoring can be categorized into Limited Mentoring (advice and emotional support) and Intensive Mentoring (pedagogically-oriented mentoring). Intensive Mentoring involves close interaction between mentor and mentee throughout the learning process, fostering a climate of trust and empowerment (Fletcher et al., 2008).

2.4 L1-Mediation

The use of learners' native language (L1) in second language classrooms is a debated topic. However, some researchers argue that logical and proper use of L1 can facilitate language learning (e.g., Cheng, 2013; Lee & Macaro, 2013; Nitisakunwut et al., 2023; Mohammad Hosseinpur & Bagheri Nevisi, 2018; Scutt & Fueute, 2008). Excessive use of L2 can cause anxiety and stress, and principled use of L1 can alleviate this stress and create a secure learning atmosphere.

The Vygotskian sociocultural theory of mind supports the use of L1 as a mediational tool for L2 learning. Language can be used to focus attention, communicate, and cooperate between individuals (Storch, 2002; Wells, 1999). Swain (2006) introduces the concept of "languaging", which highlights the role of language in mediating thinking processes. Both L1 and target language can be used as mediation tools, despite some teachers' reservations about using L1 in L2 classes.

This study investigated how social interaction could impact learning a second language (EFL). Since research on sociocultural theory applied to EFL is limited, the study focused on three specific methods: collective scaffolding, intensive mentoring, and using learners' native language (L1) as a bridge. The goal was to see how these methods affect EFL learners' ability to write paragraphs. To achieve this, the study addressed the following research question:

Do collective scaffolding, intensive mentoring, and L1-mediation techniques have any significant impact on Iranian EFL learners' paragraph development?

3. Method

3.1 Participants

This research involved students from four existing classes at an Iranian English language institute. These students enrolled to enhance their overall English proficiency and were placed in their classes based on the institute's placement test. To ensure a similar level of ability among participants, an additional Oxford placement test (2007) was administered. Only those who scored 47 or higher, indicating an intermediate level, were included. The final study group consisted of 64 participants, ranging in age from 18 to 28, divided across three experimental groups and one control group.

3.2 Materials

The second researcher of the study employed a writing course book by Bailey (2011), *Academic writing for international students*, to run all the classes for eight weeks. The book, which is widely used in writing courses in EFL institutes in Iran, was selected due to its prevalence, user-friendly appearance, and its educationally appropriate contents. The book covers all the rudiments of paragraph writing as well as the development of different paragraph types such as descriptive, compare/contrast, problem/ solution, process, and opinion paragraphs. The topics and writing tests were selected from this book as well. To specifically control for prior knowledge and practice, we randomly selected participants who had not taken the course before and had not been exposed to the specific topics and writing tasks used in the study.

3.3 Instruments

3.3.1 Placement test

The Oxford Placement Test (2007), as a standard and reliable placement test presented by Oxford University Press, was employed to determine the participants' proficiency level. The test, based on CEFR, which is an internationally accepted scale to pinpoint the level of English learners, was adopted due to its reliability, credibility, and ease of administration. The score range of 31⁺ out of 50 for vocabulary and grammar, 8⁺ out of 10 for reading comprehension, 8⁺ out of 10 for writing, and the total of 47⁺ is considered for the B2 or intermediate level, which was the concern of this research.

3.3.2 Writing tests



To check the participants' knowledge prior to the treatment and after the treatment, they were required to write two paragraphs as pre-test and post-test, respectively. The topics of the paragraphs were borrowed from Bailey (2011), and the participants were invited to write at least 150 words for the two descriptive paragraphs in the timeline of 30 minutes during the pre-test and post-test.

TOEFL iBT rating scale was used to evaluate the paragraphs on the basis of five categories: The first category concerned topic sentence, and it was about the clarity of the topic sentence and how it attracted interest. The second category dealt with adequate development of the paragraph, organization of the paragraph, and its smooth transition. The third one related to the use of sources, contextualization and drawing reasonable conclusions. The fourth category considered substantive content in which use of well-chosen and factually correct evidence to support the topic sentence was taken into account. The final category addressed grammar, punctuation, and spelling. In each category, scores from 0 to 2 were assigned and the total score was 10. Considering this rating scale, the paragraphs were rated by the two researchers of the study.

3.4 Data collection procedure

As the first step, to homogenize the participants, Oxford placement test (2007) was administered and 64 male and female students who scored 47 and above, intermediate level, were qualified to participate in the study. In addition, 12 more students who had already passed this course with the second researcher of this study and had managed to get high scores volunteered to help the researchers as the leaders of the groups.

Therefore, the study was conducted using four groups (classes). There were 16 students in the first group, collective scaffolding group. The learners were assigned to groups of four, and according to the definition of collective scaffolding, no leader was selected for the groups. Here, the learners were involved in collaborative activity in which none of them was regarded as the significant person. All the learners attended to the tasks and worked collaboratively, and they jointly managed different parts of the tasks. In the process of the activity, the learners constructed a collective scaffold for each other and during these interactions, they joined forces and helped one another.

Like the previous group, the 16 participants in the L1-mediator group were assigned to groups of four and one leader was randomly assigned to each group. In the L1-mediated group, all the needed clarification was presented in the L2, and principled and judicious application of L1 was considered by the leaders only when the members encountered with specific questions and difficulties. It should be noted that the leaders had already been briefed not to use L1 in every stage of

doing the tasks.

Contrary to the two previous groups, due to the necessity of close interaction between mentor and mentees, the 16 participants in the intensive mentoring group were assigned to eight groups of two, and one leader was assigned randomly to each group. In this class, the mentor (leader) and the two mentees were in close interaction and from the very outset of the task, the mentor's responsibility started. It was on the burden of the mentor to provide the mentees with help in all the aspects and steps of the task. It is noteworthy that prior to each step, the mentor had instructional conversation with the mentees, and afterward they had the mentees under scrutiny and perpetual observation. If the mentor noticed that the members were following the wrong track, s/he would provide them with explanations, clarifications, and examples. The mentee's responsibility was to make the most of the instructional explanations and ask for help and clarification where needed and to follow the presented feedback. As an instance, in the process of the writing the paragraphs, one of the learners in the group had problem in understanding the aim of the task of writing and the question, the mentor simplified the topic and broke it into the parts and explained it to her. The participants in the last group, control group, received no treatment and went through the traditional way of paragraph development.

After the placement process, the participants were invited to write a general topic from *Academic writing for international students* (Bailey, 2011) as the pretest. They were asked to write a 150-word paragraph in 30 minutes. Prior to the treatment, a briefing session was held with the leaders of the intensive mentoring and L1-mediation groups out of the class meeting time to brief them and clarify their responsibilities. In the process of the treatment, the second researcher of the study presented the participants with some basic information regarding paragraph development such as the features of a well-written topic sentence, major and minor supporting sentences and a well-written concluding sentence as well as different techniques of support such as facts, statistics, anecdotes, personal experience, and physical description. Then, the participants in the experimental and control group were assigned with some tasks and were invited to work in their groups and individually, respectively. The treatment lasted for eight sessions, and the participants met once a week in a 100-minute session.

Finally, another general topic from *Academic writing for international students* (Bailey, 2011) was administered as the posttest in the class to evaluate the learners' improvement. Blank sheets were given to the learners, and they were asked to write 150-word paragraphs in 30 minutes. Then, the papers were collected and scored by the researchers of the study based on the TOEFL iBT rating scale.



3.5 Data Analysis

The researchers used a mix of descriptive and statistical analyses to evaluate the data collected. To ensure consistency in scoring, they calculated Cronbach's alpha, a reliability measure. The results showed a strong agreement between the two raters, with alpha scores exceeding 0.80 for both the pre-test and post-test. Tests like the Kolmogorov-Smirnov and Levene's ensured the data met the assumptions necessary for the chosen statistical methods. To address the study's research question, researchers conducted an ANCOVA analysis followed by a Bonferroni post-hoc test.

4. Results

Before analyzing the data statistically, normal distribution and homogeneity of variance were checked. A normality test (Kolmogorov-Smirnov) showed the data was normally distributed for all groups ($p > 0.05$). Similarly, Levene's test confirmed that the variance of the variable was equal across groups ($p > 0.05$). This ensured the validity of our chosen statistical methods.

The following table (Table 1) presents the average scores and variations achieved by the participants in a pre-test and post-test, allowing us to investigate the impact of different teaching methods on their paragraph writing skills.

Table 1

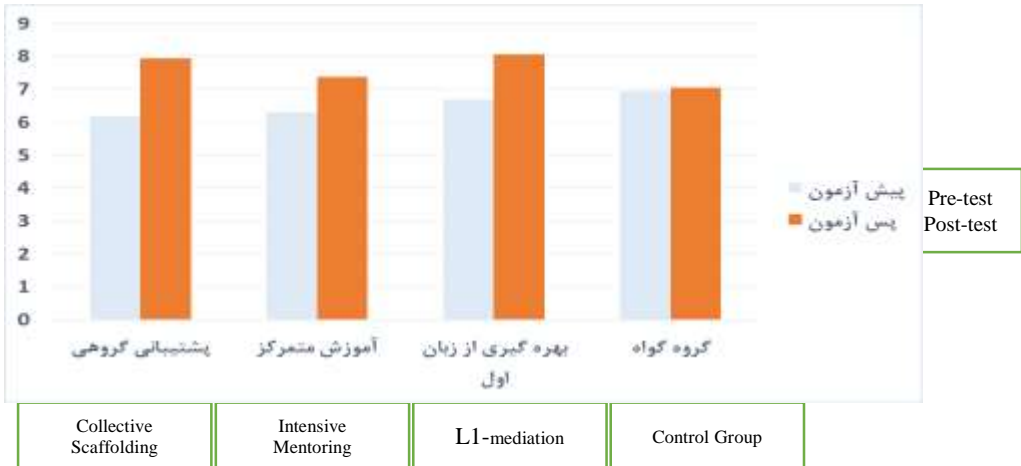
The Descriptive Indices of Paragraph Development in Pre-test and Post-test by Groups

Group		Pre-test	Post-test
Collective Scaffolding	Mean	6.19	7.94
	N	16	16
	Std. Deviation	1.32	.92
Intensive Mentoring	Mean	6.31	7.38
	N	16	16
	Std. Deviation	1.30	1.20
L1-Mediation	Mean	6.69	8.06
	N	16	16
	Std. Deviation	1.35	.85
Control Class	Mean	6.94	7.06
	N	16	16
	Std. Deviation	1.43	1.48
Total	Mean	6.53	7.61
	N	64	64
	Std. Deviation	1.35	1.19

Table 1 indicates that the mean scores of all groups have improved in the posttest compared to the pretest. The collective scaffolding group ($M = 6.19$, $SD = 1.328$), intensive mentoring group ($M = 6.31$, $SD = 1.302$), L1-mediation group ($M = 6.69$, $SD = 1.352$), and control group ($M = 6.94$, $SD = 1.436$) have gained higher means in the posttest, respectively: The collective scaffolding group ($M = 7.94$, $SD = .929$), intensive mentoring group ($M = 7.38$, $SD = 1.204$), L1-mediation group ($M = 8.08$, $SD = .854$), and the control group ($M = 7.06$, $SD = 1.482$). The following figure demonstrates changes between and within the groups in the pretest and posttest clearly:

Figure 4.1

The Bar Graph of the Paragraph Development in the Pre-test and Post-test by the Groups



To see if there were any significant differences in the final test (post-test) scores between the groups, an ANCOVA test was run. This statistical analysis considered the participants' scores on the initial test (pre-test) to account for any existing differences in their abilities.

Table 2

Tests of Between-Subjects Effects

Source	Type III Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	Partial Eta Squared	Observed Power ^b
Corrected Model	49.809 ^a	4	12.452	18.635	.000	.558	1.000
Intercept	34.341	1	34.341	51.391	.000	.466	1.000
Pre-test	39.137	1	39.137	58.568	.000	.498	1.000



Group	16.352	3	5.451	8.157	.000	.293	.988
Error	39.426	59	.668				
Total	3795.000	64					
Corrected Total	89.234	63					

The results in Table 2 show a significant difference ($p < 0.05$) in paragraph writing ability between the groups that received the special teaching methods (collective scaffolding, intensive mentoring, L1 mediation) and the control group, even after accounting for the students' initial scores (pre-test). This suggests that the teaching techniques used in the experimental groups had a meaningful effect on how well the students learned to write paragraphs. Furthermore, the analysis indicates that the instructional techniques (group membership) accounted for 29% of the variation seen in paragraph writing scores. The high-test power (0.98) confirms that the study design and sample size were sufficient to detect these group differences.

Then, as Table 3 shows, Benferroni's post hoc test was conducted for the pairwise comparison of the groups.

Table 3

Results of Bonferroni Post hoc Test for Pairwise Mean Comparisons of paragraph development

(I) group	(J) group	Mean Difference (I-J)	Std. Error	Sig. ^b	95% Confidence Interval for Difference ^b	
					Lower Bound	Upper Bound
Collective Scaffolding	Intensive Mentoring	.637*	.289	.032	.058	1.216
	L1-Mediation	.173	.292	.556	-.411	.756
	Control Class	1.322*	.295	.000	.732	1.912
Intensive Mentoring	Collective Scaffolding	-.637*	.289	.032	-1.216	-.058
	L1-Mediation	-.464	.290	.115	-1.045	.117
	Control Class	.685*	.293	.023	.098	1.271
L1-Mediation	Collective Scaffolding	-.173	.292	.556	-.756	.411
	Intensive Mentoring	.464	.290	.115	-.117	1.045
	Control Class	1.149*	.290	.000	.569	1.729
Control Class	Collective Scaffolding	-1.322*	.295	.000	-1.912	-.732

Intensive Mentoring	-.685*	.293	.023	-1.271	-.098
L1-Mediation	-1.149*	.290	.000	-1.729	-.569

Looking closer at the results (through pairwise mean comparisons), we found that each of the experimental groups (collective scaffolding, intensive mentoring, L1 mediation) scored significantly higher than the control group on the paragraph writing test ($p < 0.05$). This suggests that each of these teaching methods was effective in improving paragraph writing compared to the traditional approach used in the control group.

Digging deeper into the results, it came to light that the collective scaffolding method led to the greatest improvement in paragraph writing skills compared to the intensive mentoring group ($p < 0.05$). Interestingly, there wasn't a significant difference between collective scaffolding and L1 mediation ($p > 0.05$), or between intensive mentoring and L1 mediation ($p > 0.05$). In other words, all three methods were beneficial, but collective scaffolding seemed to be the most effective, followed by L1 mediation and then intensive mentoring.

5. Discussion

This study investigated the effectiveness of three teaching methods based on Vygotsky's sociocultural theory (SCT) for improving EFL learners' paragraph writing. These methods were collective scaffolding, intensive mentoring, and L1 mediation. The results showed that all three techniques had a positive impact on paragraph development, with collective scaffolding being the most effective.

These findings support the previous research (e.g., [Lantolf et al., 2018, 2021](#); [Mohammad Hosseinpur, 2015](#); [Ohta, 2005](#); [Poehner et al., 2018](#); [Xi & Lantolf, 2020](#)) demonstrating the value of SCT in second language acquisition (SLA). They further suggest that applying SCT principles to L2 teaching holds promise for future research and practical applications (as noted by [Ohta, 2005](#)). The findings of the study demonstrated that all the three instructional techniques were effective in the EFL learners' paragraph development. This effectiveness could be attributed to the social interaction and learning within the ZPD that are the fundamental tenets of the SCT ([Lantolf et al., 2018](#)). For example, in the collective scaffolding technique, which turned out to be the most effective technique, the participants, who were not considered expert or more knowledgeable, were involved in collaborative activity and jointly managed different parts of the writing task. In the process of the activity, learners constructed a collective scaffold for each other and during these interactions, they came together and joined their forces and could achieve some purposes that they could not achieve individually ([Donato, 1994](#)). In the process of the paragraph development, through mutual scaffolding, the participants jointly constructed a



ZPD, and each individual participant was actively involved in the brainstorming and generation of ideas, organizing and outlining of the ideas, writing the initial draft, and editing and revision processes. It seems that the effectiveness of the collective scaffolding, as [Hammond and Gibbons \(2005\)](#) put it, stems from the fact that it provides students with the right amount of challenge.

The group members' friendship and familiarity with each other in the small groups had created affective support ([Lee, 2010](#)) and a secure and stress-free atmosphere of cooperation which culminated in supportive interaction and collaboration. It seems that, in the process of collective scaffolding, the participants were sources of new information for each other, and each individual learner contributed something to the learning process and took something away from the interaction ([Li & Zhu, 2013](#)). In the same vein, what they managed to accomplish collaboratively in their group was beyond each individual's ability ([Shabani, 2016](#)).

The employment of the participants' L1, as a mediation tool, proved to be an effective technique in this study. This finding aligned with the results of previous studies (e.g., [Bruen & Kelly, 2014](#); [Cheng, 2013](#); [Lee & Macaro, 2013](#); [Mohammad Hosseinpur & Bagheri Nevisi, 2018](#)) support the position of logical and careful employment of the learners' L1 for the second language acquisition.

It seems that careful, occasional, and principled application of learners' L1, as a mediation tool, along with their L2 has served as an important cognitive, affective, social and instructional resource ([Storch & Aldosari, 2010](#)). Apparently, L1 employment has furnished the ground for the learners to move from known to unknown ([Eslami-Rasekh, 2005](#)) and has provided them with the needed analytic tools and effective scaffolding to reduce the cognitive demands of the tasks and activities ([Dressler & Kamil, 2006](#)). It could also be argued that the judicious implementation of the learners' L1 in conjunction with target language has functioned as an effective means to alleviate stress and make the classroom context as a secure atmosphere for the learners in their small groups. Many studies (e.g., [Cook, 2001](#); [Kang, 2008](#); [Meyer, 2008](#)) have demonstrated that principled and judicious application of learners' L1 in language learning contexts could culminate in lowering the learners' affective barriers and result in greater achievement. Finally, it might stand to logic to argue that the use of learners' L1 in their group has resulted in social categorization and identification and has promoted their identity investment ([Cook, 2001](#); [Manyak, 2004](#)). It seems that this sense of belonging and affiliation with a social group has functioned as an effective mediational tool and has encouraged the participants to be involved in the collaborative learning process actively and willingly.

The study also found that students receiving intensive mentoring improved more than those in the control group. This supports existing research highlighting

the benefits of intensive mentoring for novice teacher development (e.g., Ehri & Flugman, 2018; Stanulis & Floden, 2009; Stanulis et al., 2012; Wallin & Boggan, 2015). However, in this study and considering the language learners, the relative success of the participants might be attributed to the ongoing and sustained social, emotional, and pedagogical support that the mentors provided to mentees at all phases of doing the tasks. The mentors had already been briefed by the researchers of the study about their responsibilities. They were volunteers that had willingness and a keen desire to participate in the study. As a first step, the mentors managed to build mutual trust and a secure environment for the mentees (Johnson et al., 2007). Apparently, this positive psychological climate of trust had led the way to an intuitive acceptance of the mentors on the part of the mentees (Fletcher et al., 2008). Moreover, the mentors had been instructed to listen carefully and actively to the mentees to identify their concerns, lacks, and desires. They were not allowed to provide the right answer; rather, they were there to encourage, provide scaffolding, enable growth, provide corrective feedback, and leave the scene for the mentees to accomplish the task themselves. It seems that this multi-faceted educative mentoring and support has helped the participants in this group to achieve better results than the control group.

6. Conclusion

This study intended to explore the promising contributions of SCT to second language learning and teaching. The findings showed the effectiveness of instructional techniques grounded in SCT and highlighted that interaction between the language learners is the key factor that furnishes the ground for learning process, and as Swain and Deters (2007) put it, the social context and interaction is the main driving force behind cognitive development in general and language learning in particular. The findings of the study suggest that second language learning and development best achieves through interaction, scaffolding, negotiation, cooperation, mediation, and collaboration when the instruction has been planned to be within the learners' ZPD.

The results of the study also indicated that the judicious and principled application of learners L1 along with the target language is a promising area that can provide valuable educational opportunities for language teachers and learners, and as Levine (2012, p. 4) put it, we should try to get benefit from the wonderful potentials of L1 and draw upon its advantages in bilingual contexts.

This research contributes to the field by demonstrating the positive impact of SCT-based techniques on EFL learners' writing skills. By integrating these findings into curriculum design, educators can create more collaborative learning environments that foster improved student outcomes. Future research can explore the long-term effects of these techniques and investigate their effectiveness in different learning contexts. It should be noted that this study was conducted with



a limited number of learners in an EFL context, and it just focused on the learners' paragraph development. Drawing upon other interesting and promising potentials of SCT such as ZPD and microgenetic development of learners, further researches could target language skills and areas other than writing development to improve the status quo and add more dimensions to the existing literature on the contributions of SCT to language learning and teaching.

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