

# Novice Iranian EFL Writers' Reactions to Collective Peer Scaffolding Incorporation into their Paragraph Writing Course

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**Abstract:** Research has provided conflicting findings regarding the benefits of paired and small-group peer scaffolding in EFL writing context. The present case study incorporated collective peer scaffolding technique in an EFL paragraph writing class and elicited learners' reflections towards this activity. After some preliminary sessions which focused on writing process instruction and collective peer scaffolding training, the students were introduced to three writing genres. Each genre was discussed and practiced every other week and was followed by a collective peer scaffolding session. During collective scaffolding sessions, representative learners were asked to write their paragraphs on the board. Other students acted as collective, scaffolding solutions to the problems they noticed in the paragraphs written on the board. All of the students were also required to carefully listen to the scaffolds (comments) provided in class, use them to self-revise their first drafts (if applicable), and develop their second drafts. At the end of the term, eight volunteer students were invited to participate in a group interview and their reactions to this technique were elicited. In general, the experience was favored by the interviewees and the challenges reported in previous research regarding pair and small-group scaffolding/collaboration were not expressed by this cohort of EFL learners.

**Keywords:** Collective Peer Scaffolding, Sociocultural Learning Theory, L2 Writing Learners' Perceptions, Peer Feedback, EFL Writing.

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## **Introduction**

Pair and small-group peer scaffolding/collaboration has been increasingly popular in L2 writing classes over the last few decades (Memari Hanjani, 2016). In fact, during the recent decades, ESL/EFL writing programs across the world have increasingly supplemented the traditional teacher-centered pedagogy by alternate forms of instruction such as pair and small-group peer scaffolding (Hyland & Hyland, 2006). Process composition pedagogy which is characterized by developing multiple drafts and receiving feedback during the composing process, provides an excellent opportunity for pair and small-group scaffolding in writing courses (Memari Hanjani & Li, 2014b; Ferris, 2003; Hansen & Liu, 2005; Hu, 2005; Kamimura, 2006; Tsui & Ng, 2000). It is also strongly supported by several theoretical perspectives including Vygotsky's learning theory (Memari Hanjani & Li, 2014a; Hansen & Liu, 2005; Min, 2005, 2006; Yong, 2010; Zhu, 2001). Vygotsky's theoretical framework holds that writing and learning are social processes (DiPardo & Freedman, 1988; Hansen & Liu, 2005; Hyland, 2003; Santos, 1992; Yong, 2010) and peers can mutually scaffold each other to improve their writing skills (Anton & DiCamilla, 1998; de Guerrero & Villamil, 1994, 2000; Ohta, 1995; Shehadeh, 2011; Storch, 2002, 2005; Villamil & de Guerrero, 1996, 1998; Yong, 2010).

Grounded in sociocultural theory of learning and guided particularly by the concept of "collective scaffolding" (Donato, 1994), the present study aimed to provide insights into EFL learners' perceptions of practicing collective peer scaffolding technique and to examine their reactions to its incorporation into a paragraph writing class. It should be noted that in this study collective peer scaffolding encompasses peer collaboration activities in which all students are engaged in providing assistance to their classmates to improve the quality of their texts in subsequent drafts in a paragraph writing class. More specifically, all learners jointly revise representative paragraphs written by their peers, pool their resources, and facilitate co-construction of new language knowledge in an attempt to maximize their paragraph writing skill.

## **Literature Review**

The sociocultural perspective of development rejects the view that cognitive growth exists or is developed inside individual brains independent of context and intention and as a consequence of individual processing of information (Alfred, 2002; Palincsar, 1998). According to this paradigm, learning is a much more complex activity than individual

engagement. In fact, the basic assumption of the sociocultural theory of mind and learning, originally associated with the work of Vygotsky, is that human learning is intertwined with the context within which it occurs, and knowledge is constructed through a process of interaction, collaboration, and communication among members of the society (Nassaji & Swain, 2000).

From a sociocultural perspective, higher forms of human mental abilities and complex skills are learnt in specific cultural, historical, and institutional contexts through the medium of language and other semiotic tools (Frawley & Lantolf, 1985), by which the novice and the expert work together in order to create a mutual activity frame (Aljaafreh & Lantolf 1994). This activity frame known as the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) is where learning and development come together and is “the distance between the actual developmental level as determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers” (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 86). However, for that interaction to be effective, the assistance provided by the more knowledgeable member (expert) needs to be adjusted to the less knowledgeable partner’s ZPD (Van Der Stuyf, 2002). In the literature, this graduated and temporary assistance provided by the expert to a novice has been metaphorically referred to as “scaffolding” (Weissberg, 2006).

Vygotsky’s original framework was later extended to educational settings (Donato, 1988) and to both unequal (expert-novice) and equal (learner-learner) situations (Storch, 2002). One of its implications, for example, is for second language learning scenarios in which L2 learners need to be scaffolded and supported in their ZPD in order to develop second language competence (Lantolf, 2000, 2006). Accordingly, Ohta (1995) adapted the concept of the ZPD to L2 as “the difference between the L2 learner’s developmental level as determined by independent language use, and the higher level of potential development as determined by how language is used in collaboration with a more capable interlocutor” (p. 96). Hence, scaffolding in the L2 refers to those supportive behaviors employed by the more advanced partner in collaboration with the less competent learner that aims to foster L2 learner’s progress to a higher level of language proficiency. However, a number of researchers (Memari Hanjani & Li, 2014a; de Guerrero & Villamil, 1994, 2000; Ohta, 1995; Shehadeh, 2011; Storch, 2002, 2005; Swain, Brooks & Tocalli-Beller, 2002; Villamil & de Guerrero, 1996, 1998; Yong, 2010; Watanabe, 2008; Wigglesworth & Storch, 2009) have stressed that scaffolding is not just a unidirectional support from an expert to a novice, but

can occur between novices with both learners acting as the expert and supporting each other mutually and concurrently through dialogic interaction.

Sociocultural theory also offers a theoretical framework for peer scaffolding and collaboration including collaborative writing, peer review, collaborative revision in writing context (Memari Hanjani, 2013; Memari Hanjani & Li, 2014a). Indeed, by rejecting the traditional view that assumes writing as an individual attempt through which the writer tries to convey his/her message to the intended audience, this theoretical perspective considers writing as a deeply rooted social act (Santos, 1992, p. 3). As DiPardo and Freedman (1988) put it, sociocultural theory provides “a close relationship between talk and writing and the importance of a research framework that leads to understanding how social interactions, in this case in the form of peer talk, can contribute to writing development” (p. 122). It is also well documented that scaffolding can occur in an L2 composition context among peers when working in pairs and groups (Anton & DiCamilla, 1998; de Guerrero & Villamil, 1994, 2000; Shehadeh, 2011; Storch, 2002, 2005; Villamil & de Guerrero, 1996, 1998; Yong, 2010).

On the other hand, findings in relation to pair and small-group peer scaffolding especially peer review in L2 writing have been inconsistent. While a number of studies have been generally positive about the learning benefits of such collaboration (Memari Hanjani, 2013; Berg, 1999; Byrd, 2003; Mangelsdorf & Schlumberger, 1992; Mendonca & Johnson, 1994; Min, 2005, 2006; Rollinson, 2005; Schmid, 1999; Ting & Qian, 2010; Tsui & Ng, 2000; Villamil & de Guerrero, 1998; Yang, Badger & Yu, 2006), some investigations have highlighted its challenges (Memari Hanjani & Li, 2014a; Allaei & Connor, 1990; Carson & Nelson, 1996; Diab, 2010; Fei, 2006; Hu & Lam, 2010; Leki, 1990; Lockhart & Ng, 1995; Mendonca & Johnson, 1994; Tsui & Ng, 2000).

For example, some research findings have indicated that pair/small-group scaffolding can boost student autonomy (Tsui & Ng, 2000; Yang, Badger & Yu, 2006), encourage critical reading (Berg, 1999; Rollinson, 2005; Ting & Qian, 2010), enhance audience awareness (Memari Hanjani, 2013; Mendonca & Johnson, 1994; Mittan, 1989; Tsui & Ng, 2000), generate more positive attitudes towards writing (Min, 2005), improve confidence and language skills (Byrd, 2003; Min, 2006), establish a supportive atmosphere in class (Memari Hanjani, 2013; Mangelsdorf & Schlumberger, 1992; Schmid, 1999), and improve learners' writing skill (Villamil & De Guerrero, 1998; Yang, Badger & Yu, 2006) by the incorporation of the peer feedback in revised drafts (Ting & Qian, 2010).

On the contrary, some of the limitations of pair/small-group scaffolding include students' distrust of their peers' ability to provide quality feedback and their hesitation to use peer comments in revision (Carson & Nelson, 1996; Fei, 2006; Hu & Lam, 2010), overemphasis on surface level errors than semantic or textual ones (Memari Hanjani & Li, 2014a; Leki, 1990), inability to provide concrete and valid feedback (Lockhart & Ng, 1995; Mendonca & Johnson, 1994; Tsui & Ng, 2000), and students' lack of linguistic knowledge and skills needed for peer review (Allaei & Connor, 1990; Memari Hanjani & Li, 2014b; Diab, 2010).

These conflicting results can be attributed to several variables including the contexts where the studies have been conducted e.g. ESL or EFL, the research methodologies adapted by the researchers especially peer scaffolding training, the length of the investigations, and the pair/group structures, as well as the age, gender, English proficiency level, and personal and socio-cultural characteristics of the participants. Hence the wide range of variables that can largely affect the findings of pair/small-group peer scaffolding research in general, and problems such as novice L2 learners' inability to identify their classmates' errors, their doubtful feeling about the accuracy of their classmates' comments, and their reluctance to use their peers' suggestions when placed in pair or small-groups which have been reported by several researchers as impeding factors in successful integration of pair and small-group peer scaffolding in L2 writing courses in particular, provide incentive for further research to clarify the role and potential learning benefits of collective peer scaffolding in EFL writing contexts. As it was stated earlier, collective peer scaffolding refers to those activities in which all students of the class work together and pool their writing knowledge and resources to provide assistance (scaffold) to the representative paragraphs written by their classmates in an attempt to improve their quality in subsequent drafts. Furthermore, although previous studies have explored pair/small-group scaffolding, little attention has been paid to a large group of learners (whole class) performing such task. It is hoped that engaging the whole class in peer scaffolding/collaboration activities alleviate some of the concerns expressed by L2 researchers and practitioners working with pairs or small groups. Therefore, drawing on 'collective scaffolding' tenet (Donato, 1994), the present study aimed to address these issues by seeking volunteered learners' perceptions of participating in this activity. To serve that end, the following research question was formulated:

1. What are EFL students' perceptions of engaging in collective peer scaffolding activities in an English paragraph writing course?

## **The Study**

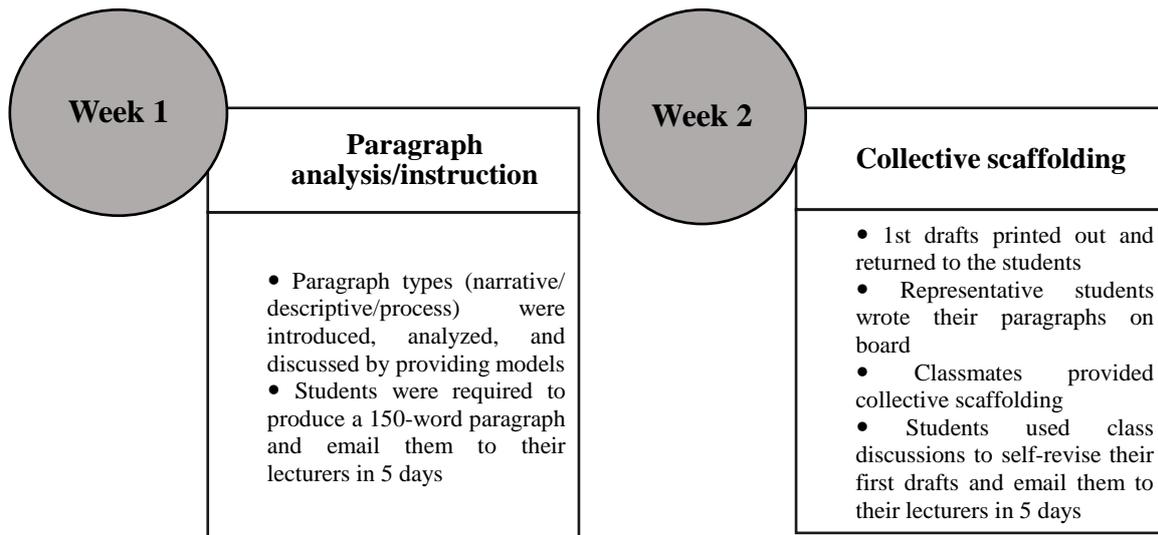
### **Context and Participants**

The study was embedded in an English Paragraph writing course at a medium sized private university in Iran during the first semester of 2017 academic year. This course was scheduled once a week (90 minutes) for 15 weeks. Altogether, 32 students enrolled in the course. The students shared Persian as their native language and were English Language Translation majors. The age of the learners ranged from 20 to 24 years, with the average age being 22. Before attending university, they had studied English in high school for four years and their English proficiency level ranged from lower intermediate to intermediate with the majority of them being novice English writers. In their profile questionnaires, most students admitted that they had no formal, systematic previous exposure to process, learner-centered composition instruction before. The overall course objective as outlined by the curriculum was to develop paragraph writing skills. The lecturer/researcher was a non-native English speaker who had been teaching English in Iran and the UK for over 17 years by that time.

### **Data Collection and Analysis**

The research was conducted in an L2 paragraph writing class with no changes to the course syllabus apart from incorporation of collective peer scaffolding technique in the class activities. To ensure that students enjoyed the same level of writing proficiency, all of them were required to compose a sample piece at the onset of the semester. The sample papers were evaluated using multiple trait scoring rubric. According to Hamp-Lyons, the advantage of multiple-trait scoring rubric is that the traits are specific to the task. In other words, the method judges the texts against not only the features of a particular genre, but also an assigned prompt and the goal is to create criteria for writing that are unique to each prompt and the writing produced in response to it (1991, cited in Min, 2006, p. 135). As the assessment revealed, almost all participants had restricted knowledge of English writing skill.

The course was generally composed of two main parts. The first part of the course which lasted for eight weeks focused on writing generics and students were introduced to the process of writing such as pre-writing, drafting, and revision, as well as English paragraph structure and components. The second part, on the other hand, concentrated on preparing students for composing narrative, descriptive, and process paragraphs, respectively (See Figure 1).



**Figure 1.** *Data Collection Procedure*

As Figure 1 demonstrates, first, each type of paragraph was introduced, its characteristics were discussed, and the steps involved in developing it were explained by providing some models. Then, the students were assigned a 150-word paragraph (pre-collective scaffolding draft) and were asked to email them to the lecturer in five days before the next class met. Next, collective peer scaffolding sessions were held a week after each genre had been taught. During these sessions, the lecturer returned the students' printed first drafts and asked six representative learners to write their paragraphs on the board. Other students acted as a collective, scaffolding solutions to the problems they noticed in the paragraphs written on board. The lecturer monitored the process and intervened whenever needed. All of the students were also required to carefully listen to the scaffolds (comments) provided in class, use them to self-revise their first drafts (if applicable), develop their second drafts (post-collective scaffolding), and email them to their lecturer in five days before the next session was held and a new genre was taught. This part continued for six weeks and the participants produced three paragraphs (six drafts). It should be noted that all students had a chance to write their paragraphs on board at least for one time and receive feedback from their classmates. At the end of the course, eight volunteer students were invited to participate in a focus group interview and their reactions to collective peer scaffolding technique were sought.

Overall, the focus group interview lasted for 62 minutes and concentrated on collective peer scaffolding technique performed in the paragraph writing class including (a) students' perceptions of engaging in the tasks, (b) participants' perceived advantages and

disadvantages of collective peer scaffolding activities, (c) and interviewees' affective reactions towards class atmosphere in terms of stress, motivation, interaction, and participation.

Persian was used, so the interviewees could express their opinions without experiencing any unnecessary pressure that might be caused by using L2. The interview was audio recorded with the permission of the interviewees. To minimize any possible impact of the lecturer/researcher on students' perceptions, the participants were assured that their responses would have no effect on their 'end of term' marks. They were also made aware that data elicited from them would be treated in the strictest confidence and any information gathered would be used for research purposes only. Finally, by agreeing not to publicize their names and identities, the participants were reassured of their anonymity and confidentiality. Thus, in reporting the findings, pseudonyms are used to sustain confidentiality and cover participants' identities. During the interview, the students showed no hesitation in answering the questions and responded to the questions in an open and straightforward manner. Hence, it can be claimed that potential researcher/lecturer impact on students' responses, if any, was kept to a minimum.

To analyze the interview data, first the interview recording was transcribed and translated into English by the researcher. Coding procedures for the interview data involved open coding (theme identification) and axial coding proposed by Strauss and Corbin (1998). During open coding phase, the translations were read recursively and the data were broken down, examined, compared, so that patterns and major themes could be identified. After this, the data were categorized around the themes. Axial coding, on the other hand, involved putting the data back together in new ways after open coding by making connections between a category and its sub-categories. Further, the categories were verified by sharing the data with an experienced colleague who has been teaching and researching at the same university for more than 15 years. The inter-coder reliability was measured as 0.79. Disagreements in coding were resolved through discussion, and the preliminary set of coding categories was further refined.

## Findings

Interview data aimed to investigate what learners believed about their experiences of collective peer scaffolding activities they performed during an English paragraph writing course. The report presented here arose from a 62-minute focus group interview with eight

volunteer (six females and two males) EFL interviewees after the course. The volunteer students were representative of the larger group who had enrolled in the course in terms of their age, gender, writing proficiency level, and educational background. Pseudonyms are used when references are made to the participants. In general, the participants expressed positive feelings towards collective scaffolding activities and their responses formed four major themes which will be discussed respectively:

### Writing Quality Progress

All of the learners agreed that collective peer scaffolding could boost their writing skill by sharing and pooling knowledge and ideas with their classmates. They also stressed that they were motivated to work harder and develop a good quality piece of work. For instance, the following comments reveal the general sense of satisfaction associated with collective scaffolding activity. As George argued:

*The experience was very informative. We noticed our classmates' mistakes and tried to correct them within our group. All of the students had a chance to provide feedback and participate in the activities.*

Siena also stressed that:

*Some of the errors were common in students' paragraphs. As the problems were highlighted in class, we tried to avoid repeating the same errors in our own papers. Indeed, the activity improved our writing skill noticeably.*

Further, Emily pointed out a neglected issue which Iranian students carry with themselves throughout their educational experience.

*In high school we don't normally learn how to write even in our native language. Our teachers just require us to write a composition without providing any instruction on writing conventions. We attend English writing courses at university with the same impression. However, we noticed that writing is not an aimless production of a bunch of words/sentences. First, the training we received at the beginning of the course familiarized us with the qualities of a good paragraph. Then, the activities helped us practice what we had already learned and reviewed how other students used those instructions in their paragraphs. Hence, we could notice the difference. Now we have an appropriate grasp of paragraph structure, organization, and support.*

On the other hand, a couple of students confessed that even though the activities were useful, there still remained some problems. For example, Jessica admitted that:

*The activity was useful. Most of the time, I used the class discussions to better my subsequent drafts. Yet, there were some problems which were unique in my paragraphs and were not addressed. Due to my limited writing skill I couldn't identify and correct them. Only after the final drafts were corrected and returned by the lecturer, I could realize them.*

### **Self-Revision Skill**

Six students admitted that the activities enhanced their self-revision skill. They felt that peer collaboration facilitated their concentration and independence. For example, Henry asserted that:

*The technique developed our self-revision skill. Before participating in class discussions, we knew the grammatical rules and characteristics of a good paragraph but we failed to apply them in our writings. The activities helped us focus more on our writings and double-check different aspects of our paragraphs such as topic sentence, support, conclusion, and make sure that all of these key parts were accurate”.*

Clare expressed a similar view as she said: *“As our classmates’ mistakes were highlighted and corrected in front of the class, this fostered our self- revision awareness and provided us with an opportunity to use the comments to revise our own papers.”*

### **Audience Awareness**

Of participants, two claimed that student interactions assisted them to realize the dynamic, two-way communicative nature of writing. Hence, they attempted to consider the target audience in their paragraphs. As Marya maintained:

*I knew that my paragraph would be read and evaluated by the whole class. So, I tried not only to write a clear and organized paper, but also to include all the necessary details and information to support my argument. Composing a reader friendly paragraph was always in the back of my mind.*

Gill endorsed this sentiment as she said:

*Writers normally think that their readers share the same information as they do. So, they unconsciously skip/ignore providing some significant information which*

*helps comprehension of their texts. This activity helped me understand that writers and readers do not necessarily share the same information and the writers should meet their readers' expectations.*

### **Pleasant Class Atmosphere**

Most of the interviewees found the activities novel, attractive, and believed that the class atmosphere was friendly, supportive, and stress-free. They also believed that extending and receiving scaffold from peers helped them reduce their writing apprehension and build self-confidence. As Henry pointed out, *"The class was student-centered and everybody had a chance to participate in discussions. The students were encouraged to cooperate and support each other"*. Gill also noted that *"the activities helped me overcome my apprehension as we worked in a non-threatening atmosphere. Besides, reviewing other students' papers helped me notice that other students experienced the same difficulties in their writings as I did"*. Further, Jessica mentioned that *"Helping our classmates improve their paragraphs was a pleasant experience. It made us feel content and increased our self-confidence"*. Finally, Clare acknowledged that:

*The course was attractive. We attended the class with great interest. Contrary to the monotonous teacher-centered classes, the interactive nature of the course was appealing and encouraged us to play a dynamic role in class activities, engage in the process with great interest, and actively contribute in offering assistance to our classmates"*.

However, a couple of students expressed different viewpoints. For example, George indicated that *"Standing in front of the class and being exposed to other students' evaluations and critiques can be stressful for novice writers. It negatively affects our self-confidence"*. Emily also stated that *"Sometimes the class environment got chaotic because several students talked at the same time offering scaffolds. This made the class very noisy"*.

### **Discussion**

So far, several studies have investigated various aspects of pair/small group scaffolding/collaboration. One line of research has examined the nature of peer scaffolding and patterns of peer-peer interaction (Memari Hanjani, 2013; Lockhart & Ng, 1995; Mangelsdorf & Schlumberger, 1992; Mendonca & Johnson, 1994; Nelson & Murphy, 1992; Villamil & de Guerrero, 1996; Zhu, 2001; Zhu & Mitchell, 2012). Another research strand

has focused on the efficiency and outcome of collaborative activities (Memari Hanjani, 2013; Connor & Asenavage, 1994; Diab, 2010, 2011; Kamimura, 2006; Leki, 1990; Lundstorm & Baker, 2009; Paulus, 1999; Ting & Qin, 2010; Villamil & de Guerrero, 1998; Yang, Badger & Yu, 2006). The third line of research has considered L2 learners' reactions to peer scaffolding tasks (Memari Hanjani, 2013, 2015; Amores, 1997; Berg, 1999; Byrd, 2003; Hu & Lam, 2010; Mendonca & Johnson, 1994; Min, 2006; Morra & Romano, 2009; Nelson & Carson, 1998; Sengupta, 1998; Tsui & Ng, 2000; Villamil and de Guerrero 1996; Wang, 2014; Yang, Badger & Yu, 2006). However, despite a wealth of research on pair and small group scaffolding/collaboration sometimes with inconsistent results, studies examining collective peer scaffolding in general, and the attitudes of L2 learners engaged in such activities in particular are rather sparse. Informed by social constructivism, the present study attempted to advance peer collaboration research by understanding student perceptions of engaging in collective peer scaffolding activity in an EFL paragraph writing context.

As the results of this study revealed, the participants in our study generally expressed favorable remarks toward collective peer scaffolding activity performed in the class. They noted that the activity enhanced their self-revision and writing skill as it provided them the opportunity to interact with their peers and share and pool expertise, co-construct knowledge, and learn from each other. Hence, considering the interviewees' reflections, it can be concluded that dialogue, interaction, collaboration, and the scaffold provided by the peers in class fostered self-revision skill of the learners and as they claimed, they could produce more accurate and richer texts. In this respect, our findings are in line with the reports of other scholars who have maintained that peer scaffolding can boost student autonomy (Tsui & Ng, 2000; Yang, Badger & Yu, 2006) and improve learners' writing skill (Ting & Qian, 2010; Villamil and De Guerrero, 1998; Yang, Badger & Yu, 2006). From sociocultural theory perspective, this finding indicates the role of collective peer scaffolding activity during which the students extended and received assistance, pooled their incomplete individual resources, and co-constructed linguistic knowledge. As they argued, their active participation and engagement in evaluation tasks contributed to good quality self-revised subsequent drafts. In other words, collective peer scaffolding boosted learning since during discussions the learners made use of each other's strengths to address their uncertainties and ambiguities and by interaction and collaboration, individual students could move from other regulation to self-regulation state and improved their writing and revision skills.

The students also argued that the activity increased their sense of audience and helped them understand their readers' expectations, view their texts from their perspectives, and clarify the misunderstandings if needed. More precisely, meeting audience needs was another offspring of engaging L2 students in collective peer scaffolding tasks as they allowed the students to realize the information gap and ambiguities in their texts and enabled them to ensure their intended messages were clearly expressed. In this regard, our results corroborate other L2 writing researchers who acknowledge that peer scaffolding can enhance audience awareness (Memari Hanjani, 2013; Mendonca & Johnson, 1994; Mittan, 1989; Tsui & Ng, 2000). Considering sociocultural learning theory which stresses the social nature of writing, it is safe to conclude that constructive conversation and negotiation of meaning between student writers and readers can create a collaborative environment which offers students opportunities to address high-order composition issues such as content and idea, eliminate misinterpretations, and ultimately improve their texts. Hence, special attention should be paid to meaningful writing for a real purpose and audience in writing courses and students should be reminded that writing is a social practice. This purpose can best be achieved by adopting process writing pedagogy in composition classes as it perceives writing as a process rather than an end product (Susser, 1994; Zamel, 1987) encouraging learners to develop several drafts of their papers. Indeed, the process approach provides an excellent opportunity for performing collaborative tasks and receiving feedback from the audience during the writing process. It allows the students to understand their readers' expectations and address those expectations in the subsequent revisions of their written works (Reid, 1994; Susser, 1994).

Furthermore, the constructive and supportive atmosphere which was established and maintained during performing the tasks were highlighted by the students. They stressed that such non-threatening and relaxed atmosphere helped them overcome their apprehension, develop self-confidence, and improve the quality of their papers. Thus, it can be inferred that creating a cooperative atmosphere during which learners respected their classmates' comments and built on their strengths to compensate their weaknesses was a significant issue that could alleviate their affective qualities and increased their productivity. More precisely, compared to the mechanical and boring product based writing classes that writing tasks lack stimulation and the atmosphere is normally monotonous, the participants found the adopted approach and its interactive activities appealing as they helped the learners play a dynamic role in class activities, engage in them with great interest, and cooperate in performing revision tasks in order to improve their paragraph writing skill. In terms of affective

outcomes, our findings are consistent with what is documented in previous research which stresses that peer scaffolding can generate more positive attitudes toward writing and improve L2 learners' confidence (Byrd, 2003; Min, 2005, 2006) and establish a supportive atmosphere in class (Memari Hanjani, 2013; Mangelsdorf & Schlumberger, 1992; Schmid, 1999).

Finally, some of the challenges expressed by L2 learners in earlier studies regarding paired or small-group peer scaffolding including students' distrust of their peers' ability to provide quality feedback and their hesitation to use peer comments in revision (Carson & Nelson, 1996; Fei, 2006; Hu & Lam, 2010) and peers' inability to provide concrete and valid feedback (Memari Hanjani & Li, 2014b; Lockhart & Ng, 1995; Mendonca & Johnson, 1994; Tsui & Ng, 2000) were not observed in our research, even though a few of our participants still complained about their lack of linguistic knowledge and skills to self-revise their own paragraphs. Thus, it is safe to claim that collective peer scaffolding during which the whole class comment on their peers' writings can alleviate most of the problems associated with implementing pair/small-group peer scaffolding tasks and can in turn improve L2 writing skills provided that it is supplemented by proper planning, purposeful instruction, and extensive practice. More precisely, carefully planned scaffolding activities and preparing students adequately can facilitate learners' active involvement in the tasks and consequently produce promising results.

## Conclusion

This study aimed to address a gap in the literature by examining the extent to which L2 learners' participation in collective peer scaffolding activities in a paragraph writing class could alleviate the challenges documented in previous research regarding pair and small group scaffolding. Our encouraging findings deserve attention as they indicate that engaging EFL students in collective peer scaffolding activities can have several advantages acknowledged by learners such as improving writing quality, developing student autonomy, reducing anxiety, fostering confidence, and creating friendly and cooperative environment in class. Thus, the results may be helpful to guide L2 writing practitioners' decisions when they plan to incorporate student-centered activities such as collective peer scaffolding into their writing class as a complement to the traditional teacher feedback pedagogy. However, it had some limitations and its findings must be interpreted quite cautiously. First, as the researcher was also the course lecturer, this could have influenced the honest responses of students in

the interview. Second, the participants in this study were from the same cultural, linguistic, and educational backgrounds. The scope of the present study could be extended by conducting similar studies in other instructional contexts in order for the researchers and practitioners to develop a better understanding of the efficiency of collective peer scaffolding activity as well as L2 learners' perceptions toward it. Third, the interviewees were selected from volunteer learners. Hence, their attitudes may not cover the view points of the whole group of students enrolled in this particular paragraph writing course. Finally, this research reflected EFL learners' perceptions of incorporating collective peer scaffolding into their paragraph writing class, interested researchers can empirically examine the effect of this technique on writing quality and self-revision skill of L2 learners by conducting carefully designed larger scale studies to verify the results of this investigation with their findings.

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