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Exploring L2 writers' collaborative revision interactions and their writing performance

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Abstract

Over the last few decades, researchers and practitioners have acknowledged the social aspects of language learning. This study drew on Vygotsky's sociocultural learning theory to investigate EFL students' interactional dynamics during a collaborative revision activity. The study examined the impact of this jointly performed task on participants' writing performance. Participants include five pairs of EFL learners enrolled in an L2 essay writing course at an Iranian university. Each pair attended one collaborative revision session during which they jointly revised their argumentative texts utilizing the feedback provided by their instructor. In the study, the researcher collected the participants' interactions during peer reviewing and collaborative revision, and their revised drafts. Data analysis revealed that students employed a variety of functions in their negotiations including scaffolding. It was also observed that scaffolding was mutual and both partners benefited from the joint revision task regardless of their level of L2 writing proficiency. These findings suggest that collaborative revision can be incorporated in EFL writing pedagogy as a method to improve writing and revision skills.

Key Words: Collaborative revision, Scaffolding, L2 writing, Writing performance

1. Introduction

Peer collaboration - collaborative writing, peer review, collaborative revision - during which students work together to complete a writing task, to evaluate the writing performance of their classmates, or to revise their written texts jointly, is grounded in the social constructionist theory of learning and the process-based approach to writing (Min, 2005; Shehadeh, 2011). Research has focused on various issues of collaborative writing (Gutierrez 2008; Shehadeh, 2011; Storch, 2002, 2005) and peer review (de Guerrero & Villamil, 1994, 2000; Morra & Romano, 2008; Suzuki, 2008;) in second language (L2) contexts. However, collaborative revision during which peers jointly revise their drafts using the feedback and comments provided by their instructor has received little attention in the L2 literature. Against this background, this study draws on sociocultural theory to explore the dynamics of peer interaction during collaborative revision and to examine the impact of collaborative revision on the quality of the participants' writing.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Sociocultural theory of learning, L2, and peer collaboration

A Sociocultural perspective emphasizes the collaborative nature of development that occurs through interaction among members of a society (John-Steiner & Mahn, 1996). From a sociocultural perspective, cognition and knowledge are characteristically social and are dialogically created and shared within a community (Lantolf, 2000, 2006; Swain, et al., 2002). Hence, the theory assigns a pivotal role to cultural, historical, and institutional contexts, as well as to the interactions in which an individual is involved (Barnard & Campbell, 2005). It also asserts that any kind of higher mental ability is initially social and collaborative and is formed between individuals in a mutual activity frame known as the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) (Aljaafreh & Lantolf, 1994). 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). According to Aljaafreh and Lantolf (1994), ZPD is “the framework, par excellence, which brings all of the pieces of the learning setting together - the teacher, the learner, their social and cultural history, their goals and motives, as well as the resources available to them, including those that are dialogically constructed together” (p. 468). In short, learning takes place within the learners’ ZPD, with the “graduated”, “contingent”, and “dialogic” assistance/guidance (Aljaafreh & Lantolf 1994, p. 495), which is offered by the more knowledgeable to the less knowledgeable individual. Such guidance has been metaphorically named “scaffolding” (Weissberg, 2006).

Originally, Vygotsky’s framework focused on child psychological development, expert/novice interactions, and co-construction of knowledge. However, in recent decades it has been argued that the idea and its two key constructs - ZPD and scaffolding - can also be extended to educational settings and to both asymmetrical (expert-novice) and symmetrical (equal ability) situations (Storch, 2002). One of its implications, for example, is for second language learning scenarios in which L2 learners need to be scaffolded in their ZPD in order to develop L2 competence (Lantolf, 2000; 2006). 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). Accordingly, scaffolding in the L2 refers to those supportive behaviours

employed by the more advanced partner in collaboration with the less competent learner that aims to foster an L2 learner's progress to a higher level of language proficiency. However, a number of researchers (e.g. de Guerrero & Villamil, 1994, 2000; Storch, 2002, 2005; Yong, 2010) have stressed that scaffolding is not just a unidirectional support from an expert to novice, but can occur between novices with both learners acting as expert and supporting each other mutually and concurrently through dialogic interaction.

2.2 Process writing pedagogy and peer collaboration

Peer collaboration fits well with the shift from a product to a process approach in writing pedagogy and is compatible with writing cycles, multiple drafting, and extensive revision which features prominently in a process approach to writing (Hyland & Hyland, 2006). This shift challenges “the traditional practice of teaching writing according to reductionist and mechanistic models” (Lockhart & Ng, 1995, p. 606) and seeks to construct cognitive models of what writers actually do as they write (Hyland, 2003). At the heart of this model is the view that writing is a “non-linear, exploratory, and generative process whereby writers discover and reformulate their ideas as they attempt to approximate meaning” (Zamel, 1983, p. 165). The advocates of this approach stress that producing multiple drafts of a composition and receiving a response at intermediate stages of writing whether by the teacher or the peer is helpful. It takes readers' needs into consideration and allows writers to utilize the feedback in subsequent revisions of their writing (Reid, 1994; Susser, 1994). It also implies that revision should become an integral component of writing instruction, that content and organization are of primary importance, and that editing and proofreading should be delayed until the last stage of composing (Zamel, 1982, p. 205). This emphasis on audience, feedback, and revision supports an increased use of peer collaboration in L2 writing classrooms, which complements the traditional written teacher feedback (Ferris, 2003, p. 69).

2.3 Peer collaboration

Peer evaluation pedagogy has been adopted in L2 writing as an alternative or complement to teacher-based feedback in the last few decades. Even though the application of this activity has been found beneficial for learning and it provides a persuasive argument in favour of writing dyads/groups, there are some reservations among L2 researchers and practitioners (Nelson & Carson, 1998; Tsui & Ng, 2000). Research highlights some potential problems inherent in peer response practice and they lie in,

- L2 writers' different attitudes and expectations towards collaboration and pair or group mechanisms (Carson & Nelson 1994, 1996)
- Learners' beliefs about the relative value of teacher and peer feedback (Morra & Romano, 2008; Nelson & Carson, 1998)
- L2 learners' inability to detect errors, offer valid feedback, and lack of experience and unfamiliarity with peer evaluation technique (Tsui & Ng, 2000)
- Lack of trust in their peers' writing skills and reservations to each other's advice (Rollinson, 2005; Yang et al, 2006)

Failure to achieve the goals of peer evaluation is more likely to happen in contexts where learners have had limited formal exposure to writing skills training and have not yet developed adequate evaluative criteria for good writing. Learning to write on the one hand, and to evaluate on the other, is a dual agenda which may eventually lead to cognitive overload and frustration in novice writers (van Steendam et al., 2010). Therefore, teacher intervention, whether direct or indirect, may be needed at all stages of the writing process particularly when dealing with EFL students at lower levels of proficiency.

On the other hand, the L2 literature sheds little light on collaborative revision mechanisms. Thus far, to our knowledge, collaborative revision using the response and comments provided by the instructor has rarely been investigated in L2 writing research. There is also no known study which examines the possible benefits of executing this type of task in L2 writing. In this respect, this research is one of the first which has attempted to probe the nature and effectiveness of collaborative revision in EFL writing classrooms from Vygotsky's Social Development Theory and its key tenets scaffolding and ZPD. Hence, the scant research investigating collaborative revision activity in L2 writing contexts and the concerns regarding the effectiveness of peer review tasks form the primary motives of undertaking this class-based project. Indeed, the focus of the current study is (a) to understand EFL student interactional dynamics during a collaborative revision activity in general and to deepen our knowledge of scaffolding strategies they employ as they cooperate together in particular, and (b) to examine the impact of this jointly performed task on participants' writing quality outcomes. Two research questions are addressed:

1. How do EFL students engage in a collaborative revision activity?
2. To what extent does collaborative revision activity improve the writing quality of EFL students?

The findings of this research can be illuminating in terms of both theoretical and pedagogical considerations. From a theoretical perspective, it can demonstrate whether a collaborative revision activity can provide opportunities for meaningful communication and mutual scaffolding that contributes to the creation of better quality in L2 writing. From a pedagogical perspective, the findings of the research might provide empirical evidence on the efficiency of a collaborative revision task as an interim stage between teacher and peer fronted evaluation.

3. The Study

3.1 Context

The research project took place at a medium-sized, private university in Iran with English translation major undergraduates in 2010. Students need to complete an essay-writing course totalling about 25 teaching hours.

The course consisted of two main stages: preparation and collaboration. The preparation stage lasted six weeks, focusing on writing generics and the composing process, such as pre-writing, drafting, and revision, as well as the English academic essay structure and components. In the collaboration stage, students produced three drafts of a descriptive and an argumentative essay during two writing cycles under different conditions. Each cycle had four phases, with each lasting for a week (one session) (see Figure 1):

- Phase 1: students were introduced to a specific genre; characteristics of each genre were analysed, discussed, and model essays were provided. Individual students were asked to produce a 250-word essay in two weeks, on the prompt, *“By taking a position either for or against give your opinion whether married women should work or not. Be sure to back up your opinions with specific examples”*
- Phase 2: students received a copy of a sample student paper along with a peer review sheet and were instructed to evaluate the paper in terms of content and organization as well as language and mechanics using the guidelines provided by peer response forms.
- Phases 3: students were involved in a peer review¹ activity during which students exchanged their individually written original drafts, reviewed them, and commented on them both in written and oral form in class. The second drafts were then developed using the peer suggestions, submitted to the instructor in three days, and were commented on by the

¹ Peer evaluation or peer review is an activity used exclusively by student pairs as they exchange, review, and evaluate each other's essays and provide their partners with written and oral feedback.

instructor using indirect coded feedback to address language and mechanics errors and written comments to address content and organization problems.

- Phase 4: students conducted collaborative revision². Pairs were allotted the whole class time (90 minutes) to read their essays jointly, and act on the indirect coded feedback as well as the written comments provided by the instructor on their second drafts.

INSERT FIGURE 1 ABOUT HERE

3.2 Participants

The participants were six dyads selected from a pool of 135 students who enrolled in a semester-long essay-writing course. The pairs were organized based on two criteria: (1) L2 writing proficiency, and (2) gender. To assign dyads, at the beginning of the semester students were asked to complete a writing task, which was assessed using the relevant multiple-trait scoring rubric (see Appendix 1). The underlying rationale for the first criterion was that since the study was informed by the sociocultural theory of learning and one of its key concepts - scaffolding - it seemed sensible to establish pairs with similar levels of writing proficiency in order to check the scaffolding mechanisms in fairly symmetrical conditions. In addition, exploring the role of gender and its possible association with the phenomenon also looked appealing, as it provided an opportunity for a better understanding of the role of gender in dyads' interactional dynamics especially in an L2 context like Iran where, due to cultural norms and religious beliefs, society and education are segregated in some respects. The participants had studied English for an average of 10 years and their English proficiency level ranged from lower intermediate to upper intermediate with the majority of them being novice English writers. All were native speakers of Persian and they had no formal, systematic previous exposure to multiple-drafting, peer review, and collaborative revision activities. Of the six dyads, three were composed of two females, two of a male and female, and one of two male participants. All pairs remained constant over the course of the study. However, the only two-male dyad withdrew from the study, so the whole study is based on data from the remaining five dyads. Table 1 shows the composition of the pairs and the characteristics of each participant. To protect participants' anonymity, pseudonyms are employed:

INSERT TABLE 1 ABOUT HERE

² Collaborative revision activity, on the other hand, is an activity during which students jointly revise their drafts using the (indirect coded) feedback and comments provided by their instructor.

3.3 Data Collection

The data consist of audio-recorded negotiation in collaborative revision and participants' argumentative drafts produced before and after the collaborative revision session (Draft M and Drafts F respectively). The dataset includes five audio recordings and twenty argumentative essays (10 M drafts and 10 F drafts).

3.4 Data Analysis

To determine how students engage in collaborative revision, interaction during the collaborative revision session was analysed following five stages. The analysis placed an emphasis on identifying and classifying the participants' interactions and revision behaviours. First, recordings were listened to carefully over and over again and dyadic interactions were segmented into negotiation episodes. Each negotiation episode was defined as dialogues between interlocutors which focused on revising a particular trouble-source. Following Villamil and Guerrero (1996), trouble-sources were referred to as those mistakes, faults, and deficiencies noticed by the reviewer (instructor), marked in the writer's text, and discussed by the pairs. The analysis of conversations between dyads resulted in 526 negotiation episodes. It should be noted that in almost all negotiation episodes the peers employed a variety of functions. The second stage of data analysis involved developing and coding functions as they occurred in pairs' discussions. To do that, a preliminary taxonomy of functions (categories) was drawn up according to one sample dyadic student negotiation. Categorizing was based on functions the students used to achieve their communication. That is, the focus was not on speech acts but on the specific features in the discourse or functions (Walsh, 2006). The initial categories were then added, refined and modified by referring to the rest of the interactions. Frequency and percentage of each category was counted. The third stage of audio-recorded data analysis comprised of clustering the emerged functions into three broad interactive categories: evaluative, social, and procedural negotiations. This was followed by the fourth stage during which the interactive categories were divided into sub-categories based on their features. For instance, evaluative negotiations were labelled as scaffolding or non-scaffolding dialogues. The last stage focused on transcribing (using standard orthography) and translating representative negotiation episodes which encompassed examples of functions.

To examine the effect of collaborative revision on writing quality, students' writing drafts were analysed using Microsoft Word 2007. First, twenty drafts along with the indirect coded feedback and comments were carefully typed verbatim. Second, the changes over drafts were traced by using

the Review and Compare options of the software. Finally, to examine feedback efficiency, a multiple-trait scoring rubric was developed considering the genre, task requirement, input the students had received, and their knowledge of grammatical rules and vocabulary. A three-band description rubric consisting of a ten-point scale was developed to evaluate students' genre awareness, along with their performance in terms of content and organisation, and language and mechanics issues.

4. Results

4.1 RQ1: How do EFL students engage in collaborative revision activity?

The five-stage interactional analysis revealed that participants spent different times revising their papers with pair two spending the shortest (31.47 minutes) and pair three the longest (88.02 minutes)..

INSERT TABLE 2 ABOUT HERE

The analysis of dialogues between dyads resulted in 526 negotiation episodes, with 2653 functions of 50 different types of negotiation were identified. Table 2 presents negotiation episodes, the time and the frequency of functions by each pair during joint revision of their texts.

INSERT TABLE 4 ABOUT HERE

An analysis of pairs' discussion focus revealed that students were overly concerned with micro level errors rather than macro level problems (see Table 3). Surface level corrections and addressing grammatical, vocabulary, and language and mechanics flaws dominated the majority of feedback practices while textual level comments such as content, organization, cohesion, coherence, and paragraph unity just covered a minor part of the negotiations.

INSERT TABLE 3 ABOUT HERE

The emphasis on surface level errors rather than textual level concerns suggests either the importance of accuracy over fluency which preoccupied both the students and the instructor, or more frequent instances of linguistic errors which impeded and hindered comprehending the meaning of the texts. Interactional data also revealed that in most cases the dyads addressed the local issues first and then the global aspects of their texts. More precisely, discussing the frequent surface level flaws took most of their time, leaving little time to deal with global level issues. Finally, the structure of dyads had some effect on their interaction dynamics. For instance, the two mixed-gender pairs showed concerns for not hurting each other's feelings and their tones were formal and the conversations were brief. In pairs of the same gender, on the other hand, the

conversations were longer, peers challenged each other more frequently, the tone of the participants was informal, and they seemed keen to collaborate more naturally.

As stated earlier, the functions students utilized were further categorized as evaluative, social, and procedural negotiations. In what follows, each type of negotiation category and its sub-category will be highlighted and discussed (Figure 2).

INSERT FIGURE 2 ABOUT HERE

4.1.1 Evaluative Negotiations

Evaluative negotiations refer to dyadic discussions and joint efforts intended to fix errors. In these dialogues, peer conversations were directly focused on offering advice and providing suggestions for revisions. Evaluative negotiations might lead either to agreement and revision or to conflict. More than two-thirds of functions (1709 functions of 36 types) the pairs employed during their discussions fell into this category, indicating that the participants took the task seriously and stayed on task for most of the recorded interactions. As shown in Figure 3, evaluative negotiations were further classified as scaffolding and non-scaffolding dialogues.

INSERT FIGURE 3 HERE

4.1.1.1 Scaffolding negotiations

Scaffolding negotiations were the verbal support provided to L2 writers by their peers, irrespective of their writing and linguistic abilities, to broaden/extend their cognitive and linguistic development. An evaluative negotiation should meet three conditions in order to be considered as scaffolding: it should draw peers' attention to the trouble-source(s), offer solution(s)/ alternative(s), and extend the scope of the immediate task so that the students could improve their writing quality (ability). Based on this operational definition, twelve out of thirty-six evaluative negotiations were grouped as scaffolding, totalling 1024 times during the task. The most frequent scaffolding types were "advising" (436), "response to question" (123), and "decoding" (109). The following excerpts illustrate sample functions within this category, which clearly demonstrate features of scaffolding (See Appendix 2 for transcription convention):

Extract 1: Advising (Mani-Marya)

- (1) Marya: What does **NE** stand for?
- (2) Mani: "There are different **OPINIONS**".
- (3) Marya: That's right.
- (4) Mani: The sentence is **plural**. The word **opinion** should be in plural form.

In the above example, the instructor had used the code “NE” to show a noun ending error. Maryam did not understand the code and sought for help (turn 1). Mani proposed the correct form, and offered an explanation (turns 2 and 4). Here, offering a solution is a way to scaffold and the collaborative revision presents an opportunity for partners to share their strengths and grammatical knowledge.

Extract 2: Instructing (Tina-Mahdi)

- (1) Tina: And here, when we use relative pronouns, we do not normally use pronouns too. I think the pronoun **it** is redundant here. I don't know.
- (2) Mahdi: Right!

Scaffolded help can be offered in the form of instructing (teaching). In the above example, Tina was explaining to her partner that when WH forms - relative pronouns - are used in the middle of an English construction, using a pronoun was unnecessary.

Extract 3: Providing options (Roya-Afrouz)

- (1) Afrouz: Here the verb after **like** should be either in **-ING** form or infinitive.
- (2) Roya: We can also use bare infinitive.
- (3) Afrouz: Either in **-ING** form or infinitive
- (4) Roya: “some don't like work out”=
- (5) Afrouz: =don't like **WORKING**

Scaffolding can also happen in the form of offering options to solve the problem. As this example shows, Afrouz helped Roya notice the problem and offered her two options by explaining the rule (turn 1). Here, Roya presented a different opinion (turn 2), which Afrouz disagreed with, repeating the explanation (turn 3). Roya attempted to make a sentence following her understanding (turn 5), which Afrouz corrected. In this extract, it is worth noting that Afrouz did not restrict her scaffold to suggesting just one correct form, but provided both possible accurate options which could follow the verb ‘like’ (turns 1 and 3), with an example in turn 5 as a correction to Roya's sentence.

4.1.1.2 Non-scaffolding negotiations

Although this group of negotiations did not directly involve providing scaffolded support, they still concentrated on correcting the errors and improving the quality of written drafts. Indeed, some of them were expressed in reaction to the scaffold offered by peers, some sought help and support from their partners, and a number of them either requested or provided explanations and

information. Dyads employed this group of functions 685 times during their negotiations, the most common of which were “asking a question” (179), “clarifying” (128), and “accepting advice” (107). The following extracts contain examples of these non-scaffolding functions:

Extract 4: Requesting advice (Mahdi-Tina)

- (1) Mahdi: Here I have written **As opposed to**, have you got **transition** list?
- (2) Tina: Which one?
- (3) Mahdi: It should be in your hand-outs.
- (4) Tina: Where is it? It should be here. What do you want?
- (5) Mahdi: List of **transition words**.
- (6) 4 turns are omitted here
- (7) Tina: The cohesive devices? Yes, I know what you mean.
- (8) Mahdi: I found “**as opposed to**” in this list.
- (9) Tina: What do you mean by “**as opposed to**”?
- (10) Mahdi: I wanted to express contrast. However, the instructor has marked it. What do you think is the best choice?
- (11) Tina: What did you want to say?
- (12) Mahdi: I wanted to show an opposite view.
- (13) Tina: Use **IN CONTRAST**. It expresses contradiction more clearly.
- (14) Mahdi: I just wanted to use new terminology and add variety to my text.

One of the advantages of peer interaction which is normally absent in teacher-centered classes is that peers have an opportunity to seek support and help from their partners. In the above example, Mahdi seeks his partner’s advice (turn 13) and Tina helps him to correct the error (turn 16).

Extract 5: Accepting advice (Nasrin-Mina)

- (1) Nasrin: “However, we admit that a few women, due to the condition of their job would”=
- (2) Mina: =It should be their **JOBS**
- (3) Nasrin: Yes, their **jobs**

When the peers felt that the advice and scaffold provided by their partners was accurate, they accepted it. In such cases, the support extended by peers led to improving accuracy of the text. In the above extract, the instructor had used “NE” code suggesting a noun ending mistake in Nasrin’s text. Mina noticed it and fixed it for her partner and Nasrin accepted the offered support.

Extract 6: Asking a question (Fariba-Azam)

- (1) Azam: “When some married women believe that working outside home being detrimental to household and it is not a nice experience”=
- (2) Fariba: =I think **-ing** is unnecessary here. Is that right?
- (3) Azam: **being**=
- (4) Fariba: =**-ing** is not needed.
- (5) Azam: What did you want to express in this sentence?
- (6) Fariba: I just wanted to say that some women believe that married women’s working outside can have negative effect on family atmosphere.
- (7) Azam: Ok!
- (8) Fariba: That’s it. Then, a new sentence begins.
- (9) Azam: You should use the term **when**, when you want to connect two clauses to each other.
- (10) Fariba: So, you mean **when** is unnecessary here?
- (11) Azam: Yes!
- (12) Fariba: But the instructor hasn’t marked it.
- (13) Azam: Probably he hasn’t noticed it because your sentence is awkward.
- (14) Fariba: But he hasn’t marked it. I think there is something wrong with the verb form. It doesn’t need **-ing**. Am I right?
- (15) Azam: What does **detrimental** mean?
- (16) Fariba: It means harmful, destructive.
- (17) Azam: I think you should use **HAVE** here. **Have** or **has**?
- (18) Fariba: **HAS**

The interaction between the participants helped them ask about the points they did not know and receive their partners’ responses, check if they had understood their partners’ meaning correctly and avoid confusions, and propose suggestions and seek their peers’ confirmation. It also helped them recall, review, and internalize the points that they had forgotten or were unfamiliar with. In this example, Fariba and Azam tried to correct an ungrammatical construction. Even though they failed to address the errors appropriately, they used a variety of functions to support and help each other such as asking a question (turn 15), responding to the question (turn 16), confirmation request (turns 2, 14, 15, and 17), response to confirmation request (turn 18), comprehension check (turns 5 and 10), and response to comprehension check (turn 6 and 11). Hence, the collaborative revision task

facilitated the participants' active engagement in the revisions of their drafts rather than unreflective incorporation of their instructor's feedback into their papers.

4.1.2 Social Negotiations

Social negotiations refer to the talk when participants express feelings, emotions, and opinions, as well as maintain the conversation between the interlocutors. Social negotiations were either on-task or off-task (Figure 4). Overall, 915 functions which were used by the participants belong to this category.

INSERT FIGURE 4 HERE

4.1.2.1 On-task negotiations

Although not primarily concerned with providing suggestions and error correction, this type of function was still on task and discussions were within the task completion scope. The most frequent of the on-task functions were "reading" (430), "writing reminder or correction" (349), and "repetition" (87) which occurred 893 times during pair discussions. The following extracts include examples of this function.

Extract 7: Expressing surprise (Roya-Afrouz)

- (1) Roya: **Children** doesn't need plural s?
- (2) Afrouz: No!
- (3) Roya: Why did I make such a mistake?

Making such obvious mistakes could be one of the consequences of the product writing pedagogy which engaged the students in controlled composition without requiring them to redraft their papers. In Extract 7, upon confirming that the plural form for 'children' does not have 's', Roya displayed surprise.

Extract 8: Expressing frustration (Mina-Nasrin)

- (1) Nasrin: "which you can remove all"
- (2) Mina: "which you can remove all"
- (3) Nasrin: I cannot understand [her tone is desperate].
- (4) Mina: **wrong word**, "you can remove all". **You can, you can...**
- (5) Nasrin: Help me! Help me!
- (6) Mina: Instead of **remove** we should use another word.
- (7) Nasrin: Do you mean that **remove** is not ok?

- (8) Mina: May be here [it] is not ok.
- (9) Nasrin: **Remove**, for example, which you can...
- (10) Mina: **Remove all...**
- (11) Nasrin: What we can use here? What word can be used here? Why are you laughing?
- (12) Mina: I'm not laughing. I am thinking.
- (13) Nasrin: I will start to cry.

Indirect coded feedback assumes a relatively advanced level of linguistic knowledge in the L2 learners. In other words, if the students do not possess adequate formal knowledge of L2, they may not benefit from an indirect correction strategy. Sometimes it was noticed that the students' prior preparation to interpret the codes which were used by the instructor had not been adequate particularly when the codes addressed either more complex grammar or covered several errors. In the above extract, when Nasrin noticed that the term "remove" had been marked by the instructor, she expressed her inability to understand its reason (turn 3) and asked for Mina's assistance (turn 5). The frustration is shown again when Mina was trying to support her (turn 11 and 13).

Extract 9: Repetition (Roya-Afrouz)

- (1) Roya: **depressive**
- (2) Afrouz: "such as depressive". **DEPRESSION** is the right choice. I shouldn't have used an adjective here. Hang on! Depression [in Persian] is an adjective then.
- (3) (6 turns are omitted here)
- (4) Roya: Then the meaning of your sentence is unclear.
- (5) Afrouz: Why? Such as depression, depression [Persian].
- (6) Roya: Depression [in Persian] is a noun. You are not saying depressive [in Persian].
- (7) Afrouz: Ok!

In the above example, although Afrouz used the correct part of speech – depression - in her native language several times (turns 2 and 10), she failed to do it in English and could not understand that "depressive" was an adjective and not a noun. In fact, there was a mismatch between what she said orally and what she actually had used in her paper. Eventually, her partner's explanations convinced her that the right choice was a noun; "depression".

4.1.2.2 Off-task negotiations

This group of discourse was unrelated to the scope of the task and in such instances the students were not engaged in revising but were talking about irrelevant issues. Only a small number of functions (22) which students utilized during their discussions were off-task, among which “distraction” was the most common (13). The following extract demonstrates an example of this type of function used by peers.

Extract 10: Distraction (Nasrin-Mina)

- (1) Mina: “For a long time”=
- (2) Nasrin: =“For a long time men were persons who should”=
- (3) Mina: =“Men were persons”
- (5) Nasrin: They [their classmates] have question [laughing]
- (6) Mina: I have questions in my essay too.
- (7) Nasrin: Ok!
- (8) Mina: For example; why **about**? Why **thoes** [those] [Mina refers to the mistakes in her second draft in the middle of discussing and revising Nasrin’s paper].
- (9) Nasrin: Ok! We can keep it. We can keep it.
- (10) Mina: Let me make [put] a question [mark]; here, and this one, and this one [on her paper].
- (11) Nasrin: Shame on you! It’s my turn.
- (12) Mina: I don’t want very impolite partner. Can you understand it? [joking]
- (13) Nasrin: You should thank God because of having me as your partner [joking].
- (14) Mina: Never [joking].
- (15) Nasrin: I will see [meet] you after the class [jokingly threatens her partner].
Person; can you see anything wrong?
- (16) Mina: No! I cannot.

In this extract, Mina remembered to ask some questions from her instructor in the middle of revising Nasrin’s paper. Nasrin got irritated and the partners started arguing with each other jokingly. Distraction and inability to fix the error led the partners to leave it and move to the next marked error.

4.1.3 Procedural Negotiations

In discussing task procedures, the students talked about “the task” procedures such as clarifying instructions, assigning responsibilities, and telling their partners what to do next (Figure 5). Procedural conversations did occur to a relatively small degree (29). The following excerpt includes an example of one of the most frequently employed functions of this category; that is, “giving directives”:

INSERT FIGURE 5 HERE

Extract 12: Give directives (Azam-Fariba)

- (1) Fariba: Let’s first read the comments and then we will return to the codes.
- (2) Azam: Ok! Paragraph 4 doesn’t introduce any opposing view point at its beginning. Its pattern should be like other body paragraphs (counter-claim, refutation, claim) [reading the instructor’s comments].

In this short example, Fariba suggested reading the instructor’s comments before addressing the language and mechanical issues, which was accepted by Azam as she started reading the annotations provided at the end of Fariba’s text.

4.2 RQ2: To what extent does the collaborative revision activity improve the writing quality of EFL students?

Collaborative revision made difference in the overall writing quality, as can be observed from Table 6. This trend was specifically observed in Mahdi’s performance as he made the greatest positive change over drafts and improved the quality of his text noticeably. However, even though Afrouz outperformed her classmates in terms of overall score, she demonstrated the least progress in the subsequent text she generated.

INSERT TABLE 4 HERE

Students’ drafts analysis also revealed positive changes at both local and global levels. However, some inconsistencies were identified in participants’ revision behaviours. For instance, it was noticed that fewer than half of the participants (4 cases) made positive changes to textual aspect of their texts and the majority of participants’ content score remained the same over drafts. In addition, in terms of organization and structure features, six cases showed overall progress over drafts. Three cases – Marya, Azam, and Fariba - gained the same marks over drafts and surprisingly, Afrouz’s score regressed. On the other hand, concerning language and mechanics, it became clear that in

most cases, feedback and joint revision led to an increase in surface level accuracy (however Roya's final draft was poorer than the one she had produced before the joint revision activity).

As for essay length, all students wrote essays longer than the minimum limit (Table 8). However, the analysis of papers showed that error reduction in some cases occurred owing to shortening of drafts and it did not mean better quality writing (e.g. Mahdi, and Azam). That is, the lower number of mistakes was not necessarily the result of the effective or positive changes the participants made in their drafts, but was due to shortening the size of the texts. Further, deleting the erroneous portion or even the whole paragraph in response to the feedback was identified in some cases (e.g. Azam).

INSERT TABLE 8 HERE

5. Discussion

The findings provide an in-depth understanding of the students' interaction dynamics and revision behaviours, and the effect of collaborative revision on writing quality.

The interaction data revealed that the participants showed a high level of engagement in the activity and remained on task discussing each other's papers during most of their allocated time. In addition, the collaborative relationship established by members of the dyads benefited both partners; that is, peers reciprocally supported each other through dialogic revision activity regardless of their proficiency level. In their interactions, they offered and received advice that could help them improve writing to a high quality. In this sense, our findings corroborate earlier studies of peer collaboration (e.g. de Guerrero & Villamil, 2000; Shehadeh, 2011; Storch, 2002, 2005; Villamil & de Guerrero, 1996; 1998; Yong, 2010). The support provided by peers was "dialogic", "contingent", and "gradual" and met the three main characteristics of scaffolding proposed by Aljaafreh and Lantolf (1994). Indeed, L2 students in this study tailored their assistance according to the complexity and nature of the errors as well as the peers' needs. For example, at times discussions not only included explicit advising and providing solutions, but also, if necessary, encompassed explanation and instruction on either micro or macro aspects of writing. Similarly, peers were able to detect whether a problem occurred as a result of lack of knowledge or from carelessness, and make a subsequent decision on how to resolve the problem. In such occasions, feedback was just provided implicitly by referencing or pointing to the mistake.

The students' texts also revealed that all students managed to develop more accurate essays over drafts even though the amount of progress varied from one individual student to the other. Most

participants were able to move through their ZPDs beyond their current levels of development to higher levels of achievement by generating higher quality revised drafts as a result of appropriating the solutions that were jointly constructed, and incorporating them into their revisions.

However, collaboration was mainly limited to microstructure features, and addressing linguistic errors dominated the discussions. Of 526 negotiation episodes identified during student dyads' interactions, a great majority of them (84.41%) focused on the microstructure level. This result confirms previous research (e.g. Liu & Sadler, 2003; Nelson & Carson, 1998; Villamil & de Guerrero, 1998). As a result, more positive changes were observed at surface level features of the revised drafts compared to other aspects of writing. This tendency can be attributed to several reasons such as the nature and type of errors, the approach towards writing, and students' knowledge. One of the reasons could be the fact that errors that correspond with microstructure issues of a text are always more frequent and happen at lexical and even punctuation level – this requires students to frequently give feedback on the text at micro level. Given that making local surface corrections is easier than addressing substantive and complex macro textual issues, it could be argued that students tended to act on surface errors of grammar and mechanics especially when faced with time constraints. Further, the product-oriented background of this group of participants can also justify their concern about formal accuracy. Consequently, accuracy became a priority in writing. The over-emphasis on local issues and consequently greater progress at the surface level rather than the textual aspects of students' written texts can also be explained in terms of the ZPD of this group of L2 learners. Macro level issues are more cognitively demanding, which requires higher level of expertise in revision practices. Since the students are novice, they do not have such expertise. In other words, dealing with text-based concerns was beyond the current ZPD of the learners and they were less successful in handling such problems. Failure to successfully address global problems indicates that learners could only revise to the extent of their abilities. The findings also shed light on the effect of gender on interaction dynamics. It is observed that interaction between mixed gender pair was more polite, reverent, and formal, with few interruptions. When disagreement occurred, there was no disapproval. This behaviour was especially noticed in male participants. For example, in pair two, where a male and a female partner worked together, although the male partner was more competent than his female counterpart, he avoided challenging his partner's incorrect suggestions directly during their interaction. On the other hand, the interactions of the pairs which comprised two female members seemed more natural and dynamic. These single gender dyads simply produced far more conversation about their drafts than the mixed gender dyads,

used more informal language, and more openly and more frequently challenged and interrupted each other. However, caution has to be made that this comparison cannot be generalized as this dataset included only one pair of mixed gender. Further research in this area deserves more attention. The level of English language proficiency was also important in pair discussion dynamics. In asymmetrical dyads composed of one more knowledgeable student working with a less competent one, the tutor/tutee relationship was more obvious. In such pairs the more competent partner considered him/herself a trouble-shooter and played a teacher's role trying to support the partner and fine-tune his/her text. In such dyads, as in dyad one, the more capable student was self-confident, taking the lead and calling the other student's attention to the errors marked, and setting the agenda for the discussion. The less skilled partner, on the other hand, was more conservative in her comments, her tone was less confident and she changed her suggestions when faced with her partner's disagreement.

6. Conclusion, recommendations, and implications

The present study attempted to explore collaborative revision activity in an EFL writing course from a social constructivist perspective and could add further supportive evidence to the literature that acknowledges the fundamental role mutual scaffolding and co-construction of knowledge can play in stimulating learning of L2 novice students. More precisely, this study revealed that collaborative revision tasks in which learners discuss and revise a written text together, can provide students with opportunities for meaningful and purposeful communication. Further, this interactive, student-centred activity may eventually improve writing quality. Hence, it is proposed that the technique can be used as an alternative or complementary activity to address some of the challenges associated with peer evaluation; namely, the validity and specificity of peer feedback, distrust in peer comments, and lack of experience in performing evaluation. Like peer response, this activity takes advantage of the socio-cultural theory of learning and process-based writing instruction. However, it has a key difference from peer reviewing. Whereas in peer evaluation students comment on each other's texts, in any collaborative revision activity the teachers are still the main sources of feedback. Collaborative revision can be treated as an interim stage on a continuum from sole teacher feedback/evaluation to sole peer feedback/evaluation in EFL writing classrooms as it can help and prepare both teachers and students to transform teacher-fronted, product-based writing pedagogy to student-fronted, process-based approach to composition instruction efficiently. Figure 6 delineates the theoretical model derived from the findings of current research. In this sense, teachers provide students with opportunities to become familiar with more participatory forms of

pedagogy and help them work together and use each other's knowledge and strengths to develop a better quality text by using their instructor's comments. In addition, students learn evaluation techniques, get familiar with feedback strategies, and gradually get prepared and develop the required skills and techniques to become peer evaluators.

INSERT FIGURE 6 HERE

However, it should be stressed that the technique might not yield its presumed benefits without careful group/pair work organization, detailed planning and training, along with adequate modelling and practice. Finally, as this strand of L2 writing research is rather unexplored, further studies are needed to probe different aspects of performing collaborative revision activity in various contexts with other populations.

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Appendix 1 (Multiple Trait Scoring Rubric)

Score	Content	Organization & Structure
8-10	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * The introduction contains a brief history of the issue (whether married women should work or not) * The thesis statement clearly states both the claim (position), and the counter claim (the opposing position) of the issue * Convincing evidence to support the author's claim are provided and opposing views are acknowledged * The author's claim (position) and a summary of the main ideas are restated in the concluding paragraph 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * The arguments are organised in a clear, simple, and logical way and the reader can follow the writer's train of thought with ease * The essay is well organised through introduction, body and conclusion * Paragraphs are unified (separate paragraphs are devoted for each claim and its counter claim) * The transitions are used effectively and properly * The arguments are presented in emphatic order
4-7	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * The issue is implicitly introduced in the introduction * The thesis statement does not directly state the claim or the counter claim or it discusses just one side of the argument * Convincing evidence to support the author's claim is moderately developed but lacking detail, and the opposing views may or may not be acknowledged * The conclusion includes/ does not include the writer's claim and a summary of the author's main arguments may or may not be reiterated 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * The arguments can be followed but with some difficulty * Some patterns of organization- introduction, body, conclusion evident but poorly done * Lack of focus in some paragraphs * Over/under use of transitions with some incorrect use * The arguments are largely presented in emphatic order
1-3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * The background of the issue is missing * The paper lacks thesis statement * The paper lacks strong evidence to support the writer's claim and the counter claim is not taken into account * The writer's claim is not reiterated in the concluding paragraph and it does not contain a summary of the author's main arguments 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * The arguments are difficult to follow * Little evidence of organization- introduction/conclusion is/are missing (improper paragraphing) * No paragraph unity * No or incorrect use of transitions * Haphazard and incoherent sequencing

Language control: verb tense/form, articles, pronouns, prepositions, s-v agreement, noun endings, parallel constructions, run-ons, fragments, etc.

Appendix 2 (Transcription Convention)

“quotation marks”	reading from the text
bold	terms/phrases in English
BOLD AND CAPITAL	suggested revision
[]	explanations added by the researcher
=	interruption in the participants' speech