

Research Article

**The Effects of Task-Based Collaborative Output Activities and Scaffolding Techniques on EFL Learners' Writing performance: A Mixed-Methods study**

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**Abstract**

Literature review confirms that task-based collaborative output activities (TBCOA) and scaffolding techniques (ST) were effective in improving EFL learners' writing skills. However, a new study is necessary to compare the rate of effectiveness of these activities and techniques on Iranian intermediate L2 learners' writing performance. Hence, in the present study, the impact of two types of TBCOA versus two types of ST on intermediate EFL learners' writing performance were compared. This research followed a quasi-experimental design. A sample of 80 intermediate-level EFL learners, selected through convenience sampling from a private language school, constituted the participants. The learners were assigned to four groups. The homogeneity of the participants in terms of writing performance was checked through a quick placement test at the outset of the study. Furthermore, the effects of debating vs. dictogloss., teacher scaffolding vs. peer scaffolding, and overall TBCOA vs. overall ST were compared through ANCOVA, with the pretest scores treated as the covariate. The results revealed that debating outperformed dictogloss, teacher scaffolding was more effective than peer, and the overall TBCOA group significantly performed better than the general ST group in writing performance. The learners' interview results, concerning the role of TBCOA and ST in their writing production, resulted in several common themes, which were categorized into 16 codes for debating, 11 codes for dictogloss, and six common codes for teacher scaffolding and peer scaffolding. This study provides implications for EFL writing instruction.

**Keywords:** Collaborative Output-based Activities, Scaffolding, Writing Performance

### **Introduction**

As stated by Nunan (1989), "Writing is a cognitively complicated task in which several components should be controlled by the writer at a time" (P. 37). Nunan notes that this includes controlling the sentence content, structure, format, vocabulary, spelling, punctuation, and text cohesiveness and coherence. These components can be described in four levels, excellent, good, poor and very poor, and are the key to a range of scores. While writing, L2 learners need to select and use appropriate grammar and vocabulary structures, language usage, text construction, layout, style and effectiveness (Harmer, 2007). Hyland (2019) notes that writing skills nature is more challenging than merely function and content word arrangement. Shernoff et al. (2003) claim that learners engage under challenging tasks that instructional and interactional contextual classroom factors influence this engagement.

Constructivist theories claim that L2 learners develop their learning through constant experiencing, reflection, and interaction with new educational situations (Vygotsky, 1978, 1979). Sociocultural theory in L2 learning maintains that learners can play the role of tutor and pupil for each other's development (Ohta, 2000, 2001). Learners have different language competencies, so they can scaffold and repair their pair's Achilles heel so that their performance goes beyond individual level of competence (Ohta, 2001). Teng, et al. (2022) contended that writing is naturally multidimensional, complex and process-oriented. It interweaves metacognitive, affective and behavioral aspects to control, generate, review and revise a text.

Concerning learners' problems in learning writing and its complicated process, the researchers dealt with the problematic nature of teaching and learning writing for the EFL learners; therefore, at a price, they sought to heel these drawbacks through using new functional tasks and techniques as in task-based collaborative output activities (TBCOA) and scaffolding techniques (ST), and via getting the teacher and peers' feedback to increase EFL learners' writing skills. They found out that generating the content and developing ideas into a good paragraph or a short essay is difficult for EFL learners. Also, a lack of awareness in the domain of paragraph development and essay writing as well as insufficient mastery of grammar, vocabulary, mechanics, content and the number of subordinate clauses discourage the learners from writing well. It is supposed that TBCOA and scaffolding are fruitful learning activities and techniques to make classes more dynamic and practical; moreover, the prior relevant literature review confirms that TBCOA and scaffolding practically makes writing classes more creative and communicative (e.g., Dobao, 2012).

To overcome the above-mentioned difficulties, EFL writing skills should be process-based and follow the steps of idea-generating, organizing, drafting,

revising, and editing rather than using traditional approaches. This process can strengthen the learners' writing competence and their self-confidence. Pritchard and Honeycutt (2007) reported that process approach does not certainly produce a final draft, but it is a vital movement to the last draft production (p. 30).

It is argued that TBCOA qualifies learners to consider writing process, feedback reflections, and reviewing and editing tasks” (el Majidi et al., 2020, p. 806). TBCOA and peer review (scaffolding) are fruitful sociocultural approaches to language learning which promote learners' language orientation, concentration and thinking skills, specifically in evaluating their peers (Villarreal & Gil Sarratea, 2019). Debate and dictogloss intervention deal with process-oriented instruction. Process writing enables internship learners to get feedback and direction from beginning to end of the essay (Yong, 2010). El Majidi et al. (2020) state that debate is a valid L2 writing instruction and oral communicative activity. Dictogloss as a TBCOA enables learners to enhance their L2 writing ability and assists them in employing their grammar resources for text reconstruction (Benati, 2017). These concepts are scrutinized in the following section.

#### **Task-Based Collaborative Output activities**

Swain (2001) describes collaborative tasks as communicative activities, which engage learners to comprehend, manipulate, produce, or interact in L2 with meaning priority rather than form (Nunan, 1989, p. 10). These tasks provide communicative environment for learners to use language to solve misunderstandings, inquire about uncertainty usage, or do reciprocal correction. (Swain & Lapkin, 1998). The tasks also help learners work together, share their ideas, and put their knowledge together to obtain the same goal (Fernández Dobao, 2012). Collaborative learning is a valuable and enjoyable activity to qualify writing and learn vocabulary. It also sets the scene for discussing and planning writing, generating ideas, creating texts through getting peer feedback immediately, and polishing mutual texts up (Shehadeh, 2011). Learners' report confirms that collaborative writing improves their self-confidence, and speaking abilities (Storh, 2005).

Pham (2022) examined whether task-based instruction (TBI) affects students' abilities in speaking and writing skills. Pham stated that using TBI was critical in improving students' productive skills. Kafipour, et al. (2018) mentioned that utilizing TBI had significantly increased Iranian EFL students' writing ability. Furthermore, Sundari et al. (2018) argued that TBI had a positive effect on the results of learners' writing, for example structure, content, organization, and grammar.

Debating as a TBCOA and language development are thoroughly associated (el Majidi et al., 2018). Recently, el Majidi, et al. (2020) surveyed to know how

debate instruction was positively effective in improving secondary school students' writing performance. Modarresi (2021) found that L2 learners' aspects of writing performance significantly enhanced through utilizing dictogloss and debating instructions. In addition, the debate trend of instruction deals with 'willingness to communicate in L2' (McIntyre et al. 1998) because debate can increase learners' discourse engagement, and since sensory emotion is significantly in line with their inclination to speak and eagerness to write (Makiabadi et al., 2019).

Shehadeh (2011) showed that longitudinal collaborative activities improved learners' writing in content, grammar, and vocabulary at all proficiency levels. Nassaji and Tian (2010) compared two tasks, a cloze task and an editing task individually and collaboratively. They confirmed pair-working learners were more accurate in completing the tasks than individual working.

### **Scaffolding**

The Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) refers to having an opportunity to learn with or from others. Vygotsky (1978) pointed to the ZPD as an inevitable learning process factor which elaborated as the distance between the learner's level of actual development due to individual problem-solving and potential developmental level owing to problem-solving under an adult's guidance or through collaborating with more capable peers. In the ZPD, learners move gradually from other's dependency on learning toward self-dependency. This way of getting help in the domain of ZPD referred to as scaffolding. However, in a classroom setting where there is collaboration among learners, multiple forms of support are provided not only by teachers but also by peers (Shin et al., 2020).

### **Teacher Scaffolding**

It is upon the teachers to set a suitable scene for learners' social interactions (Allwright, 2005). Teachers must indirectly and insensibly scaffold the learners and raise their responsibility for learning and try to meet their required needs (Wang & Sneed, 2019). That is to say, teacher scaffolding must lead the learners toward their educational needs (San Martín, 2018). In addition, learners act independently by teacher's deliberate or inadvertent attitudes, reactions, thoughts, and teaching strategies in different situations (Lamb, 2008). Bruner (1985) argued that scaffolding initially does not guarantee to ease the task, but it culminates the task support.

### **Peer Scaffolding**

Peer scaffolding is the learners' mutual and multiple communication or conferring with other learners, instead of merely the teacher, to possibly agree (Webb, 1989). Peers' exchanging knowledge and information, to a large extent, promotes learners' wakefulness of their learning requirements; in truth, intellectual incompatibility or confliction, which is a vague notion during individual activity, becomes meaningful through peer communication (Brown, 1989, as cited in Choi, Land, & Turgeon, 2005). To put it another way, it is using some props in a purposeful group activity for learning and solving problems. Individuals in the groups should actively use the pedagogical underpinnings and help the group members to learn and find solutions to the issues. (Ge, Chen, & Davis, 2005).

Choi et al., (2005) stated that learners are ready to elaborate on their viewpoint about the topic and compromise with their peers to achieve the intended conclusion. Danli (2011) accentuated that peer scaffolding does not certainly assure accurate target forms because the learners are not masterly enough in linguistic knowledge and using the scaffolding functions. What is more, the teacher's feedback and their scaffolding are more reliable for the learners than their peers' (p. 108). Taheri and Nazmi (2021) found that teacher, peer, and "teacher and peer" scaffolding techniques were fruitful and persuasive in the total organization and linguistic accuracy of the learners' argumentative writing ability. Badr Parchin and Davaribina (2019) mentioned the significant role of symmetrical and asymmetrical scaffolding in developing EFL learners' writing ability. Riazi and Rezaei, (2011) clarified that teacher scaffolding appeared to be more effective in improving learners' writing text than peer scaffolding in the EFL context.

Amerian et.al., (2014) examined the effect of teacher, peer, and class scaffolding on the EFL learners' writing proficiency. They appointed into three experimental groups, and one control group. The findings highlighted that the teacher scaffolding experimental group developed the participants' writing remarkably, but peer and class scaffolding groups were not productive. Unexpectedly, the control group was better than the experimental group. Abasi Mojdehi and Zarei (2023) elaborated the effects of three types of scaffolding techniques (peer, reciprocal, and distributed) on the anxiety level of EFL learners. The results merely confirmed the significant role of reciprocal scaffolding in reducing the learners' writing anxiety. This result agrees with the findings of some L2 researchers who believe that the learners' perceptions are mostly the base of writing apprehension. Richer (1992) made a comparison between the role of peers feedback and teacher feedback on

college students' writing proficiency. More significant gains in writing proficiency were obtained by the peer feedback groups. Moreover, Plutsky and Wilson (2004) stated that students become more proficient writers through peer review.

### **Writing Performance**

Brown (2000) stated that performance is the overtly observable and concrete manifestation or realization of competence. It is an actual reflection of competence. In other words, writing performance is the productive language to communicate with each other for any purposes involving physical and mental activities. So far, few studies have aimed to examine and compare the effects of TBCOA and ST on writing performance in Iranian context. This research sought to fill this gap operationally through the following research questions:

1. Are there any significant differences between the effects of debate and dictogloss on EFL learners' writing performance?
2. Are there any significant differences between the effects of teacher scaffolding and peer scaffolding on EFL learners' writing performance?
3. Are there any significant differences between the effects of TBCOA and ST on EFL learners' writing performance?
4. How do the EFL learners react to the influence of TBCOA and ST on their writing improvement?

The study hypothesizes that TBCOA and ST can enhance writing performance. Therefore, the following null hypotheses were formulated based on the first three research questions. Research question four did not require a null hypothesis as it was a qualitative question.

1. There are no significant differences between the effects of debate and dictogloss on EFL learners' writing performance.
2. There no any significant differences between the effects of teacher scaffolding and peer scaffolding on EFL learners' writing performance.
3. There no any significant differences between the effects of TBCOA and ST on EFL learners' writing performance.

## **Methodology**

The current study aimed to investigate the effect of TBCOA and ST on improving EFL learners' writing performance. The procedure to achieve this goal is elaborated in detail in the following sections.

### **Design of the Study**

The present study applied a sequential explanatory mixed methods design. The sequential explanatory strategy is a popular strategy for mixed methods design. It consists of "the collection and analysis of quantitative data in a first phase of research followed by the collection and analysis of qualitative data in a second phase that builds on the results of the initial quantitative results"(Creswell, 2009, p.175). Furthermore, with respect to the quantitative section, the study followed a quasi-experimental design, in which there was no control group. In addition, the design followed in the present study can be called a comparison groups design as experimental groups were compared with each other without a control group (Mackey & Gass, 2005).

### **Participants**

Initially, based on the accessibility and willingness of the participants, 95 EFL learners (two genders) were selected through convenience sampling from intermediate EFL learners of a private language school in Malayer. Quick Placement Test (QPT) version 2 was accomplished to ensure the homogeneity of the participants. They were assigned to four groups. Two groups were randomly assigned to TBCOA, and the other two groups followed scaffolding techniques. Fifteen subjects were excluded from the study since their scores were one standard deviation (SD) above or below the mean. Therefore, the final number of participants was reduced to 80 learners, 20 in each group. The age range of the learners was 18 to 25, and their first language was Farsi. They had similar characteristics in several aspects as in linguistic background and language learning experiences. To this end, four experimental English classes were identified. The experimental groups were randomly assigned to debating (class A), dictogloss (class B), teacher, and peer scaffolding (classes C and D), respectively. Each group had 60-minute classes in a week working on speaking and writing productive skills. Besides the EFL learners, two raters, who were Ph.D. graduates in TEFL, were involved in the study.

**Table 1**  
*Demographic Background of the Participants*

No. of Students	80 (26 Undergraduate & 54 high schoolstudents)
Gender	Males & females
Raters/ Coders	Two TESL Ph.D. holders
Native Language	Persian
Major	English language learners
Institute	Khatesefid Language School, Malayer
Academic Years	2022-2023

### **Instruments**

The instruments used in this study were as follows:

#### ***Quick Placement Test (QPT)***

Firstly, the QPT was executed to measure the L2 learners' language proficiency. It includes 60 multiple-choice vocabulary, grammar and cloze test items and its reliability was estimated to be .83 (Cronbach's alpha). The learners were classified into four proficiency levels based on their QPT scores: beginner (0-17), elementary (18-29), lower-intermediate (30-39), and upper-intermediate (40-47). The intermediate-level learners participated in the current study. QPT is a reputable test and has been used in many previous studies.

#### ***Pretest***

In the second session, before the treatment stage, a pretest, a ready-made controversial free-opinion topic, "Is global climate change man-made?" was administered to examine the learners' argumentative writing performance. The learners were given 60 minutes to write an essay of about 180 words on the topic. For calculating reliability, 25% of the participants' writing papers in the pretest (i.e., 20 writing papers) were scored by the two raters. The raters were made familiar with the scoring procedure before they embarked on marking the papers. The inter-rater reliability (Pearson Correlation) for the taxonomic categorization of errors in writing performance indices were .81, .79, .78, .81, and .73 for content, organization, vocabulary, language, and mechanics, respectively.



### ***Post-test***

Following the treatment, a writing post-test was administered, which included a free-discussion topic “The advantages and disadvantages of pursuing academic studies,” which was pertinent to their academic career. Like the pretest, the participants had 60 minutes to write an essay of about 180 words on the topic. To calculate the inter-rater reliability, the researchers had 25% of the participants' writing papers in the post-test (i.e., 20 writing papers) scored by the two raters. The inter-rater reliability (Pearson Correlation) taxonomic categorization of errors in writing performance indices were .82, .77, .76, .82, and .75. for content, organization, vocabulary, language, and mechanics, respectively.

### **Scoring Rubric**

In this research, following Jacobs et al., (2020) guidelines, the researchers measured writing performance manually. They established the taxonomic categorization of errors in each text into five classifications, including content, organization, vocabulary, language, and mechanics.

### **Instructional Materials: American English File (AEF) Series Levels 3 and 4**

AEF Series Levels 3 and 4, third edition by Latham-Koenig, et.al., (2021) were used as the main course books. These books are planned for lower and upper intermediate level language learners and each book has ten units of three lessons (A, B, and C). Their writing sections are at the end of them with paragraph or essay writing themes that are aligned with the ultimate goal of this study. According to the CEFR (Common European Framework of Reference), the above-mentioned books are specifically designed for intermediate-level English learners.

### **Data Collection Procedure**

The study quantitatively aimed to investigate the treatment effects of four experimental groups, including debate, dictogloss, teacher scaffolding, and peer scaffolding, on writing performance in twelve sessions in a private language institute in Malayer. In the first session, QPT was applied to ensure the homogeneity of the participants in terms of EFL proficiency. Then, in the second session, before the treatment stage, a pre-test, which was a controversial free-opinion topic (Is global climate change man-made?) was administered to examine the learners' argumentative writing performance. The learners were given 60 minutes to write a short essay about the topic. Thus, any probable differences in the post-test could be attributed to the effects of treatment.

The subsequent three sessions (3, 4, & 5), sixty minutes each, were allotted to teaching the structural organization of paragraph and essay writing. In this stage, the teacher explained, in English and Farsi, the three-paragraph sections, including the topic sentence, which expresses the topic and controlling idea, supporting sentences, and the concluding sentence. Besides, he elaborated on the introduction, body and conclusion for essay writing. Moreover, the teacher explained the argumentative method of support. Planning, revising, and preparing the final copy of an argument are much the same as for other kinds of writing as in descriptive, narrative, and expository. Planning an argument, however, requires some different strategies that are suitable for the various independent variables of this study. Ghanbari and Salari (2022) states that argumentative writing is the most important genre that undergraduate students need to learn to meet their academic requirements. Then, the teacher presented the learners with some sample paragraphs and sample short essays from their textbook. He helped the learners to circle, underline and highlight the three parts of the paragraphs and clarified the thesis statement, body and conclusion of the essays. Some learners voluntarily read the text samples from their textbooks loud, and helped expound the features of paragraphs and composition based on the texts.

During sessions six to eleven, 90 minutes each session, in the first 30 minutes, the learners participated in oral discussion and prepared for the topic in each class. Then, in the second 30 minutes, they wrote and reconstructed essays of about 150 words. They wrote on one topic in each session: *The topics are the advantages of having fewer tools to communicate, the advantages and disadvantages of living without TV, and the effects of air pollution on human health* and so on,. Then, in the last 30 minutes, correction and feedback were provided by the teacher and peers on the learners' drafts for all four groups. These drafts were revised on four sweeps, including the whole paragraph, sentences, words and phrases, and punctuation. After editing, the teacher tried to distinguish the learners' weak points in writing a paragraph or an essay. He specifically explained and clarified the areas of problem for all of them. The time constraint of 540 minutes in six sessions was necessary at this stage.

Considering the experiment, classes A, B, C and D were taught through debating, dictogloss, teacher scaffolding, and peer scaffolding in the following order.

The debate group was required to discuss an interesting pre-selected topic (e.g., fashion, games) and express their attitude toward the topic. el Majidi et al. (2018) identifies three levels for debate group, and the learners need to know about them during the first session. In line with el Majidi et al. (2018), at first the learners interacted with information, arguments, and texts on the

learner-content level. Then, the teacher and the learners debated the topic on the learner-instructor level, and the teacher gave feedback on their performance. In the end, the learners discussed it in groups on the learner-learner level. This took place in 30 minutes.

According to Wajnryb's procedure (1990), there are four stages of dictogloss collaborative output tasks: preparation, dictation, reconstruction, analysis and correction. Following Wajnryb's procedure, at first, the teacher divided the class into five groups of four individuals each and started warming up, reviewing the essential vocabulary and collocations to deal with the task. Secondly, the teacher read a related text at average speed twice. First, the learners listened carefully without taking any notes. Then, they were required to listen again and note down the keywords for reconstructing the text. Thirdly, the learners were encouraged by the teacher to reconstruct the text in small groups. Finally, the texts were compared, analyzed, and corrected by the learners. The required feedback was provided by the teacher. Time constraint of 90 minutes was necessary for these steps.

In the scaffolding groups, from sessions six to eleven, which lasted about 90 minutes each, the teacher posed six topics for the learners in classes C and D. After preparation, the learners were required to write a short article about the topic while considering the features and organization of an article.

In group C, the teacher familiarized the learners elaborately with the topic. Then, throughout the writing process, clarification questions and declarative statements were used by the teacher to pay the learners' attention frequently to the stages and processes of argumentative writing. Moreover, while writing, the teacher checked every individual learner's writing and raised their awareness regarding wrong grammatical structures, vocabulary, and cohesion and coherence of the text. He had the learners revise the incorrect parts, such as fragments, alignment, misplaced or dangling modifiers and references, whenever they came across a problem, the teacher was present to provide the required assistance.

In group D, there were four sub-groups of five members each, and each group the learners were scaffolded and familiarized with the topic by the most proficient peers who the teacher told them how to scaffold. Additionally, while writing, the best members of the groups took heed of their peers' writing dimensions carefully and they informed them whenever they went wrong in grammatical structures, vocabulary and text organization.

Then, in the last 30 minutes, correction and feedback were provided by the teacher and peers on the learners' drafts for C and D groups. These drafts were revised on four sweeps, including the whole paragraph, sentences, words and phrases, and punctuation. After editing, the teacher tried distinguishing the

learners' weak points in writing a paragraph or an essay.. The teacher also allowed some time for students to revise their writings and implement the feedbacks and comments made.

After the treatment and the practice sessions, the writing post-test was administered which included a free-speech topic ;“The advantages and disadvantages of pursuing academic studies”, which the learners were interested in as it was pertinent to their academic career. The teacher used different topics for the pretest, practice and post-test to eliminate practice effect. Similar to the pre-test, the participants had 60 minutes to write an essay of about 180 words on the topic. The participants' scores were analyzed to identify any possible changes from the pre-test to the post-test (after treatment).

In the second stage of the study, twelve learners from two overall groups (six learners from each group) took part in a semi-structured interview method. The purpose of the interview was to extract more in-depth data on the learners' views towards implementing TBCOA and ST in academic writing classes. They participated in face-to-face English/Persian interview sessions. A series of four-week data collection sessions was held in August 2023 and each session took about 25 to 30 minutes. The learners could use English or Persian to answer the questions; however, English was used to transcribe the responses and then analyze and classify them, finding their commonalities. The questions of the interview were extracted from the results of a questionnaire, and it was open-ended questions. Three subject-matter experts in applied linguistics and three in assessment and testing checked the content of the questions and confirmed the questions' content validity.

### **Data Analysis Procedure**

This research aimed to compare the effects of TBCOA and ST on the writing performance of the participants by applying descriptive and inferential statistics for analyzing the data. In this process, the researchers measured the participants' writing manually and categorized the errors in the texts into five classifications, including content, organization, vocabulary, language, and mechanics. In addition, the researchers used SPSS software version 26 to evaluate the inter-rater reliability of writing performance. According to the guidelines offered by Cohen (1960), the inter-rater reliability for writing performance was plausible since it was .82. Following this, ANCOVA was conducted to examine the effects of debating vs. dictogloss, teacher scaffolding vs. peer scaffolding and two overall TBCOA vs. two overall ST groups in general while controlling the pre-test scores as the covariate.

In the qualitative section of the research, regarding the learners' reactions to the impact of TBCOA and ST on their writing development, the researchers used "theme-based categorization" (Dörnyei, 2007, p. 245) to code the learners responses to the open-ended interview questions. The inter-rater agreement and inter-rater reliability for coded transcripts were also handheld. In the former the two coders need to reach an agreement through discussion (Garrison et al., 2006), and in the latter, the two coders must choose the same code for the same unit of text (Krippendorff, 2004).

### Results

The researchers compared the sets of scores obtained through the post-test in four experimental groups. Regarding the homogeneity of the learners in terms of EFL proficiency, there were only trivial differences among the mean scores of the four groups in QPT (Table 2); yet, it was necessary to compare the means statistically to ensure that the differences were insignificant.

**Table 2**  
*Descriptive Statistics of the QPT*

Groups	N	Mean	St. deviation (SD)
Debating	20	33.40	5.90
Dictogloss	20	34.80	6.10
Teacher scaffolding	20	32.80	5.31
Peer scaffolding	20	37.05	5.24

As Table 3 indicates, the difference among the four groups with the  $F$  value of 0.97 at the significance level of 0.481, being larger than 0.05, was not statistically significant. Therefore, the results of the one-way ANOVA with the assumption of homogeneity of the variances indicate no significant difference among the mean scores of the four groups on their EFL proficiency at the beginning,  $F(3, 76) = 0.481, p > 0.05$ .

**Table 3**  
*Results of One-way ANOVA on Language Proficiency*

	Sum of the square	df	mean square	F	Sig
Between groups	17.835	3	5.94	0.97	0.481
Within groups	462.670	76	6.08		

### Descriptive Statistics

The descriptive statistics related to the debate, dictogloss, teacher scaffolding, peer scaffolding groups, and two overall tasks and scaffolding groups are presented in Tables 8, 14, and 19, respectively.

### Research Question One

Research question one (RQ1) aimed to investigate if there were any significant differences between the effects of debate and dictogloss on EFL learners' writing performance. As all assumptions of parametric ANCOVA (i.e., normal distribution of data, reliability of the covariate, homogeneity of variances, linearity, and homogeneity of regression slopes) in task-based groups were met, parametric ANCOVA was utilized to examine the difference between the effects of the debate and dictogloss groups (Table 8) regarding writing performance.

Concerning normal distribution of data, the results of the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test ( $p > .05$ ) indicated that the data was normally distributed in the pretest and post-test (Table 4).

**Table 4**  
*Tests of Normality (Kolmogorov-Smirnova)*

	Group	Statistic	df	Sig.
Writing Pretest	Debate	.127	20	.200*
	Dictogloss	.144	20	.200*
Writing Posttest	Debate	.153	20	.200*
	Dictogloss	.130	20	.200*

Regarding reliability of the covariate, the researchers evaluated the inter-rater reliability of the scores assigned to the learners' writing performance. For this purpose, 20% percent of the writing papers were scored by two raters. Then, the correlation between the two sets of scores was computed. According to the guidelines offered by Cohen (1960), the inter-rater reliability for writing performance was plausible since it was .82.

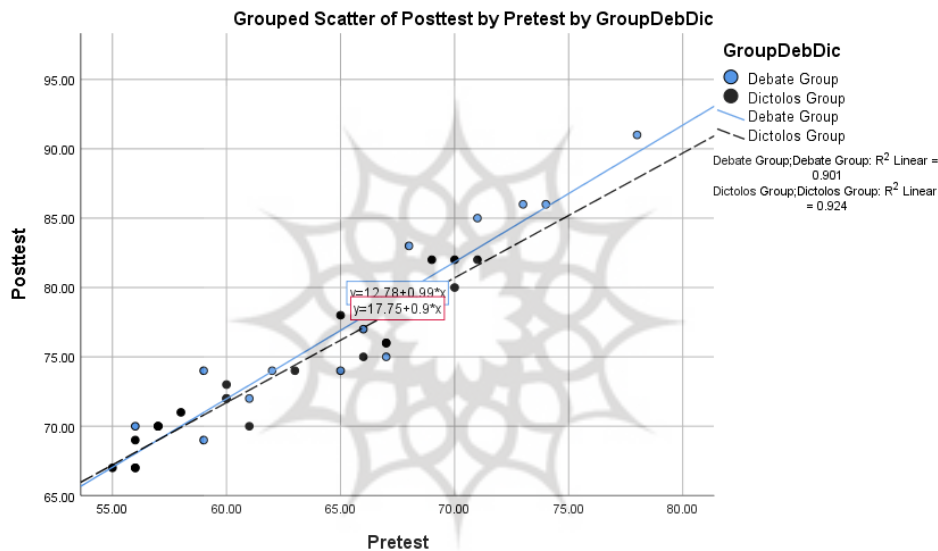
Concerning the homogeneity of variances, the non-significant result of the Levene's tests (Table 5) indicated that the assumption of homogeneity of variances was retained on debate and dictogloss groups' post-test of writing performance,  $F(1, 38) = 1.054, p > .05$ .

**Table 5**  
Levene's Test of Equality of Error Variances, Dependent Variable: Post-test

F	df1	df2	Sig.
1.054	1	38	.311

Concerning linearity, the straight lines in Figure 1 show that linearity assumption of ANCOVA was met for the debate and dictogloss groups.

**Figure 1**  
Linearity Test Result



With regard to the homogeneity of regression slopes, the non-significant interaction ( $P = .383$ ) in Table 6 shows that the assumption of homogeneity of regression slopes was met for the debate and dictogloss groups.

**Table 6**  
Tests of Between-Subject Effects for Debate and Dictogloss Groups

Source	Type III Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	Partial Eta Squared
Group	1.850	1	1.850	.613	.439	.017
Pretest	1098.694	1	1098.694	363.903	.000	.910

Group*pretest	2.357	1	2.357	.781	.383	.021
Error	108.691	36	3.019			
Total	230864.000	40				

The descriptive statistics results for the first RQ, entailing the means and SDs, displayed that the learners ameliorated during the treatment course in their writing performance. The learners in two groups improved their writing performance due to the intervention. From the two TBCOA groups, the debate group performed better than the dictogloss on the part of the mean at the post-test (Table 7).

**Table 7**

*Descriptive Statistics for Debate & Dictogloss Groups/ Dependent Variable: Post-test*

Groups	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
Debate group	77.50	6.10004	20
Dictogloss group	74.00	5.19109	20
Total	75.75	5.86493	40

Regarding the means (M) in Table 7, the debate group (M =77.50) was slightly better than the dictogloss group (M =74.00). The results of parametric ANCOVA in Table 8 display no significant difference between the two TBCOA groups apropos of writing performance components,  $F(1, 37) = 1.179$ ,  $p = .285$ , after controlling for the effect of pretest as the covariate. The partial eta squared in Table 8 shows a small effect size for Tests of Between-Subject Effects,  $\eta^2 = .031$ .

**Table 8**

*Tests of Between-Subject Effects: Post-test by Group (Debate and Dictogloss) with Pretest*

Source	Type III Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	Partial Eta Squared
Pretest	1107.952	1	1107.952	369.159	.000	.909
Group	3.537	1	3.537	1.179	.285	.031
Error	111.048	37	3.001			
Total	230864.00	40				

### Research Question Two

The second research question investigated the possible significant differences between the effects of teacher scaffolding and peer scaffolding on the EFL learners' writing performance. As all assumptions of parametric



ANCOVA (i.e., normal distribution of data, reliability of the covariate, homogeneity of variances, linearity, and homogeneity of regression slopes) in scaffolding groups were also met, parametric ANCOVA was utilized to compare the difference between the effects of the teacher and peer scaffolding groups (Table 10) regarding writing performance,  $F(1, 38) = 2.503, p = .122$ .

Concerning the normal distribution of the data, the results of the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test for the teacher scaffolding and peer scaffolding groups in the pretest and post-test (Table 9) yielded non-significant  $p$  values ( $p > .05$ ), indicating that the data were normally distributed.

**Table 9**  
*Tests of Normality (Kolmogorov-Smirnova)*

		Group Statistic	df	Sig.
Writing Pretest	Teacher Scaf.	.140	20	.200*
	Peer Scaf.	.159	20	.200*
Writing Posttest	Teacher Scaf.	.189	20	.060
	Peer Scaf.	.121	20	.200*

Regarding reliability of the covariate, the inter-rater reliability of the scores assigned to the learners' writing performance was evaluated. For this purpose, 20% percent of the writing papers were scored by two raters. Then the correlation between the two sets of scores was computed. According to the guidelines offered by Cohen (1960), the inter-rater reliability for writing performance was plausible since it was .81.

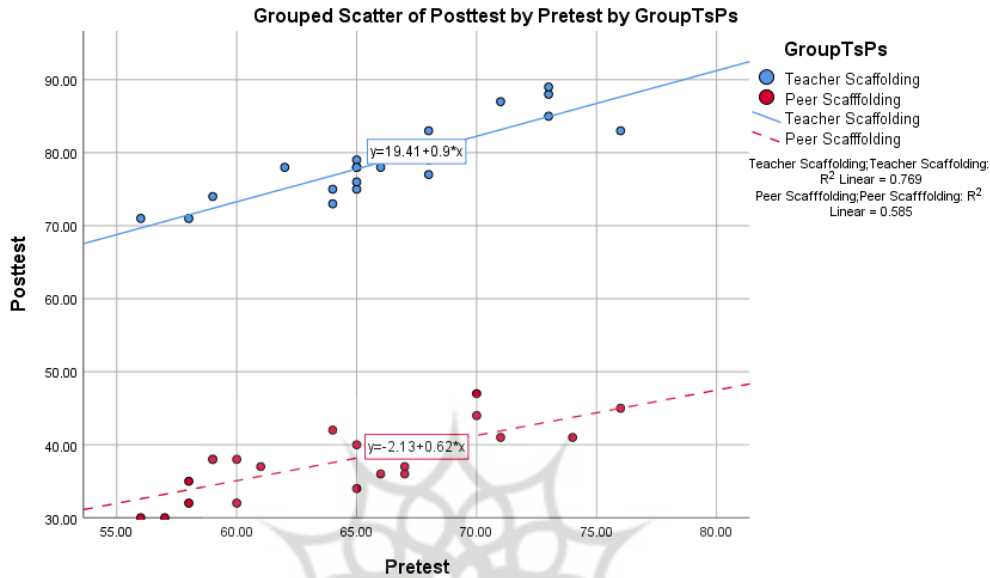
Concerning the homogeneity of variances, the non-significant results of Levene's tests.  $F(1, 38) = 2.503, p > .05$ , (Table 10) indicated that the assumption of homogeneity of variances was retained on teacher scaffolding and peer scaffolding groups' post-test of writing performance.

**Table 10.** *Levene's Test of Equality of Error Variances, Dependent Variable: Post-test*

F	df1	df2	Sig.
2.503	1	38	.122

Concerning the linearity, the straight lines in Figure 2 show that the linearity assumption of ANCOVA was met for teacher scaffolding and peer scaffolding groups.

**Figure 2**  
Linearity Test Results



Concerning the homogeneity of regression slopes, the non-significant interaction ( $P = .112$ ) in Table 11 shows that the assumption of the homogeneity of regression slopes was met for teacher scaffolding and peer scaffolding groups.

**Table 11**  
*Tests of Between-Subject Effects for Teacher Scaffolding and Peer Scaffolding Group*

Source	Type III Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Group	31.675	1	31.675	3.701	.062
Pretest	675.979	1	675.979	78.974	.000
Group* Pretest	22.656	1	22.656	2.647	.112
Error	308.141	36	8.559		
Total	153684.00	40			

a.  $R$  Squared = .983 (Adjusted  $R$  Squared = .981)

The descriptive statistics results for the second RQ, entailing the means and SDs, revealed that the learners ameliorated during the treatment in their writing performance. The learners in two groups improved their writing performance due to the intervention. From the two ST groups, considering

the mean at the post-test (Table 12), the teacher scaffolding group did better than the peer scaffolding.

**Table 12**

*Descriptive Statistics for Teacher & Peer Scaffolding Groups/ Dependent Variable: Post-test*

Scaffolding groups	Mean	Std. deviation	N
Teacher	78.8500	5.38297	20
Peer	37.6500	4.79336	20
Total	58.2500	21.46046	40

The results of parametric ANCOVA (Table 13) show that the two scaffolding groups are significantly different concerning Tests of Between-Subject Effects,  $F(1, 37) = 1700.797, p = .000$ . The results of parametric ANCOVA (Table 13) along with the results of descriptive statistics (Table 12) indicate that the teacher scaffolding group ( $M = 78.85$ ) significantly outperformed the peer scaffolding group ( $M = 37.65$ ), after controlling for the effect of pretest as the covariate. The results of eta squared do not show a small effect size for Tests of Between-Subject Effects,  $\eta^2 = .979$ .

**Table 13**

*Tests of Between-Subject Effects: Post-test by Group (Teacher and Peer Scaffolding) with Pretest*

Source	Type III Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	Partial Eta Squared
Pretest	656.304	1	656.304	73.408	.000	.665
Group	15205.871	1	15205.871	1700.797	.000	.979
Error	330.796	37	8.940			
Total	153684.000	40				

### Research Question Three

The third RQ makes a comparison between the overall TBCOA and ST groups in terms of writing performance in the post-test. The researchers intended to use parametric ANCOVA to examine the differences between overall TBCOA and overall ST groups. However, the ANCOVA assumption of normality of data distribution was violated in the post-test of overall ST group,  $p = .000$ , (Table 14) and the assumption of homogeneity of variances (Table 15) was not met,  $F(1, 78) = 806.26, p = .000$ . Therefore, nonparametric ANCOVA was used to examine the differences between the two overall groups in terms of writing performance (Table 16).

**Table 14***Test of Normality*

Statistic	df	Sig.	Kolmogorov-Smirnov			Shapiro-Wilk		
			Statistic	df	Sig.	Statistic	df	Sig.
Writing Pretest	Overall Task Group		.129	40	.091	.953	40	.096
			.096	40	.200*	.959	40	.160
Writing Post-test	Overall Task Group		.092	40	.200*	.961	40	.184
			.224	40	.000	.829	40	.000

**Table 15***Levene's Test of Equality of Error Variances, Dependent Variable: Post-test*

F	df1	df2	Sig.
806.269	1	78	.000

The results of nonparametric *Quade* ANCOVA (Table 16),  $F(1, 78) = 17.77, p = .000$ , along with the results of descriptive statistics Table 17), indicated that the overall TBCOA group ( $M = 75.75$ ) outperformed the overall ST group ( $M = 58.25$ ).

**Table 16***Quade ANCOVA: Overall Post-test by Overall Groups*

F	DFH	DFE	P value
17.775	1	78	.000

**Table 17***Descriptive Statistics for Overall Tasks & Scaffolding Groups*

Groups	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
Overall task	75.75	5.86493	40
Overall scaffolding	58.25	21.46046	40

### Results of Interviews with the Learners

The semi-structured interviews were administered to 12 learners. A group of five male learners and a group of seven female learners were chosen from the experimental groups to answer the qualitative research questions. The learners were purposefully selected from high achievers, medium achievers, and low achievers based on their writing pretest and post-test performance. Before undertaking the discussions, the interviewees were made aware of the aim and the timing of the interviews. The first researcher of the study

conducted the interview sessions, and each interview lasted between 25 to 30 minutes. Then, all interviews were recorded and with the participants' consent, were also transcribed. To remove the affective barriers and concerns of the learners, they were assured that the results of the interview would remain secret.

Guest, Bunce and Johnson (2006) noted that saturation in qualitative research usually occurs with around 12 participants in homogeneous groups. The researchers reached saturation with 12 participants. Some of the learners' statements, as well as the researchers' elaborations, are cited below.

The learners in the debate group argued that the three stages of debating meaning practice improved their word stock since they could employ the words more efficiently to clarify their opinions. The dictogloss group learners mentioned that it could make acquiring new terminology and collocations easy, and reduce stress because the teacher explained the new unknown vocabulary and the collocations before starting the task.

The learners in the teacher and peer scaffolding groups claimed that the teacher and peers could help them develop their argumentative writing and make them aware of their wrong grammatical points. Scaffolding could meet their contentious writing needs and demands, improve their interest in argumentative essay writing, and be adequate in strengthening their autonomy in argumentative essay writing.

In the debate group, the first participant said: [This activity was interesting for me since I could speak English without stress with peers, but vocabulary was more important for me than mechanics. I also used different types of clauses in my writings]. In this group, the learners announced that debate-based activities and small group interaction were challenging and lowered their stress and anxiety. Moreover, they mentioned that they learned to use various words to make longer sentences in argumentative writing. It appears that debating was effective in enriching the learner's ideas rather than focusing on writing mechanics.

The second learner in the debate group mentioned: [Writing a meaningful and creative text was more important for me, and while writing, developing ideas, writing compound sentences and word variety combinations were easy for me. While writing, I could critically write more about the merits and demerits of the topic with less interruption].

The interviewees believe that debate-based instruction could scaffold them to write down critically and argue masterfully with the readers about the topic. The researchers also figured out that learners could try their best to write perfectly if positive energy and emotional feedback stimulated their

minds. In this group, the third participant remarked: [Writing down the arguments and the classmates' mistakes during class helped me a lot].

In the dictogloss group, the first volunteer noted: [The teacher paid attention to the new vocabulary. He encouraged us to compare our writing with peers and analyze the language. Then we contributed to the discussion before the writing tasks started]. The researchers pointed out that dictogloss could help learners accomplish the task by integrating four language skills and working in small groups. The second participant in this group mentioned: [Cooperative tasks contributions enable me to write longer sentences]. The learners identified syntactic errors by comparing and analyzing the texts in small groups. While doing the writing tasks, they monitored organization and correct grammar constructions. Of course, one of the students said they tend to write in a creative and fluent way because of adequate exposure to input and output activities before writing tasks. The third participant pointed out:

1. Creating interest among learners: Most of the students believed that scaffolding could develop their interest and motivation regarding academic writing.
2. Willingness towards writing argumentative essays improved remarkably.
3. Developing writing argumentative performance. Most of the participants noted that scaffolding could develop their argumentative writing performance, and they could write their argumentative essays quickly after receiving this instruction.
4. Overcoming argumentative writing challenges: Some participants believed that scaffolding knowledge could help them overcome the challenges of academic writing. They mentioned that these challenges impeded their argumentative writing performance and through this course, they could overcome these problems and improve the quality of their academic writing.
5. Organizing ideas, using proper vocabularies and expressions, and implementing the formal tone.
6. Developing the learners' writing autonomy. Most participants maintained that scaffolding knowledge is beneficial to boost their academic writing autonomy

### **Discussion**

In this study, TBCOA and ST techniques were applied to investigate their effects on EFL learners' writing performance. The findings of the first two research questions revealed that treatment in both TBCOA and ST groups was influential in developing different components of writing in EFL classes. These align with el Majidi et al. (2020) who concluded that debate-based instruction enhanced students' writing performance, and the indices of their writing components in secondary school. In the same line, Makiabadi et al. (2019) argued that debate can boost learners' preparedness to engage in the discourse. Similarly, as McIntyre et al. (1998) reported, instructional debating

seems to be related to L2 learners' willingness to communicate through writing. Farid et al. (2017) confirmed that the dictogloss improves the learners' writing ability. It is claimed that collaborative activities elevate learners' writing competence and promote their attention, involvement, and self-efficacy to do productive tasks. Moreover, critical thinking and opinion presentation are the result of collaborative activities.

Concerning RQ2, we observed a development in writing performance through scaffolding techniques. These findings are compatible with Vygotsky's SCT, which concentrates on social nature of all knowledge and believes that learning due to the social context interactions leads to understanding (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 86). In contrast, the finding of research question two goes against Danli's (2011) view that peer scaffolding alone without a teacher may not always or necessarily lead to correcting target forms due to the learners' limited mastery of linguistic knowledge and ability to use the scaffolding functions. Furthermore, Danli maintains that the learners are more teacher-oriented for giving feedback and scaffolding than peer-oriented since they wouldn't like to disclose their competence Achilles' heel and lose their face. What is more, the teacher and learners' interaction was more formal, serious and active in providing feedback and hints in comparison with the peers', so they paid more attention and had more concentration on the writing and using scaffolding (p. 108).

Moreover, the second research question agrees with Shooshtari and Mir's (2014) study, in which peer and tutor scaffolding positively influenced the participants' writing. However, the findings related to the ST groups in research question two are for and against Amerian et al.'s (2014) work, which showed that the teacher scaffolding led to remarkable developments in the participants' writing, but this was not operative for peer and class scaffolding. It supports the importance and trustworthiness of the teacher's knowledge for the learners. Furthermore, the teacher's interactions with learners are more formal, serious and active than the interaction among peers.

The results related to the first research question (RQ1) showed that the debate group means were slightly better than the dictogloss group regarding content, organization, vocabulary, language, and mechanics. The results associated with this research question revealed that the debate task was significantly more effective than dictogloss task in reducing writing performance errors.

The findings related to the second research question demonstrated that Group C was more effective than Group D regarding increasing writing content and decreasing writing performance errors. This is in line with the findings of Taheri and Nazmi (2021) who found that in apropos of total

organization and linguistic accuracy, the teacher scaffolding group obtained a higher mean score than peer scaffolding group. Besides, the findings related to RQ2 disclosed that teacher and peer scaffolding did not differ significantly regarding their effects on writing performance errors. This finding disregards Richer's (1992) who found that more significant gains in writing proficiency were obtained by the peer feedback group, not the teacher group.

Through peer scaffolding learners provide and receive each other's explanation to deepen their cognitive processing, as in clarifying, thinking, reorganizing information, correcting misconceptions, and removing misunderstanding (Simeon, 2014). GE and Land (2004, as cited in Simeon, 2014) referred to co-constructing ideas as a process that can promote learning and lead to independent problem-solving. Finally, cognitive conflicts that prompt explanation and justification of the learners' positions recognize questionable beliefs, seek recent information to elevate agreement, and identify different viewpoints are the results of co-working.

Regarding RQ3, the findings also showed that TBCOAs were more effective than scaffolding techniques about total mean scores. The possible impression for this result has to do with the reality that group discussion and group construction are more trustworthy and motivational for the learners than the teacher's knowledge and peer consultation. Moreover, thanks to the point that these group discussions and group construction engage learners better and more actively to rephrase and paraphrase the text together than scaffolding techniques reconstructions. Kafipour et al. (2018) found that class task-based writing helps improve the learners' writing skills in sentence patterns, language use, vocabulary, materials, and organization. Sundari et al. (2018) argued that task-based language training had a significant impact on students' writing results. These two findings confirm the superiority of tasks in general writing performance.

The common ideas obtained from the learners' responses revealed that TBCOAs are motivating, enjoyable, and helpful in reducing the learners' stress. In this respect, Swain and Lapkin (2001) concluded that collaborative tasks help learners deal with linguistic drawbacks beyond their abilities.

The purpose of the present study was to investigate the effect of TBCOA and ST on the writing performance of Iranian EFL learners. The two mentioned instructional techniques are helpful in promoting EFL learners' language skills and subskills. The scaffolding techniques appeared to be less effective than task-based activities. The score lines or the final scores gained from this project emphasized the potency of scaffolding and TBCOA in the future trend of EFL learners' writing performance.



The outcomes of this study uphold Vygotsky's theoretical attitude about the efficient pedagogical role of scaffolding. The inferences of the current research imply that pair-work or group work, along with teacher's support and meaningful productive tasks, are the cornerstone of language skills development and explicitly writing skill promotion. Also, it is vitally essential for EFL learners to be deeply engrossed in controversial output tasks and socially oriented activities. They should foster their awareness of the different aspects of writing proficiency to help them improve their writing skill. The active participation and concentration in the collaborative atmosphere and scaffolding constructive pair work or group work can cultivate learners' understanding of the different dimensions of writing ability. L2 learners should learn to interact with their classmates and teachers and utilize productive output activities to elevate their creativity, structure, content, organization, and grammar in L2 writing.

However, there are some limitations and delimitations: First, the study was limited by the data collection methods. Further studies need to use other methods of data collection, such as observation and focus group interviews, to strengthen their data. Second, since the sample was not representative of all intermediate-level EFL learners, it may not be generalized to other conditions. Third, there was no control group because the equality of treatment was necessary for comparison among all four groups. Fourth, this experiment was conducted in twelve sessions in approximately two months. Storch (2009) stated that L2 skills cannot be developed over a 2 to 4-month period. Therefore, more long-term studies are essential to determine the extent to which TBCOA and ST can revolutionize writing competence apropos of writing performance. Last word, further research can examine the effect of listening to the text and scaffolding on writing performance. In this study, the participants had similar L1 backgrounds. Will this study have the same results with participants of different L1 backgrounds? However, this question also is left for future researchers to explore.

**Declaration of interest:** none

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