The Effects of Collaborative Assessment on Fostering EFL Writing Proficiency: A Sociocultural Perspective

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Abstract
Anchored in Vygotskian sociocultural perspective, this study attempted to investigate the role of collaborative assessment (CA) in developing EFL writing proficiency. To this aim, two intact groups of Iranian intermediate EFL learners were randomly assigned to experimental (n = 15) and control groups (n = 15). Both groups wrote a total of eight essays on eight identical topics, which the first and the last ones were considered as pre- and post-tests. However, in the experimental group, both learners and the teacher assessed the essays based on an analytic scale. Then, being engaged in collaborative dialogue, the learners were given the opportunity to discuss existing differences between their self-assessed scores and those assigned by the teacher in order to reach an agreed score. Moreover, all their dialogic interactions were audio-recorded for later transcription and micro-analysis. The control group, however, was merely provided by the teacher’s scores. Results of the study demonstrated that the experimental group significantly outperformed the control group on the post-test. Besides, the micro-analytic analysis of the dialogic discussions in the experimental group portrayed how CA could help the learners gain a better insight into their strengths and weakness; further, it led to their metacognitive awareness about components of a good piece of writing.

Keywords: Collaborative assessment, Sociocultural theory, EFL writing proficiency

Introduction
Language testing has always been under the substantial influence of the dominant linguistic theories of the day (Brown & Abeywickrama, 2010). In the middle of the 20th century, language learning, with the effect of behavioral psychology and structural linguistics, was essentially concerned with the mastery of discrete language components and linguistic accuracy on the part of learners. Consequently, on the assumption that language can be chopped up into smaller pieces, language testing was chiefly aimed at designing and developing tests to measure students’ proficiency in a specific domain of language through discrete items. Further, assessment was mostly used to measure students’ achievements for administrative and reporting purposes (William, 2001). In fact, the main focus of teachers and learners was fixed on scores, and therefore, test-takers did not obtain a deep understanding into test content and scoring procedures of their performances, but they had to rigidly adhere to the test principles so as to succeed in taking them (Shohamy, 2001).

In the 1990s, the belief that traditional testing can give a thorough evaluation of overall proficiency in language skills came under question. At the same time, a new concept entered the language testing arena which was dubbed as alternative assessment (Brown & Abeywickrama, 2010; Hancock, 1994). Alternative assessment emphasizes the formative function of assessment by whose formative role the learning process is facilitated (Andrade, Du, & Wang, 2008; Black & William, 1998; Crook, 1988). According to Jones (2010), students should have a clear-cut outline of the goals they are moving towards, a thorough understanding of the criteria they are assessing against and should be engaged in self- and peer-assessment to enrich their work. Therefore, it is necessary to make use of various types of alternative assessment, namely reflective journals, observations, interviews, peer-, self-, portfolio and collaborative assessment so as not only to assess learners’ findings but also to promote the L2 teaching and learning.
CA, one of the branches of alternative assessment, “involves the student, their peers, and tutor in thoughtful and critical examination of each student’s course work” (McConnell, 2002, p.43). It is referred to as an ‘experiential journey’ and a ‘process of development’ for students without marring the evaluative nature of assessment (Chau, 2005). According to Chau, the key characteristics of collaboration are “mutual goals (working towards a mutually acceptable assessment grade), dynamic exchange of information (presenting, defending and elaborating views on the grade by the tutor and student) and role interdependence (emphasizing individual accountability for meaningful exchange to take place)” (p. 27). Accordingly, through CA, teachers enlist the aid of learners to move towards a common goal which is assigning a score acceptable to both. Furthermore, both sides have equal rights to express and defend their own views on the final score. Implementing CA, Fahim, Miri, and Najafi (2014) set two levels for conducting CA, namely, teacher-student and student-student levels. At the teacher-student level, the teacher, on the one hand, assesses students’ performance, and on the other, students are provided with an opportunity to assess their own performance according to a set of established criteria which are acceptable to both teachers and learners. Afterwards, assigned scores are compared and contrasted by both parties to CA. If there is a discrepancy between the scores calculated by the teachers and learners, as Fahim et al. (2014) noted, they sit together and discuss over the points of difference in order to reach a consensus over one common score. In student-student collaborative assessment, on the other hand, the two assessors are students. That is, students are initially engaged in assessing their peers’ performances on the basis of clear-cut scoring procedures; then, the students will be asked to assess their own performance according to the same scoring procedures. Finally, the two sides are given a chance to sit together and negotiate on the existing detected points of difference. More specifically, student-student CA encompasses both peer- and self-assessment. More relevantly, on the CA paradigm, teachers are involved in “close assessment of learners’ understandings”, and learners are engaged in self-assessment and provided with peers’ feedback which as, Shepard (2000) mention, is “the central part of the social processes that mediate the development of intellectual abilities, construction of knowledge, and formation of students' identities” (p. 4). In essence, CA pays particular attention to the sociocultural aspects of assessment (McConnell, 1999) and reflects the main sociocultural foundation stone that the development is an ongoing process which takes place in the social milieu with the help of more capable others (Vygotsky, 1978).

With the arrival of sociocultural theory’s (hereafter SCT) on the scene in 1986, learning is conceptualized as an enterprise shaped and reshaped through social interaction on the premise that the human mind is always mediated by virtue of interaction with self or others (Lantolf, 2000). Put it another way, SCT rests on the premise that higher forms of thinking are formed and enhanced through interaction in a social context, and then they are transferred from the social to individual level (Vygotsky, 1978). Such an ongoing process best occurs within the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), which is defined as the distance between the actual developmental level (i.e., what an individual is able to do without reliance on others) and the potential developmental level (i.e., what an individual is able to perform relying on others) (Vygotsky, 1978). In fact, the ZPD forges a relationship between a person who is expert enough in performing tasks and one who has a limited capacity but has capabilities to take part in the process of task performance (Poehner & Lantolf, 2010); the expert plays the role of a supporter who helps learners compensate for the aspects of tasks which they are unable to consider and perform on their own (Anton, 1999). More specifically, the expert temporarily scaffolds the novice person so that s/he can carry out a task which is beyond his/her current level of abilities. In principle, the mediator provides learners with appropriate calibrated aids through a mutual dialogue due to the fact that the accurate diagnosis of learners’ capabilities cannot be made but through dialogic interaction between the expert and novice (Aljaafreh & Lantolf, 1994).

To date, no empirical study has been carried out to elucidate the developmental and effective role of the CA on developing EFL writing proficiency from a sociocultural perspective. Therefore, this study was set out to give increasing clarity to the role of CA in promoting EFL writing proficiency through the microgenetic (i.e. the study of every unfolding moment and move in learning process) lenses to shed more light on the undertaken processes of EFL writing development within a sociocultural framework.

**Empirical studies on CA**
Chau (2005) conducted a study to explore the benefits and difficulties of involving in CA and its impacts on language development and learning among two groups of sophomore students at the Hong Kong University enrolling in a course on English in their workplace. Results of the study suggested that the attitude of the teacher, unfamiliarity with CA, and time constraints were major difficulties arisen as a result of involvement in collaborative assessment. The results also confirmed the success of CA in enhancing L2 learning. Furthermore, there was a shift in students’ roles from ‘passive learner’ to ‘active participant’ and a change in using learning strategies as a result of engaging in collaborative assessment.

In another study, Fahim et al. (2014) looked into the role of CA in promoting critical thinking and EFL writing proficiency. To explore the effects of CA on EFL writing, observation was carried out on the writing performance of two intact groups of students at the intermediate level of language proficiency: the teacher assessment group (n = 18) and collaborative assessment group (n = 18). In addition, the performance of the CA group was investigated at the two levels of teacher-student and student-student. Results of this study provided evidence that CA can improve writing proficiency of EFL students. However, this study did not examine how CA managed to increase gains in writing proficiency. Thus, this study delved into the effects of teacher-student CA on fostering EFL writing proficiency from a sociocultural point of view.

More precisely, the following questions were raised and explored in order to accomplish the objectives of the current study.

1. Do teacher-student collaborative assessment and teacher-centered assessment differ in enhancing writing proficiency of Iranian intermediate EFL learners?
2. Does teacher-student collaborative assessment lead to any significant gains in writing proficiency of Iranian intermediate EFL learners?
3. How can teacher-student collaborative assessment contribute to developing writing proficiency of Iranian intermediate EFL learners?

Method
Setting and participants

Two female intact groups of intermediate EFL learners in an Iranian private institute participated in this study. The educational curriculum of the institute was intended to hone in L2 learners’ communicative skills and cover all four language skills, i.e., listening, speaking, reading and writing. The participants attended the classes twice a week, and their age ranged from 17 to 23. Further, the registration documents substantiated that they all had been studying English in this institute for about two years; however, they did not have any experience of being engaged in collaborative assessment prior to the experiment based on the data collected through a checklist. In addition, based on the results of a placement test administered at the very beginning of their entrance to the institute, the homogeneity of the classes had been established. It should be noted that the placement test covered all four language skills. Moreover, teachers’ appraisal and the participants’ scores on the latest summative test held at the end of the term leading to the time when the study was carried out indicated that both classes were homogeneous. Then, the classes were randomly assigned to teacher-student CA group (n = 15) and teacher-centered assessment group (n = 15). The former was taught by one of the researcher and the latter was instructed by another instructor. Nevertheless, both were the regular teachers of the classes. Worthy of note is that both teachers were doing their M.A in TEFL (Teaching English as a Foreign Language) at the time of study with about 4 years of experience in teaching at the institute.

Instrumentation
Tasks and tests

Eight writing tasks were chosen from the participants’ regular textbook (Appendix A), *Four Corners* (Richards & Bohlke, 2012) on the following grounds. First, it was hypothesized that task demands were in consistency with the participants’ level of L2 writing proficiency. Second, selecting the tasks from the participants’ regular textbook was taken as a strategy to enhance the ecological validity of the study, assessing learners “in situations which more closely resemble actual working conditions” (Gardner, 1992, p. 91). Third, it was postulated that the participants would do the tasks more seriously. In this connection, it is important to mention that the tasks covered a wide range of
topics and genres, and the participants had to write about the topics in class. Furthermore, the first and the last participants’ writings were taken as the pre-and post-tests, respectively.

**The scoring checklist**

To assess the EFL learners’ writing tasks, an analytic 100-point scale, designed by Jacob, Zinkgraf, Wormuth, Hartfiel, and Hughey (1981) was used (Appendix B). In comparison with the holistic scoring in which a single score is assigned to a piece of writing, the analytic scale assesses writings according to five main aspects of writing and gives different values to these categories: content (30 points), language use (25 points), organization (20 points), vocabulary (20 points), and mechanics (5 points). Therefore, such an analytic scale allows teachers to gain a more nuanced understanding into language learners’ strengths and weaknesses. Moreover, it affords learners with an opportunity to reflect on their own writings in order to overcome their weaknesses and boost their strengths (Brown & Abeywickrama, 2010). Further, analytic scoring lays the groundwork for more points of difference and consequently more discussions between the two sides of CA. In the current study, copies of the analytic checklist were distributed among the CA group according to which they were allowed to self-assess their writing performance and benefit from the advantages of using an analytic checklist.

**Interview**

To inquire into the metacognitive knowledge of the learners and their views about the nature of the study, a semi-structured interview was arranged between the teacher and CA group at the end of the treatment sessions. Holding an interview in a friendly manner in which learners feel comfortable with the situation to express their opinions freely might afford the researchers with the possibility to evaluate the outcomes of the investigation from the ‘emic’ perspective; that is, the learners’ perceptions of the study (Mackey & Gass, 2005) which might otherwise be difficult to elicit. Simply put, the interview was conducted to reflect the personal attitudes of CA learners towards their experience of being involved in the CA sessions. Further, it should be noted that to the interviews were transcribed verbatim and reviewed several times by the researchers to elicit the recurrent and repetitive patterns.

**Microgenetic analysis**

Microgenetic method was originally devised by Heniz Werner, an Australian developmental psychologist in the mid 1920s, and then was endorsed by Vygotsky (1978) who proposed the genetic model in psychology. Microgenesis, as one of the genetics of the genetic model, is defined by Gutierrez (2007) as “the moment-to-moment co-construction of language and language learning” (p. 2). The genetic model is premised on the fact that the comprehensive understanding of the higher, culturally organized levels of human mental functioning is only achieved through the study of the processes rather than the products of development (Vygotsky, 1978). In line with the previous argument, most sociocultural researches perform the microgenetic method since focusing merely on the products may lead us to neglecting the genetic relationship between the elementary and higher levels of the mental activity and may not provide the researcher with the internal nature of mental development (Vygotsky, 1978). Indeed, as Mitchell and Myles (2004) contend, microgenesis is “a local, contextualized learning process . . . [that] can sometimes be traced visibly in the course of talk between expert and novice” (p. 198). Conducting a microgenetic analysis, teachers may be able to observe the subtle changes that may go unnoticed in a particular course of learning when the students go through the learning process. Moreover, the circumstances precede and follow a change, and the change itself is brought to light through direct and intensive observation in the microgenetic method (Siegler & Crowley, 1991). As a result, microgenetic analysis can assist teachers to diagnose learners’ needs and consequently to tailor their methods of teaching to learners’ requirements.

In this study, microgenetic analysis was conducted with the aim of examining the internal nature of the dialogic interaction between the teacher and the learners when they joined to share their knowledge of L2 writing throughout the CA. To suit the purpose, the dialogues between the learners and the teachers were transcribed verbatim and then reviewed several times by the researchers to identify the points of difference between the parties to dialogues; then, the target parts were closely examined by the researchers to trace how the dialogues led to co-construction of knowledge or awareness about various aspects of writing proficiency.

**Procedures**
All participants in the CA and teacher-centered assessment groups, in the first session, were provided with an introduction on how to organize, develop, and support their ideas logically. After giving this briefing, the teacher afforded the CA group with copies of the analytic scale checklist according to which the learners were supposed to assess their writings. In the CA group, in order for the learners to learn the procedures of the CA in practice, the teacher provided the learners with a sample of writing scored on the basis of the analytic scale. Then, the learners were given a chance of assessing the sample based on the same scale and to negotiate with the teacher if there was a difference between the grade given by the teacher and the one assigned by them. Following this procedure, the learners were asked to write about the topics assigned for each session at the class and to assess it on the basis of the analytic scale prior to the class. Afterwards, the teacher scored the learners’ essays according to the checklist. Then, the learners were given a chance to compare and contrast their appraisal with the teachers’ in one-to-one tutorial sessions out of the class. If a learner detected a discrepancy between these two set of scores, she dialogued with the teacher to reach a mutually agreed score. The point is that the learner was encouraged to found her argument on the basis of score distribution in the checklist. This strategy was undertaken in order to offer the learners some kind of incentive to obtain a deeper insight into the qualities of the writing proficiency. In reality, the teacher involved the learners in a conversation in which they encountered the contradictory ideas and consequently pushed them to notice points of the difference between the presented viewpoints and wrestled with the matter of taking the more proper one. Further, the teacher provided the learners with the graduated helps, sensitive to their ZPDs, on their errors to enhance their awareness of the main aspects of their writing provided by the checklist. It is worth mentioning that this procedure continued for eight sessions, and all interactions between the teacher and the learners were audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim in order to track the trend of the learners’ awareness about different aspects of the writing proficiency and its possible effects on gains in writing as a result of collaborative dialogues. In the teacher-centered assessment group, on the other hand, although the learners were asked to write on the same topics for each session, they received no feedback on their essays by the teacher and their writings were only assessed by the teacher based on the same assessing scale. In fact, the learners were deprived of scoring their writings and of engaging in collaborative dialogues with their teacher. Moreover, after the treatment sessions, an interview was held between the teacher and the CA EFL learners so as to open windows of insight into the learners’ personal views about tasks at hand, its goals, and strategies utilized to meet task requirements. It should also be noted that the first and the last participants’ writings were taken as the pre- and post- tests of the study, respectively.

Results and discussion

The goal of this section is to deliver the final results of quantitative and qualitative approaches adopted to conduct CA on Iranian EFL writing from a sociocultural perspective and to discuss the findings of the study in the light of the literature reviewed.

The first research question

In order to determine whether there were any identifiable differences in the effects of the teacher-student collaborative assessment and teacher-centered assessment on promoting writing proficiency of Iranian EFL learners at the intermediate level, a Mann-Whitney U Test was conducted. As displayed in Table 1, the mean rank of the collaborative group was higher than that of the teacher-centered group (20.03 and 10.97 respectively).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Method</th>
<th>N</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Teacher-centered group</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10.97</td>
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</table>
As viewed in Table 2, the result revealed that there was a significant difference ($z = -2.82, p = .005$) between the teacher-student collaborative assessment and teacher-centered assessment potentials for enhancing writing proficiency of Iranian EFL learners at the intermediate level with a large effect size ($r = .5$). Due to the fact that the significant level was smaller than 0.5, it can be claimed that the difference between the post-tests of the teacher-centered and the collaborative groups was significant. Therefore, the CA was significantly better than the teacher-centered assessment in terms of their potential effects on enhancing EFL writing. However, the means of the CA group and the teacher-centered group were fairly similar in the pre-tests (56.8 and 57.4 respectively).

The results can be ascribed to the underlying factor that through the CA, learners were actively involved in the evaluative process and took control of their learning (McConnell, 1999) instead of being “reduced to passive testees” (Lee, 2007, p. 209). Furthermore, involving in the self-assessment as part of the collaborative assessment, as Fulcher (2010) highlighted, shifted the learners’ attention from the final product of the assessment, scores, to the processes underlying performing the tasks. To be more specific, self-assessment may assist learners to gain insights into their forte and flaws in writing (Harris, 1997; McNamara & Deane, 1995), monitor their performance (Gardner, 2000; Harris, 1997), notice gaps between their performance and desired one (Fulcher, 2010), enhance their awareness of learning processes (Oscarson, 1989), focus on the metacognitive aspects of their learning (Harris, 1997), boost their self-confidence to strengthen their motivation (Brown & Abeywickrama, 2010; Gardner, 2000), take the responsibility for their learning processes (Klenowsky, 1995; Gardner, 2000), gain control over their learning (Oscarson, 1989), and to be provided with ‘personalized feedback’, thus to “reflect on their goals, strategies, and achievements” (Gardner, 2000, p. 52). In the teacher-centered group, on the other hand, since the focus remained on the products of the writing tasks, the learners might not achieve a comprehensive understanding of their capabilities in the writing tasks. More importantly, due to the fact that learners in the teacher-centered group did not have the opportunity to be provided with the graduated assistance on the part of the teacher and also did not play any special role in the process of assessing their achievements, they may not be able to identify, improve, and move beyond their current competence in the writing.

### The second research question

To address the second question and to explore whether teacher-student collaborative assessment led to any significant gains in writing proficiency of Iranian EFL learners at the intermediate level, a Wilcoxon Signed Rank Test was run on the results of the pre- and post-tests of the CA group. As viewed in Table 3, the descriptive statistics related to the second question revealed that there was a mean difference for gains in writing proficiency.

**Table 3**

| Descriptive statistics for CA group on pre- and post-tests |
|---------------------------------|---|---|
| **N**                          | **Mean** | **SD** |
| Pre-collaborative group        | 15 | 56.86 |
| 11.78                          |    |       |
| Post-collaborative group       | 15 | 73.00 |
| 12.51                          |    |       |
The result of the inferential statistics, depicted in Table 4, also indicated a statistically significant promotion in the writing gains following teacher-student CA, $z = -3.412$, $p = .001$ with a large effect size ($r = .62$). Since the significant level is lower than 0.5, it can be deduced that the difference from the pre- to the post-test was significant. Further, from the large value of the effect size using Cohen’s (1988) criteria, it can be inferred that the difference was mainly due to the effect of the independent variable, i.e. CA, on the dependent variable, gains in writing proficiency. On the whole, the results lent some support to Fahim et al.’s (2014) claim about the superiority of CA over teacher-centred assessment and its potential to promote writing proficiency of Iranian EFL learners.

The third research question
To answer the third question, a microgenetic analysis was used to investigate how the CA brought about positive changes in the writing abilities of the EFL learners. The qualitative portion of this study focused on analyzing the naturally occurring interactions between the L2 learners under investigation and their teacher while they were undertaking the CA in the classroom context. Through the following extracts, some of the transcribed interactions are represented and then discussed to indicate the internal processes of the CA potential on promoting EFL writing. The first two extracts represent the interaction between the teacher and Sadaf’s (pseudonym) composition in the first and last sessions in order. Extract 1 is a sample of the interaction between the teacher and Sadaf while they were getting involved in the CA of Sadaf’s first composition on “how to study better?” (See Appendix C for the transcription key used).

**Extract 1**

1 T: Look at the scores. Are you satisfied with them? First, look at the score; then we discuss.

2 S: (10). Uh. *Yeah*!  

3 T: No no. (.) Express your idea. (.) Look, the score that you have given to the content section is 21, isn’t it?  

4 \[\text{But I have given it 16. (.) You CAN disagree with me. (.) There is no problem. (.) If you can defend your view based on this checklist, you can change the score. (.) Maybe, I have given you a low score. (.) There isn’t any problem.}\]

5 T: Express your view.

6 S: ( •,•)  

7 T: If you think the scores I have given to your writing are low; for instance, the scores on vocabulary, organization, or those of any part of your writing, you can tell me.

8 S: I accept the content score.

9 T: The content that I have given it 16?

10 S: Yeah. (.) But the vocabulary.

11 T: Vocabulary? (.) What score have you given to vocabulary? (.) 18? (.) What score have I given to vocabulary?

12 S: 13

13 T: Why do you think the vocabulary score should be graded 18?
23 S: I think I have used a sophisticated range of vocabulary, so my score should be 24 in the range of 20-18. ((laughter))
25 T: Aha. (.) The vocabularies are nice, but in some parts, I couldn’t get the meaning 26 (. ) For examples, “while I study, I take note to subsist what I study in my 27 remembrance”. (.) What do you mean by this sentence?
28 S: I mean I take notes in order to keep in my mind what I study.
29 T: You can say to keep what I study in my mind. (. ) You have looked it up in 30 a Persian to English dictionary. Haven’t you?
31 S: Yeah.
32 T: You should have checked it in a monolingual dictionary to avoid making 33 mistakes in selecting words.
34 S: OK!
35 T: If you think there is any problem in other parts, you can discuss.
36 (0.6)
37 S: Why have you given 16 to the content section?
38 T: Aha, I think the topic is not developed adequately.
39 S: That’s right. (.) “But the vocabulary”.
40 T: Vocabulary? (. ) Aren’t you satisfied with its score?
41 S: “No”.
42 ( ((The teacher is reading the essay)) (17) )
43 S: I think the vocabularies are new.
44 T: They are new but they haven’t been used in correct structures and this has 45 altered the meaning of the sentence.
46 S: ↑All of them?
47 T: For example here, “I have habits for better study for parable:” what does 48 ‘parable’ mean here?
49 S: I wanted to give examples.
50 T: You should say for example as you have used elsewhere. (. ) The parable means 51 a story.
52 S: I checked it. (. ) It means ‘example’.
53 T: Yeah. (. ) As I said, in a Persian to English dictionary, it may [mean]
54 S: [Uh-huh]
55 T: But it doesn’t mean ‘Example’ in English.
56 S: I look up the words in my cell phone dictionary. (. ) The problems may be 57 because of that.
58 T: Generally, when you look up the words in Persian to English dictionaries, you 59 must also check them in a monolingual dictionary.
60 S: Ok. (15) Organization, I have given it 16 but you 13. (. ) Why?
61 T: The sentences are disconnected.
62 S: Yeah!
63 T: Based on the checklist: 13-10: non-fluent, ideas are confused or disconnected.
64 S: (0.4) That’s right.
65 T: If you want to [discuss more]
66 S: [No] (0.3) Mechanics 4.
67 T: ↑That’s right?
68 S: Yeah, Thanks.

At the beginning of the conversation, the teacher asks Sadaf to look at the scores to see whether she is satisfied with the scores given to her writing and to negotiate on the scores (lines1-2). This directive results in a long pause (10 seconds), a non-lexical perturbation, and the positive response token “′yeah′” in a soft voice which are produced by Sadaf to express her partial agreement with the teacher’s scores half heartedly (line 3). In line 4-9, delivering ‘no’ two times, the teacher does not treat Sadaf’s partial agreement accountable, and by using an imperative, comparing the scores, and
putting a heavy emphasis on ‘can’ (CAN), the teacher works very hard to bring her into discussion. After a 0.8 second pause in line 10 during which there is no answer, the teacher repeats her elicitation by means of an imperative which is followed by another 0.8 second pause in line 12. In line 16, it is perhaps the teacher’s insistence on eliciting Sadaf’s view in lines 13-15 which leads to further participation by Sadaf as she expresses her satisfaction with the content score. Following her response, the teacher poses a confirmation check question by highlighting the grade she has given to the content section to make sure of her satisfaction with the score (line 17). Sadaf’s confirmation is accompanied by her dissatisfaction with the vocabulary score (lines 18). Two subsequent teacher-learner slots regarding the scores given to the vocabulary part are followed by a wh-question launched by the teacher to push Sadaf for a reason (line 22). Sadaf’s justification in response to the teacher’s pursuit of her opinion (lines 23-24) is accompanied by the teacher’s utterance on distorting the intended meaning of the text due to using the vocabulary in ungrammatical constructions (lines 25-27); she then attempts to draw Sadaf’s attention to a portion of her essay where the meaning is changed and asks her for clarification. Since the words used do not reflect the meaning which Sadaf intends to convey, the teacher offers the correct words and by posing a confirmation check in the form of a tag question, she asks her whether she looks up the words in a Persian to English dictionary (lines 29-30). Receiving a positive response from Sadaf (line 31), the teacher suggests her to check the words in a monolingual dictionary so as to prevent from making such errors (lines 32-33). Saying ‘OK!’, Sadaf seems to accept the teacher’s suggestion (line 34). In line 35, the teacher’s attempt to offer Sadaf some encouragement to discuss the scores of the other parts of her writing is followed by a 0.6 second pause (line 36). In the next turn, filling the waiting time, Sadaf steps back and refers to the content score and therefore contradicts her initial satisfaction with the content score in line 16 and poses a question to the teacher about her reason for giving the content section the score of 16 (line 37). The teacher’s response in line 38 is immediately acknowledged by Sadaf in line 39. In the same turn, Sadaf’s utterance produced in a soft voice “◦but the vocabulary◦” is accurately interpreted by the teacher as Sadaf’s dissatisfaction with the vocabulary score; therefore, the teacher poses a yes-no question on this issue (line 40). In response, Sadaf voices her dissatisfaction with the score by saying “-no-” in a low voice in line 41. The long pause (17 seconds) taken by the teacher to search the essay for the vocabularies in line 42 allows Sadaf to produce an utterance to persuade the teacher to upgrade the score in line 43 by referring to the novelty of the words used. In lines 44-45, the teacher tells that being new is not the only factor for the vocabularies to be effective, but they must be also used in appropriate grammatical structures. Moreover, the teacher asserts that not observing such a principle causes the meaning to be hampered. In the next slot (line 46), addressing a question with a rising intonation, Sadaf obviously attempts to draw the teacher’s attention to the fact that the use of all words has not distorted the intended message of the text. As a counterargument, the teacher reads out another example of the inappropriate use of vocabulary and seeks clarification (lines 47-48). Sadaf clarifies the meaning (lines 49), but due to the inconsistency between the vocabularies used and her intended meaning, the teacher offers the correct option in lines 50-51. Sadaf’s effort in justifying her error is apparent from the next turn (line 52) which is accompanied by the teacher’s repeated remarks that checking the words only in the Persian-to-English dictionary may lead to grammatical problems (line 53). The teacher’s turn is overlapped by Sadaf’s acknowledgement token in line 54 accompanied by the teacher’s completion of her prior turn (line 55). Then, Sadaf tries to offer some justification that looking up the words in her cell phone dictionary might have created such problems for her (lines 56-57).

In the next turn, the teacher initiates another sequence to proffer her prior suggestion about the need for checking the words in the monolingual dictionaries (lines 58-59). In line 59, Sadaf confirms the teacher’s utterance with a receipt token ‘OK!’ and takes a 15 second pause to shift the talk orientation towards discussing the organization section score in the form of an elicitation to seek the teacher’s reason for giving the organization section the score of 13. The teacher’s utterance on providing the reason in line 60 is met with Sadaf’s acknowledgement in line 61. The teacher’s goal to make her reason more convincing is reflected in the ensuing turn; the teacher reads the explanation provided by the checklist on the range from which the score is chosen (line 62), hence pushes Sadaf to accept it (line 63). Afterwards, the teacher’s attempt to create an opportunity for further discussion in line 64 is
overlapped by Sadaf’s rejection and taking a .03 second pause to focus on the score of the mechanics of writing (line 67). Uttering her utterance with an upward intonation in lines 6Y, the teacher asks for confirmation that Sadaf is satisfied with her score. Finally, Sadaf accepts her score and thanks the teacher to close down the conversation (line 6A).

Extract 1 offers some evidence that learning is a social, dynamic process in which people get engaged in co-constructing meaning (Wells, 1999). This illustration fits quite well with the Vygotskian understanding of development that knowledge is born out of the interaction among ‘unequal abilities’ which leads them to “extend [their] current competence” (Donato, 1994, p. 37). In such a situation, language, as the most powerful semiotic tool, mediates the process of knowledge formation. In principle, as Swain (2006) mentions, the problems are resolved through languaging, “the process of making meaning and shaping knowledge and experience through language” (p. 98). Specifically speaking, noticing discrepancies between the scores, the teacher and Sadaf made use of language to resolve them. Moreover, the teacher, by using the language, monitored the conversation, facilitated Sadaf’s contribution, directed Sadaf to express her ideas in order to play a pivotal role in the process of promoting her L2 writing ability, and moved towards more democratic models of assessment where there is shared knowledge and collaboration between the two sides of assessment (Shohamy, 2001). Another point worthy of note is the role of the scoring checklist coupled with collaborative dialogues in raising Sadaf’s awareness of the scoring procedure; as viewed, the mediatory tools helped Sadaf co-construct the understanding that there was a rationale behind the teacher’s scoring of her writing, and it was not a haphazard undertaking. When the teacher assured her that she had the authority to change her scores if she had based her argument on the scoring checklist, Sadaf ventured to express her opinions and challenge the teacher’s scoring. As indicated, in line with collaborative assessment premises, in this extract, both sides moved towards a mutually accepted score and had equal rights to offer and discuss their ideas.

Extract 2 displays an example of the interaction between the teacher and Sadaf on her last composition on “an embarrassing moment: what happened? Where did it happen? Who was there? Why was it embarrassing?”

Extract 2

1. S: What is the problem in language use?
2. T: The problem lies in using complex constructions and in forming tenses of the verbs.
4. T: What is important is that you do not patch the words together.
5. S: No. (.) First, I write what I want to write about, and then write my essay, and finally, revise it.
6. T: That’s GREAT.

Sadaf opens up the floor and invites comments from the teacher on her weaknesses in the language use; this is quickly responded by the teacher in line 1. Sadaf’s confirmation of the teacher’s utterance is obvious from the immediate acknowledgement ‘Yeah’, the positive evaluation ‘Exactly’, and the explicit utterance produced by Sadaf (line 4). In the next turn, the teacher states that Sadaf’s strength lies in her ability to organize the essay (line 5). Following the teacher’s remark, Sadaf acknowledges the teacher’s utterance by saying “no” which might be thought at first glance at odds with the teacher’s turn. In the same exchange, Sadaf’s extended response displays that it serves to confirm the teacher’s words; however, it is normally used as the negative token (lines 6-7). Sadaf’s turn is followed by an assessment by the teacher in line 8, a positive evaluation ‘that’s GREAT’ with an emphasis on the word ‘great’.

Extract 2 represents the major shift from the teacher-centered context to a more collaborative one. As is illustrated, Sadaf was not concerned about the scores, but she was eager to know her weaknesses in writing in order to work on them. Additionally, this extract reveals a reduction in the discrepancies between the two given scores in comparison with those of the first session partially due to the fact that Sadaf has obtained a better understanding into the process of assessment. More importantly, Sadaf gained a nuanced understanding of the growth and troublesome areas of her writing as a consequence of involving in dialogic interaction (Kowal & Swain, 1994). As is showcased, the points of contrast
between the two sides’ opinions on the scores decreased across sessions. In fact, Sadaf showed signs of moving away from mere reliance on the teacher for assessing her performance by means of performing the collaborative assessment coupled with collaborative dialogue. In essence, Sadaf was able to develop by being under the tutelage of her teacher and transmitted what discussed at the social level through previous sessions to the individual level and appropriated it as knowledge. Results of the interview also highlighted Sadaf’s growing awareness of the writing tasks as a fruit of holding the collaborative dialogue with the teacher and making use of the checklist as one of the meditational vehicles. For instance, Sadaf confessed that

The experiment was remarkably effective. Previously, I thought that I was not able to write even some successive sentences. Conducting this task, I learnt how to write an essay, how to include components in writing an essay, and how to use vocabularies in the correct grammatical structures. Moreover, by being involved in the interaction, I could enhance my writing abilities. Additionally, using the checklist assisted me to improve my writing to get better scores and to give fairer grades to my performance.

In order to put more flesh on the bones of our argument, some episodes from the teacher and Yalda (pseudonym) are presented. The extracts are included in order to show the microgenetic growth of the student. Extract 3 is taken from the interactional talk between the teacher and Yalda on her first essay.

Extract 3

1  T: Can we start? (.) What scores do you disagree with? Based on the scores, you can start.
2  Y: OK! (.) Uh, I have given the content section 25, but you have assigned it 17.
3  T: Do you think 17 is low?
4  Y: (0.3) Maybe, I have graded a high score.
5  T: OK! You should defend your idea based on this checklist.
6  Y: I think what I have written is relevant to the topic and the topic is developed.
7  T: I think you haven’t gone to details to support your idea. (.) Moreover, you haven’t covered one part of the topic. You haven’t written anything on what you do to study better.
8  Y: Yeah. (.) ↑75 is fair?
9  T: ↑Isn’t it? (.) Why? (.) You should discuss the scores separately. (.) I haven’t given you 75 haphazardly. (.) I have scored based on the checklist.
10 T: Why do you think it should be 19?
11 Y: I have used good vocabularies.
12 T: What are the vocabularies that you think they are good.
13 Y: (0.3) I don’t know.
14 T: Well, defend you idea. (.) If you offer a convincing reason, I will change the score.
15 Y: (0.7) You are certainly right.
16 T: No, no, not certainly. (.) I may have made mistakes in scoring. (.) As I changed the score of the student before you, I [can also change your score].
17 Y: [Although the vocabularies] are not excellent, they have been used correctly.
18 T: Your reason is convincing. (.) Yeah, you are right. (.) 18 is better. (.) It may be 28 fairer.
19 Y: ((Laughter))
20 T: What else? (.) What about the language use?
21 Y: Why have you given the language use section 16?
22 T: Although you have used the correct grammatical structures in the most parts, there are some errors in some other parts.
23 Y: ↑Just because of some errors?
24 T: Yeah. (.) They are few. (.) 18 is better.
36 Y: ((Laughing))
37 T: 24 is high. (.) The errors are relevant to simple grammatical structures.
38 Y: Yeah. (.) It is not in that range. (.) What about the mechanics section?
39 T: I have given the mechanics section 4 because of some errors in capitalization and spelling.
40 Y: That’s right.
41 T: Thanks for taking time for writing the essay.

The teacher opens up the floor with a question to secure agreement from Yalda that she is ready for the negotiation. Further, she asks her to discuss the scores with which she disagrees (lines 1-2). In response, Yalda answers the teacher’s request by using the receipt token ‘OK!’ and takes some hesitations to read the scores of the content section (line 3). In the next turn, the teacher’s question to elicit Yalda’s opinion in line 4 may be incorrectly interpreted by Yalda that her score is too high; for this reason, taking a 0.3 second pause in line 5, she utters that she might have given a high score. Just following the teacher’s remark on defending the viewpoint based on the checklist in line 6, Yalda airs her opinion on grading the content section 25 (line 7). What is apparent from the next turn is the teacher’s rejection of Yalda’s opinion by citing her reasons for giving the content section 16 which are so convincing that they lead Yalda to accepting them in line 11. In the same turn, Yalda produces an utterance in a rising intonation and projects a disagreement with the total score. In lines 12-13, the teacher takes the initiative with a confirmation check question produced with an upward intonation accompanied by a clarification request delivered with a highBrise pitch (↑Why?) seeking a ‘detailed response’, to borrow the words of Walsh and Li (2013). Additionally, she asks Yalda to discuss the scores separately according to the categorization of the checklist of the main writing components since she has scored her performance according to the same checklist.

In pursuit of the teacher’s utterance on discussing the scores separately, Yalda changes the focus of the conversation by posing a yes-no question to the teacher on the score given to the vocabulary section which is followed by the teacher’s acknowledgment and addressing the same question to Yalda to spark the discussion (line 15). Yalda’s positive answer is followed by an elicitation attempt by the teacher in line 17 pursuing Yalda’s reason for giving it 19. After Yalda’s response to the elicitation question in line 18, the teacher opens up another question to seek further clarification (line 19). In response, Yalda seems to be unwilling to support her idea due to her claim of insufficient knowledge (CIK) (Sert & Walsh, 2013) made after a 0.3 second hesitation (line 20). Not satisfied with the response, the teacher tries to trigger Yalda to rationalize her stance (line 21-22). In the next turn, taking a 0.7 second pause, Yalda yields to the teacher’s viewpoints totally (line 23). The teacher immediately delivers the item “no” multiple times to signpost her dissatisfaction with Yalda’s utterance. Just as the teacher mentions that the score of the learner before Yalda has been changed as a result of the discussion (lines 24-25), Yalda overlaps the teacher’s turn and gives justification (line 26) which gets the teacher to upgrade the vocabulary score (lines 27-28) after a 0.3 second pause. In line 29, Yalda shows her satisfaction with the teacher’s decision by laughing. Then, the teacher initiates another sequence to draw Yalda’s comment on the grades assigned to other aspects of writing, specifically the language use (line 30). Then, Yalda poses a question to the teacher to discover her reason for grading the language use section 16 (line 31). The teacher expounds on her reason in lines 32-33. In line 34, Yalda tries to highlight that the score given by the teacher is low by repeating a portion of the prior turn by the teacher with a rising intonation. The teacher’s action of upgrading the score in line 35 is followed by Yalda’s laughter to convey her sense of dissatisfaction with the score (line 36). In the next turn, the teacher’s attempt in line 37 to convince Yalda to accept her view is accompanied by Yalda’s confirmation and another elicitation which seeks the teacher’s opinion on the mechanics section (lines 38). In response, the teacher articulates the reason of grading the mechanics section 4 (lines 39-40) and Yalda accepts it by interjecting ‘Yeah’ (line 41). In the last line, the teacher ends the conversation by thanking Yalda for taking part in the discussion (line 42).

This extract also demonstrates the teacher and Yalda’s attempts to solve the problems through engaging in collaborative talk. Although Yalda addressed her disagreement over her total score, she did not defend her viewpoints on the basis of the checklist. It appears that under the influence of teacher-centered circumstances in which teachers assign scores to learners’ performance according to
a set of criteria often-times unknown to learners, and do not try to draw out learners’ opinions about their scores, do not afford them with opportunities to negotiate for their grades, and hence, change or improve them, Yalda thought that the teacher had given her performance an overall score which could not be modified. As illustrated, as soon as recognizing the possibility of altering her scores, Yalda tried to substantiate her ideas based on the checklist; in essence, she gets the teacher to improve her final grade. Such understanding could not be created but through the collaborative dialogue which occurred between the teacher and Yalda and assisted her to obtain a better understanding that rendering justifiable reasons for validating her claims, she could change her teacher’s opinion on her score and consequently raise her final grade.

Extract 4 is represented as another example of the conversation between the teacher and Yalda on her last essay while they were involved in the collaborative assessment.

Extract 4

1  Y: What’s happened?
2  T: Look at the scores.
3  Y: ↑22-24? ((Laughs))
4  T: You have graded the content section 22 and I 24. (. ) Look, it has improved. (. ) 5 Do you want to change it to a lower one? ((Laughs))
6  Y: No. (. ) That’s good ((Laughs)). (. ) In return, you have graded the language
7  use 17 but I 21. (. ) Why?
8  T: Why have you given 21 to the language use?
9  Y: Because there aren’t many grammatical errors.
10 T: I have given it 17 due to the errors in using correct prepositions and some 11 other grammatical errors. (. ) Regarding the language use, one of your strengths 12 is that you have observed the consistency in the use of tenses.
13   (0.7)
14  T: Oh! Look at the score on the vocabulary section. You have scored it 14 but [I 15 17].
16  Y: [Wow] ((laughs))
17  T: Your writing is improving but don’t content yourself with it.
18  Y: OK! (. ) But about the language use, the meaning is not obscure.
19  T: Yeah. (. ) The meaning is not obscure.
20  Y: How many scores have been added? ((laughs)).
21  T: 3 scores ((laughs)).
22  Y: I’m not accustomed [to using capital letters] at all.
23  T: [Why?]
24  Y: I don’t know. (. ) I don’t like capital letters.
25  T: Eh!
26  Y: (0.8) What is it?
27  T: I have put ‘my’ before “mother and father”.
28  Y: My parents.
29  T: My parents. (. ) GOOD.
30  Y: That’s good.
31  T: ↑That’s good? (. ) Is there any problem? (. ) You have given mechanics 5 but I 4.
32  Y: °Why?°
33  T: What do you think about the reason why I given it 4? (. ) What is included in the 34 mechanics?
35  Y: Capitalization.
36  T: Uh-huh, that you don’t like it ((laughs)) (. ) And also due to the 37 paragraphing.
38  Y: ((laughs)) Thanks
39  T: Regarding the organization, you should put some general sentences at first and 40 then go to details.
41  Y: OK!
Beginning with line 1, Yalda opens the conversation with a question. In the next turn, the teacher uses the imperative ‘look at the score’ to invite her to the discussion (line 2). Reading out the scores with a questioning intonation along with laughter, Yalda shows a surprise at them (line 3). By means of the comparison between the scores in lines 4-5, the teacher tries to provide Yalda with the positive feedback on her performance on the content section of her essay. Moreover, she makes use of humor accompanied with laughter and tells Yalda that she has the opportunity to change the score to a lower one. In response, producing the negative token “no”, Yalda expresses her satisfaction with the teacher’s score and poses an elicitation to the teacher seeking her logic for grading the language use section 17 (lines 6-7). Instead of answering her question, the teacher turns the interactional pattern around and addresses the same question to Yalda (line 8). In the next two turns (lines 9-12), Yalda and the teacher cite their reasons accompanied by the teacher’s remark on Yalda’s strength in the grammatical aspect of her writing. Following a 0.7 second pause, the teacher directs Yalda’s attention to the vocabulary part by using the change-of-state particle ‘oh’ in line 14-15 followed by the imperative ‘Look at the vocabulary’. Then, she reads the vocabulary scores which are overlapped by Yalda’s token ‘wow’ along with laughter to show her surprise and satisfaction with the score (line 16).

In the next turn, the teacher takes the initiative to say that Yalda’s writing is in the process of maturation and suggests her not to be satisfied with it (line 17). Saying ok, Yalda acknowledges the teacher’s utterance and instantaneously turns back to the language use score, and by uttering that the errors with it have not altered the meaning, she seeks a better grade (line 18). The teacher’s display of agreement in line 19 by repeating Yalda’s talk is followed by a question addressed along with laughter by Yalda in lines 20 to suggest a better grade. In response, the teacher’s act of increasing the score is accompanied with laughter (line 21). In line 22, Yalda’s utterance on not using the capital letters is overlapped by the teacher’s clarification request (line 23). In response, Yalda, at first, claims the insufficient knowledge of the response of the teacher’s elicitation, but then she utters that she does not like the capital letters (lines 24). Producing ‘eh’, the teacher expresses her surprise at Yalda’s utterance (line 25). After a 0.8 second pause, Yalda encounters a phrase corrected by the teacher and asks about the problem with it (line 26). Then, the teacher provides an explanation on the issue in line 27 which leads Yalda to putting the phrase in a better way (line 28). Afterwards, a repetition of the prior turn along with a strong positive evaluation (GOOD) may reflect the teacher’s confirmation of the previous talk by Yalda (line 29). Just after Yalda expresses her satisfaction with the conversation in line 30, the teacher employs certain interactional resources to ensure that Yalda is satisfied with the scores (line 31). The resources include echoing Yalda’s utterance with an upward intonation, a confirmation check, and a comparison between the scores on the mechanics of writing. Following Yalda’s question produced in a soft voice in line 32, the teacher launches another question in lines 33-34 to give Yalda the opportunity to identify her weaknesses herself. Further, she tries to help Yalda reflect more on her essay. Following Yalda’s immediate response in line 35, the teacher produces ‘uh-huh’ to show her acceptance of Yalda’s talk and offers an increment to Yalda’s previous turn and continues the sequence by pointing to another error on the mechanics section preceded by laughter (lines 36-37). Thanking the teacher with the laughing token, Yalda accepts the teacher’s view (line 38). In her turn, the teacher provides Yalda with a suggestion to enrich her essay in terms of the organization (lines 39-40), and Yalda accepts it by uttering the acknowledgement token ‘ok’ (line 41).

This last extract can be taken as Yalda’s advancement in writing as a consequence of conducting the CA in a sociocultural perspective. Both scores and the explicit teacher’s utterances indicate Yalda’s enhancement in writing. In principle, getting involved in the dialogic interaction and provided with the assisted scaffolding help (Swain, 2000), Yalda arrived at a richer understanding of the problems with her performance, gained a greater insight into her abilities, and developed a greater awareness of the language produced. The most striking is that although Yalda showed a strong tendency towards getting the best mark under the influence of the product-oriented perspective and consequently selected the scores from the highest ranges of the checklist in the first session, she gradually came to know that the learning process takes precedence over the learning product in the CA. Consequently, the discrepancy between the score given by Yalda and that given by the teacher was decreased in the last session. Further, the result of the interview confirmed the point that Yalda has got a good grasp of her strengths and weaknesses in writing. For example, Yalda mentioned that
That was a new experience that we [Yalda and the teacher] expressed our views about the scores and discussed over them. It made me aware of my errors not to make the same mistakes in the following sessions. The checklist was also useful for supporting my ideas about the grades.

To recap the discussion, from a sociocultural perspective, the microgenetic findings of the study gave corroborative evidence to Vygotsky’s (1978) statement that development takes place in the social encounters as a result of the mediation of more capable others and its transmission to the individual level. In particular, getting engaged in the dialogic interaction with their teacher, the EFL learners made use of the checklist as an objective meditational tool and the language (i.e., both social and private speech), as the most powerful meditational vehicle, to achieve an understanding co-constructed with the teacher through the moment-to-moment verbal interaction during conducting CA. Worthy of note is that, through performing CA, the learners moved towards self-regulation and were handed over more responsibility. In fact, they obtained opportunities to internalize the co-built knowledge and metacognitive awareness which were constructed by virtue of mediatory tools such as the checklist and dialogic interaction employed in this study.

Additionally, the findings can be justified on the basis of literature on collaborative dialogue (e.g., Kowal & Swain, 1994; Swain, 2000; 2006). As pointed out by Swain (2000, 2006), language can be used in order to deepen our knowledge and awareness of tasks at hand. In fact, engaging the learners in collaborative dialogues with their teacher sets the ground for the learners to render their initial thoughts to concrete words; then, they are benefited by an occasion to reflect upon their initial hypotheses about their writings under the guidance and support of a more capable teacher and by resorting to the provided checklist in order to test out and refine the hypotheses. Further, it is worthwhile to mention that the points of difference between the learners and teacher’s positions on various aspects of the writing tasks are worked as cognitive conflicts “in which different views, theories and beliefs are raised to a conscious level through talk” (Tocalli-Beller & Swain, 2005, p. 23). In reality, establishing a dialogue in which conflict perspectives are presented, the teacher provided learners with the opportunity to weigh their ideas against different perspectives, and in so doing raise their metacognitive awareness of their language problems. As Lemon (2001) claims, this is construed as a necessary factor for the cognitive conflict to promote learning.

More to the point, the findings may endorse Vygotsky (1996) and Wertsch’s (1985) views on the role of the dialogic encounter in fostering the development of the metacognitive awareness which, in its own right, deemed as a contributory factor in facilitating intellectual growth. In particular, the results of conducting interviews with the participants after the experiment indicated that the learners’ metacognitive awareness of the writing tasks increased over the sessions. In one of the interviews, Mozhgan stressed that

Before doing the collaborative work, I was able to produce simple sentences. Further, the sentences were replete with errors. To carry out the task successfully and to meet the criteria in the checklist, I searched the net to enrich the vocabularies, the grammatical constructions, and especially, mechanics which were my weaknesses in writing.

Similarly, in another illustration, Samaneh voiced that

It was a good experience because we talked about the writings. If I merely wrote something and got a score without discussion, I might not be able to understand my weaknesses, for instance, on not using discourse markers. Furthermore, using the checklist was helpful in scoring.

The findings of the interviews documented some evidence that the learners’ metacognitive knowledge which, according to Flavell (1979), entails personal knowledge (i.e., general knowledge about self), task knowledge (i.e., knowledge about the nature of the task, its goals, and skills needed to perform it successfully), and the strategic knowledge (i.e., knowledge about the effective strategies used to achieve the goals) was enhanced through getting engaged in dialogic interaction (Vygotsky, 1996; Wertsch, 1985). To be specific, during the study, the EFL learners accomplished to detect their strengths and weaknesses by the help of mediatory tools such as the checklist and collaborative dialogues. By way of illustration, Mozhgan voiced, “…especially, mechanics which were my weaknesses in writing”. Samaneh also mentioned that “…without discussion, I might not be able to understand my weaknesses”. In addition, Yalda said that “It (i.e., the collaborative dialogue) made me aware of my errors”. Moreover, they employed the appropriate strategies to cope with their weaknesses; Mozhgan pointed out that she surfed the net to perform the tasks more efficiently.
Furthermore, the learners’ awareness of the goals of writing tasks also increased as a result of using the checklist in the scoring procedure; as highlighted by Sadaf, “… I learnt…, how to include components in writing an essay”. Generally speaking, taking advantage of the mediatory roles of the collaborative dialogue and the checklist, learners obtained the metacognitive awareness of the tasks at hand, an insight into the components of a good writing, an understanding of their weaknesses, of their abilities to self-assess their performance on the basis of solid and reasonable criteria, and executed effective strategies to get on with the task of writing.

Conclusion

Results of the present study indicated that CA was more conductive to L2 writing than the teacher-centered assessment. In particular, implementing collaborative rather than unilateral assessment helped the EFL learners to better perform on the post-test. In fact, CA group profited from carrying out the self-assessment as one of the unique characteristics of the CA. Specifically speaking, gaining a deeper insight into writing components, inspiring an internal motivation and awareness of learning and assessment criteria (Fulcher, 2010), taking control over the learning (Oscarson, 1989), taking the responsibility for the learning processes (Klenowsky, 1995; Gardner, 2000), and identifying weaknesses and strengths in the writing on the part of the EFL learners (Harris, 1997; McNamara & Deane, 1995) were among the fruits of carrying out the self-assessment. The teacher-centered group, on the contrary, deprived of undertaking self-assessment and of involving in the collaborative dialogue to voice their opinions, did not achieve considerable growth in their final written performance.

Further, findings obtained from the microgenetic analysis suggested that learners benefited from the collaborative dialogue in which they were engaged during assessing their writing tasks. In fact, the dialogic interaction afforded the learners the chance to present, discuss, and test their ideas and consequently enhance their awareness of the writing tasks (Swain, 2000; 2006). Additionally, they attained mastery over the assessment process as an outcome of being provided with the ‘graduated’ and ‘contingent’ helps. In essence, learners first made use of the calibrated assistance, the checklist, and language to co-build knowledge with their teacher and gradually their dependence on the mediational tools decreased over time. In fact, they were better able to self-regulate the writing assessment (Vygotsky, 1978). Most simply put, the learners grew beyond their current capabilities as a consequence of learning through the social medium (Vygotsky, 1987).

Especially, worthy of note here is the results of the interviews conducted after the treatment sessions. In principle, in pursuit of involving in mutual interaction, learners’ metacognitive awareness of the writing tasks, their abilities and weaknesses in writing, and the strategies which could be used to grapple with their problems increased.

Though we made the best of our efforts to conduct this study, there are some limitations to it that should be acknowledged. First and foremost, the number of the participants was limited; second, the researchers were not allowed to assign the CA participants to two groups. Therefore, the generalizability of the findings should be done with some caution. Consequently, there is scope for further investigations on both kinds of CA with the larger number of participants and learners of other levels of proficiency. Furthermore, this study did not attempt to examine the effects of CA on specific components of writing provided by the analytic checklist developed by Jacob et al. (1981). Thus, a fruitful line of research would be to investigate how different aspects of writing might benefit from engaging in CA procedures.

References


Appendix A: Writing Tasks
The following eight tasks were used in this study.

1. What tips for success can you think of? Discuss your ideas and make a list of your tips.
   Tips for success: How to study better

2. Think about your personality traits. My personality:
   - What are your positive personality traits?  - Are there any traits you would like to change?
   - Has your personality changed through the years? If so, how?

3. Think of the place and a friend you would like to visit. Write an email to a friend about your travel plans. An email to a friend:
   - What is your friend's name?            - Where does your friend live?
   - When do you plan to visit?              - What would you like to do there?
   - Where is your dream home?            - How many rooms does it have?
   - What does it look like?                    - Is there anything unusual about your home?

4. Think about how you manage stress. Managing stress:
   - How much stress do you feel?        - What makes you stressed?
   - How well do you manage stress?    - What do you do?

5. Think of natural wonder in your country. A natural wonder:
   - Where is it?                        - What does it look like?
   - What is the best thing about it?  - Is it easy to get there?

6. A biography: discuss famous people who made a big difference in people lives.
   - What were their names?            - What do you know about their lives?
   - What did they do?                  - How did they make a difference?

7. Think of an embarrassing moment that happened to you or someone you know. An embarrassing moment:
   - What did it happen?                        - Where did it happen?
   - Who was there?                                - Why was it embarrassing?
# Appendix B: The scoring checklist

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Aspect</th>
<th>Level</th>
<th>Criteria</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Content</td>
<td>30-27</td>
<td>Excellent to very good: Knowledgeable; substantive; thorough development of topic; relevant to assigned topic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>26-22</td>
<td>Good to average: Some knowledge of subject; adequate range; limited development of topic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>21-17</td>
<td>Fair to poor: Limited knowledge of subject; little substance; inadequate development of topic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>16-</td>
<td>Very poor: Does not show knowledge of subject; non-substantive; not pertinent; or not</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organization</td>
<td>20-18</td>
<td>Excellent to very good: Fluent expression; well-organized; ideas clearly stated/supported; logical sequencing; cohesive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>17-14</td>
<td>Good to average: Somewhat choppy; loosely organized but main ideas stands out; limited support; logical but incomplete sequencing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>13-10</td>
<td>Fair to poor: Non-fluent; ideas confused or disconnected; lacks logical sequencing and development</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>9-7</td>
<td>Very poor: Does not communicate; no organization; or not enough to evaluate.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vocabulary</td>
<td>20-18</td>
<td>Excellent to very good: Sophisticated range; effective word/idiom choice and usage; word form mastery; appropriate mastery</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>17-14</td>
<td>Good to average: Adequate range; occasional errors of word/idiom form, choice, usage but meaning not obscured</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>13-10</td>
<td>Fair to poor: Limited range; frequent errors of word/idiom form, choice, usage; meaning confused or obscured</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>9-7</td>
<td>Very poor: Essential translation; little knowledge of English vocabulary, idioms, word form; or not enough to evaluate.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Language use</td>
<td>25-22</td>
<td>Excellent to very good: Effective complex constructions; fewer errors of agreement, tense, number, word order/function, articles, pronouns, prepositions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>21-18</td>
<td>Good to average: Effective but simple constructions; minor problems in complex constructions; several errors of agreement, tense, number, word order/function, articles, pronouns, prepositions but meaning seldom obscured</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>17-11</td>
<td>Fair to poor: Major problems in simple/complex constructions; frequent errors of negation, agreement, tense, number, word order/function, articles, pronouns, prepositions and/or fragments, run-ons, deletions; meaning confused or obscured</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>10-5</td>
<td>Very poor: Virtually no mastery of sentence construction rules; dominated by errors, does not communicate, or not enough to evaluate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mechanics</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>Excellent to very good: Demonstrates mastery of conventions; few errors of spelling, punctuation, capitalization, paragraphing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Good to average: Occasional errors of spelling, punctuation, capitalization, paragraphing but meaning not obscured</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Fair to poor: Frequent errors of spelling, punctuation, capitalization, paragraphing; poor handwriting; meaning confused or obscured</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Very poor: No mastery of conventions; dominated by errors of spelling, punctuation, capitalization, paragraphing; handwriting illegible, or not enough to evaluate</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

# Appendix C: Transcription key

Partially adopted from Hutchby and Wooffitt (2008)

(1.8) Numbers enclosed in parentheses indicate a pause. The number represents the number of seconds of duration of the pause, to one decimal place. A pause of less than 0.2 seconds is marked by (.)

[ ] Brackets around portions of utterances show that those portions overlap with a portion of another speaker’s utterance.

:: A colon after a vowel or a word is used to show that the sound is
extended. The number of colons shows the length of the extension.

? A question mark indicates that there is slightly rising intonation.
. A period indicates that there is slightly falling intonation.
, A comma indicates a continuation of tone.
- A dash indicates an abrupt cut off, where the speaker stopped speaking suddenly.
↑ ↓ Up or down arrows are used to indicate that there is sharply rising or falling intonation. The arrow is placed just before the syllable in which the change in intonation occurs.

Underlines indicate speaker emphasis on the underlined portion of the word.
CAPS Capital letters indicate that the speaker spoke the capitalized portion of the utterance at a higher volume than the speaker's normal volume.
° This indicates an utterance that is much softer than the normal speech of the speaker. This symbol will appear at the beginning and at the end of the utterance in question.
> <, <> ‘Greater than’ and ‘less than’ signs indicate that the talk they surround was noticeably faster, or slower than the surrounding talk.

Appendix D: Samples of writings:
How to study better:

Everyone has customs for good reading that this is away customs of others.

A good study subsist in remembrance and always raise letter level.

I have customs for better study for parable:

1. I clean my room.
2. I bring my books.
3. While I study, I take note to subsist what I study in my remembrance.
4. Presently, I think I should stay in my room because I have more concentration and I relearn the words.
5. I should have enough composure but, my sister doesn’t have this customs for example:

-she doesn’t clean the room but she gets a very good grade.

My habits for better study differ with other habits for example: with my sister, my brother, and my friends.

Content = 27
Organization = 16
Vocabulary = 18
Language use = 16
Mechanics = 5

Content = 16
Org = 13
Vocab. = 13
Gram use = 13
Mechanics = 4

Session 1
An embarrassing moment:

Every person experiences various moments in her life. Some of the moments are good and some are bad. One of the bad moments are embarrassing moments. I also experience an embarrassing moment.

I am a person that always is not shy, but I shy when I do bad work. For example, my brother has guests last week. I also were there. Meanwhile, the fruit dish fall of my hand and it breaks. I’m embarrassed that moment and I did not go to living room for 1 or 2 hours. My aunt family and my family were also in the party. It was very bad experience.

As a result, person’s experiences are different with other persons. I think embarrassing moments are bad experiences for all persons.

con = 27 — 27
olgy = 18 — 18
vocab = 18 — 16
luse = 21 — 17
mechanics = 5 — 5