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Micro-Level Peer Scaffolding in Academic Essay Writing Among Symmetrical Vietnamese EFL Learners

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***Abstract*—Guided by Sociocultural Theory, this study explores micro-level peer scaffolding strategies used by symmetrical EFL university students across pre-, while-, and post-writing stages. Using a mixed-methods design, data from audio recordings, interviews, and questionnaires (N=150) were analyzed via an expanded coding framework. Results show scaffolding is stage-sensitive: conceptual strategies (e.g., *Questioning–Clarifying*) dominated pre-writing; strategic moves (e.g., *Stating–Modeling*) guided drafting; and evaluative strategies (e.g., *Suggesting–Rewording*) supported revision. Affective scaffolding, though less frequent, underpinned a collaborative climate. A key finding was the gap between observed frequent questioning and learners' lower self-reported use, suggesting culturally mediated implicit mediation. The study offers a stage-based scaffolding model, demonstrating how reciprocal peer dialogue within a shared ZPD transforms writing from an individual task into a co-constructed process, with implications for fostering autonomy and competence in collaborative EFL writing instruction.**

***Index Terms*—Sociocultural Theory, peer scaffolding, micro-strategies, academic writing, ZPD, symmetrical peers**

I. Introduction

Academic writing in EFL contexts poses substantial cognitive, linguistic, and rhetorical challenges, extending beyond surface features to metacognitive and affective dimensions, often resulting in learner anxiety and difficulty producing coherent academic texts (Aldabbus & Almansouri, 2022; Ramadhanti & Yanda, 2021). In line with the shift toward learner-centered pedagogy, collaborative learning approaches, particularly peer scaffolding, have gained prominence for promoting interaction, knowledge co-construction, and affective support within learners' ZPD (Alam, 2023; Chairinkam & Yawiloeng, 2021, 2024; Rafaha et al., 2025; Tinggie et al., 2023).

Within the SCT framework, peer scaffolding has been shown to enhance idea generation, revision, and collaborative engagement in L2 writing (Kim, 2022). However, prior research has largely emphasized macro-level strategies in asymmetrical pairings, leaving limited insight into how micro-level dialogic moves, namely as questioning–clarifying, stating–modeling, and suggesting–rewording, are enacted among symmetrical peers of comparable proficiency. Despite initial attempts to examine sub-strategies of questioning (Tinggie et al., 2023), a comprehensive micro-analytic account spanning the full writing process remains lacking.

Moreover, little is known about how these strategies evolve functionally across pre-, while-, and post-writing stages or how they are shaped by socio-cultural contexts. In settings such as Vietnam, where norms of respect, face-saving, and conflict avoidance prevail, peer interaction and feedback practices may differ substantially from Western classrooms. Addressing these gaps, the present study examines micro-level peer scaffolding strategies used by symmetrical EFL learners across the academic essay writing process, guided by SCT. Specifically, it asks: *What micro-level scaffolding strategies are employed by symmetrical EFL peers across the pre-writing, while-writing, and post-writing stages of academic essay writing?*

II. Literature Review

A. Theoretical Framework

The study is employed in Vygotsky's (1978) SCT, which posits that higher-order cognitive functions, including language learning, originate in and are mediated through social interaction. A central tenet is the ZPD, indicated as the distance between knowledge a learner can get independently and what they can gain with guidance by more knowledgeable others (MKOs), such as teachers or peers (Lantolf & Poehner, 2023; Ninche, 2025). Scaffolding, the temporary and adjustable support provided within the ZPD, enables learners to internalize new skills and knowledge (Puntambekar, 2022; Wood et al., 1976). In the EFL context of academic writing, peer scaffolding may thus be understood as the dialogic and strategic support learners provide one another to co-navigate the complexities of writing

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tasks, thereby collectively advancing within their shared ZPD. SCT provides the foundational lens to examine how such mediation is linguistically realized and functionally adapted through peer interaction.

B. Peer Scaffolding in L2 Writing

Peer scaffolding is commonly understood as a dialogic, reciprocal process through which learners support one another in addressing cognitive and linguistic challenges within their ZPD (Li & Kim, 2016). Writing research has identified a range of macro-level scaffolding strategies, such as questioning, suggesting, elaborating, and providing feedbacks that contribute to learner autonomy and reduced reliance on teachers (Chairinkam & Yawiloeng, 2021; Storch, 2002). Empirical evidence broadly confirms the value of peer scaffolding for L2 writing development, including gains in textual quality, strategic regulation, and affective engagement (Axrorova, 2025; Chairinkam & Yawiloeng, 2024; Hasan & Bidin, 2023).

Nevertheless, existing studies reveal two persistent limitations. First, scaffolding effects are often uneven and largely confined to surface-level features, with limited impact on higher-order meaning-making and argumentation (Chairinkam & Yawiloeng, 2024; Sousa et al., 2024). Second, the enactment of scaffolding is strongly mediated by socio-cultural norms particularly in Vietnam where face-saving and conflict avoidance constrain direct critique and shape feedback practices (Zohrevandi et al., 2024).

Crucially, despite growing interest in interactional detail, the mediational process of peer scaffolding remains insufficiently theorized at the micro level. While Tinggie et al. (2023) move beyond macro categories by identifying questioning sub-types (e.g., questioning–eliciting, questioning–elaborating), these classifications remain largely functional and do not fully capture how questioning operates as context-sensitive mediation, which is, how it is contingent on peer alignment, affective positioning, and moment-by-moment negotiation of support. As a result, the situated meanings and supportive force of micro-level scaffolding moving across different writing stages remain underexplored, pointing to the need for a more fine-grained, contextually grounded analysis of peer interaction.

C. Identifying Research Gaps

A synthesis of prior research crystallizes three interconnected gaps this study targets to address. First, there is a lack of fine-grained analysis of micro-strategies. Although frameworks like Li and Kim's (2016) and Chairinkam and Yawiloeng's (2021) catalog macro-behaviors, and Tinggie et al. (2023) begin to unpack sub-strategies for *Questioning*, the full spectrum of micro-level moves (e.g., *stating–modeling*, *suggesting–rewording*) and their precise discursive functions in authentic peer talk remain inadequately mapped.

Second, prior studies have not systematically developed a stage-based model of scaffolding evolution. While research notes that strategy use may vary by phase (e.g., more questioning in pre-writing), there is no detailed account of how the functional focus of scaffolding strategically shifts from conceptual development in pre-writing, to strategic drafting in while-writing, and finally to evaluative revision in post-writing. Understanding this dynamic transition is key to appreciating scaffolding as a process aligned with the internalization of writing skills.

Third, the existing literature exhibits a predominance of studies on asymmetrical (expert-novice) or teacher-student dyads (Chairinkam & Yawiloeng, 2021; Kim, 2022; Tinggie et al., 2023). Consequently, the distinct dynamics of *symmetrical peer* scaffolding, where participants share comparable proficiency and authority, are less understood. This symmetrical context, where mediation is likely more reciprocal and co-constructed, warrants specific investigation.

Therefore, this study seeks to bridge these gaps by conducting a micro-analysis of the scaffolding strategies employed by symmetrical EFL peer pairs across the three core stages of academic writing. In doing so, it aims to extend SCT to the micro-interactional level and offer a nuanced, stage-based model of peer support with specific relevance to collaborative writing pedagogy.

III. METHODOLOGY

This study adopted a convergent parallel mixed-methods design to examine micro-level peer scaffolding strategies and their functional evolution across the academic writing process (Creswell & Clark, 2017). Multiple data sources including audio-recorded peer interactions, semi-structured interviews, and a questionnaire, were triangulated to enhance validity and objectivity (Mackey & Gass, 2015; Ramirez-Montoy & Lugo-Ocando, 2020), addressing limitations of single-method studies (e.g., Chairinkam & Yawiloeng, 2021; Tinggie et al., 2023).

Participants were 20 third-year English majors at a university in central Vietnam, purposively paired into 10 symmetrical dyads based on formative and summative writing assessments to ensure comparable proficiency, consistent with Vygotsky's ZPD. Each pair completed an academic essay task across pre-, while-, and post-writing stages (Faraj, 2015), with all interactions audio-recorded. Follow-up semi-structured interviews were conducted with all 20 participants. To contextualize these findings, a 30-item five-point Likert-scale questionnaire was administered to 150 students from the same population.

All interaction data were transcribed and coded using a macro–micro analytical framework adapted from Li and Kim (2016), Chairinkam and Yawiloeng (2021), and Tinggie et al. (2023). As summarized in Table 1, the framework comprises 10 macro-strategies (e.g., Questioning, Stating) and their associated micro-strategies (e.g., Questioning–Clarifying, Stating–Modeling). Each utterance was assigned one or more codes based on its contextual scaffolding

function. Strategy frequencies were calculated for each writing stage and, following Yawiloeng (2021), converted into mean (M) and standard deviation (SD) values per pair to enable standardized comparison using a five-point frequency scale (4.51–5.00 = frequently used; 3.51–4.50 = almost every time; 2.51–3.50 = occasionally; 1.51–2.50 = almost never; 1.00–1.50 = never used).

TABLE 1
CODED PEER SCAFFOLDING STRATEGIES IN ACADEMIC ESSAY WRITING

Peer scaffolding (macro)	Peer scaffolding (micro)	Characteristics
ACKNOWLEDGING (Ack.)	**Acknowledging–Thanking**	Peers express gratitude to provide emotional support and encourage continued collaboration.
	Acknowledging–Praising	Peers use praise to reinforce confidence and affirm the value of their partners' contributions.
AGREEING (Agr.)	**Agreeing–Accepting**	Peers agree with partners' ideas, acknowledging contributions and facilitating writing progress.
	Agreeing–Supporting	Peers reinforce agreed ideas to strengthen confidence during essay development.
DISAGREEING (Dis.)	**Disagreeing–Rejecting**	Peers challenge ideas critically to identify weaknesses or inconsistencies.
	Disagreeing–Softening	Peers offer mitigated disagreement to maintain rapport while suggesting revisions.
	Disagreeing–Replacing	Peers reject ideas and propose alternatives to improve expression.
REQUESTING (Req.)	**Requesting–Commenting**	Peers invite additional comments to broaden perspectives and develop the essay.
	Requesting–Checking	Peers request content review to identify errors and enhance accuracy.
	Requesting–Guiding	Peers provide directives to guide subsequent idea development.
	Requesting–Planning	Peers plan the essay to support time management and structural organization.
	Requesting–Stating	Peers prompt idea articulation to enhance clarity and precision.
STATING (Sta.)	**Stating–Informing**	Peers share information to support content development.
	Stating–Organizing	Peers discuss structure to organize arguments coherently.
	Stating–Selecting	Peers assist in selecting relevant ideas to maintain focus.
	Stating–Modeling	Peers model writing by providing examples.
	Stating-Commenting	Peers evaluate drafts by identifying strengths and weaknesses.
ELABORATING (Ela.)	**Elaborating–Detailing**	Peers elaborate details to deepen content.
	Elaborating–Connecting	Peers connect ideas across sections to ensure coherence.
JUSTIFYING (Jus.)	**Justifying–Reasoning**	Peers justify suggestions through reasoning.
SUGGESTING (Sug.)	**Suggesting–Rewording**	Peers suggest lexical or phrasal revisions for accuracy and naturalness.
	Suggesting–Correcting	Peers correct grammatical or structural errors.
	Suggesting–Ideating	Peers contribute new ideas to expand content.
ELICITING (Eli.)	**Eliciting–Encouraging**	Peers encourage continued idea contribution.
QUESTIONING (Que.)	**Questioning–Initiating**	Peers initiate discussion through opening questions.
	Questioning–Clarifying	Peers seek clarification to resolve ambiguity.
	Questioning–Confirming	Peers request confirmation to align understanding.
	Questioning–Requesting	Peers ask for assistance to facilitate knowledge sharing.
	Questioning–Suggesting	Peers pose suggestion-oriented questions to explore alternatives.
	Questioning–Eliciting	Peers elicit ideas to stimulate creative thinking.

To ensure rigor, 20% of the data were independently cross-coded, yielding high inter-coder reliability (Cohen's κ = 0.82). Interview data were thematically analyzed within an SCT-based scaffolding framework, while questionnaire results provided quantitative triangulation with acceptable internal consistency (Cronbach's α = 0.78). Validity was supported through expert-reviewed content validity, construct validity confirmed by EFA identifying a three-factor structure explaining 69% of variance, and ecological validity ensured by authentic classroom data. Member checking further enhanced the credibility of qualitative interpretations.

IV. RESULT

A. Micro-Peer Scaffolding Strategies in the Pre-Writing Stage

In pre-writing stage, the ten symmetrical student pairs from EFL writing classes were observed during their pair discussion sessions, which focused on brainstorming, outlining, and preparing writing materials. In parallel, each pair engaged in topic-based discussions with "*Nowadays, many people say that animals should be protected, while some believe animals should be used for entertainment*". The micro-level strategies were represented by their frequency of occurrence, as illustrated in Table 2.

TABLE 2
FREQUENCY OF MICRO-PEER SCAFFOLDING STRATEGIES IN PRE-WRITING

PSS	P1	P2	P3	P4	P5	P6	P7	P8	P9	P10	Total (micro)	Total (macro)
Ack-Prai.	0	2	0	0	1	0	0	0	1	1	**5**	**(Ack.) = 5**
Ack-Tha.	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	**0**	
Agr-Acc.	1	4	3	4	19	0	6	1	0	2	**40**	**(Agr.) = 40**
Agr-Sup.	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	**0**	
Dis-Rej.	0	1	0	1	2	0	0	0	0	0	**4**	**(Disa.) = 9**
Dis-Repl.	0	0	0	0	2	0	2	0	0	1	**5**	
Dis-Soft.	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	**0**	
Ela-Conn.	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	0	0	0	**2**	**(Ela.) = 14**
Ela-Deta.	0	4	0	0	3	0	5	0	0	0	**12**	
Eli-Enco.	0	1	0	1	2	0	1	1	0	1	**7**	**(Eli.) = 7**
Jus-Rea.	0	0	0	0	0	1	4	0	0	0	**5**	**(Jus.) = 5**
Que-Clar.	0	4	3	1	11	1	2	0	1	1	**24**	**(Que.) = 65**
Que-Conf.	1	8	4	5	6	2	5	0	2	1	**34**	
Que-Elic.	0	2	1	0	1	0	0	0	1	0	**5**	
Que-Init.	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	**1**	
Que-Requ.	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	**0**	
Que-Sugg.	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	**1**	
Req-Chec.	0	2	0	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	**4**	**(Req.) = 37**
Req-Comm.	0	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	**2**	
Req-Guid.	1	10	1	0	11	0	4	1	0	0	**28**	
Req-Plann.	0	0	0	0	2	1	0	0	0	0	**3**	
Req-Stat.	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	**0**	
Sta-Comm.	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	**0**	**(Sta.) = 123**
Sta-Info.	6	10	5	3	16	2	7	1	4	12	**66**	
Sta-Mode.	4	2	1	1	6	0	2	1	2	3	**22**	
Sta-Orga.	1	8	2	1	8	3	8	0	1	1	**33**	
Sta-Sele.	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	1	0	**2**	
Sug-Corr.	0	0	1	2	0	0	2	0	0	2	**7**	**(Sug.) = 19**
Sug-Idea.	0	3	2	0	0	0	5	0	0	1	**11**	
Sug-Rewo.	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	**1**	

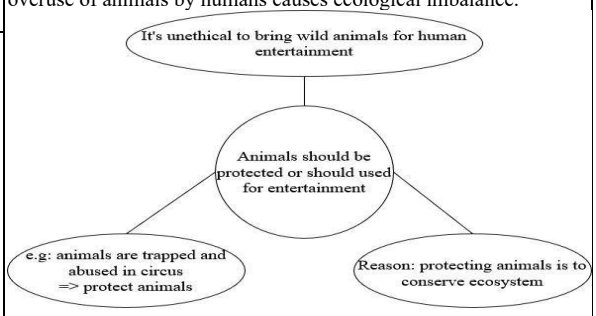
The pre-writing stage showed substantial collaboration, with 323 scaffolding instances dominated by Stating (f = 123), Questioning (f = 65), and Requesting (f = 37). Frequent Stating–Informing and Questioning–Confirming reflected a focus on co-constructing and verifying shared knowledge. Supported by Agreeing and Requesting–Guiding, and with minimal Disagreeing, interactions fostered a psychologically safe environment for open dialogue and idea negotiation.

Interview data aligned closely with these observations, revealing that learners perceived scaffolding in pre-writing as multi-faceted. Participants described collaboratively brainstorming and outlining ideas, with one noting, "*My partner and I made the outline together... generated ideas, searched for sources...*" (S1). They emphasized co-preparing vocabulary, clarifying task requirements, and providing structural guidance to organize their essays. Strategic planning, such as dividing tasks and managing time, was also reported, alongside affective support aimed at reducing anxiety, as one student shared, "*Before writing, we interacted actively to reduce stress and generate ideas*." (S13). These functions collectively underscore pre-writing as a critical mediational phase where learners jointly establish the cognitive, linguistic, and emotional foundations necessary for writing. This process is further exemplified in the representative transcript provided in Table 3, which demonstrates the interplay of micro-strategies, including the use of *translanguaging* to facilitate understanding.

TABLE 3
AN EXAMPLE OF A PRE-WRITING EXTRACT

<table>
<tr><th>Move/Statement</th><th>Strategy</th><th>Examples of Written Products</th></tr>
<tr><td>S1: This part is to write the introduction, isn't it?</td><td>Questioning--Confirming</td><td rowspan="14">Content of the product generated from the discussion:
Essay topic:
The issue of using animals for entertainment purposes (animal entertainment).
Essay type: Discussion Essay
Discuss both views and give your opinion — discussing two opposing perspectives (supporting vs. opposing the use of animals for entertainment).

Introduction paragraph structure developed through discussion:
General statement:
"Nowadays, there are many opinions suggesting that animals should be protected, while some believe animals should be used for entertainment."
Paraphrased topic:
"It's true that we should prevent the use of animals for entertainment for a number of reasons."
Thesis statement:
"This essay will discuss both views and provide reasons why animals should not be used for entertainment."

Main body ideas planned:
Reason 1: It is unethical to use wild animals for human entertainment; they are often abused or exploited in circuses.
Reason 2: Protecting animals helps maintain ecosystem balance, as overuse of animals by humans causes ecological imbalance.
 

This is an example of ideas discussed from symmetrical peers for Extract 1</td></tr>
<tr><td>S2: Alright!</td><td>Agreeing--Accepting</td></tr>
<tr><td>S1: Now, we will say something like this: Nowadays, there are many opinions suggesting that animals should be protected, while some believe animals should be used for entertainment.
Then we will say, "Animals should not be used for entertainment,"</td><td>Stating--Informing</td></tr>
<tr><td>S2: Then we will say, "We will discuss both views."</td><td>Stating--Modeling</td></tr>
<tr><td>S1: Hmmm, "There are so many controversial arguments." I don't know what you are talking about. For example, I'm not using any animal entertainment.</td><td>Stating--Informing</td></tr>
<tr><td>S2: I'm not using any animal entertainment. I'm just using this site. Hmmm, Let's see.</td><td>Stating--Informing</td></tr>
<tr><td>S2: The site is cold. Wait a moment, wait a moment. Practices, to provide, comprehensive, understanding, disappear.</td><td>Requesting--Guiding</td></tr>
<tr><td>S1: So, first, we will write: it's true that we should prevent the use of animals for entertainment for a number of reasons.</td><td>Stating--Modeling</td></tr>
<tr><td>S1: After that, we will list out the ideas.</td><td>Stating--Organizing</td></tr>
<tr><td>S2: Firstly, there are many animals that are abused in circuses and... Perhaps animals are being exploited in circuses.</td><td>Stating--Informing</td></tr>
<tr><td>S2: Next, hmmm, for example, there are many animals that are trapped and abused in circuses.</td><td>Stating--Informing</td></tr>
<tr><td>S2: In line, secondly, protecting animals is also the best way to protect the ecosystem.</td><td>Stating--Modeling</td></tr>
</table>

This extract illustrates the co-construction of an essay outline through peer scaffolding. The dialogue began with a Questioning–Confirming move to align task understanding, followed by Stating–Informing and Stating–Modeling to formulate the introduction and thesis. Through Requesting–Guiding and Agreeing–Accepting exchanges, the pair refined their ideas, culminating in two core arguments: "*Using animals for entertainment is unethical*" and "*Protecting animals helps maintain ecological balance*," supported by the concrete example that "animals are trapped and abused in circuses." This sequenced interaction demonstrates integrated conceptual and strategic scaffolding, where collaborative dialogue within a shared ZPD directly produced a coherent and logically structured outline.

B. Micro-Peer Scaffolding Strategies in the While-Writing Stage

After completing discussions in the pre-writing stage, the pairs proceeded to the while-writing phase, during which they continued composing their essays and engaging in discussions when necessary. This stage was characterized by highly insightful interactional exchanges, where learners collaboratively co-constructed meaning and supported one another in developing their first drafts. The recorded classroom observation data, once coded, revealed the frequency of micro-strategies employed during this stage, as presented in Table 4.

TABLE 4
FREQUENCY OF MICRO-PEER SCAFFOLDING STRATEGIES IN WHILE-WRITING

PSS	P 11	P 12	P 13	P 14	P 15	P 16	P 17	P 18	P 19	P 20	Total (micro)	Total (macro)
Ack-Prai.	0	3	0	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	**5**	**(Ack.) = 7**
Ack-Tha.	0	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	**2**	
Agr-Acc.	1	1	2	4	10	1	5	0	8	12	**44**	**(Agr.) = 45**
Agr-Sup.	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	**1**	
Dis-Rej.	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	3	0	**3**	**(Dis.) = 3**
Dis-Repl.	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	**0**	
Dis-Soft.	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	**0**	
Ela-Conn.	0	0	0	0	1	0	2	0	0	0	**3**	**(Ela.) = 33**
Ela-Deta.	2	4	2	3	3	2	3	4	0	7	**30**	
Eli-Enco.	0	1	0	0	1	1	0	1	0	0	**4**	**(Eli.) = 4**
Jus-Rea.	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	2	0	**3**	**(Jus.) = 3**
Que-Clar.	0	2	0	1	14	0	10	0	12	7	**46**	**(Que.) = 92**
Que-Conf.	3	2	2	2	5	1	6	0	12	7	**40**	
Que-Elic.	0	4	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	**4**	
Que-Init.	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	**0**	
Que-Requ.	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	**2**	
Que-Sugg.	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	**0**	
Req-Chec.	1	1	0	0	4	0	0	0	1	0	**7**	**(Req.) = 29**
Req-Comm.	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	**2**	
Req-Guid.	1	2	2	0	5	1	3	0	1	3	**18**	
Req-Plann.	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	**1**	
Req-Stat.	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	**1**	
Sta-Comm.	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	**0**	**(Sta.) = 188**
Sta-Info.	1	6	0	0	20	0	7	2	6	26	**68**	
Sta-Mode.	3	6	7	6	7	0	7	0	14	23	**73**	
Sta-Orga.	2	1	4	4	9	2	7	2	7	6	**44**	
Sta-Sele.	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	2	0	**3**	
Sug-Corr.	0	0	0	0	4	1	2	0	5	2	**14**	**(Sug.) = 31**
Sug-Idea.	0	3	0	0	1	2	0	0	1	1	**8**	
Sug-Rewo.	1	0	1	0	2	0	0	0	3	2	**9**	

The while-writing stage involved the most intensive interaction, dominated by Stating (f = 188) and Questioning (f = 92). Frequent Stating–Modeling (f = 73) and Stating–Informing (f = 68) highlight collaborative text construction through shared examples and content. Questioning, mainly for Clarifying and Confirming, regulated understanding and negotiated meaning within a shared ZPD. The supportive presence of Agreeing (f = 45) and Suggesting (f = 31), alongside minimal Disagreeing (f = 3), reflects a cooperative climate characterized by a reciprocal Stating–Questioning–Agreeing pattern of mediated regulation.

Interview data substantiate this quantitative profile, revealing a multifaceted collaborative process. Participants emphasized co-constructing content, noting, *"While writing, we added ideas for each other and checked whether we stayed on topic."* (S5). Linguistic scaffolding was frequently reported, as one student shared, *"While writing, we thought of transition words and suggested them to each other."* (S3). Learners also described joint editing and strategic management: *"While writing, we corrected spelling mistakes together."* (S1) and *"We divided time management during*

writing." (S2). Affective and regulatory support was integral, with participants stating, *"While writing, we motivated each other to make richer essays."* (S6) and *"When I went off track, my peer noticed and guided me back."* (S18).

Collectively, these findings depict the while-writing stage as a period of integrated cognitive, linguistic, and affective scaffolding. The fluid alternation between the roles of supporter and recipient exemplifies Vygotskian co-regulation, facilitating the internalization of writing strategies through collaborative practice, essentially learning to write together before writing alone. To further illustrate these interactional processes and the timely provision of peer scaffolding, Table 5 presents a representative extract of peer discussions observed during the while-writing stage.

TABLE 5
AN EXAMPLE OF A WHILE-WRITING EXTRACT

Move/Statement	Strategy	Examples of Written Products
S2: Let's start writing the first paragraph now.	**Stating--Organizing**	—
S1: Yes, in this paragraph, we will emphasize the main idea first. Let me try writing: *"It's true that we should prevent the use of animals for entertainment for a number of reasons.' Does it sound okay?"*	**Stating--Modeling & Questioning--Confirming**	It is true that we should prevent the use of animals for entertainment for a number of reasons.
S2: Alright, let's move on to explaining why it's unethical.	**Requesting--Guiding**	—
S1: Yes, let me add: "*Firstly, it is unethical to exploit wild animals for human entertainment. For example, many animals are trapped and abused in circuses*." Does this work?	**Stating--Modeling & Questioning--Confirming**	Firstly, it is unethical to exploit wild animals for human entertainment. For example, many animals are trapped and abused in circuses
S2: Alright, but add this sentence to make the point clearer: "*These animals often suffer from stress, physical harm, and poor living conditions*."	**Elaborating--Detailing**	These animals often suffer from stress, physical harm, and poor living conditions.
S1: Yes, that's correct. I'll add it. Next is the point about protecting the ecosystem, right?	**Agreeing--Accepting & Questioning--Confirming**	—
S2: Yes. Try writing: "*Secondly, protecting animals is crucial for maintaining ecological balance*."	**Stating--Modeling**	Secondly, protecting animals is crucial for maintaining ecological balance.
S1: Alright, sounds good. Do you think of any other examples?	**Requesting--Commenting**	—
S2: Yes. Write more: "*For instance, when species are overexploited for human entertainment, ecosystems become unbalanced, leading to long-term environmental damage*."	**Elaborating--Detailing**	For instance, when species are overexploited for human entertainment, ecosystems become unbalanced, leading to long-term environmental damage.
S1: Ok, so I'll continue writing the final part of the body. "*In fact, the decline of many species is directly linked to human activities, including overuse in the entertainment industry*."	**Stating--Informing**	In fact, the decline of many species is directly linked to human activities, including overuse in the entertainment industry
S2: That's right. This part needs to be coherent in order to conclude well.	**Stating--Organizing**	—
S1: Can you read it over for me to see if it covers all the points?	**Requesting--Checking**	—
S2: That's enough. Now we just need to tweak the wording a bit to make it smoother and it'll be done.	**Suggesting--Rewording**	In fact, a decreasing number of animals are directly related to human activities, including the overuse in the entertainment industry.

Table 5 illustrates how two learners of similar proficiency co-constructed a body paragraph through a sequence of Stating, Questioning, and Elaborating strategies. The process began with Stating–Organizing ("*Let's start writing the first paragraph now*") and Stating–Modeling ("It's true that we should prevent the use of animals for entertainment…"), followed by Requesting–Guiding and Elaborating–Detailing ("*These animals often suffer from stress, physical harm, and poor living conditions*"). The pair then extended their reasoning using Stating–Modeling ("Secondly, protecting animals is crucial for maintaining ecological balance") and Elaborating–Detailing ("*When species are overexploited… ecosystems become unbalanced*"). Finally, Suggesting–Rewording helped refine linguistic expressions for greater coherence ("*Now we just need to smooth out the wording a bit*"). This extract vividly demonstrates co-construction of knowledge, as learners collaboratively negotiated meaning, structure, and expression to produce a coherent academic paragraph.

C. Micro-Peer Scaffolding Strategies in the Post-Writing Stage

After completing the first draft, the post-writing stage involved activities such as peer reviewing and mutual feedback, focusing on evaluation, revision, and final refinement before submission. Observations from the ten symmetrical pairs revealed the frequency and distribution of both micro- and macro-strategies, as detailed in Table 6 below.

TABLE 6
FREQUENCY OF MICRO-PEER SCAFFOLDING STRATEGIES IN POST-WRITING

	P21	P22	P23	P 24	P25	P26	P27	P28	P29	P30	Total (micro)	Total (macro)
Ack-Prai.	1	4	3	1	2	0	2	0	0	0	13	**(Ack.) = 16**
Ack-Tha.	0	1	0	0	2	0	0	0	0	0	3	
Agr-Acc.	2	0	1	2	4	11	4	1	7	0	32	**(Agr.) = 32**
Agr-Sup.	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	
Dis-Rej.	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	**(Dis.) = 1**
Dis-Repl.	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	
Dis-Soft.	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	1	
Ela-Conn.	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	1	**(Ela.) = 7**
Ela-Deta.	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	6	0	6	
Eli-Enco.	0	0	0	0	2	0	0	0	0	0	2	**(Eli.) = 2**
Jus-Rea.	0	1	0	0	0	2	0	0	5	0	8	**(Jus.) = 8**
Que-Clar.	6	2	1	2	4	4	0	1	22	0	42	**(Que.) = 69**
Que-Conf.	0	1	1	1	4	4	2	1	4	1	19	
Que-Elic.	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	
Que-Init.	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	1	
Que-Requ.	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	3	0	4	
Que-Sugg.	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	0	1	0	3	
Req-Chec.	0	0	1	0	3	1	1	0	1	0	7	**(Req.) = 27**
Req-Comm.	1	0	2	1	2	0	0	0	0	0	6	
Req-Guid.	0	0	0	0	2	1	0	0	4	0	7	
Req-Plann.	0	0	0	0	2	0	0	0	1	0	3	
Req-Stat.	0	0	0	0	1	0	1	1	1	0	4	
Sta-Comm.	4	2	4	1	9	8	0	2	2	2	34	**(Sta.) = 89**
Sta-Info.	1	1	0	0	4	4	2	2	14	0	28	
Sta-Mode.	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	9	0	10	
Sta-Orga.	1	0	0	0	7	4	0	0	4	0	16	
Sta-Sele.	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	
Sug-Corr.	2	1	1	1	8	2	1	0	2	0	18	**(Sug.) = 52**
Sug-Idea.	0	1	0	0	0	1	1	0	0	0	3	
Sug-Rewo.	2	3	0	1	0	6	4	0	13	2	31	

The post-writing stage was characterized by an evaluative feedback cycle focused on revision. Stating remained frequent (f = 89) but shifted toward critique and explanation, primarily through Stating–Commenting (f = 34) and Stating–Informing (f = 28). Questioning was prominent (f = 69), especially Questioning–Clarifying (f = 42), supporting logical scrutiny. Suggesting increased (f = 52), mainly via Rewording (f = 31) and Correcting (f = 18), targeting linguistic accuracy. This evaluative work was balanced by Agreeing (f = 32) and Acknowledging–Praising (f = 16), sustaining a supportive climate, while Disagreeing was minimal (f = 1). Occasional Justifying–Reasoning (f = 8) reflected metacognitive engagement, collectively enabling systematic, self-regulated editing and indicating a shift from other- to shared and self-regulation through mediated peer interaction within the ZPD.

Interview data confirmed this shift toward evaluative and reflective scaffolding. Participants most commonly reported providing overall feedback and commentary, stating, *"After writing, we reread our essays and decided which ideas to keep or remove."* (S1). This was closely followed by a focus on grammatical and lexical correction, with one learner noting, *"After writing, I gave feedback on verb tense mistakes."* (S3). More advanced support involved paraphrasing for stylistic improvement, as in *"I replaced simple words with more academic ones..."* (S9), and checking for coherence and organization. Learners also highlighted the affective and reflective dimension of this stage, sharing that they *"gave feedback and complimented each other's main ideas"* (S1) and *"learned from mistakes"* (S11). This integration of cognitive, linguistic, and affective support illustrates the internalization phase of learning, where peer-regulated collaboration progressively fosters the autonomy and self-regulation essential for academic writing. To illustrate this stage, Table 7 presents examples of effective peer interaction and mutual support during the post-writing phase.

TABLE 7
AN EXAMPLE OF A POST-WRITING EXTRACT

Move/Statement	Strategy	Examples of Written Products
S1: This paragraph is clear, hmm, it has an introduction and expresses an opinion. Then it says we will discuss two aspects, which follows the structure.	**Stating--Commenting**	In these days, the question of whether the animals should be conserved or used for recreation is being deeply debated. This essay is going to shed light on both sides of these statements
S1: The first paragraph, hmm, has some grammar mistakes. Here, "entertainment" is missing an "n."	**Suggesting--Correcting**	Government should have policies to ban any individuals or organizations using animals for entertaiment => **entertainment**
S1: This paragraph introduces the first idea and then provides specific examples of animals and how those actions are unethical toward them.	**Stating--Commenting**	Firstly, using animals for entertainment is unethical, as many species are confined, mistreated, and forced to perform unnatural acts for human amusement. For example, circus animals are often kept in cramped cages, trained through physical punishment, and compelled to perform stressful tricks that cause long-term psychological and physical harm. => (this sentence is maintained for meeting the essential demands for writing)
S1: In this paragraph, the first idea is presented. Hmm, it's okay.	**Stating--Commenting**	——
S1: Then, there are specific examples of animals.	**Stating--Informing**	Take wild animals as example, elephants in circuses are frequently chained for long hours and beaten with billhooks during training, causing severe physical injuries and emotional distress.
S1: This part should clearly state "example."	**Suggesting--Rewording**	People take advantages of animals as the tools for earning money through entertainment. => For instance, people take advantages of animals as the tools for earning money through entertainment.
S1: Or we could clearly see through the following example.	**Suggesting--Rewording**	For instance, dolphins in marine parks are forced to perform unnatural tricks solely for commercial shows, turning them into tools for profit rather than living creatures with natural needs.
S2: Ok. Okay.	**Agreeing--Accepting**	___

Table 7 presents how two peers collaboratively engaged in post-writing scaffolding, focusing on error correction, feedback, and text refinement. The extract begins with Stating–Commenting ("This paragraph is clear… it follows the structure") and Suggesting–Correcting ("'*entertaiment' missing an 'n'*"), showing attention to accuracy. As the discussion continues, the student identifies ethical arguments and praises content ("*How are those actions unethical toward animals? Quite good.*"), demonstrating Acknowledging–Praising as affective support. The pair also negotiate text structure through Questioning–Clarifying and Suggesting–Correcting ("*This should have been separated into its own paragraph*"). Finally, Suggesting–Rewording moves ("*This part should clearly state 'example'*") refine coherence and cohesion. Overall, this interaction typifies metacognitive and linguistic scaffolding in the post-writing phase, where learners co-construct revisions, improve clarity, and consolidate academic writing awareness.

D. Peer Scaffolding Strategies From Questionnaire

To provide deeper evidence for the identified peer scaffolding strategies, the questionnaire data were statistically analyzed to examine how these strategies were employed by students throughout the academic writing process. This quantitative analysis complemented the qualitative findings, confirming the consistency between observed behaviors and self-reported perceptions. Table 8 presents students' evaluations of the peer scaffolding strategies, reflecting how their practical classroom experiences aligned with the patterns observed in the recorded data.

TABLE 8
MEAN SCORES OF PEER SCAFFOLDING STRATEGIES

No.	Statement	Min	Max	Mean (M)	Standard Deviation (SD)
20	My peers support me by providing necessary vocabulary for writing activities.	1	5	3.91	0.84
21	My peers explain the requirements of writing activities to me.	1	5	3.87	0.94
22	My peers support me in brainstorming ideas for topics and writing activities.	1	5	4.03	0.89
23	My peers frequently ask topic-related questions that help me better understand what needs to be written.	1	5	3.83	0.95
24	My peers often provide encouragement and motivation when I face difficulties.	1	5	3.59	1.01
25	My peers frequently provide me with examples and evidence for logical and persuasive writing.	2	5	4.09	0.72
26	My peers consistently remind me to stay focused on completing my writing.	1	5	3.49	1.07
27	My peers frequently help me identify errors in word usage, grammar, and writing appropriateness.	1	5	3.95	0.84
28	My peers frequently support me in correcting vocabulary and grammar mistakes and making appropriate revisions while writing.	1	5	3.89	0.86
Overall Mean (Q20-Q28)		2	5	**3.83**	**0.55**

The questionnaire results (Table 8) revealed that students actively engaged in peer scaffolding across multiple dimensions of academic writing, with an overall mean of M = 3.83 (SD = 0.55), indicating positive perceptions. The most valued strategies were providing examples and evidence for persuasive writing (M = 4.09, SD = 0.72) and brainstorming ideas (M = 4.03, SD = 0.89), showing peers' strong cognitive and conceptual support. Linguistic scaffolding was also emphasized through error identification (M = 3.95, SD = 0.84) and revision assistance (M = 3.89, SD = 0.86). In contrast, affective and regulatory strategies such as encouragement (M = 3.59, SD = 1.01) and focus reminders (M = 3.49, SD = 1.07) were less frequent, implying that students valued tangible, task-oriented help over emotional support. Overall, the data highlight that peer scaffolding in EFL academic writing is dominated by cognitive and linguistic collaboration, while affective mediation remains a developing area requiring further pedagogical attention.

E. Triangulation in Micro-Peer Scaffolding Strategies

The triangulation of data from the questionnaire, interviews, and classroom observations provided a comprehensive and reliable understanding of how EFL students practiced peer scaffolding throughout the academic writing process. All three data sources consistently confirmed that scaffolding strategies, such as brainstorming, feedback, linguistic correction, and encouragement, appeared across the pre-writing, while-writing, and post-writing stages, with mean scores ranging from 3.49 to 4.09, indicating a frequent level of use. Interview excerpts revealed that students supported their peers by sharing vocabulary, developing ideas, and offering feedback, while classroom observations reinforced these findings through frequent behaviors such as suggesting, questioning, correcting, and elaborating. Table 9 presents the triangulated convergence of these data sources.

TABLE 9
CONVERGENCE OF PEER SCAFFOLDING STRATEGIES IN ACADEMIC WRITING

Statement (Key focus)	Peer scaffolding types	Mean	SD	Frequency	Interview expression
Vocabulary support for writing	Sta., Sug., Ela.	3.91	0.84	Almost every time	"*…work together to generate ideas, structure, and vocabulary… support each other with vocabulary and grammar… give feedback after writing…*" (S9)
Explaining task requirements	Sta., Ela., Jus.	3.87	0.94	Almost every time	"*…in the pre-writing stage, I don't really understand the topic… my partner explains it more clearly…*" (S5)
Brainstorming and idea development	Eli., Ela., Sug., Sta.	4.03	0.89	Almost every time	"*…first brainstorm and select essential ideas… exchange and support ideas… motivate one another…*" (S6)
Topic-related questioning	Que., Eli., Ela.	3.83	0.95	Almost every time	"*…interacted actively to reduce stress… helped us think critically to expand ideas…*" (S13)
Encouragement and motivation	Ack., Agr., Disa.	3.59	1.01	Almost every time	"*…provided vocabulary and motivation during writing… gave feedback after writing…*" (S10)
Providing examples and evidence	Ela., Jus., Sta.	4.09	0.72	Almost every time	"*…motivated me to expand ideas… often provided examples and evidence…*" (S8)
Maintaining focus and time management	Req., Sta.	3.49	1.07	Occasionally	"*…helped create an outline… managed time during writing… corrected mistakes…*" (S17)
Identifying language errors	Sug., Ela., Sta.	3.95	0.84	Almost every time	"*…after writing, helped correct spelling and grammar mistakes…*" (S10)
Revising vocabulary and grammar	Sug., Ela., Sta., Req.	3.89	0.86	Almost every time	"*…provided vocabulary and grammatical structures… checked spelling, vocabulary, and structure…*" (S10)

The comparison of Mean, SD, and interview data in Table 9 shows a wide distribution of peer scaffolding strategies

across writing stages. Most strategies achieved Mean ≥ 3.51 ("almost every time"), indicating frequent reliance as key mediational tools, while only "reminding to maintain focus" (M = 3.49) was used occasionally. This difference reflects varying depth and frequency of scaffolding. The alignment between coded strategies, Likert ratings, and observed behaviors confirms that peer scaffolding is a dynamic socio-cognitive-affective process, not a surface form of help. Triangulated evidence validates consistency across sources, revealing nuanced patterns and highlighting its central role in academic, emotional, and social development in EFL writing.

V. Discussion

A. Operationalizing SCT: From Macro-Strategies to Micro-Level Scaffolding

This study advances prior research by moving beyond cataloguing macro-strategies to reveal the micro-interactional mechanisms through which scaffolding is dialogically enacted (Saadat & Alavi, 2020; Chairinkam & Yawiloeng, 2021). By identifying sub-strategies such as *Questioning–Clarifying* and *Stating–Modeling*, it makes the abstract SCT concepts of mediation and the ZPD empirically observable.

This extends work focused on Language-Related Episodes (Saadat & Alavi, 2020) or limited questioning subtypes (Tinggie et al., 2023) by providing a comprehensive linguistic map of scaffolding-in-action. Furthermore, it refines understandings of affective scaffolding (Axrorova, 2025) by showing how emotional support is structured through specific micro-acts like *Acknowledging–Praising*, rather than being merely spontaneous.

B. The Symmetrical Peer Model

Departing from the prevalent expert-novice paradigm (Chairinkam & Yawiloeng, 2021; Tinggie et al., 2023), this research highlights the distinct dynamics of symmetrical peer scaffolding. Here, mediation was reciprocal; strategies like *Stating–Modeling* and *Justifying–Reasoning* were employed fluidly by both partners.

This transforms scaffolding from a directive transmission into a process of joint negotiation and co-construction (Taheri & Nazmi, 2021), embodying Vygotsky's concept of distributed cognition and establishing a *horizontal ZPD* where knowledge is generated collaboratively rather than transferred unidirectionally.

C. A Dynamic, Stage-Based Model of Scaffolding Functions

Building on previous stage-aware descriptions (Chairinkam & Yawiloeng, 2021; Kim, 2022), this study proposes a functional taxonomy of scaffolding that evolves with writers' needs. In pre-writing, *Conceptual Scaffolding* (e.g., *Questioning–Initiating*) dominated, activating the ZPD for idea generation. During while-writing, *Strategic Scaffolding* (e.g., *Suggesting–Rewording*) took precedence, managing real-time drafting and linguistic accuracy. In post-writing, the focus shifted to *Regulatory–Evaluative Scaffolding* (e.g., *Justifying–Reasoning*), fostering metacognitive evaluation. This functional progression illustrates the ZPD as a dynamic continuum, reconstructed at each stage to meet specific cognitive demands, thereby extending SCT's explanatory power in writing process research.

D. The Cultural Mediation of Strategy Use: The Case of Questioning

A critical finding is the divergence between observed behavior and self-reported perception regarding questioning strategies. While questioning was pervasive in interactions, learners reported using it less frequently. This aligns with research on culturally moderated interaction (Taheri & Nazmi, 2021), suggesting that in Vietnamese context, overt questioning may be subconsciously tempered by norms of harmony and face-saving. Thus, questioning often functioned as an implicit, culturally embedded mediational tool rather than a deliberate tactic, underscoring the necessity of mixed-methods designs to uncover such nuanced practices.

VI. Conclusion and Implications

This study demonstrates that peer scaffolding among symmetrical EFL learners is a dynamic, stage-sensitive process mediated by fine-grained linguistic strategies. It operationalizes SCT at the micro-interactional level, revealing how a horizontal ZPD is co-constructed through dialogic moves that evolve from conceptual, to strategic, to regulatory-evaluative functions across the writing process. The findings yield concrete implications. Pedagogically, instructors should explicitly teach micro-scaffolding strategies and design stage-specific collaborative activities to make implicit support more deliberate. Culturally, the role of *translanguaging* and culturally-shaped interaction patterns should be acknowledged as assets. For research, future studies should employ longitudinal and cross-cultural designs to trace scaffolding development and explore its digital manifestations. In sum, this research contributes a refined theoretical model, a robust methodological framework, and practical insights for harnessing the power of symmetrical peer interaction to transform EFL academic writing from an individual struggle into a collaboratively mastered skill.

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