

# Affective and Motivational Dynamics in Peer Scaffolding for Academic Writing Among Vietnamese University EFL Students

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**Abstract**—Grounded in Sociocultural Theory (SCT), this mixed-method study investigates the underexplored emotional and motivational dimensions of peer scaffolding in academic writing among Vietnamese EFL university students. Addressing the dominance of cognitively oriented research, the study examines learners' perceptions and experiences of affective support in collaborative writing. Data were collected through surveys (N=150), interviews (N=20), and observations of peer interactions (10 dyads). Findings reveal a strong shared perception of the emotional value of peer scaffolding ( $M = 4.19/5$ ) and identify a two-layer support system combining dynamic peer motivation and emotional support, forming an Emotional ZPD that facilitates cognitive risk-taking. However, Confucian face-saving norms simultaneously foster harmony and constrain critical feedback. The study advances SCT by operationalizing *perezhivanie* and extending the concept of Emotional ZPD with pedagogical implications for similar EFL contexts.

**Index Terms**—sociocultural theory, peer scaffolding, Emotional ZPD, academic writing, Confucian heritage values

## I. INTRODUCTION

Peer scaffolding, an extension of the broader concept of scaffolding (Donato, 1994; Wood et al., 1976) grounded in Sociocultural Theory (SCT), is widely recognized as a powerful mechanism in second language (L2) writing (Lantolf & Poehner, 2023; Storch, 2002). Previous studies have documented its cognitive and strategic functions, including idea development, error correction, and feedback exchange (Chairinkam & Yawiloeng, 2021; Tinggie et al., 2023; Zhang et al., 2023). However, the equally important emotional and motivational dimensions of peer scaffolding have received far less scholarly attention and are often treated as peripheral affective variables rather than as central mediating processes.

This neglect is especially evident in educational settings shaped by Confucian Heritage Culture (CHC), such as Vietnam. Values such as social harmony, respect for hierarchy, and face (*mianzi*) strongly influence classroom interaction (Phan, 2020; Rošker, 2017). To maintain good relationships, students may prioritize group harmony over open disagreement and direct critique. As a result, the emotional fabric of peer interaction - the extent to which students feel safe, encouraged, and motivated by one another - may be a major predictor of the richness and effectiveness of cognitive collaboration. Vygotsky's notion of *perezhivanie*, understood as the emotionally charged experience through which individuals interpret

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and internalize their social environment, provides an important theoretical lens for this study (Cong-Lem, 2023; Veresov et al., 2024). Accordingly, this study asks: How do Vietnamese EFL university students perceive and experience the emotional and motivational dimensions of peer scaffolding in collaborative academic writing?

## II. LITERATURE REVIEW

### A. *The Affective Turn in SCT and L2 Learning*

Although early SCT work emphasized cognitive mediation through language and tools (Vygotsky, 1978; Le, 2021), recent scholarship has renewed attention to its affective dimension through the concept of *perezhivanie* (Cong-Lem, 2023; Garcia & Pan, 2023; Veresov et al., 2024). *Perezhivanie* refers to the indivisible unity of personal characteristics and environmental conditions, with emotion serving as the prism through which social experience is interpreted and internalized (Cong-Lem, 2023). From this perspective, anxiety, confidence, and motivation are not merely background variables in L2 learning; rather, they are integral to how learners engage with and benefit from mediation (Tian & McCafferty, 2022). In the present study, peer interaction offers a psychologically safer space in which learners can exchange ideas, receive support, and participate in academic writing in culturally sensitive and emotionally meaningful ways. Peer scaffolding therefore operates not only at the cognitive level but also at the emotional level of writing development.

### B. *Peer Scaffolding Beyond Cognitive Strategies*

Previous research has carefully described strategic behaviors in peer scaffolding during writing, including questioning, suggesting, and correcting (Chairinkam & Yawiloeng, 2021; Nguyen, 2013; Saadat & Zahed Alavi, 2020; Tinggie et al., 2023). More recent work has begun to identify affective scaffolding as a distinct dimension that can reduce anxiety and sustain engagement (Zhang et al., 2023). Related studies also suggest that acknowledging peers' contributions can support motivation during interaction (Chairinkam & Yawiloeng, 2021). Nevertheless, most of this scholarship still treats emotion as only one category among many, rather than examining emotional and motivational support as underlying processes that shape all other forms of scaffolding - especially in contexts where social-emotional relations are highly valued. Understanding the role of emotion and motivation in language learning is therefore both timely and necessary (Reeve, 2024). The present study responds to this need by examining how emotional and motivational processes are intertwined with linguistic cognition in collaborative academic writing.

### C. *Cultural Context: Confucian Heritage Culture and Learning Emotions*

In CHC classrooms, the socio-emotional climate plays a central role. Students may hesitate to disagree openly because they wish to preserve harmony and avoid causing others to lose face, which can constrain critical peer feedback (Phan, 2020; Zhang & Gao, 2023). At the same time, this cultural framework promotes strong group values in which mutual support and collective success are highly appreciated (Rošker, 2017; Tuan & Anh, 2023). This creates a paradox: the same cultural orientation that supports cooperation may also inhibit the incisive critique often needed for academic writing development. Understanding how affective scaffolding operates within this tension is therefore essential.

### D. *Related Studies*

Peer scaffolding is widely recognized as a central process in L2 academic writing, rooted in SCT and the Zone of Proximal Development, where learners can achieve more through socially mediated interaction than they can independently (Vygotsky, 1978; Lantolf & Poehner, 2023). Much of the existing literature has mapped cognitive and interactive strategies, coding behaviors such as questioning, suggesting, elaborating, agreeing, and repairing linguistic errors, all of which support idea co-construction, language development, and text refinement (e.g., Saadat & Zahed Alavi, 2020; Chairinkam & Yawiloeng, 2021; Tinggie et al., 2023). Another line of work has examined the effects of peer scaffolding on writing accuracy, fluency, coherence, and organization (e.g., Zohrevandi et al., 2024; Axrorova, 2025). In Vietnam, peer scaffolding has also been associated with increased interest, motivation, and collaboration in writing classes (Nguyen et al., 2025).

More recently, researchers have begun to move beyond cognitive dimensions and to foreground affective and motivational variables. For example, Zhang et al. (2023) distinguish cognitive, behavioral, and affective scaffolding, with the latter reducing anxiety, providing encouragement, and enhancing motivation. Related studies report decreases in writing anxiety (Chairinkam & Yawiloeng, 2021), increases in confidence and motivation (Axrorova, 2025), and lower anxiety through peer questioning even at lower proficiency levels (Tinggie et al., 2023). In Vietnam, Nguyen et al. (2025) found that collaborative writing increased students' interest and motivation, although fear of losing face remained a constraint. Mohammad Hosseinpour et al. (2024) further showed that strategic L1 use in peer interaction can reduce anxiety and support thinking.

However, findings are not uniformly positive. Peungcharoenkun and Waluyo (2024), for instance, found that although students appreciated peer feedback at an emotional level, affective engagement did not lead to a significant improvement in writing outcomes. This suggests that the relationship between emotional support and writing development may be more complex and indirect than is often assumed.

### E. *Identified Research Gaps*

Despite this progress, important gaps remain, especially in relation to Vietnamese EFL undergraduates. First, there is a gap in our understanding of learners' lived experience. Most previous studies report the presence or effects of affective factors, such as reduced anxiety, but they do not sufficiently explore students' inner worlds. We know that emotional support matters, yet we still know too little about how Vietnamese students actually experience such support, what kinds of emotional assistance they value, how their motivation changes during collaboration, and how emotions such as anxiety, safety, or excitement are co-constructed during peer work.

Second, there is a gap concerning the operational mechanisms and roles of the emotion-motivation system in peer scaffolding. Although researchers such as Zhang et al. (2023) identify affective scaffolding as a category, its internal mechanisms remain underexplained. Emotional and motivational support should not be treated as a simple checklist of behaviors. Rather, it may function as an interconnected system that builds trust, sustains effort through moments of stagnation, and creates a psychologically safe space in which learners can take intellectual risks. Clarifying these mechanisms is necessary for theorizing what this study terms an Emotional ZPD.

Third, there is a context-specific gap related to Vietnamese higher education and CHC. Although international scholarship acknowledges culture and Vietnamese studies mention barriers such as fear of losing face, few studies have systematically examined how Confucian values shape the emotional fabric of peer scaffolding in Vietnam. Important questions therefore remain: How do collectivism, harmony, respect, and face influence students' perceptions and behaviors? Do these values encourage affirmation and support while discouraging direct critique? How do students manage the tension between maintaining good relationships and meeting the academic need for critical engagement? Without such insight, models of scaffolding developed in Western settings may not fully capture the nuances of supportive processes in Vietnamese collectivist classrooms.

Overall, this study is motivated by three interrelated gaps: (1) insufficient attention to students' subjective experiences and perceptions; (2) limited analysis of the operational mechanisms and underlying roles of emotional-motivational support in scaffolding; and (3) limited understanding of how these dynamics are shaped by the Vietnamese higher-education context. By addressing these gaps, the study contributes to SCT and scaffolding theory while offering culturally sensitive insights for designing more effective collaborative writing activities in Vietnamese EFL classrooms.

### III. METHODOLOGY

#### A. Research Design

This study employed a convergent parallel mixed-methods design (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018) to obtain a multidimensional and relatively holistic account of emotional and motivational peer scaffolding in academic writing. This design enabled the simultaneous collection and analysis of quantitative and qualitative data, followed by the integration of findings to produce a richer and more persuasive explanation of the phenomenon.

#### B. Research Context

The research was conducted in the natural context of a third-year mandatory Academic Writing course for English majors at a top-ranking state university in Central Vietnam, thereby ensuring contextual authenticity and enhancing transferability.

#### C. Participants

The quantitative phase involved 150 students. The demographic profile was predominantly female (92.7%), and most participants were at the upper-intermediate (B2) level of English proficiency according to the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) (72.7%).

From this group, 20 students were purposively selected for in-depth interviews to generate qualitative data. In addition, 10 pairs of students identified as symmetrical peers in terms of academic performance were audio-recorded during collaborative writing activities to capture naturally occurring interaction.

#### D. Instruments and Data Collection Procedures

Three main data-collection instruments were used. First, a questionnaire based on a 5-point Likert scale measured students' perceptions of the emotional and motivational impact of peer scaffolding (e.g., stress reduction, confidence enhancement, and motivation maintenance). The instrument was piloted and demonstrated excellent internal consistency (Cronbach's  $\alpha = .938$ ).

Second, 20 semi-structured interviews, each lasting 30–45 minutes, were conducted to explore in depth students' lived experiences, personal narratives, and subjective interpretations of giving and receiving emotional-motivational support.

Third, classroom observation was conducted through audio-recording 10 pair-work sessions, each lasting 90 minutes, in order to collect data on natural verbal and non-verbal interactions across the three writing stages: pre-writing, while-writing, and post-writing.

#### E. Data Analysis

Data were analyzed separately by type before the findings were integrated. For the survey data, descriptive statistics (e.g., means and standard deviations) were calculated to describe general trends. A one-sample t-test was then used to

compare the observed mean score with the neutral midpoint in order to determine whether students' overall perceptions were significantly positive.

For the qualitative data, all interview and observation recordings were transcribed verbatim and analyzed using thematic analysis following Braun and Clarke (2006). The analytic process involved familiarization with the data, initial coding, theme searching, theme review, theme definition and naming, and report writing. The resulting themes focused on the manifestations, mechanisms, and meanings of emotional-motivational support.

To enhance trustworthiness, the study used strict data triangulation by comparing, contrasting, and integrating findings across all three data sources - survey, interviews, and observations. This procedure enabled cross-verification and supported the development of a robust and holistic explanation of the research question.

#### IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

##### A. Social Consensus on Emotional Value

Findings from the 150 valid survey responses indicate a strong social consensus regarding the importance of peer scaffolding. The mean score on the 5-point Likert scale was high ( $M = 4.19$ ,  $SD = 0.45$ ), showing substantial agreement among participants. A one-sample t-test confirmed that this mean was significantly higher than the neutral midpoint of 3.0,  $t(149) = 35.522$ ,  $p < .001$ , with a 95% confidence interval for the mean difference ranging from 1.13 to 1.27. This result provides a strong empirical basis for arguing that positive emotional responses to collaborative interaction are not isolated cases but a broadly shared norm in this learning context.

TABLE 1  
EMOTION & MOTIVATION IN PEER SCAFFOLDING ACROSS WRITING STAGES

| Stage         | Statement                                                                         | Mean | SD   | Emotional and Motivational Values                                                                                                                    |
|---------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------|------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Pre-writing   | Brainstorming with peers helps generate more ideas.                               | 4.43 | 0.73 | Positive Emotion & Initial Motivation: Reduces blockage, increases creative excitement, provides momentum to start a difficult task.                 |
| Post-writing  | I can self-correct better thanks to peer feedback.                                | 4.42 | 0.63 | Confidence & Intrinsic Motivation: Reduces anxiety about quality, increases sense of competence and desire for perfection.                           |
| Post-writing  | I recognize errors and accumulate experience from peer suggestions.               | 4.42 | 0.64 | Confidence & Learning Motivation: Reduces fear of mistakes, increases awareness of progress, promotes a learning spirit.                             |
| While-writing | I learn more relevant vocabulary from peers.                                      | 4.31 | 0.71 | Sense of Competence: Accumulating language tools increases feelings of readiness and progress.                                                       |
| Pre-writing   | I understand the writing requirements more clearly when discussing with peers.    | 4.29 | 0.66 | Reduced Insecurity & Confidence: Eliminates initial ambiguity, creates a solid psychological foundation to begin.                                    |
| Post-writing  | Peer feedback helps improve the next draft.                                       | 4.30 | 0.70 | Improvement Motivation: Seeing a clear path for progress sustains effort across drafts.                                                              |
| Post-writing  | I learn editing procedures and how to avoid errors by working with peers.         | 4.32 | 0.67 | Reduced Anxiety & Procedural Confidence: Grasping the "how-to" reduces fear of complex rules.                                                        |
| While-writing | I understand my writing more deeply through peers' opinions and suggestions.      | 4.15 | 0.87 | Exploratory Motivation: Sustains interest and curiosity throughout the writing process.                                                              |
| Pre-writing   | I know how to outline more effectively after exchanging with peers.               | 4.25 | 0.61 | Reduced Confusion & Structural Confidence: Clear direction, reduces feeling overwhelmed by a blank page.                                             |
| While-writing | I gradually become familiar with writing skills through each stage of group work. | 4.00 | 0.92 | Incremental Motivation: Sensing systematic development sustains commitment.                                                                          |
| While-writing | I manage writing time more effectively when collaborating.                        | 3.83 | 0.94 | Limitation of Affective Scaffolding: Weaker impact on pure self-regulatory skills, highlighting focus on direct psychological and cognitive support. |
| Overall       | Overall perception of the value of peer scaffolding.                              | 4.19 | 0.45 | Strong Social Consensus: Affirms the prominent value of collaboration in shaping positive emotional experiences and learning motivation.             |

The survey results (composite mean = 4.19/5) not only confirm generally positive perceptions of peer scaffolding but also suggest an emotional-motivational mediation mechanism that is consistent with SCT. The highest-scoring items illustrate this clearly. Brainstorming with peers (4.43) did not simply provide cognitive support; it transformed personal blockage into shared creativity, thereby energizing task initiation. Similarly, the high ratings for self-correction and learning from errors in the post-writing stage (4.42) indicate that peer feedback reduced evaluation anxiety and strengthened confidence, which in turn supported intrinsic motivation to improve. These findings suggest that emotions (e.g., anxiety to confidence) and motivation (e.g., obligation to voluntary improvement) are co-constructed through social interaction and become catalysts for development. By contrast, the lower mean and wider dispersion for time management (3.83) suggest that peer scaffolding may be more effective in mediating direct emotional-social processes than in developing individual self-regulatory skills. This pattern underscores the specifically social and affective nature of the support mechanism within an SCT framework.

##### B. Qualitative Analysis: A Two-Tier Support System and Its Mechanism

Thematic analysis of 20 depth interviews and observations on 10 dyads indicated that emotional and motivational support is not a one-dimensional phenomenon, but rather a pair of dialectically related two levels: a surface level of dynamic motivational propulsion, and a deeper level of emotional support.

The Dynamic Motivational Propulsion layer was manifested through three major functions reported by students. First, it had a transformative role: the writing task became not an individual burden but a collective intellectual project. One student explained, "This is interesting because it creates motivation to complete the task, making the essay better and more appealing" (S5). Second, it served a maintaining and navigational function, acting as an external mechanism that helped students overcome stagnation and redirection problems. As Student S18 noted, "Sometimes I write in the wrong direction, and my peer will guide me back." Third, this motivation was partly self-generating, because the process of producing a better text became rewarding in itself and gradually shifted students' orientation from mere task completion toward collaborative skill development.

Beneath the motivational layer lies Foundational Emotional Support. Its central function is to reduce anxiety and build psychological safety. Student S4 articulated this clearly: "I think it also helps me relax before writing because I usually feel stressed, but interacting with others makes the atmosphere more comfortable and pleasant." This form of support resembles a lowering of the affective filter that prepares the way for cognitive engagement. It also creates a sense of solidarity and shared burden, thereby fostering resilience. Together, these elements contribute to what this study conceptualizes as an Emotional ZPD - a co-constructed psychological space in which students feel sufficiently safe to take intellectual risks, including trying more complex sentences. As S12 stated, "Knowing someone will correct errors with me, I dare to try more complex sentences".

TABLE 2  
DIALOGUE ILLUSTRATING EMOTIONAL & MOTIVATIONAL SUPPORT

| Statement                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             | Scaffolding Behavior                                     | Emotional/Motivational Factor                                                                                                                                       |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| S3: Where do we begin? This is an individual assignment, right? First, we need an introduction, but what would the topic sentence be?                                                                                                                                 | <b>Questioning--Clarifying</b>                           | Confusion, initial lack of confidence. Shows a need for guidance and direction.                                                                                     |
| S4: That's right, this is an individual paper. To make it clearer, we first need to define the topic sentence clearly. The topic sentence could be something like: 'Tourism not only brings economic benefits but also promotes cultural exchange between countries.' | <b>Stating--Organizing &amp; Stating--Modeling</b>       | Provides affirmation and safety. Reduces confusion by offering structure and a specific model, creating clear direction.                                            |
| S3: Sounds good. Let's start with the economic benefits, shall we?                                                                                                                                                                                                    | <b>Agreeing--Accepting &amp; Questioning--Confirming</b> | Confidence is built. Accepts the support and proactively proposes the next step, showing that motivation has been ignited.                                          |
| S4: Exactly! The first part could talk about 'how tourism helps generate a lot of money for local areas.' For example: The price of tourism packages is often higher than for local people.                                                                           | <b>Stating--Informing &amp; Elaborating--Detailing</b>   | Encourages and reinforces. Uses affirmative language ("Exactly!") and provides detailed ideas, continuing to maintain work momentum and motivation for the partner. |

The brief dialogue in Table 2 illustrates the effect of emotional-motivational scaffolding particularly well. S3's anxiety and confusion were quickly transformed into confidence and action through S4's affirming, organizing, and encouraging support. The safe interactional environment enabled S3 to admit uncertainty and then re-engage in the writing process. In this sense, emotional support did not merely accompany cognitive work; it actively enabled it.

### C. Cultural Shaping and the Harmony Paradox

The observational data also indicate that this two-tier system is deeply shaped by Confucian cultural values, producing a context-specific paradox. Across the 10 recorded sessions, agreeing behaviors ( $f = 40$ ) far outnumbered disagreeing or critical behaviors ( $f = 9$ ), demonstrating a strong tendency toward harmony-oriented interaction (see Table 3).

TABLE 3  
SYNTHESIS OF EVIDENTIARY DATA FROM THREE KEY SOURCES

| Central Focus                                  | Quantitative Data                                                                                               | Interview Data                                                                                                                                                                     | Evidence from Recorded Data                                                                                                                                                                                                |
|------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>1. Strong Positive Perception</b>           | Composite Mean = 4.19/5<br>SD = 0.45<br>T-test: $t(149) = 35.522, p < .001$                                     | <b>Quote:</b> "This is exciting because it creates motivation to complete the task, making the essay better and more engaging" (S5).                                               | Overall Communication Tone: Highly affirmative and consensual, consistent with the high mean from the survey.                                                                                                              |
| <b>2. Motivational Mechanism: Navigation</b>   | Related Survey Items (e.g., Q8, Q14):<br>Mean scores ranging from 4.00 to 4.30.                                 | <b>Quote:</b> "Sometimes I write things incorrectly, and peers help remind me. If I'm going in the wrong direction, they guide me back" (S18).                                     | Requesting-Guiding Behavior: Frequency (f) = 28. This behavior demonstrates students actively seeking and receiving specific guidance from their peers.                                                                    |
| <b>3. Support Mechanism: Anxiety Reduction</b> | Related Survey Items (e.g., Q4, Q17):<br>Mean scores ranging from 4.29 to 4.42.                                 | <b>Quote:</b> "I think it also helps me relax before writing because I usually feel stressed, but interacting with others makes the atmosphere more relaxed and comfortable" (S4). | Agreeing-Accepting Behavior: Frequency (f) = 40 (Highest). This continuous affirming behavior creates a safe environment that supports anxiety reduction.                                                                  |
| <b>4. Cultural Preference: Harmony</b>         | Low Composite Standard Deviation (SD = 0.45): Indicates high social consensus and low variation in perceptions. | _____                                                                                                                                                                              | Agreeing/Disagreeing Ratio: Agreeing (f=40) / Disagreeing (f=9) $\approx$ Ratio 4.4:1. This large disparity clearly demonstrates a priority for maintaining harmony.                                                       |
| <b>5. The Trade-off: Lack of Critique</b>      | _____                                                                                                           | <b>Description of Disagreement:</b> Described by students in a <b>subtle, indirect</b> manner (e.g., "suggesting an alternative" rather than "criticizing") (S3)                   | Disagreeing Behaviors:<br>• Disagreeing-Replacing: f=5 (suggesting a different idea).<br>• Disagreeing-Rejecting: f= 4 (more direct rejection).<br>→ Total disagreeing frequency is low (f=9) compared to agreeing (f=40). |

This disparity provides clear evidence that collectivism, harmony, and face mediate the form of affective scaffolding by channeling it toward affirmation and support in order to preserve group relationships. The downside of this preference, however, is the possibility of limited critical engagement. The relative scarcity of disagreeing behaviors ( $f = 9$ ) and especially direct rejection ( $f = 4$ ) suggests a cultural trade-off: the Emotional ZPD may be strong in terms of psychological safety but potentially limited in terms of cognitive challenge. In other words, the boundaries of the Emotional ZPD are shaped not only by reduced anxiety but also by implicit social pressure to maintain agreement, which may constrain the refinement of ideas through constructive conflict.

#### D. Discussion

This research has presented a multi-dimensional and comprehensive empirical image of the operation of emotion and motivation in peer scaffolding ecosystem of the Vietnamese EFL students based on a convergent parallel mixed-methods design. The research question is addressed directly by the findings, and the gaps are addressed, not to mention that new theoretical and contextual contributions are made.

##### (a). Lived Experience (Perezhivanie) and the Two-Tier Mechanism

The research question asked how students perceived and experienced the emotional and motivational aspects of peer scaffolding. At the level of shared social perception, the quantitative results provide a clear answer: students reported strongly positive views of these interactions, as shown by the high mean score (4.19/5) and low standard deviation (0.45), with the one-sample t-test confirming that this pattern was statistically significant ( $p < .001$ ). This result is consistent with previous work that highlights the importance of affective scaffolding (Zhang et al., 2023).

However, the present study goes beyond confirming a general positive pattern. Through the qualitative findings, it operationalizes Vygotsky's concept of perezhivanie within peer scaffolding research. Interview excerpts about feeling relaxed, facing challenges together, and daring to try are not merely reports of isolated emotions; rather, they represent lived emotional experiences through which the social context of collaboration is interpreted and internalized. More specifically, our analysis shows that this lived experience is structured through a dialectically related two-tier system. Dynamic Motivation propels the writing process through transformative, navigational, and self-generating functions, whereas Foundational Emotional Support creates the psychological safety that makes such motivation sustainable. Their interaction explains not only that affective scaffolding matters, but how it works.

##### (b). Emotional Zone of Proximal Development

Building on this two-tier mechanism, the study proposes the notion of an Emotional ZPD. Whereas the traditional ZPD concerns the gap between independent performance and performance supported by cognitive mediation (Vygotsky, 1978; Aljaafreh & Lantolf, 1994), the Emotional ZPD refers to the psychosocial space in which learners feel sufficiently safe, accepted, and motivated to enter and remain active in their cognitive ZPD.

The empirical evidence supports this proposition. Survey items linked to stress reduction and confidence building, interview accounts of daring to try, and the high frequency of agreeing behaviors ( $f = 40$ ) all indicate that peer interaction created a psychologically supportive environment. These confirmatory behaviors were not merely conversational moves; they functioned as cultural tools for building the Emotional ZPD. The findings therefore suggest that writing development under peer scaffolding is a process of both cognitive and affective mediation, with the Emotional ZPD acting as a necessary condition for effective participation in the cognitive ZPD.

*(c). Cultural Shaping and the Harmony Paradox*

This is also the study's most contextually significant contribution. Earlier research in Vietnam has typically noted the general benefits of collaborative writing or mentioned fear of losing face as a barrier, but it has rarely unpacked the mechanism through which CHC values shape affective scaffolding. The present study does so by showing that the striking imbalance between agreeing ( $f = 40$ ) and disagreeing ( $f = 9$ ) behaviors reflects the influence of harmony and face on interaction. These values encourage support, affirmation, and conflict avoidance.

This context-specific pattern helps explain why emotional support does not always translate directly into stronger writing outcomes. If the Emotional ZPD is built primarily on agreement and the avoidance of critique, it may produce psychological safety while still limiting the kind of constructive cognitive conflict needed for deeper argument development. This interpretation offers one possible explanation for prior findings in which positive affective engagement did not necessarily lead to measurable improvement in writing quality.

*(d). From Awareness to Intentional Action*

The pedagogical implications of these findings extend beyond simply promoting group work. First, instructors should explicitly recognize and legitimize the value of the Emotional ZPD. This can be done by establishing classroom expectations that position emotional support and intellectually constructive challenge as twin foundations of effective collaboration. Second, collaborative writing should be scaffolded through structured tasks and feedback guidelines. For example, rubrics can ask students to begin with a positive observation before posing an open-ended question that invites deeper thinking, thereby preserving emotional safety while promoting critical engagement. Third, students should be encouraged to engage in metacognitive and meta-affective reflection so that they become more aware of how group interaction shapes their emotions, motivation, and writing quality.

Overall, this study reframes peer scaffolding not as a simple list of strategies or benefits, but as a complex process of affective-cultural mediation. In doing so, it offers a more detailed analytical framework for understanding and improving collaborative learning processes in Vietnamese collectivist EFL contexts.

## V. CONCLUSION

### A. Summary of Key Findings

This study has examined the emotional and motivational dimensions of peer scaffolding among Vietnamese university students learning academic writing in English. The mixed-methods design provided a nuanced account showing that these dimensions are not peripheral but central to collaborative writing development. The qualitative findings revealed a two-tier mechanism consisting of Dynamic Motivational Propulsion and Foundational Emotional Support. Their interaction illustrates Vygotsky's concept of *perezhivanie* in action, as positive emotional experiences during collaboration become a channel through which writing development is internalized. On this basis, the study proposed the concept of the Emotional ZPD as a psychologically safe transitional space that enables students to engage productively in their cognitive ZPD. Another major contribution is the demonstration that Confucian cultural values shape the form of affective scaffolding, promoting harmony and support while potentially limiting critical discussion.

Several directions for future research follow from these findings. First, intervention-based studies are needed to test pedagogical tools that balance emotional support with cognitive critique. Second, cross-cultural comparative research could clarify whether the Emotional ZPD is a broadly applicable concept or one that is especially salient in collectivist settings. Third, longitudinal studies could track how these mechanisms evolve over time. Finally, future work should examine the role of teachers in facilitating affective scaffolding, thereby linking theoretical insight with practical classroom design.

### B. Scientific Contribution

The study makes both theoretical and pedagogical contributions. Theoretically, it enriches SCT by operationalizing *perezhivanie* in language-education research and by proposing the Emotional ZPD as an extension that foregrounds the affective dimension of developmental space. It also highlights collaborative learning as a process of dual mediation in which culture and emotion jointly shape participation and development. Pedagogically, the findings call for a shift from treating group work as an informal arrangement to designing it as an emotional-social learning environment. This includes creating tasks that balance emotional support with cognitive challenge and incorporating meta-affective reflection activities that help students become more aware and agentic co-constructors of a positive learning environment.

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