

# FEEDBACK-MEDIATED INDIVIDUAL AND COLLABORATIVE PLANNING: EFFECTS ON STRUCTURAL ORGANIZATION AND CLARITY OF ARGUMENTATIVE ESSAYS

By

FATEMEH SOLTANPOUR \*

MOHAMMADREZA VALIZADEH \*\*

FATEMEH GHAFARIANZIRAK \*\*\*

\* University Lecturer, Department of English, Kar Higher Education Institute, Qazvin, Iran

\*\* Ph.D. Candidate, Department of English, Faculty of Foreign Languages, Gazi University, Ankara, Turkey.

\*\*\* Department of English Language, Payame Noor University, Tehran, Iran.

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## ABSTRACT

*This two-week quantitative experimental study aimed at making a comparison among the effects of individual and collaborative pre-task planning, both with and without receiving teacher feedback on structural organization and clarity of argumentative essays. The participants were 120 Iranian English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners, assigned randomly to five groups (four experimental and one control, with no planning condition). They were given 10 minutes for planning as a pre-writing activity. The individual group did the planning individually, while the collaborative one did it through peer-interaction. There were two more individual and collaborative groups, who also received the teacher feedback during the planning process. The other writing tasks processes were done individually in all groups and in 30 minutes. The results revealed that the four experimental groups outperformed the control one. The collaborative group was significantly better than the individual one, but the two groups who received the teacher feedback had superiority over the others. The findings, which are in line with the social constructivist view of learning, also corroborate the results of previous relevant research papers. Additionally, the findings can be enlightening; the L2 writing teachers can apply the techniques utilized in this research in their classes, and hopefully obtain beneficial results.*

*Keywords: Collaborative Planning, Individual Planning, Peer-Interaction, Structural Organization of Argumentative Essays, Teacher Feedback.*

## INTRODUCTION

As Weigle (2014) truly stated, although writing has always had a place in the L2 curriculum, "In the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the ability to write in an L2 may be even more important than ever" (p. 222) because of globalization and the crucial need for written communication across languages and cultures and in many fields, such as education and business. Therefore, writing ability is looked not only as a cognitive ability, but also as a socio-cultural phenomenon and focusing only on improving L2 proficiency does not lead to good writing production (Weigle, 2014). As a result, adopting a process approach to teaching the writing skill and noticing the L2 writers' composing processes and sub-processes, such as planning, drafting, revising, and editing

(Matsuda & Silva, 2010) are really essential. Nevertheless, in the context where this study has been done, the traditional form-focused and product-oriented instruction is still the dominant method of teaching students to write in their L2. Writing instruction is mostly concentrated on accuracy in the final product. Consequently, the teacher-researchers in the current study thought of finding ways to effectively develop their L2 learners' writing abilities in this trend emphasizing the importance of communication.

In addition, as Shin (2008) emphasized, it is critical to investigate learners' writing processes, especially, the planning process, and identify what learners do to overcome difficulties in the writing process because of their lack of competence in L2 writing. Moreover, "research on

how the planning process affects learners' final written products is needed" (Shin, 2008, p. 4), so the present study attempted to focus on planning and its effect on the language development of Iranian EFL learners. The planning of this study includes the sub-processes which Johnson, Mercado, and Acevedo (2012) stated: "idea generation, organization, and goal setting" (p. 264).

## 1. Theoretical Background

With regard to theoretical background supporting the planning on L2 writing, four major issues can be discussed: cognitive processing theory of writing (Flower & Hayes, 1981; Hayes, 1996), Task-Based Instruction (TBI) (Ellis, 2000; Nunan, 2004; Skehan, 1996), the role of working memory (Hayes, 1996; Kellogg, 1990, 1996), and strategy use (Kellogg, 1990).

Processing theory is mainly concerned with the writer's writing process, writing strategies, the complexity of planning or revision processes, and the influence of tasks. This theory, which is constructed from the L1 writing model (Flower & Hayes, 1981) has been also applied to L2 writing models (Silva, 1993; Zimmermann, 2000). In the composing process of the processing models, planning has been considered as one of the major stages for producing a text (Hayes & Nash, 1996). More specifically, planning as a reflective process, includes problem solving, decision making, and inferencing (Hayes, 1996).

With regard to Task Based Language Teaching (TBLT), it is stated that how tasks are designed and implemented affects students' language learning and performance (Ellis, 2012; Robinson, 2005; Skehan & Foster, 2001), so the research findings on planning activities can be used in TBI (Shin, 2008). TBI plays a facilitative role in interlanguage development of L2 learners and is relevant to the issue of conducting effective planning activities into task-based classroom instruction (Skehan, 1996; Skehan & Foster, 1997, 1999).

Additionally, according to Kellogg's (1990) Overload hypothesis, planning can free spaces in individual's limited working memory during the writing process, and as a result, leads to reducing cognitive demands placed on writers; therefore, planning condition would improve text quality. In addition, Ellis and Yuan (2004) mentioned, planning

"affords learners more time overall" (p. 65) and thus contributes to focusing their attention on content and organization during writing, which consequently leads to production of better quality text. Relevant to this issue is the subject of strategy use; learners can carry out a series of strategic activities, such as pre-planning and making notes, to compromise limited working memory capability (i.e. to reduce the amount of information held in working memory during composition and to maximize the efficiency of memory) to produce a coherent text (O'Malley & Chamot, 1990).

Moreover, based on Vygotsky's sociocultural theory (Vygotsky, 1978 as cited in Lightbown & Spada, 2006; Nyikos & Hashimoto, 1997; O'Donoghue & Clarke, 2010), learning takes place through and during interaction in the learner's Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) – through the learner's participation in completing tasks with a more experienced partner; Vygotsky has insisted that when the learner can do an activity with somebody's help today, he will be able to do it without getting assistance in the future. Socio-cultural perspective requires the learners to seek cooperation and assistance from different people and resources (Cumming, 2001) because through cooperation and doing collaborative activities, more experienced learners help the less experienced ones by providing the help they need within their ZPD (Lantolf & Thorne, 2006). Swain (2000) also assured that collaboration makes learners think about their language-related problems, when they are engaged in their writing tasks. Thus, "learners should be encouraged to participate in activities which foster interaction and co-construction of knowledge" (Storch, 2005, p. 154). Several researchers have stated that this approach can be adopted in an L2 writing classroom (Dobao, 2012; Shehadeh, 2011; Storch, 2005; Storch & Wigglesworth, 2007, 2010).

## 2. Review of Literature

Some researchers compared pre-task planning with on-line planning. For example, Ellis and Yuan (2004) found that pre-task planning had positive effect on lexical complexity and fluency of narrative writing tasks and online planning positively affected the accuracy of the mentioned writing type of 42 Chinese EFL learners. However, Rahimpour and

Safarie (2011) revealed that pre-task planning had no significant impact on the lexical complexity and accuracy of 30 Iranian EFL learners' descriptive writing task, but significantly benefited the fluency of their performance. Nevertheless, Ghavamnia, Tavakoli, and Esteci's (2013) findings with 40 Iranian intermediate EFL learners corroborated the Ellis and Yuan's (2004).

Moreover, some recent studies compared the effect of planning as a pre-writing activity on L2 writing production with no planning condition, in terms of multiple measures of complexity, accuracy, and fluency, but no beneficial results were found (See, e.g., Farahani & Faryabi, 2016; Johnson et al., 2012; Johnson & Nicodemus, 2016).

Johnson et al. (2012) explored distinct forms of pre-task planning (idea generation, organization, and goal setting) and their effect on essays written by Spanish-speaking EFL learners. It was found that pre-task planning condition had a small significant effect on writing fluency, while it had no impact on lexical complexity and grammatical complexity. Johnson et al. (2012) suggested that

the predictions of the Limited Attentional Capacity Model and Cognition Hypothesis may not be applicable to writing, that the effects of pre-task planning in earlier L1 and L2 research may have been moderated by the participants' education and genre knowledge, and that a threshold level of general L2 proficiency may be necessary for pre-task planning to impact L2 writers' texts (p. 264).

Then, Johnson and Nicodemus (2016, p. 1) replicated Johnson et al. (2012) to investigate "the effect of the specific pre-task planning sub-processes on the written language production" of L1 speakers of English, yet they found no significant effect on the fluency and complexity of the produced language; thus, a threshold level of general L2 proficiency, which had been considered by (Johnson et al., 2012) as a necessary item, was not supported by Johnson and Nicodemus' (2016) study.

Farahani and Faryabi (2016) examined the effects of two planning conditions (pre-task planning and no planning) on the argumentative writing task performance of 44 Iranian EFL undergraduates majoring in English literature. No significant difference was found between the two groups.

On the other hand, the recent studies which have compared the effect of individual and collaborative planning on L2 writing performance in terms of multiple measures of complexity, accuracy, and fluency (Tavakoli & Rezazadeh, 2014) and in terms of organization, content, grammar, mechanics, and vocabulary use (Ameri-Golestan & Dousti, 2015; Shin, 2008) revealed conflicting findings.

For example, Shin (2008), over a two-week period, explored the effects of individual and collaborative planning on L2 expository and argumentative writing tasks of Korean university students with Korean L1 background. Shin found that collaborative planning had positive effect on expository writing tasks but not on argumentative one. Additionally, the results showed that proficiency had affected learners' written performance in both tasks.

Tavakoli and Rezazadeh (2014) investigated 94 Iranian EFL undergraduate English translation majors' argumentative writing tasks. Results revealed that the collaborative planning group produced more accurate texts, whereas individual planning groups' texts were better with regard to fluency, and neither type of planned conditions improved complexity.

Ameri-Golestan and Dousti (2015) compared the three task planning conditions (individual, collaborative, and no planning) by a group of 90 Iranian upper intermediate EFL learners. The two experimental groups (i.e. individual and collaborative) outperformed the control one only with regard to organization and style of the written argumentative texts; no significant effect was revealed on content, grammar, and mechanics of the texts.

### ***2.1 Significance and the Research Question of the Present Study***

Although different findings have been revealed already, pre-task planning as well as collaborative planning can be considered effective; nonetheless, in the previous studies, the important factor of teacher's feedback in the process of pre-task planning was controlled though such feedback can enhance the efficacy of pre-task planning. Additionally providing feedback during different parts of the writing process is one of the teachers' roles and performed by all teachers worldwide and thus, its effect

cannot be ignored. Hence, the teacher-researchers in the current study, decided to conduct a research addressing the following question.

To what extent are individual and collaborative pre-task planning, both with and without provision of teacher feedback, effective in developing EFL learners' structural organization, and clarity of argumentative essays, relative to each other and to no planning?

### 3. Method

#### 3.1 Participants

The participants were 120 (82 females and 38 males) Iranian EFL learners, native speakers of Persian and ranging from 21 to 38 years old.

#### 3.2 Sampling Procedures

The study was a pretest-posttest as well as a comparison-group one. The participants were randomly assigned to each treatment group. Thus, there was one independent variable called pre-task planning with five different groups (Individual Planning (IP), Feedback-Mediated Individual Planning (FMIP), Collaborative Planning (CP), and Feedback-Mediated Collaborative Planning (FMCP), and No Planning (NP) as well as one dependent variable, named structural organization in argumentative essays. The structural organization in the scoring rubric used in the present study also includes the clarity of essays, so the clarity, in this study, has not been considered as a separate dependent variable.

#### 3.3 Instrumentation

To ensure that the individual participants and the groups were homogeneous, two tests were used. The first one was the pen-and-paper version of Quick Placement Test (QPT), which has been developed by Oxford University Press and Cambridge English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) for placement testing and examination screening (Geranpayeh, 2003). The test is divided into two parts and contains 60 questions. To decide on the students' level, Geranpayeh's (2003) guideline was used. Besides, the participants' pretest scores in all groups were also compared to ensure that the groups were homogeneous.

The essay questions of argumentative type were utilized as the pretests and posttests. Then, to evaluate the final written

products, Rezaei and Lovorn's (2010) scoring rubric was utilized. The original rubric conforms to the 100-point scale and includes five criteria covering all aspects of a written text. Nevertheless, as the main focus of this study was on the structural organization and clarity, only this aspect of the rubric was considered in this research. Table 1 shows the details of the rubric used in this study, based on Rezaei and Lovorn (2010, p. 38).

### 3.4 Procedure

#### 3.4.1 Forming the Groups

The QPT was given to the 231 EFL learners of four English language institutes who were studying the 2<sup>nd</sup> edition of Summit 1 (Saslow & Ascher, 2012a) and Summit 2: English for Today's World (Saslow & Ascher, 2012b). Based on Geranpayeh's (2003) guideline, the students took the first part of QPT (Questions 1-40). 203 participants scored more than 36 out of 40. The second part of the test was given to these learners. 12 students scored more than 48 out of 60. As a result, the rest of the learners (191), who scored between 41 to 47, out of 60 (i.e. the upper-intermediate level, based on the guideline) were informed about this two-week research. They were told that the course would not be a part of their curriculum, and thus would not affect their final exam marks. 120 learners volunteered to participate, so they were assigned randomly to each treatment group, consisting of 24 participants.

Structural Organization and Clarity	Score
There is no clear purpose; Essay lacks logical progression of ideas; Essay addresses topic but loses focus by including irrelevant ideas; Ideas are unclear and/or not well-developed.	0-6
Attempts communicate the purpose throughout; Essay includes brief skeleton (introduction, body, and conclusion) but lacks transitions; Essay is focused on topic and includes few loosely related ideas; Un-elaborated ideas that are not fully explained or supported; repetitive details	7-13
Generally maintains purpose; Essay includes logical progression of ideas aided by clear transitions; Essay is focused on the topic and includes relevant ideas; Depth of thought supported by elaborate, relevant supportive evidence provides clear vision of the idea; contains details	14-19
Establishes and maintains clear purpose; Essay is powerfully organized and fully developed; The essay is focused, purposeful, and reflects clear insight and ideas; Depth and complexity of thought supported by rich, pertinent details; supporting evidence leads to high-level idea development	20-25

Table 1. Scoring Rubric

### 3.4.2 The Treatment Period

Following some scholars (e.g., Crookes, 1989; Ellis & Yuan, 2004; Kellogg, 1990; Mehnert, 1998; Shehadeh, 2011; Shin, 2008; Skehan & Foster, 1997), all groups spent 10 minutes planning. In addition, the participants in this study spent 30 minutes writing the pretests and posttests essays as well as each composition during the treatment period.

In the first session, the pretest was done and the format of work was explained to each group. In the second session, the formats of argumentative essay as well as outlining an essay were briefed. In the third session, the main treatment period started, which lasted for 5 sessions. During this time, every session, the participants in the experimental groups planned their writing for 10 minutes and then wrote an argumentative essay for 30 minutes. Finally, in the 8<sup>th</sup> session, the posttest was administered in each group.

The participants in the IP group did the pre-task planning alone without receiving help from other classmates or the instructor, while in the FMIP group the individuals could ask the teacher for help whenever they needed feedback. Additionally, the teacher reviewed the outlines and provided the individuals with appropriate feedback before they started composing their essays. In the CP group, the participants collaborated in pairs with their peers in the pre-task planning, whereas the participants in the FMCP group, not only did the pre-task planning in pairs through collaboration with their peers, but they also had the opportunity of asking for the teacher feedback whenever they needed it. Like the FMIP, the teacher reviewed the outlines and offered the appropriate feedback before the students wrote their essays.

Two points should be noted in this research (1) No student took the pre- and posttests twice; and 2) The topics of essays were different in the mentioned tests. However, the topics were the same for all groups.

### 3.4.3 The Scoring Procedure

During the quantitative analyses, in order to prevent the possibility of the researcher's bias and considering the rater reliability (Mackey & Gass, 2005), the three researchers evaluated each essay independently, and the final score was the average score of the three raters.

## 4. Data Analyses and Results

### 4.1 The Normality Tests

The assumption of normality was examined through both the graphic of histogram and a numerical way, as recommended by Larson-Hall (2010); the ratio of skewedness and kurtosis over their respective standard errors were utilized as the numerical way of assessing the normality (Field, 2013; Larson-Hall, 2010). All the tests enjoyed normal distribution both as indicated by histogram and the mentioned numerical tests; their outcomes were within the ranges of  $\pm 1.96$  (Field, 2013).

### 4.2 Ensuring the Homogeneity of Groups

A one-way between-groups Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) was conducted to explore the difference among groups' performance (Larson-Hall, 2010) on the QPT. It should be noted that the general ANOVA assumptions were met. The assumption of normality was explained above. Additionally, the Sig value for Levene's test was 0.99, which was greater than 0.05, so the assumption of homogeneity of variance was not violated. Table 2 gives both between-groups and within-groups information.

As Table 2 indicates, the result of the one-way ANOVA revealed no significant difference at the  $p < 0.05$  level in scores for the five groups: Sig. = 0.92,  $F(4, 115) = 0.22$ . However, the  $\eta^2$  was found to be 0.00, which in (Cohen's, 1988 as cited in Pallant, 2013) terms is considered a very small effect size.

The second instrument which was used to decide on the homogeneity of the groups was the pretests. The assumptions of normality and homogeneity of variances were met. The Sig value for Levene's test was 0.69, which was greater than 0.05; therefore, a one-way between-groups ANOVA was conducted to explore the difference among groups' performance (Larson-Hall, 2010) on the pretests. Table 3 gives both between-groups and within-groups information.

As Table 3 shows, the result of the one-way ANOVA revealed

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	2.21	4	0.55	0.22	0.92
Within Groups	283.37	115	2.46		
Total	285.89	119			

Table 2. ANOVA for the Placement Test

no significant difference at the  $p < 0.05$  level in scores for the five groups: Sig. = 0.99,  $F(4, 115) = 0.03$ . Nevertheless, the Eta squared was found to be 0.00, which in (Cohen's, 1988, as cited in Pallant, 2013) terms is considered a very small effect size.

### 4.3 Inter-Rater Reliability Indices

The Cronbach alpha indices were calculated as inter-rater reliability coefficients.

Table 4 indicates good and acceptable reliability indices.

### 4.4 The Findings of the Research Question

As the groups included quite small sample sizes and very small effect sizes were found for the placement test and pretest, a one-way Analysis of Covariance (ANCOVA) was utilized, as recommended by Larson-Hall (2010) and Pallant (2013). The pretest was considered as the covariate.

It should be noted that with regard to the requirements that are special to the ANCOVA, only the assumption of

homogeneity regression slopes was not met; the following is the information about these requirements.

- The relationship between the covariate and response variable proved to be linear enough by the scatterplot.
- The Sig. value on the Levene's Test of equality of error variances was 0.43, which was greater than 0.05; thus, the variances were equal.

The assumption of homogeneity of regression slopes was assessed statistically. The Sig. value for the interaction (Treatment \* Pretest) was 0.02, which is smaller than 0.05 and a problem as mentioned by Larson-Hall, (2010) and Pallant (2013); the slopes for each group of the regression were not the same. As a result, following one of the Larson-Hall's (2010) recommended solutions, the robust ANCOVA analysis was used, "which does not require homogeneity of regression" (p. 364).

The robust one-way ANCOVA revealed that the groups were significantly different in terms of their scores on the posttests ( $F 4, 114 = 417.12, p = .000 < 0.05$ , partial eta-squared = 0.93, power = 1.00); therefore, 93% of the variance in the dependent variable (i.e. structural organization and clarity of argumentative essays) is explained by the treatments. As for the effect size, according to (Cohen, 1988, as cited in Pallant, 2013), this is a large effect size.

On the other hand, regarding the influence of the covariate (i.e. pretest), the Sig. value was 0.00, which is also less than 0.05, and thus indicating that the pre-test scores were a statistical covariate with a strong effect size ( $F 1, 114 = 301.78, p = 0.000 < 0.05$ , partial eta-squared = 0.72, power = 1.00); this means that pre-test scores did have a strong effect on how the participants performed on the post-test. Table 5 shows the adjusted means (i.e. the mean

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	0.02	4	0.00	0.03	0.99
Within Groups	21.22	115	0.18		
Total	21.25	119			

Table 3. ANOVA for the Pretests

Tests	Groups	Indices
Pretest	IP	0.74
	FMIP	0.81
	CP	0.83
	FMCP	0.85
	NP	0.89
Posttest	IP	0.97
	FMIP	0.97
	CP	0.96
	FMCP	0.98
	NP	0.92

Table 4. Inter-Rater Reliability Indices

Groups	Mean	Standard Error	95% Confidence Interval		Bootstrap for Mean <sup>a, n</sup>		95% Confidence Interval	
			Lower Bound	Upper Bound	Bias	Standard Error	Lower	Upper
IP	15.56	0.07	15.41	15.71	0.00	0.11	15.31	15.79
FMIP	18.06	0.07	17.90	18.21	-0.00	0.09	17.87	18.23
CP	16.23	0.07	16.08	16.39	0.00	0.09	16.06	16.41
FMCP	18.05	0.07	17.90	18.20	0.00	0.09	17.86	18.24
NP	14.51	0.07	14.36	14.66	0.00	0.06	14.39	14.64

<sup>a</sup> Covariates appearing in the model are evaluated at the following values: Pre-test = 14.40,  
<sup>a, n</sup> Unless otherwise noted, bootstrap results are based on 1000 bootstrap samples.

Table 5. Estimated Marginal Means

scores with the influence of the covariate factored out).

Additionally, because significant difference was found between the groups and the independent variable had five groups, the post-hoc tests were also run on the independent variable. Following Larson-Hall's (2010) recommendation, the Least Significant Difference (LSD) was selected for its higher power. The pairwise comparisons table showed a significant difference between the control group (NP) and all the experimental ones.

Moreover, the experimental groups that did not have any significant differences were FMIP and FMCP (FMIP ( $n = 24$ ,  $M = 18.06$ ); FMCP ( $n = 24$ ,  $M = 18.05$ ), ( $p = 0.94 > 0.05$ , Cohen's  $d = -.01$ ), but these two groups outperformed the IP ( $n = 24$ ,  $M = 15.56$ ) and CP ( $n = 24$ ,  $M = 16.23$ ) ones; the corresponding Sig. values were  $0.000 < 0.05$ .

Considering the IP and CP groups, the corresponding Sig. value was 0.000, which was less than 0.05 indicating that there was a significant difference between them, and as the mean scores reveal, the CP group outperformed the IP one. The effect size was found to be 0.8, which is large according to Cohen's (1988, as cited in Pallant, 2013).

Based on Larson-Hall's (2010) guideline, the effect sizes were calculated with standard deviations. The following are the calculated effect sizes for the found significant differences: IP and FMIP (Cohen's  $d = 3.1$ ); CP and FMCP (Cohen's  $d = 2.5$ ); IP and FMCP (Cohen's  $d = 3.1$ ); CP and FMIP (Cohen's  $d = 2.5$ ); IP and NP (Cohen's  $d = -1.5$ ); CP and NP (Cohen's  $d = -2.9$ ); FMIP and NP (Cohen's  $d = -5.6$ ); FMCP and NP (Cohen's  $d = -5.7$ ). Thus, all the outcomes revealed very large effect sizes.

## 5. Discussion

Pre-task planning, whether done individually or collaboratively, both with and without feedback, proved to be helpful in terms of improving the quality of structural organization and clarity of argumentative essays. Nevertheless, the CP group was better than the IP one, and the FMIP as well as the FMCP outperformed the others.

Most of the previous studies which investigated the issues of planning as a pre-writing activity focused on the effect of it on the fluency, lexical, and grammatical complexity as well as accuracy (Ellis & Yuan, 2004; Farahani & Faryabi, 2016;

Ghavamnia et al., 2013; Johnson et al., 2012; Johnson & Nicodemus, 2016; Rahimpour & Safarie, 2011; Tavakoli & Rezazadeh, 2014) or some explored the items of organization, content, grammar, mechanics, and style (Ameri-Golestan & Dousti, 2015; Shin, 2008). Although there are some similarities among the previous research and the current one, the setting, scoring procedures as well as the tasks and participants' conditions are different; as a result, whether the studies are closely comparable may be a matter of question.

Considering the positive impact of the pretask planning, the findings of this study confirm what Ameri-Golestan and Dousti (2015) found. The interpretation might be put on the results of the current study in terms of Kellogg's (1996) model of working memory. When several processes must be managed simultaneously, as in writing a text (Torrance & Galbraith, 2006), attentional demands are very high, but pre-task planning may positively impact the language produced (Skehan & Foster, 2001). Therefore, based on Kellogg's (1996) model, pre-task planning reduced the demands placed on working memory resources, which allowed more attention to be directed to the translation process of writing the text. Ellis and Yuan (2004) also stated that pre-task planning can help the participants use such planning time to concentrate attention on the propositional content of the essay, so it "facilitates process and text planning for content and organization" (p. 78)

Moreover, the positive effects of collaboration found in this study are consistent with the findings of some previous studies (e.g., Ajideh, Leitner, & Yazdi-Amirkhiz, 2016; Elola & Oskoz, 2010; Shehadeh, 2011; Storch, 2005; Storch & Wigglesworth, 2007). Nonetheless, the present research was different from the above-mentioned ones because it did not examine the whole composing process collaboratively; this study explored the differences between collaborative and individual planning as a pre-writing activity. Nevertheless, the following logical explanations can be proposed.

Findings of this study can be explained in terms of the social constructivist view of learning stated earlier in the Introduction section. In addition, from a socio-cognitive perspective, L2 writing is a process "in which mind, body,

and ecosocial world function integratively" (Nishino & Atkinson, 2015, p. 37). On the one hand, "Mental models of any cognitive endeavor will vary from learner to learner." (Devine, Railey, & Boshoff, 1993, p. 205). On the other hand, Shehadeh (2011) explained:

According to the social constructivist perspective of learning, external activities in which the learner participates are the main source of mental/ cognitive activities. When individuals interact, their cognitive processes awaken. (L2) learners first collaboratively construct knowledge as a joint activity, and then transform it into a mental one through the processes of approximation and internalization. It has been argued that this co-construction of knowledge engages learners in cognitive processes that can be a source of L2 learning (p. 297).

Moreover, based on the socio-cognitive perspective, "the effects of planning on attention are as much a matter of social action as they are of cognitive processing" (Batstone, 2005, p. 278). Batstone (2005) stated that:

We can usefully think of learners' engagements with language through planning as being socio-cognitive: 'cognitive' because attention is so centrally implicated, 'social' because attention is activated through discourse endeavor of very particular kinds, 'socio-cognitive' because the cognitive and the social are so closely intertwined (p. 278).

This fact shows that when participants planned collaboratively (i.e. a social action), their attention was activated. As it was already mentioned by Ellis and Yuan (2004), the participants in the current study may have used collaborative pre-task planning time to concentrate attention on the propositional content of the essay.

Moreover, the superiority of the FMIP and FMCP can be supported by Vygotsky's emphasis on the importance of meaningful social interactions between novice learners and more experienced others (Nyikos & Hashimoto, 1997); Vygotsky believed that such interaction will support learning because cognitive functions originate in social interaction and that learning "is the process by which learners are integrated into a knowledge community" (Woo and Revees, 2007, p. 18). Therefore, such meaningful

interaction is assumed to be essential for the learner's cognitive development to occur and progress, "which extend his or her knowledge of the task at hand from a lower level of understanding to a higher order of thinking through, with the assistance of more experienced social partners" (Lin & Yang, 2011, p. 4). In this study, like what Shi (1998) and Shin (2008) found, the individuals in the IP group were limited to their own ideas with no help to conceptualize or direct them, whereas the other groups were provided by opportunities to conceptualize a variety of other people's viewpoints. Through FMIP and FMCP, both cognitive apprenticeship and scaffolding occurred; not only did the students have the responsibility to do the required task, but also the teacher, as the more knowledgeable person, had the responsibility of offering the learner support to facilitate the process of doing the task and learning. Teacher scaffolding, as an active, ongoing process is considered essential to support writing instruction (Benko, 2012). On the other hand, as some scholars have stated, scaffolding can occur in peer interaction, when learners work in small groups or pairs (Donato, 1994; Storch, 2002, 2005, 2007), which took place in the CP group in this study; however, the teacher scaffolding proved to be more beneficial; this finding is in line with what Riazi and Rezaii (2011) found.

Finally, although the affective factors have not been statistically assessed in the current study and this issue needs to be meticulously investigated, the affective factors might have some positive effects on the performance of the participating students based on the previous studies. For example, the positive effect of individual and collaborative writing on decreasing the writing anxiety level of EFL learners was already proved by Wu (2015) as well as Jallili and Shahrokhi (2017). Qashoa (2014) also suggested that the strategies related to process writing approach such as group work and planning can alleviate writing anxiety. Furthermore, Huwari and Hashima (2011) revealed that L2 learners with high writing anxiety lacked self-esteem and confidence in improving their writing skills; they usually wrote papers of low quality (e.g., lacking well-developed ideas). One of the sources of writing anxiety in Cheng's (2004) categorization was also low self-confidence. As Ellis and Yuan (2004) stated and Ojima (2006) found, pre-task

planning could contribute to increase in L2 learners' confidence in their ability to write clearly and effectively. This has also been supported by the previous studies on the relationship between writing strategy instruction and/or use and the learners' self-efficacy (See e.g., Magogwe & Oliver, 2007). Additionally, considering the teacher feedback, Pajares and Johnson (1994), asserted that, "one important source of students' self-confidence lies in the feedback that students receive from their teachers." (p. 327). In addition, Qashoa (2014) added that self-confidence can be enhanced in L2 learners through teachers' helpful feedback. Therefore, it can be hypothesized that doing pre-task planning, especially in conjunction with the teacher feedback could contribute to increasing the learners' level of self-confidence in the present study, and as a result, may have alleviated their level of writing anxiety and could lead to improvement of their writing ability and the quality of their written texts.

## Conclusion and Recommendation for Future Research

Pre-task planning, whether done individually or collaboratively, both with and without feedback, proved to be helpful in terms of improving the quality of structural organization and clarity of argumentative essays. Nevertheless, the CP group was better than the IP one, and the FMIP as well as the FMCP outperformed the others. In spite of this, it should be stated that the groups in this study comprised small sample sizes and this can affect the generalizability of the findings, the results can be enlightening; the L2 writing teachers can apply the techniques utilized in this research in their classes, and hopefully obtain beneficial results.

As the concluding remark, it should be noted that a qualitative study is essential to investigate the students' attitudes and expectations towards the purpose and value of the experimental treatments with the aims of first, exploring their attitudinal engagement, which was recommended by Ellis (2010), and second, finding out some information about their individual differences via analyzing their statements in order to understand how they can be helped to do the writing task better (Hyland, 2009).

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## ABOUT THE AUTHORS

*Fatemeh Soltanpour is currently working as a University Lecturer in the Department of English at Kar Higher Education Institute, Qazvin, Iran. She holds an MA in TEFL from Payame Noor University, Tehran, Iran. She has also been teaching EFL since 2003. She has published several research papers in different scholarly Journals. Her areas of interest, include Psycholinguistics, Individual Differences in Language Learning, Corrective Feedback, Learner Autonomy, CALL, Teacher Education and Development.*



*Mohammadreza Valizadeh is currently a PhD candidate in the Department of English at Gazi University, Ankara, Turkey. He holds an MA in TEFL from University of Tehran, Iran. He has published several articles in different scholarly Journals. His areas of interests, include Psycholinguistics, Language Learning Strategies, Learner and Teacher Autonomy, Task-Based Language Teaching, and Individual Differences in Language Learning.*



*Fatemeh Ghafarianzrak holds M.A. in TEFL. She has graduated from Payame Noor University, Tehran, Iran. She has been teaching EFL at high schools in Mashhad, Iran for over 25 years. Her research interest is in EFL learning and Teaching.*

