



From Task-Based to Task-Mediated Language Teaching: a Case Study – Action Research approach to developing a Chinese EFL writing course.

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Date: 9th February 2026

Dedication

This thesis is dedicated to you, my beloved daughter, Aimee. In moments when I felt overwhelmed, uncertain, and full of self-doubt, you once said something so simple but powerful: *“Be you, then everything will be fine.”* I have carried those words with me more times than you may ever know.

Thank you for your support, your understanding, and the steady love you gave me throughout this long journey. Your laughter brought light to difficult days, and your hugs reminded me to breathe, slow down, and keep going. You helped me stay grounded, and you reminded me that I can be a researcher and still be your mum, wholeheartedly.

This thesis is part of my growth, but it also carries your warmth and courage. I dedicate it to you with all my love, and with the hope that one day you will feel proud, not only of what I achieved, but also of who I became along the way.

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Abstract

Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) has been widely promoted in China as an approach that emphasises learning by doing and real-world communication. Yet, cultural and practical challenges, such as the dominance of high-stakes examinations, limited teacher training, and learner expectations for teacher-led instruction (Ji & Pham, 2020; Li & Thomas, 2023; Liu et al., 2021), make TBLT application in authentic classrooms less straightforward. To better localise TBLT in China, scholars and practitioners have undertaken great efforts to adapt this approach to varied teaching contexts (e.g., Ji & Pham, 2020; Lu, 2022; Wen, 2018). Most of these adaptations are underpinned by Second Language Acquisition (SLA) theories that adopt a cognitive view of acquisition, where learning is seen as an individual mental process resulting from interaction. Within this SLA-oriented trajectory, adaptations have primarily sought to improve the provision of comprehensible input and to incorporate explicit grammar instruction, thereby addressing the accuracy-oriented nature of the Chinese context. What remains underexplored, however, is how to design tasks that embed scaffolding and mediation to support learners who are accustomed to teacher-led guidance and need more systematic support. This gap highlights the potential value of a sociocultural perspective, which views language learning as a socially mediated process where learners internalise knowledge through interaction and scaffolding. To better address how learners can be scaffolded and provided with effective mediation during task-based instruction, this study adopts a sociocultural perspective to adapt Willis (1996, 2021) and Ellis et al. (2020)'s task-based pedagogical frameworks in three iterative research cycles. Situated within paradigms of both interpretivism and social constructivism, this study employs a qualitative approach to explore learners' language development process and their perceptions of their language-learning experiences in an online writing course, while simultaneously examining how iterative action research cycles informed the development and refinement of the TBLT frameworks.

Informed by the Sociocultural Theory (SCT), I designed a SCT-informed TBLT online English writing course to teach email writing in a mainland China commercial English learning centre. In this course, SCT-featured instructional designs, including focus-group Needs Analysis, SCOBAs, collaborative writing, graduated corrective feedback, were integrated into traditional three-phase TBLT framework. Following the research design of action research, I, as the teacher-researcher, evaluated and developed the course in three iterative research cycles, where there was an independent cohort per cycle. The participants were 17 adult Chinese learners who planned to study abroad in English-speaking countries. Data was collected by video-recorded classroom observations and semi-structured interviews. I used microgenetic analysis (Aljaafreh & Lantolf, 1994; Ellis, 2005) to explore the classroom interactional data, and thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2022) to examine the data on learners' perceptions.

Findings indicate that learners' English developed from external to internal regulation, supporting the trajectory of L2 development grounded in SCT. During this transition from other-regulation to self-regulation, learners co-regulated the learning process, appropriated language resources and mediation tools, and often made use of L1 for its cognitive, affective and interactional mediating functions. Both linguistic and pragmatic improvements were evidenced by microgenetic growth and were further affirmed by learners in semi-structured interviews. Findings also show that learners held a generally positive perception of the online writing course. They attributed their improvement mainly to teacher and peer scaffolding, the tailored instructional support, and the course's built-in opportunities for reflection. They appreciated their contribution to the course, acknowledging their ownership of the learning process, which reflects their demonstration of learner agency.

Based on the interpretation of these findings, I developed the Task-Mediated Language Teaching (TMLT) pedagogical framework that embodies both learner-centred and learner-directed nature with five principles. The framework promotes learning by doing through process-oriented language development, encourages personalised instruction, upholds task authenticity, promotes collaboration, and supports an agentive role for learners throughout the course. Built on mainstream TBLT frameworks that only underscore the learner-centredness, the TMLT pedagogical framework further deepens this aspect by elevating it to a learner-directed nature. It grants power to learners throughout the course, highlighting learner agency in process.

By integrating sociocultural perspectives into TBLT, this study contributes to a less explored dimension of TBLT research, offering insights into how SCT tenets shape the adaptation process of TBLT frameworks. Pedagogically, the revised TMLT framework offers a structured approach for designing task-mediated writing courses that values learners' co-construction of the learning process and teacher professional learning.

Key words: Task-based Language Teaching; The Sociocultural Theory; Teaching L2 Writing

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Abbreviations

CNA – Collaborative Needs Analysis
CBI – Concept-based Instruction
CDST – Complex Dynamic Systems Theory
CET-4 – College English Test Band 4
CET-6 – College English Test Band 6
CF – Corrective Feedback
CLT – Communicative Language Teaching
CMC - Computer-Mediated Communication
CS-AR – Case Study–Action Research
CW – Collaborative Writing
DA – Dynamic Assessment
ELT – English Language Teaching
IELTS – International English Language Testing System
L1 – First Language
L2 – Second Language
LRE – Language Related Episode
PRE – Pragmatic Related Episode
MOE – Ministry of Education
NA – Needs Analysis
POA – Production-Oriented Approach
PPP – Presentation-Practice-Production
RQ – Research Question
RTA – Reflexive Thematic Analysis
SAT – Skill Acquisition Theory
SCT – Sociocultural Theory
SCOBA – Schema for the Orienting Basis of Action
SLA – Second Language Acquisition
TBLT – Task-Based Language Teaching
TMLT – Task-Mediated Language Teaching
TOEFL – Test of English as a Foreign Language
ZPD – Zone of Proximal Development

Chapter 1: Introduction

English language teaching (ELT) has occupied a central position in China's education system for decades. The establishment of English as a crucial component of formal education can be traced back to major policy reforms initiated in the late twentieth century, particularly following China's "Opening-Up" policy in 1978, which marked the beginning of a "golden age" for English in China (Q. Wen, 2024, p. 69). As China opened up to the outside world, English rapidly became a valuable resource for both national modernisation and individual advancement (Wen & Zhang, 2020). Access to authentic input expanded, study abroad opportunities multiplied, and proficiency in English became a form of cultural and economic capital. As China became increasingly integrated into the global economy, particularly after its accession to the WTO in 2001 and its successful bid to host the 2008 Olympic Games, the demand for communicative proficiency in English grew more pressing, reflecting the nation's internationalisation goals.

Against this backdrop, as one of the core subjects in the national curriculum, English is taught from primary school through university, with high-stakes examinations such as the Gaokao, College English Test Band 4 (CET-4) and College English Test Band 6 (CET-6), exerting a strong influence on teaching practices (Y. Wen, 2024). However, for much of the twentieth century, English classrooms had been dominated by grammar-translation and audiolingual methods, both of which were highly teacher-centred and focused on linguistic forms rather than communicative use (Y. Zhang, 2019). While such approaches were effective for developing reading and vocabulary knowledge, they often resulted in unbalanced competences and offered few opportunities for students to practise speaking or writing, leading to poor communicative capacity. In order to address these shortcomings, the government launched a series of top-down reforms, including curriculum revision, textbook renewal, and the adoption of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) as the guiding principle for English instruction (Feng, 2021; Hu, 2004). These reforms marked a clear shift from an emphasis on rote learning and grammatical accuracy to a focus on meaning and communicative competence. Within this reform climate, Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT), often regarded as a strong version of CLT, also began to attract attention among Chinese ELT scholars as a theoretically grounded approach to realising the goals of communicative competence (Q. Wen, 2024).

At the same time that CLT was promoted through national reforms and TBLT began to attract scholarly interest, the growing importance of English as a core academic subject also fuelled an unprecedented expansion of the private language training sector. Over the past three decades, private English schools and training centres have emerged across China, catering to learners whose needs could not be fully met by the public education system (Bray & Lykins, 2012). These institutions targeted a wide range of

learners, including school children seeking supplementary tuition, adolescents preparing for high-stakes examinations, and adults aiming to enhance their communicative or academic English for study abroad. Compared with public schools, private centres typically offered smaller classes, flexible curricula, and more specialised courses, thus positioning themselves as a vital complement to mainstream education (Xiong et al., 2022). However, their provision was largely test-oriented, as the demands of high-stakes examinations shaped both course content and learning goals. Many programmes were explicitly designed for test preparation, aiming to help students achieve higher scores in the English tests (Yung, 2015; Zhao et al., 2016), such as *Gaokao*, CET-4, CET-6, Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL), and International English Language Testing System (IELTS), sometimes even by directly teaching test-taking strategies. In this sense, the private sector, while expanding access to English learning opportunities, often reinforced the exam-oriented culture that already dominated English education in China's public schools.

The heavy emphasis on examination performance in both public schools and private training centres has led to overly test-oriented teaching and learning, which has been widely criticised and prompted government intervention (Wang, 2016). In response to this long-standing exam-oriented culture, the Chinese government introduced the "Double Reduction" policy in 2021 (Lyu & Lam, 2025). While the policy had broad objectives of reducing students' academic burden and regulating the after-school tutoring industry, it placed particular restrictions on the operation of private training institutions. These regulations prohibited excessive test preparation and exam-driven marketing, while encouraging a shift toward fostering practical language use and broader educational goals. For English training providers, the policy represented both a challenge and a mandate to reorient their courses away from high-stakes test preparation and toward promoting more meaningful, application-oriented learning.

In addition to these policy reforms, the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic almost simultaneously created a profound impact on ELT in China. School closures and social distancing measures necessitated a sudden shift to remote modes of delivery, accelerating the large-scale adoption of online and blended learning (Li, 2022; Zhang & Wu, 2022). What had previously been considered supplementary practices rapidly became mainstream, reshaping the ways in which English was taught and learned. For public schools, this transition meant moving entire curricula to digital platforms, while for private training institutions, it involved developing new forms of online courses to maintain student enrolment and engagement. The pandemic thus acted as a catalyst for digital transformation, embedding technology-mediated learning more firmly into the English education in China (Yi, 2024).

Taken together, these historical, institutional, and pedagogical conditions reveal a promising yet challenging landscape. While communicative and task-based pedagogies have been increasingly advocated in policy level, their implementation, particularly within private language training centres or schools, has often been shaped by exam-oriented priorities and practical classroom constraints. The Covid-19 pandemic further exposed both the possibilities and challenges of such pedagogical practices in online and hybrid environments. In the context, where opportunities and challenges coexist, this study focuses on localising TBLT within a private language training centre through an online writing course. This chapter proceeds as follows: Section 1.1 discusses TBLT in the Chinese context, Section 1.2 outlines my professional background, the research setting, and the rationale of this study, and presents the research aims, questions, and design, and Section 1.3 provides an overview of the thesis structure.

1.1. Task-Based Language Teaching in the Chinese EFL Context

TBLT emerged in the 1980s as a response to growing dissatisfaction with grammar-dominated and teacher-centred approaches in second language (L2) teaching and learning (Jackson, 2022). Influenced by developments in second language acquisition (SLA) theory, TBLT positioned meaningful communication at the heart of language learning. Unlike traditional approaches that prioritised the mastery of linguistic forms, TBLT emphasises the completion of real-world tasks as both the means and goal of instruction (Ellis et al., 2020). Over the decades, TBLT has gained significant international recognition and has been incorporated, with varying degrees of fidelity, into educational policies and curricula across diverse contexts. However, its implementation often reveals tensions between theoretical ideals and contextual realities, especially in Asian contexts (Carless et al., 2012; Chen & Wright, 2017). Given the scope of this introductory section, the key constructs and pedagogical debates that underpin TBLT will be examined in greater depth in Chapter 2.

In the Chinese EFL context, particularly in higher education, TBLT has been actively promoted through a series of national curriculum reforms. For example, the 2015 College English Teaching Guidelines issued by the Ministry of Education (MOE) explicitly recommend the adoption of task-based teaching approaches as part of a broader effort to enhance communicative competence, learning autonomy, and ability to use English in real-life situations (MOE, 2015). These principles are further reinforced in the 2020 Guidelines, which advocate output-oriented, project-based, and task-driven instruction aligned with learner-centeredness, real-world communication needs, and the integration of language use, cultural, and thinking skills (MOE, 2020). Although the terms “task-based” and TBLT are not used explicitly in the 2020 document, the pedagogical orientation nevertheless remains closely aligned with

core TBLT principles, particularly in their emphasis on meaningful communication and the integration of language use with real-world interaction.

While policy endorsement has created favourable conditions for adopting TBLT in China, its realisation in classrooms has been shaped by a complex interplay of opportunities and constraints. From a policy and assessment perspective, the integration of communicative, project-based, and task-driven elements into curriculum guidelines offers a clear opening for reform. However, the dominance of high-stakes examinations, such as the Gaokao, CET-4 and CET-6, continues to prioritise accuracy, discrete-item knowledge, and test-taking skills over communicative competence (Butler, 2011; Hu, 2002; Liu & Guo, 2020). This exam-oriented environment often constrains curricular flexibility, making it difficult for teachers to allocate time for open-ended communicative tasks or assess performance using criteria other than accuracy (Liu et al., 2021; Lu, 2022). At the classroom level, the interactive and learner-centred nature of TBLT can motivate learners and encourage collaboration, but large class sizes, fixed curricula, and high teacher workloads make it difficult to manage group tasks and provide individualised feedback (Li & Thomas, 2023; Liu & Ren, 2021). In addition, insufficient sustained professional development in TBLT often results in teachers reverting to teacher-directed, form-focused instruction (Li & Thomas, 2023; Liu et al., 2021; Zheng & Borg, 2014). Learner-related factors also shaped the uptake of TBLT. On one hand, Chinese learners in this context tend to value pedagogical approaches that respect and respond to their expressed needs, and they often report high satisfaction when such needs are addressed through course design and interaction (S. Zhang, 2019). On the other hand, many learners, socialised in teacher-centred, exam-oriented schooling, expect teacher-led, explicit instruction in linguistic items, especially in grammar teaching (Ji & Pham, 2020). Moreover, their readiness for autonomous learning and peer collaboration varies considerably, affecting the consistency and depth of their engagement in task-based learning (Liu & Guo, 2020). Collectively, these factors indicate that implementing TBLT in China cannot rely solely on policy support; it also requires coordinated strategies to address systemic, pedagogical, and cultural challenges.

Against the backdrop of the opportunities and challenges outlined above, TBLT is often regarded as unsuitable for direct transplantation into the Chinese EFL context. Instead, scholars have called for inclusive, non-doctrinaire approaches that can inform the construction of localized TBLT theory and practice with distinct Chinese characteristics (Carless et al., 2012; Liu & Guo, 2020). In response, Chinese scholars and frontline teachers have undertaken a range of adaptations to better align TBLT with local pedagogical, institutional, and cultural realities. One major direction in localizing TBLT in China involves combining task-based instruction with elements of task-supported language teaching (TSLT), particularly to address the accuracy-oriented demands of the exam-driven instructional context.

Carless et al. (2012) advocated that reconciling TBLT with more traditional, form-focused approaches, such as Presentation-Practice-Production (PPP), might offer a productive path for contextual adaptation. Building on such ideas, Ellis (2021b) developed a modular curriculum model that integrates TBLT and task-supported language teaching (TSLT). While not originally developed with China as its primary focus, Ellis's modular curriculum model has been identified by Chen and Dan (2024) as especially compatible with the accuracy-oriented and exam-driven nature of English education in China, offering a context-sensitive means of balancing communicative goals with requirements for linguistic form and accuracy. In addition to integrating TBLT and TSLT as complementary but distinct components at the curriculum level, other scholars have proposed more balanced adaptations that embed TSLT elements directly within individual task-based lessons. For example, Lu (2022) proposed a localized form of TBLT characterised by task alignment with exam content, the selection of textbook-based materials, an emphasis on accuracy, and reduced time spent on task implementation. She argued that this adaptation reflected an evolution toward a TSLT-informed TBLT, which preserves task structures while ensuring compatibility with institutional constraints. Similarly, Ji and Pham (2020) explored a range of adjustments made to mitigate the mismatch between TBLT principles and educational traditions in China. These included the addition of grammatical input, encouragement of focus on form, promotion of peer feedback on grammar, and increased teacher intervention during tasks.

Another attempt to localise TBLT in the Chinese EFL context is the Production-Oriented Approach (POA), proposed by Wen (2018). As a response to the limited applicability of TBLT, POA represents a systematic and theory-driven reconstruction of TBLT tailored to the Chinese educational context. It retains TBLT's emphasis on the functional use of language and encourage learners to complete purposeful communicative tasks in real or simulated situations. In this sense, POA promotes language learning as means to achieve communicative purposes, support interaction, and solve problems (Q. Wen, 2024). However, POA reconfigures both the function of tasks and the pedagogical sequence. Unlike TBLT, where tasks work as the primary unit of instruction and a site for learning by doing, tasks in POA primarily function as motivational drivers positioned at the beginning of the cycle. This aims to generate a communicative need that drives learning, rather than using tasks as vehicles for meaning negotiation. This is followed by enabling and assessing phases, where teachers support learners in expressing intended meaning and evaluating outcomes. As such, POA reflects not merely an adjustment of TBLT, but a comprehensive reconfiguration of task-based instruction, underpinned by the Output-Driven and Input-Enabled Hypothesis (Q. Wen, 2024). Notably, these adaptations, whether modular, integrated, or structurally reconfigured, continue to draw primarily on cognitive SLA theories.

Alternative theoretical perspectives, such as Sociocultural Theory (SCT), remain underexplored in current Chinese localisation efforts.

1.2. Research Context and Design

This study was conducted in a private language training centre in mainland China that primarily serves adult learners preparing for overseas study, offering short-term, intensive IELTS and TOEFL preparation courses as its main curricular focus. Compared to public educational institutions, such training centres operate with greater curricular flexibility and a market-oriented focus, often tailoring their programmes to the immediate demands of learners and parents (Yung, 2015). At the time this research commenced, I had been working in the centre for nearly a decade as a writing instructor and participating in programme design. This long-term work experience gave me an in-depth understanding of the centre's pedagogical practices and the learning needs of its students, providing a strong foundation for the design and implementation of the present study. As in many similar private language training schools in China, the teaching culture has long been shaped by an exam-orientated method, in which high-stakes assessments exert a strong influence. In practice, this often meant using the more teacher-centred approaches to explicitly teach test-taking strategies and discrete language points, and, in the case of writing and speaking classes, providing extensive model texts or templates for students to memorise and reproduce in exam settings.

In recent years, this centre has sought to diversify its teaching approaches in response to evolving learner needs and broader trends in language education. Learner-centred methodologies have gained increasing attention, both for their communicative potential and for their alignment with internationally recognised practices. TBLT has therefore been considered a promising option and was piloted in several elective courses. Many teachers in the centre, particularly those with overseas TESOL training experience, have some understanding of TBLT principles. However, the implementation of TBLT in practice has revealed challenges that limited its perceived effectiveness. Unlike those commonly reported in university contexts (Liu et al., 2021; Liu & Ren, 2021), such as large class sizes, the constraints of a fixed syllabus or teachers' reluctance to adopt TBLT because of heavy workloads, the challenges in this context primarily stemmed from learner-related factors. According to student feedback, in TBLT-oriented classes they sometimes felt a lack of explicit instruction and experienced reduced confidence in their learning.

These observations from my teaching context align with findings from previous research suggesting that, in contexts influenced by exam-oriented and teacher-directed educational traditions and prior learning experiences, learners may value learner-centred approaches yet still rely heavily on teacher guidance (Ji & Pham, 2020). This pedagogical challenge forms the starting point of the present study.

In this context, the key question was how to integrate tasks in a way that maintained their “taskness” (see Section 2.3 for details) while providing a “soft landing” for learners who were accustomed to, and reassured by, more explicit forms of guidance. From an SCT perspective, my interpretation was that students felt they had not received the kind of mediated support that would give them a sense of security in the learning process. Accordingly, this study seeks to adapt the TBLT framework through the lens of SCT to design a writing course that address these challenges while laying the groundwork for a pedagogical framework responsive to the contextual needs of similar instructional settings.

Building the professional context and pedagogical challenges outlined above, the study aims to design, implement, and evaluate an adapted SCT-informed TBLT writing course to integrate systematic support into the task cycle. In other words, the research aim is to use SCT to inform the implementation of TBLT in this particular context, ensuring that tasks, together with the pre-task and post-task activities are developmentally supportive. The overall aim is to develop an instructional framework that is based on SCT and can be used in similar teaching contexts.

Based on these aims, the study seeks to answer the following research questions:

1. How does learners’ English language develop during the SCT-informed TBLT online writing course?
2. How do learners perceive their language-learning experiences during the SCT-informed TBLT online writing course?
3. How does the case study-action research approach promote the development and revision of the TBLT framework?

To address these questions, the study adopted a qualitative research design situated within a social constructivist–interpretivist paradigm. A combination of a collective case study approach and action research was used over three iterative research cycles, each involving a different cohort of adult Chinese EFL learners preparing for overseas study. The course in each cycle was delivered online and designed using an SCT-informed TBLT framework. Data were collected through classroom observation and semi-structured interviews with learners in each cycle. Data analysis used microgenetic analysis of classroom interaction alongside reflexive thematic analysis of interview data. This iterative design allowed findings from each cycle to inform the pedagogical adjustments and research focus of the subsequent cycle.

1.3. Structure of the Thesis

The remaining thesis comprises the following five chapters.

Chapter 2 reviews the literature relevant to the study in three main parts. First, it outlines SCT as the theoretical framework underpinning the research. Second, it examines TBLT as a pedagogical framework in relation to SCT. Finally, it discusses approaches to teaching L2 writing, highlighting issues and debates most relevant to the study.

Chapter 3 details the research methodology. It explains the selection of a social constructivist-interpretivist paradigm, describes the combined case study – action research design, and outlines the pedagogical set-up of the writing course. The chapter then presents the methods of data collection and analysis adopted in the study.

Chapter 4 presents the findings from the three research cycles. Each cycle, treated as a separate case, includes findings from classroom observation and semi-structured interviews with learners.

Chapter 5 discusses the findings with reference to the three research questions, drawing on SCT to interpret the findings. The first part examines mechanisms of L2 development identified in the study. The second explores learners' perceptions of their language-learning experiences in the writing course. Addressing RQ 3, the third part synthesises insights from the first two sections to present and discuss the Task-Mediated Language Teaching (TMLT) framework developed through the study.

Finally, Chapter 6 concludes the thesis by summarising the key findings and contributions, discussing the study's limitations, and offering the researcher's reflection on the project from a teacher-researcher perspective.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

2.1. Introduction

This chapter reviews the theoretical and pedagogical foundations that inform the study. It proceeds from theory to pedagogy to application in order to build a coherent rationale for investigating TBLT writing classroom settings. First, it outlines key constructs from sociocultural theory that frame learning as a mediated, socially situated activity. Concepts including mediation, regulation, internalisation, appropriation, and Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), provide a lens for analysing how learners develop through participation in classroom activity and how tools and interaction shape that development.

Second, the chapter reviews TBLT as the pedagogical framework adopted in this thesis. It synthesises core definitions of task, explains the theoretical underpinnings, distinguishes stronger and weaker versions of task-based work, and surveys major implementation frameworks and design variables relevant to classroom practice. This section clarifies how a task-based approach organises teaching around purposeful activity while creating principled opportunities for attention to language during performance and revision.

Third, the chapter narrows to L2 writing taught through a task-based lens. It maps how process-, product- and genre-oriented traditions intersect with task-based principles, and it synthesises evidence on collaborative writing in task settings. Particular attention is given to how collaborative writing can function as a site for in-task mediation and how genre sensitivity and product standards can be incorporated without undermining the communicative orientation of tasks.

2.2. Sociocultural Perspectives of L2 Learning and Teaching

Rooted in the work of Soviet psychologist Lev Vygotsky who famously stated that “through others we become ourselves” (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 105), SCT provides an overarching theoretical frame for understanding the relationship between learning and mental development in this study. Vygotsky (1978) viewed cognitive development as inherently social, where higher mental functions emerged first in social interaction before being internalised. Building on Vygotsky’s foundation, SCT was expanded and advanced by other scholars. For example, Wertsch (1985) further developed SCT by emphasizing language as the primary tool of mediation, exploring how individuals appropriate cultural knowledge through discourse and interaction. These insights have strongly influenced sociocultural L2 learning by shifting attention from language as a system to language as a socially mediated activity.

Recognising the potential to explain the socially mediated nature of language learning, scholars in applied linguistics began to explore L2 learning from a sociocultural perspective from the 1980s. Lantolf and his colleagues were among scholars who initiated exploration of SCT as a theoretical lens to investigate L2 development (e.g., Aljaafreh & Lantolf, 1994; Lantolf & Thorne, 2006). However, this line of work encountered resistance from some mainstream SLA scholars (e.g., Long, 2015), who maintained a purely cognitive view of how L2 is acquired (Long & Ahmadian, 2021). This conflict arose because from the perspective of SCT, L2 development is not just about the acquisition of language for communication. Rather, it is about how cultural tools, especially language, mediate cognitive process, including the development of L2 communicative abilities, conceptual thinking, perceiving, and representing things and events in the external world (Lantolf et al., 2018). For SLA, language is a product that can be analysed in terms of discrete linguistic forms and cognitive processing mechanisms, whereas for SCT, it is a process through which individuals construct meaning, develop higher mental functions, and transform participation in social activity (Van Compernelle, 2015).

Since the 1990s, the growing acceptance of SCT in L2 education research has been evidenced by the expanding use of this theoretical framework to address issues pertinent to L2 learning, teaching and assessment in applied linguistics and TESOL research. In most research on L2 development, SCT is mainly employed for two purposes. In one thread, many scholars use SCT to explain findings of classroom activities and teacher interventions through a SCT lens. That is, SCT provides a rationale for those findings (e.g., Haiyang, 2017; Kim et al., 2020; Sato & Angulo, 2020; Wu, 2018; Zhang & Zhang, 2023). In the other thread, SCT plays the role of a theoretical framework to inform the pedagogical design. For example, Concept-based Instruction (CBI) and Dynamic Assessments (DA) are two SCT-informed pedagogical applications (Poehner & Lantolf, 2024).

SCT emphasises the mediated process by which human mental functioning is shaped by cultural artifacts, activities, and concepts. Humans use and develop those artifacts to regulate and control their physical and mental actions (Lantolf et al., 2020). One of the key arguments of SCT is that the cognitive functions initially emerge in social interactions between individuals, and subsequently become internalized within individuals (Poehner & Lantolf, 2024; Storch, 2017), which is distinct from the SLA view of cognitive processes within an individual's brain. That is, the direction of cognitive development is from the inter-mental behaviour (i.e., the social) to the intra-mental state (i.e., the individual). SCT considers L2 learning in the same way. That is, L2 learning is socially mediated, occurring from externally to internally. When applying the SCT concepts to explain L2 learning, such a learning process is catalysed by the interaction between others, often a more knowledgeable individual, and a learner.

The following sections will present key sociocultural constructs and their applications in related studies. These include mediation, regulation, internalisation, appropriation, and ZPD.

2.2.1. Mediation

Mediation is the fundamental tenet of SCT (Lantolf et al., 2020; Poehner & Lantolf, 2024), because human contact with the physical and social world is not direct but is mediated (Vygotsky, 1978). Mediation occurs when tools are used to enable or enhance human's actions and psychological process, including thinking process. These tools could be physical tools, such as books, toys blocks, and flashcards. These tools are labelled as mediational means (Swain et al., 2015) or more directly, mediational tools (Poehner & Lantolf, 2024). Notably, physical tools cannot become mediational means unless they are used. Mere existence of the physical tools does not have the power to shape or impact how people interact with the world, and thus they are not powerful enough to make those tools mediational. Therefore, whether a physical tool can become a mediational tool depends on how humans make use of it.

Similarly, symbolic artefacts, such as language, signs, and gestures, can also be mediational tools. Among these, language is a typical symbolic artefact that works as a mediator in mental activity (Kozulin, 2023). By the use of language, the abstract thoughts are transformed into artifacts for further analysis and deliberations. In this process, learners also gain a deeper understanding of the complex phenomenon. However, language cannot always be powerful as a cognitive tool unless it is used to serve cognitive purposes rather than social purposes (Storch, 2017). For example, when language is employed for planning and drawing attention, it is used for cognitive purposes which can mediate thinking process, while when it is adopted for general greeting, it is for social purposes.

Beyond physical and symbolic tools as mediators, Kozulin (2023), who notably extended the notions of mediation, proposed that the concept also encompasses humans and activities. He argued that humans can serve as mediators in learning contexts because they shape individuals' cognitive and social development by selecting, emphasising, and interpreting environment stimuli, such as objects, events, and interactions, as well as guiding them through cultural and educational environments. The mediational function, however, appears more multifaceted. At the compositional level, activities function as mediators because they inherently integrate multiple forms of mediation, including physical, symbolic and human mediators. For example, learning as an activity involves physical tools such as textbooks and digital resources, symbolic mediators like language and mathematical notation, and human mediators such as teachers and peers who provide guidance and scaffolding. In this sense, an activity serves as a convergence point for various mediation tools, where these tools interact to structure and guide the activity. At the impact level, beyond merely integrating mediators, activities

themselves carry cultural imprints that shape participants' cognition and learning trajectories. As Kozulin (2023) suggested, activities such as formal education and professional work influence how individual develop learning abilities and cognitive strategies. This indicates that activities are not just platforms for mediation, but also play an active role in shaping cognitive development.

In the field of L2 research, language as a mediator has received significant attention, which is often associated with the term "languaging". "Languaging" as a process where language is used to make meaning and shape knowledge and experience (Swain & Watanabe, 2019). For example, when L2 learners are languaging a problem in an L2 learning task or a concept, they use language to enable themselves to think through solutions to a problem or the concept. It is both processes and products because it not only addresses the use of language as a tool for learners to work their way through problems, including linguistic problems, but also it allows new understandings or knowledge to be constructed. Since Swain (2006) proposed the concept, numerous studies have investigated how "languaging" mediates L2 learning across different contexts and modalities (see Niu & Li, 2017). These studies have broadly examined how learners use language to externalise and regulate thinking, either through interaction with others or through self-directed verbalisation.

Collaborative dialogue is a type of "languaging", where talk is other-directed. According to Swain and Watanabe (2019), collaborative dialogue is a social talk between individuals, where speakers are engaged in problem solving and knowledge building. During collaborative dialogue, language plays the role of a cognitive tool to mediate one or both speakers' thinking. In L2 learning context, collaborative dialogue involves learners' deliberation about the language they are producing or about difficult linguistic concepts, thus making it a source of learning. This concept seems to be similar to Long (2015)'s negotiation for meaning rooted in SLA theories, because they both focus on solving problems during interaction. However, they are different in nature and should not be conflated. According to Long (2015), negotiation for meaning occurs when the conversation breaks down due to the incomprehensible input. During the process of making the input comprehensible via meaning negotiation, learners may notice the gaps in their linguistic knowledge which is believed to trigger cognitive processes, such as intake and hypothesis testing, and eventually contributes to L2 learning. By contrast, collaborative dialogue aims to resolve the problems in cognitively complex tasks rather than making the input more comprehensible. Storch (2017) explains that when a learner languages about how to solve a linguistic problem, he/she pools his/her own linguistic resources and draw on the interlocutor's linguistic resources as well. In such a process, the socially constructed external dialogue can be internalized as an internal form of dialogue over time, which lead to L2 learning. Therefore, although these two constructs both highlighted the importance of verbal interactions, they are essentially different as they view the role of interaction differently. Negotiation for meaning, rooted

in cognitive SLA, views interaction as a context for L2 learning whereas collaborative dialogue regards interaction as a learning process and a joint activity. In other words, for negotiation for meaning, learning occurs as the result of interaction, while for collaborative dialogue, learning occurs in interaction. In L2 research, collaborative dialogue is often examined through the analysis of Language Related Episodes (LREs), which refer to moments in dialogue where learners focus on language use, including discussing, questioning, or correcting linguistic forms (Swain & Lapkin, 1998; Swain & Watanabe, 2019). The analysis of LREs in both teacher-learner and peer interactions has been extensively applied in studies of collaborative writing to explore L2 learning, which will be elaborated in detail in Section 2.3.2. as part of the literature review.

Another type of “*linguaging*” is private speech, which is self-directed. Private speech occurs when a learner talks to him/herself to structure and organize his/her actions, such as focus attention, retrieve stored information, and assess information, which can occur in oral form or in the written form (Suzuki & Storch, 2020). Although private speech is directed toward oneself, it can still occur in interactive settings (Gass et al., 2020). That is, not all talk in interactions is collaborative dialogue; some utterances serve as private speech. The concept of private speech is sometimes conflated with inner speech. For example, Swain and Watanabe (2019) used them interchangeably. It is possibly because these two concepts share the common feature of self-mediation through one's own language. However, the difference between these two concepts lies in whether the speech is overtly verbalised. Unlike private speech, which is egocentric utterances, inner speech sheds all formal feature of external speech while preserving its meaning to mediate mental activity (Mitchell et al., 2019; Poehner & Lantolf, 2024). Research in L2 classroom has identified the use of private speech includes reading the text aloud, explaining concepts to themselves, and reviewing knowledge (Gass et al., 2020). Notably, private speech is not always fully articulated, as it can vary inaudibility, ranging from clearly spoken utterances to barely whispered or mouthed words. This fluidity makes it difficult to track. Nevertheless, private speech has remained a key focus of research on mediation, as it is considered as a key stage of language developmental process, which will be further explained in later in this section.

In L2 classrooms, the use of language as a mediational tool, whether in collaborative dialogue or private speech, is not limited to L2. Learners’ L1 can also be a powerful mediator, making a place for the use of L1 in classrooms. This view, however, is contradicted to many SLA theories, such as Input Hypothesis (Krashen 1985) and Interaction Hypothesis (Long, 1983)Long (1983). SLA scholars argue for the maximal use of L2 to a large extent at least on the amount and qualities of L2 exposure and opportunities to use the L2 in interaction. From this perspective, the use of L1 is believed to be detrimental to L2 development because it occupies the time for L2 input and interaction. In contrast, from the SCT perspective, the purpose of using L1 is not only for communication, but for mediation.

As Van Compernelle (2015) suggested, the use of L1 is not a crutch during L2 communication that is to compensate for an L2 shortcoming; instead, it is about conceiving of the L1 as one of several resources that can be used to expand and cultivate what a learner is able to do in and with the L2. Thus, L1 performs as a mediational tool for L2 development. This aligns with W. Li (2018), who challenged the rigid separation of L1 and L2 and instead viewed all languages use as an integrated, fluid practice that allows learners to flexibly draw on their full linguistic repertoire to mediate meaning-making and communication. Related research has demonstrated that the use of L1 has a multifaceted impact on L2 learning. For instance, East and Wang (2024) found that making use of both L1 and L2 aids communication and task completion by allowing learners to use their full linguistic repertoire to negotiate meaning and manage interactions. Seals et al. (2020) found that learners used L1 to process linguistic structures. Additionally, Y. Wen (2024) demonstrated that the combined use of L1 and L2 promotes creative language use and identity negotiation, enabling learners to integrate both linguistic and cultural resources. These studies on the use of L1 have predominantly focused on its role as a cognitive mediator. By employing L1, L2 learners structure and organise their thoughts to make sense of the target language, to explore meaning-form relationship, to co-construct understanding, and to manage the task completion process (Bao & Du, 2015; Harun et al., 2014; Sato & Angulo, 2020; Seals et al., 2020; Swain & Lapkin, 2000; Zhang & Crawford, 2022). Besides, some studies, such as Bao and Du (2015), Channa et al. (2017), Wu (2018) and Li (2023) have found that L1 also performs as an affective mediator, because one's cognition and emotion are interconnected (Swain, 2013; Vygotsky, 1978). L1 serves as an affective mediator by helping learners regulate emotions, reduce anxiety, and maintain emotionally engagement in L2 learning. Li (2023) indicated that through L1 private speech, learners can express hesitation, frustration, or confusion, which allow them to manage emotional challenges while encountering L2 difficulties. Similarly, Wu (2018) found that learners switched to L1 when struggling with complex concepts and the use of L1 reduced performance anxiety and helped them transition back to L2 more confidently. Moreover, Wu (2018) found that teachers who integrate L1 strategically, such using humour or providing L1 scaffolding, help create a more relaxed and engaging classroom atmosphere. Beyond its cognitive and affective mediation functions, L1 also serves as an interactional mediator in L2 learning. Here, interaction does not refer to common communicative exchange, but rather to the process of co-constructing meaning through collaborative engagement. Both Li (2023) and Wu (2018) have found that learners use their shared L1 to co-construct meaning in collaborative tasks, facilitating peer scaffolding and enabling them to overcome linguistic challenges that would have been difficult to resolve individually. Overall, research on L1 mediation suggests that the use of learners' L1, when strategically integrated, can function as a powerful mediational tool that

supports cognition, emotion, and interaction in L2 learning. Rather than hindering L2 development, L1 use can facilitate deeper engagement and scaffold learners' progress.

2.2.2. Regulation and co-regulation

Closely connected to mediation, regulation is another important SCT concept because the shifts in forms of regulation reflect the process through which mediation facilitates cognitive development. Object-regulation, other-regulation and self-regulation are three key stages in learning, where learners are object-regulated, other-regulated and self-regulated respectively (Poehner & Lantolf, 2024). Although the regulation continuum describes how control shifts from external to internal sources, moving from other-regulation toward self-regulation, it does not fully capture the interactional dynamics through which regulation is accomplished moment by moment. In many instructional episodes, what appears developmentally as other-regulation may simultaneously unfold as a jointly managed process, with learners shaping, redirecting, or negotiating the mediation they receive. Accordingly, the concept of co-regulation has been introduced.

Object-regulation refers to the stage where L2 learners rely on concrete physical representation of objects in the environment to control their actions to perform a task (Storch, 2017). That is, L2 learning is mediated by the use of objects. A key pedagogical application of object-regulation in L2 learning is the Schema for Orienting Basis of Action (SCOBA), which serves as an external mediational tool to structure learners' engagement with complex linguistic concepts (Lantolf & Zhang, 2017; Masuda et al., 2025). SCOBAs often take the form of a diagram, a flowchart, a picture, a physical object, (such as a 3-D clay model), or even an animation, with textual explanations accompanied. Pedagogically, they materialize abstract knowledge into structured visual or tangible forms, enabling learners to systematically organize linguistic concepts and guide their actions in language-related tasks (Lantolf & Zhang, 2017; Poehner & Lantolf, 2024). Both Masuda et al. (2025) and Fernández and Donato (2020) highlight that by structuring knowledge in a visually accessible manner, SCOBAs help to reduce cognitive overload, making linguistic concepts more comprehensible and functional for learners at the object regulation stage. Moreover, research indicates that interacting with SCOBAs allows learners to externalise their reasoning processes, facilitating meaning-making and enhancing their ability to conceptualise and apply linguistic knowledge (Arievitch, 2017; Masuda et al., 2025). Other-regulation refers to stage where learner has gained some control over the object, but still needs the help, guidance, or instruction from others (Gass et al., 2020). This assistance or instruction can come from teachers, their peers, or other individuals that guide the learner, typically through language, to achieve their goals. Therefore, in L2 learning settings, being other-regulated means the learner is reliant on the external assistance of others to produce and comprehend L2. Self-regulation represents

a stage where object- and other-regulation are no longer necessary. It indicates that learners have reached a point where they can complete tasks independently without relying on external support (Mitchell et al., 2019). The transition suggests that as learners move from object- and other-regulation to self-regulation, they gain greater control over their ability to think and act, either by becoming more proficient in using available resources or by gradually reducing their reliance on external assistance (Thorne & Thomas, 2024). The progression from other-regulation to self-regulation is captured by the term internalisation, understood as the transformation of social processes into psychological ones (Ellis et al., 2020), which will be further elaborated in the following section.

The notion of co-regulation is also derived from the SCT conceptualisation that learning is a socially mediated activity (Vygotsky, 1978) in which knowledge is shared, negotiated and co-constructed among participants (Wertsch, 1991). Van Compernelle (2015, 2022) defines co-regulation as a mutual and dialogic regulation process in which the multiple participants jointly contribute to regulating each other's thinking and behaviours. In this sense, learners' responses and actions simultaneously regulate the interlocutors' actions, co-contributing to the regulatory process (Davin, 2018). Co-regulation often occurs among peer interaction. Recent studies in collaborative writing provide further empirical support for the centrality of peer co-regulation. Su et al. (2023) and Mohammadi Zenouzagh (2023) identified the same five categories of peer co-regulation, which includes planning, monitoring, evaluating, help-seeking and effort regulation. Although conducted in different modalities, with the former examining face-to-face and computer-mediated collaboration and the latter focusing on fully online writing, both studies demonstrated that learners actively shaped one another's participation by negotiating task goals, supervising progress, offering linguistic or strategic support and sustaining group engagement. Peer co-regulation could be reflected in the processes of collective scaffolding (Donato, 1994), where learners though all novices, temporarily take on expert roles to scaffold each other's understanding. Li (2013), in her study of collective scaffolding in collaborative writing, found that, through collective scaffolding, learners' attention to linguistic accuracy increased, enabling them to make substantial corrective contributions that improved the overall quality of their collaborative writing. This aligns with Donato (1994)'s position that jointly constructed scaffolding enables learners to gradually close the gap between the demands of the task and the capabilities of any single participant, although Bailey and Heritage (2018) (Bailey & Heritage, 2018) caution that co-regulation is not uniformly beneficial and may, in some cases, impede rather than foster learners' self-regulation.

Co-regulation also occurs between teachers and learners, and teacher corrective feedback provides a clear illustration of how this process unfolds. When the teacher explicitly corrects a learner's error, the regulatory direction remains largely one-way. In contrast, clarification requests or elicitation prompts invite the learner to respond, reformulate or seek confirmation, and these responses then shape the

teacher's subsequent moves. Rather than a fixed sequence, the feedback episode becomes a jointly managed process in which both participants continually adjust their actions. This reciprocal pattern has been well documented in SCT-informed analyses of classroom interaction. Jang and DaSilva Iddings (2010), for example, showed that learners' tentative contributions and evolving understandings prompted teachers to recalibrate their scaffolding in real time. Similarly, R. Zhang (2019) demonstrated that teacher mediation during microgenetic interaction is contingent on learners' responses, with teacher and student co-constructing the regulation of meaning. Together, these studies affirm that teacher corrective feedback is not merely delivered but collaboratively shaped, exemplifying co-regulation in action.

2.2.3. Internalisation and appropriation

Like regulation, which describes a developmental movement from object- and other-regulation toward self-regulation, internalisation addresses the same process, but at a deeper psychological level. In SCT, *internalisation* is defined as the "transition of a function from outside inward" (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 170), highlighting how socially mediated activity becomes reorganised as psychological functioning. Central to this process is the mediational role of language, which enables learners to regulate their own mental and physical behaviour and thereby to move beyond the constraints of the immediate environment. As their linguistic resources develop, they acquire the capacity to talk and think about events that are not bound to the here-and-now, such as the past, the future, or hypothetical situations. Poehner and Lantolf (2024) summarised that internalisation unfolds through a developmental trajectory comprising four stages. At the first stage, behaviour is dominated by natural instincts. The second stage involves external regulation, in which behaviour is mediated by others through social communication (I–You dialogue). At the third stage, the individual begins to direct symbolic means used by others toward the self, resulting in private speech (I–Me dialogue), which, while social in form, serves a psychological function (Vygotsky, 1978). At the fourth stage, private speech becomes fully internalised as inner speech, losing its external linguistic form but retaining its meaning as a tool for regulating thought and behaviour. Through this trajectory, external regulation is gradually transformed into self-regulation, illustrating how higher mental functions originate in the social and are reorganised as individual psychological resources.

Importantly, internalisation should not be understood as a passive transfer of social practices into the individual. Rather, it entails learners' active participation in and transformation of socially mediated activities: an agentic move of "taking something that belongs to others and making it one's own" (Lantolf & Thorne, 2006, p. 63). In this sense, while internalisation describes the developmental shift from inter- to intra-psychological functioning, appropriation emphasises how this transformation is

accomplished through learners' selective adoption, adaptation, and reconfiguration of the tools, signs, and practices available in their sociocultural environment.

Research has further elaborated appropriation as both a developmental and agentic process, though studies have approached this construct from different orientations. A substantial body of SCT-informed research has explored appropriation primarily in terms of learners' appropriation of conceptual knowledge, illustrating how externally provided sociocultural concepts are gradually reorganised and transformed into personally usable resources through classroom interaction (e.g., Chen & Li, 2021; Van Compernelle & Henery, 2014), while interactionally oriented studies have also documented learners' appropriation of linguistic resources as semiotic tools in situated interaction (e.g., Kasper & Wagner, 2011). Other studies have highlighted the agentic dimension of appropriation by examining how learners selectively engage with mediational tools and practices in situated activity. For example, Jiang and Yu (2022) demonstrated that Chinese EFL learners respond to automated feedback in different ways, actively adopting, adapting, or rejecting feedback as they construct personalised, agentic ways of using feedback to regulate their writing across future tasks. Similarly, Wen et al. (2015) showed how learners appropriate representational tools through collaborative interaction, gradually integrating and reshaping these tools to support meaning-making. These studies collectively suggested that mediation cannot be assumed to yield uniform effects. Rather, its impact depends on how learners appropriate available resources and transform them into tools for future learning.

2.2.4. Zone of Proximal Development

ZPD is another central Vygotskian theoretical concept widely cited in SCT-L2 research. It unites all constructs in the learning setting together and connects the social-external with the individual-internal. Vygotsky (1978) conceptualized ZPD as the space between the inter- and the intrapsychological and defined it as "the distance between the actual developmental level as determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem solving under adult guidance, or in collaboration with more capable peers" (p.86). However, in the field of L2 learning, the understanding of Vygotsky's ZPD is not unified. Some scholars interpret the ZPD as a collaborative activity between the novice and the expert (Swain et al., 2015), whereas sometimes it may be described more broadly as an interaction (Ellis et al., 2020). Following Swain et al. (2015) and Lantolf and Thorne (2006), this thesis adopts the view of ZPD as a co-constructed activity, in which learners transition from what they are only able to accomplish with help and support (e.g., scaffold, language modification and feedback) to what they can ultimately accomplish independently. The interpretation of ZPD as a collaborative activity is closely related to the term scaffolding, which is the interactional work by which the expert (the teacher or more knowledgeable peer) assists the novice (the learner)

to perform a skill or a linguistic feature that the learner cannot perform by him/herself (Ellis et al., 2020). To put it simply, scaffolding is the proper amount of support within the learner's ZPD.

The concept of ZPD often emerges in the research into teacher corrective feedback (CF). From the SCT perspective, teacher CF is not a one-way information input by the teacher and then processed within the learner's own brain. Rather, it is a collaborative dialogue between the teacher and the learner within learners' ZPD. Within the SCT literature, different terms have been used to conceptualise teacher CF situated in the ZPD. Scaffolded feedback (Ellis, 2021a; Rassaei, 2014) highlights the supportive role of the teacher, in which assistance is gradually reduced as the learner gains control. Negotiated feedback (Ahmadian et al., 2019; Nassaji, 2011; Nassaji & Swain, 2000) stresses the dialogic aspect of teacher feedback, emphasising the collaborative work between teacher and learner to identify and resolve language problems. Dynamic feedback (Rassaei, 2019; Zhang & Zhang, 2023) underscores the adaptive and diagnostic dimension of teacher feedback framed within dynamic assessment. Finally, graduated corrective feedback (Ellis et al., 2020; Erlam et al., 2013) accentuates the iterative, process-oriented nature of teacher scaffolding, whereby feedback moves from implicit to explicit until the learner is able to self-correct. Despite the different labels, these constructs converge on the sociocultural view that effective feedback should be graduated, contingent and dialogic (Aljaafreh & Lantolf, 1994).

Therefore, the three different terms emphasise the three aspects of the SCT nature respectively. In this study, following Erlam et al. (2013) and Ellis et al. (2020), I have adopted the term graduated corrective feedback in the present study for two reasons. Firstly, it is because compared with "contingent" and "dialogic", "graduated" lays greater emphasis on the iterative nature of teacher feedback. In other words, the term graduated feedback better captures the ideas that teacher feedback is a process. Furthermore, "graduated" to a certain extent accommodates "contingent" and "dialogic", given that these two concepts typically involve in a continuous feedback process, rather than an isolated, one-off instance of feedback. According to Erlam et al. (2013), graduated corrective feedback requires the feedback to be provided gradually which is adjusted to the level of the learner to enable them to notice and correct the errors. The teacher continually adjusts the CF strategy from most implicit corrective feedback towards more explicit feedback until the learner can notice and correct the target errors. Thus, by providing graduated CF, the expert discovers a learner's developmental level and provides appropriate assistance.

In this regard, the empirical foundations of graduated CF can be traced back to Aljaafreh and Lantolf (1994)'s study, which has since become the cornerstone of many later studies on graduated CF. In this study, Aljaafreh and Lantolf (1994) illustrated how graduated CF promotes learning. One of the major

contributions of this study is the proposal of the “regulatory scale” which ranks 13 feedback moves from very implicit to very explicit. The regulatory scale plays the role of the protocol for providing graduated feedback in the related subsequent studies. Since the proposal of the regulatory scale, almost all the researchers have followed or developed this protocol to demonstrate the authoritativeness of the graduated feedback they explored in their studies. Another contribution made by Aljaafreh and Lantolf (1994)’s study is the key argument that learning could be measured not only in terms of whether a learner had achieved self-regulation, but also in terms of whether there was a reduction in the amount of scaffolding needed to mediate the correct production of a specific linguistic feature. The latter can more comprehensively cover the finer-grained L2 developmental process which provides more detailed evidence of L2 development. In the later work of Lantolf et al. (2016), the importance of incorporating learner responsiveness to mediation was added to explore the L2 development. It is argued by Lantolf et al. (2016) that although sometimes a learner does not show the reduction in reliance on others in terms of the feedback explicitness, how he/she responds to the mediation can be another indicator of L2 development, which can also help to understand the learner abilities and learning process from the SCT perspective.

Building on Aljaafreh and Lantolf (1994)’s study, some scholars have launched a series of comparative studies to further explore the effectiveness of graduated feedback. For example, Nassaji and Swain (2000) compared the effect of random feedback and graduated feedback and found that feedback provided within the learner’s ZPD was more effective than feedback provided randomly, with both quantitative and qualitative findings supporting the superiority of graduated feedback. Similarly, Erlam et al. (2013) compared the effects of graduated feedback and explicit corrective feedback on two grammatical structures, with the quantitative findings supporting the effectiveness of graduated feedback, but the qualitative findings showing no evidence of microgenetic growth. Rassaei (2014) compared the effects of graduated feedback and recast on *wh*-questions. Graduated feedback resulted in higher scores on both an untimed grammaticality judgment test and an oral production test. In more recent studies, scholars start to integrate technology into the provision of graduated feedback and explore the effectiveness of computer-assisted graduated feedback. For example, Ai (2017) explored the effectiveness of the graduated feedback provided by an intelligent computer-assisted language learning environment and found the L2 microgenetic development resulted from the computer-mediated graduated feedback paralleled those in the more traditional face-to-face context. Taken together, this body of work has generally confirmed the effectiveness of graduated feedback in promoting L2 development, particularly in quantitative outcomes, although the qualitative evidence concerning microgenetic growth is more mixed. This mixed picture has led to continued interest in how graduated feedback functions across different contexts and learner groups.

The value of these studies on graduated corrective feedback for my research is twofold. First, they provide the empirical evidence that demonstrates the effectiveness of graduated corrective feedback in both quantitative and qualitative research designs. More importantly, some of them offer an alternative research method to explore the language development. The prevalent method to measure the learners' L2 language development is to quantitatively compare the pre-test and post-test scores (e.g., Ameena & Akhtar, 2022; Shintani & Aubrey, 2016; Yamashita, 2022), or examine the CALF of the learner oral/written production (e.g., Cheng & Zhang, 2021). Some of the studies of graduated feedback still adopt this method to examine L2 development. However, in some studies scholars methodologically analyze LREs to explore the microgenetic growth which represents the L2 development from the SCT perspective (e.g., Li & Qian, 2024). The microgenetic growth is evidenced by the systematic reduction in the degree of assistance the learner needed, which is built on the provision of graduated corrective feedback. Only when teacher feedback is provided gradually from more implicit to more explicit until the learner corrects the error, can the learner demonstrate to what extent of the explicitness of the feedback he/she needs. In other words, graduated feedback is the site where microgenetic growth can be identified to evidence the L2 development. Accordingly, graduated feedback becomes a core segment of SCT approach to analyse L2 development.

2.2.5 Learner agency from a sociocultural perspective.

While concepts discussed above are widely recognised as the core constructs of the SCT, subsequent scholarship has extended these concepts to interpret the notion of agency, particularly learner agency. Unlike these original Vygotskian concepts, agency was developed by later scholars to capture how learners act within, and upon, their social and cultural environments (Lantolf & Thorne, 2006; Swain, 2006). Broadly, agency refers to learners' capacity to act and make choices (Ahearn, 2001), a capacity that shapes how they initiate, sustain, and direct their learning. This capacity is not limited to overt behaviours. Lantolf and Thorne (2006, p. 143) argue that agency also entails "the ability to assign relevance and significance to things and events", thus incorporating learners' interpretive engagement with their experiences. In a similar vein, Little and Legenhausen (2017) associate agency with ownership and responsibility, highlighting that agentive learners set goals, make decisions, monitor their progress, and evaluate outcomes.

From an SCT perspective, agency is understood as a socially and culturally mediated capacity to act, rather than a fixed psychological trait. Lantolf and Pavlenko (2014) emphasise that agency is always relational and co-constructed through interaction, mediated by cultural artefacts and symbolic tools, with language itself as the primary means of mediation. Van Lier (2008) similarly conceptualises agency as an ecological construct, stating that learners' agentive actions emerge from the affordances and

constraints of the environment, shaped by social relations and cultural expectations. This conceptualisation highlights that agency is not something bestowed by teachers, nor is it an attribute that learners simply possess. Rather, it is enacted in activity, when learners mobilise mediational means to regulate their participation in learning. Mercer (2011) further shows how agency is discursively constructed in classroom interaction, underscoring that it is dynamic, context-sensitive, and negotiated moment by moment.

This sociocultural reframing positions agency as closely intertwined with SCT's foundational constructs. First, it is inseparable from mediation, since learners exercise agency by drawing upon tools, artefacts, and social support to act. Second, it is connected to regulation, as learners' movement from other-regulation to self-regulation involves agentic decisions about how to use external support. Third, agency relates to internalisation and appropriation, because learners appropriate mediational means by investing them with personal significance. Finally, agency intersects with the ZPD, as it is enacted when learners participate in activities that exceed their current level of independent functioning and make agentic use of scaffolding to extend their capabilities (Levi & Poehner, 2018). In this sense, agency is not an add-on to SCT, but a construct that both arises from and illuminates the processes of mediated development.

Empirical research has provided further evidence of how learner agency is constructed in specific sociocultural contexts. For example, Gao (2010)'s longitudinal study of Chinese students transitioning from the exam-driven environment of mainland China to an English-medium university in Hong Kong illustrates how learners' "will and capacity to act" were dynamically shaped by shifting contextual affordances and constraints. While in China students relied heavily on memorisation strategies dictated by examination requirements, in Hong Kong they gradually exercised more self-directed choices and adapted their learning strategies in response to a more open educational environment. Gao's work demonstrates that agency is negotiated at the intersection of contextual pressures and individual initiative, highlighting its dynamic and situated nature. More recently, Huang and Lammers (2023) examined Chinese learners' engagement in informal video-based L2 learning. Their findings showed that agency was enacted when learners appropriated digital resources, navigated between L1 and L2, and constructed personalised learning trajectories. This study reinforces the SCT view that agency is relational and mediated, enacted through learners' interactions with tools, peers, and broader sociocultural environments.

These studies show that agency is not a uniform capacity but one that varies across contexts and tasks. Learners may display agency through active participation in collaborative dialogue, but also through

more subtle forms such as resisting certain feedback or adapting tasks to meet personal needs (Duff, 2013). Agency thus encompasses both overt and covert actions, reflecting learners' evaluative stance toward the resources and conditions of learning. Importantly, agency is also linked with the affective dimension. Feelings of ownership, belonging, and achievement can empower learners to take initiative (Mercer, 2011). This affective dimension resonates with recent evidence that emotions operate both as resources for and outcomes of agency. Positive feelings, as well as the regulation of negative ones, nurture learners' sense of agency, while agentic enactment, in turn, generates further positive emotions and attenuates the impact of negative emotions on motivation and engagement (Chen et al., 2025).

While the present study adopts an SCT-informed view of learner agency, it is worth noting that other theoretical approaches have offered complementary insights. From a Complex Dynamic Systems Theory (CDST) perspective, Larsen–Freeman (2019) describes agency as relational, emergent, multidimensional, and achieved rather than given. CDST underscores the temporally and spatially situated character of agency and highlights how it emerges through processes of iteration and co-adaptation. Although CDST is not the guiding framework of the present study, its emphasis on dynamism aligns with SCT's portrayal of agency as socially situated and context-dependent, offering an additional lens for understanding the variability of learners' agentic engagement.

Briefly, learner agency from an SCT perspective is best understood as a dynamic, socially mediated capacity to act. It is relational, emergent, and enacted through learners' engagement with mediational means, other people, and sociocultural contexts. This conceptualisation of agency has important implications for this research into the classroom-based L2 learning, as it highlights how learners' participation in pedagogical activities involves not only linguistic development but also agentic engagement shaped by mediation, context, and emotion.

2.3. Task-based language teaching as a pedagogical instructional framework

TBLT stands as a prominent and evolving pedagogical approach in the field of L2 and foreign language education (Ellis et al., 2020). Building on the central construct of the “task”, TBLT positions meaning-focused communication and purposeful language use at the heart of classroom practice (Long & Ahmadian, 2021). To understand its significance, this section first clarifies what constitutes a “task”, then considers how TBLT has been theorised from two different perspectives and examines how different operationalisations of tasks have shaped strong and weak versions of TBLT. Next, it turns to empirical evidence, synthesising research on TBLT across programme- and classroom-level studies, with particular attention to task complexity and modality, as well as emerging work on L2 pragmatics.

Finally, it reviews mainstream TBLT frameworks and studies on the adaptations of these frameworks in different educational contexts.

2.3.1. Task definition

As the name suggests, task is the central concept of TBLT. A “task” is defined differently by TBLT researchers. According to Branden (2006)’s review of 17 task definitions, tasks are widely defined ranging from classroom activities, in which learners work with target language to achieve an outcome, to a piece of real-life work in the outside world. Underlying these diverse definitions are two main emphases, which Ellis (2017) terms situational authenticity and interactional authenticity. Situational authenticity refers to the extent to which a pedagogic task mirrors the conditions of real-life tasks outside the classroom, whereas interactional authenticity concerns the degree to which the task requires learners to engage in genuine meaning negotiation and language processing during communication (Ellis, 2017). A similar distinction was made by Willis and Willis (2007) who conceptualised authenticity across three levels. Specifically, task can be authentic at the level of meaning, which refers to the opportunities that learners may have to engage in producing meanings which will be useful in the outside world. Alternatively, a task can be authentic at the level of discourse. Willis and Willis (2007) explained that discourse used by the learners in the task is very common in everyday life. Besides, a task can be authentic at the level of activity, which refers to the activities that can be easily occur in the outside world (Willis & Willis, 2007). To be brief, the authenticity at the level of meaning and at the level of discourse can be seen as the interactional authenticity which reflects the communicative purpose of a task, while the authenticity at the level of activity is the situational authenticity in nature which reflects the real-world nature of a task.

These distinctions between situational and interactional authenticity provide a useful lens for understanding how leading TBLT scholars have defined and conceptualised tasks. Long (1985, 2015) was the first advocate of situational authenticity. He claimed that tasks are “the real-world activities people think of when planning, conducting or recalling their day”. Real-world tasks facilitate situational and interactional authenticity, as learners are required to focus on meaning to do the tasks. Skehan (1998) also supported the importance of the real-world nature of a task, although at the same time he emphasized the communicative purposes. From Skehan (1998)’s view, a task is an activity in which there is some sort of relationship to comparable real-world activities, meaning is primary, learners are not given other people’s meaning to regurgitate, the task completion as some priority and the assessment of the task is in terms of outcome. To achieve the real-world nature of a task, Long (2016) strongly argued that tasks should stem from learners’ real needs. However, Ellis (2017) argued that learners cannot always distinguish what they what to learn and what they need for learning a target

language, which may result in the reduction in veracity of needs. That is why the situational authenticity cannot always be pursued and many TBLT scholars only take interactional authenticity or communicative purposes into consideration when defining a task. Briefly, when both situational and interactional authenticity are considered, the key identifiable features of a task in TBLT could be summarised as a relationship to real-world activities, a primary focus on meaning, something that learners need to work out, and an outcome beyond the use of language. These features together form the criteria to distinguish a task from a grammar exercise or a form-focused practice activity, which, as Long (2016) emphasised, are designed to practise discrete linguistic items rather than to achieve meaningful outcomes.

While debates around authenticity often focus on how tasks are defined, a related discussion in TBLT literature concerns whether tasks should be viewed as pedagogical workplans (task-as-workplan) or as processes (task-as-process) enacted in classroom interaction (Ellis et al., 2020). Ellis et al. (2020) believed that within TBLT as a pedagogical framework, tasks are more appropriately viewed as pedagogical workplans because task-as-workplan focused more on how tasks can create opportunities for input, output, and interaction, thus framing their pedagogical value in terms of language exposure and use. This position is grounded in the understanding that tasks emphasise the use of language for communicative purposes rather than the manipulation of predetermined linguistic structures (Nunan, 1989, 2004; Willis, 2021). In line with this view, task-as-workplan highlights that tasks involve learners in processing input, producing output, and interacting with others while relying on their own resources, in order to achieve an outcome (Branden, 2006; East, 2021; Ellis et al., 2020). Building on this position, Bygate et al. (2017) likewise recognised task-as-workplan, but also claimed that while task execution is dynamic and unpredictable, there is still “pragmatic predictability” in how learners engage with tasks. That is, while a task may unfold in unexpected ways, it still follows a general trajectory that teachers can anticipate and offer mediation.

2.3.2. Theoretical underpinnings of Task-Based Language Teaching

TBLT is not supported by a single theoretical approach. Among the theoretical underpinnings of TBLT, the cognitive perspective and the sociocultural perspective are two broad and disparate theoretical frameworks. In essence, TBLT is interactionist, which is based on the theoretical premise that language is best taught and learned through interaction (East, 2021). Although interaction in TBLT can be interpreted from both cognitive and sociocultural epistemologies, the two perspectives have different understanding of the role of interaction in second language learning. In the following section, both perspectives and the related TBLT studies will be discussed.

2.3.2.1. Cognitive-interactionist perspective

A cognitive-interactionist perspective draws on the “computational metaphor” which regards an individual mind or brain as the sole locus of thinking and learning. This perspective, emphasising mental process, views L2 acquisition as the outcome of processing information, for example, input and output (Ellis, 2018). It provides the rationale for TBLT through cognitive-interactionist theories, which highlight the role of interaction in language acquisition, claiming that learning occurs as the outcome of interaction. Accordingly, the use of tasks in TBLT is often explained through theories of input, interaction, output, and noticing, including Krashen (1985)’s Input Hypothesis, Long (1996)’s Interactional Hypothesis, Swain (1985)’s Output Hypothesis, and Schmidt (1990)’s Noticing Hypothesis.

Krashen (1985)’s Input Hypothesis claims that language acquisition occurs when input is slightly beyond the learner’s current proficiency level but remains comprehensible. This principle underpins TBLT’s emphasis on designing tasks that provide learners with rich, level-appropriate input. Long (1985) extended Krashen’s view by emphasising that input is often made comprehensible through conversational modifications, which informed the early version of the Interaction Hypothesis. This perspective directly supports interactive tasks in TBLT, which are structured to promote negotiation of meaning as a means of transforming input into comprehensible input that can facilitate acquisition.

Swain (1985, 2005) also acknowledged the role of comprehensible input but questioned its sufficiency. She proposed the Output Hypothesis, positing that in addition to input, language learning required opportunities to create output, as it provided learners with opportunities to practise and thus automatized the production of the language, allowed learners to test hypotheses of the language features, forced learners to focus on linguistic structures and drew learners’ attention to gaps in their L2 competence. This rationale explains the centrality of production-oriented tasks in TBLT, where learners are pushed to generate language rather than only comprehend it.

Based on the importance of the comprehensible input and output for language acquisition, Long (1996) reformulated the Interaction Hypothesis, to highlight the relationship between interaction and cognition by linking input, interaction, and output via meaning negotiation. According to Long (1996, 2015), negotiation of meaning naturally occurs when there is a breakdown in communication due to non-comprehension of the input, and in order to overcome the breakdown, learners negotiate to obtain comprehensive input, to receive feedback on their output, and to make it more comprehensible. In this way, negotiation of meaning triggers modified input, modified output, and other adjustments, which are believed to facilitate language acquisition. Importantly, such negotiation can also direct learners’ attention to gaps between their current knowledge and the target forms, thereby linking

interaction to noticing. This mechanism offers a theoretical justification for TBLT's reliance on meaning-focused tasks that naturally elicit form-focused episodes.

Attention to form, however, has been debated. Long (1996, 2015) argued that the implicit attention arising during interaction is sufficient for acquisition, but Schmidt (1992)'s Noticing Hypothesis suggests that conscious awareness of forms enhances learning. This supports the incorporation of "focus on form" in TBLT tasks, where attention to linguistic features can be triggered during communicative activity. Similarly, Skill Acquisition Theory (DeKeyser, 2020) stresses the value of explicit learning, positing that declarative knowledge acquired through modelling or explanation can be proceduralised with practice. This view has informed TBLT practices that allow for explicit support in pre-task or post-task phases. Ellis et al. (2020) also acknowledge the importance of explicit knowledge for adult learners, arguing that intentional learning can facilitate implicit development by activating noticing. Although the debate exists, the importance of interaction cannot be ignored. In accordance with the cognitive-interactionist perspective, tasks in TBLT are thus conceptualised as pedagogical units that provide comprehensible input, promote interaction, push learners to produce output, and create conditions for noticing, all of which activate the mental mechanisms involved in acquisition.

Building on these foundational SLA theories, the cognitive-interactionist perspective has informed many task-based studies to explore how to manipulate interactions in tasks to affect cognitive mechanisms and in turn L2 acquisition. One prominent strand concerns CF. Implicit CF is theoretically grounded in both the Interaction Hypothesis and the Output Hypothesis. The former one explains that such feedback promotes negotiation of meaning through conversational strategies, such as recasts, confirmation checks, or clarification requests, thereby fostering a reactive focus on form. The output Hypothesis adds that implicit CF pushes learners to produce modified output, which is essential for acquisition (Zhao & Ellis, 2022). By contrast, explicit CF, is justified by Skill Acquisition Theory, which emphasises the value of explicit knowledge in early stages of learning, viewing CF as providing learners with opportunities to practices until the formation of declarative knowledge (Zhao & Ellis, 2022). Informed by these cognitive-interactionist theories, many task-based studies compare the effectiveness of different types of CF strategies. Experimental and classroom-based studies have produced mixed results. For instance, some evidence suggests advantages for explicit CF or combined approaches in immediate post-tests (e.g., Yilmaz, 2013), whereas other research reports more limited benefits of explicit CF in naturalistic classroom contexts (e.g., Zhao & Ellis, 2022). Meta-analyses also reach inconclusive results, showing no consistent overall advantage for either implicit or explicit CF (e.g., Brown, 2016; Li, 2010; Plonsky & Brown, 2015). This line of research indicates that both implicit and explicit CF can facilitate learning within tasks, but their relative effectiveness depends on

contextual and methodological factors, highlighting the importance of task design in shaping learning outcomes.

Briefly, cognitive-interactionist theories have profoundly shaped how TBLT conceptualises the role of tasks. Within this perspective, tasks are primarily valued for the way they provide learners with comprehensible input, stimulate negotiation of meaning, push them to produce output, and promote noticing of the gaps between their interlanguage and the target language. This orientation explains why much TBLT research has focused on manipulating task design variables, such as feedback type, to examine how these factors influence learners' processing and subsequent language gains. The influence of this perspective thus lies in positioning tasks as psycholinguistic devices that optimise individual learners' mental processing, while placing less emphasis on the broader social aspects of task engagement.

2.3.2.2. Vygotskian Sociocultural-interactionist perspective

A few TBLT scholars (e.g., Ahmadian & García Mayo, 2017; East, 2021; Ellis et al., 2020) acknowledge the impact of SCT on the use of tasks that creates interaction in TBLT. Like the cognitive-interactionist perspective, the sociocultural perspective underscores the importance of interaction. However, this perspective views language learning as a socially constructed activity which occurs in interaction rather than a pure acquisition of knowledge as the outcome of interaction. From the sociocultural perspective, effective L2 learning is achieved through mediation and internalization which is based on the co-construction of the ZPD (Lantolf et al., 2018). The sociocultural perspective has also provided insights and guidance for using tasks in TBLT, but not for designing a task but for how to use a task. SCT sees the task-based classroom as a social context that promotes language development, where explicit attention to form is allowed during the performance of a task.

SCT-informed TBLT studies mainly draw on the theoretical concepts of mediation, ZPD, and scaffolding, as well as their application in terms of Concept-based Instruction (CBI) and dynamic assessment. For example, Bao and Du (2015) explored the mediating function of L1 use in TBLT through the lens of SCT key tenets. They found L1 worked as a tool for providing cognitive, emotional, and interactional support, which mediated L2 task completion. Feryok (2017) pointed out that concept-based instruction and dynamic assessment, two major pedagogical application of SCT in language teaching classrooms, could greatly contribute to TBLT from the theoretical perspective. These two SCT-related pedagogical applications were explored by Williams (2017) and Van Compernelle (2017) respectively. Williams (2017) integrated CBI into a TBLT framework in the context of the French curriculum at a public US university. It was found that CBI, as a SCT pedagogical approach, is compatible with TBLT and can enhance the TBLT framework to some extent. Van Compernelle (2017) introduced an approach

that drew on dynamic assessment and strategic interaction scenarios to TBLT. The findings suggested that dynamic strategic interaction in scenarios tasks facilitated a focus on meaning and forms simultaneously.

Other recent SCT-TBLT studies were focused on the technology-mediated TBLT domain, drawing on the SCT principles of mediation and scaffolding. Gánem-Gutiérrez (2014) proposed a theoretical framework for the design and evaluation of pedagogical tasks informed by SCT and Activity theory. This study was conducted in the context of a 3D virtual world environment to see how this framework can provide practical guidance for practitioners when they design and evaluate a technology-mediated task (Gánem-Gutiérrez, 2014). In addition to the proposal of the technology-mediated framework, Oskoz and Elola (2014), Pellerin (2014) and Morgana (2023) looked into more concrete technology tools that provide mediation and scaffolding in language learning classrooms. Oskoz and Elola (2014) investigated two Web 2.0 social tools in two types of writing tasks from the sociocultural perspective. This study indicated that with the mediation of the two social tools, task-based collaborative writing approach to teaching process writing enabled learners to construct and reconstruct their content knowledge, to engage with various writing conventions, and to adopt an appropriate, genre-specific language register. Pellerin (2014) conducted a qualitative interpretive study to investigate how the use of mobile devices (tablets and iPods) in language classrooms could support the redesign of task-based approaches for young language learners. Drawing on the concept of ZPD, mediation and scaffolding in SCT, this study demonstrated how mobile technologies mediated young language learners to create their own learning settings and language tasks with the assistance of cognitive tools. Similarly, Morgana (2023) also examined the use of mobile devices (smartphones and Chromebooks) in terms of mediation and scaffolding from the sociocultural perspective, but adopted a mixed-method research design. This study shows that technology-supported tasks can enhance both learning outcomes and learner engagement, which further illustrates how digital tools can extend the mediational resources available for task-based interaction. Besides, Payant (2018) explored the impact of task types on the opportunities for learners to conduct collaborative dialogues that facilitate language development in the context of French as a L3. Results of this study demonstrated the positive effects of these two types of tasks in terms of the opportunities generated for collaborative dialogues. Together, these studies show that technology has expanded the range of mediational means available for implementing SCT principles within TBLT. Digital tools, such as mobile devices, online collaborative platforms, and virtual learning environments create new spaces for scaffolding, appropriation, and internalisation in interaction, thereby extending how learning can occur in task performance.

Overall, these SCT-informed task-based studies illustrated the pedagogic potential of framing TBLT within the sociocultural perspective. Despite the increasing attention to viewing TBLT through the SCT

lens, limited research has investigated how to integrate SCT tenets into authentic TBLT classrooms, let alone in the context of English writing classrooms for Chinese EFL learners.

2.3.3. Strong and Weak TBLT: TBLT vs TSLT

Strictly speaking, TBLT is not a single, unified pedagogical approach, but an umbrella term that encompasses both strong and weak versions of task-based instruction. The weak version is commonly referred to as Task-Supported Language Teaching (Ellis, 2003, 2017), while the strong version corresponds to what Long (2015) and Ellis (2017) describe as TBLT in the strict sense. The weak version, TSLT, follows a pedagogic logic that predates task-based instruction and can be traced back to the Presentation-Practice-Production (PPP) model. PPP is a long-standing instructional sequence in which linguistic items, such as grammatical structures, are first explicitly presented, then practised in isolated sentences through controlled activities or drills, and finally produced in a freer manner, such as role-play (Anderson, 2017). TSLT retains the same sequence, beginning with explicit instruction of predetermined linguistic features and ending with a task that provides an opportunity to use these pre-taught items (Ellis, 2003, 2017, 2019). That is, tasks come in the stage of production, after clear presentation and practice. In contrast, the strong version of TBLT breaks from this PPP-based tradition. Rather than using tasks to practise pre-selected forms, strong TBLT positions tasks as the central unit through which learning emerges. In this thesis, following the terminological distinction adopted by Ellis et al. (2020), TSLT is used to represent the weak form, whereas TBLT is reserved for the strong form.

My interpretation of the relationship between TBLT and TSLT centres on how the two frameworks differ in both the degree and timing of explicit teaching in relation to task performance. This can be illustrated by the spectrum between TBLT and TSLT in Figure 1, which is a visual conceptual tool for illustrating how explicit teaching of linguistic elements is organised differently across these two approaches. At the TBLT end of the continuum, tasks initiated the learning process, and no specific linguistic features are pre-selected for explicit teaching prior to task performance. Any explicit focus on form, especially grammatical features, only arises reactively from learners' performance during the task or retrospectively after the task performance. In this sense, the degree of explicit teaching before task performance is relatively low. At the TSLT end, explicit teaching is front-loaded before the task. Linguistic features, such as grammatical structures, are pre-determined by the teacher and explicitly presented before learners carrying out a task. Here, the degree of explicit teaching is high, and the timing is pre-planned. Along the line, various points signify the extent to which linguistic features are explicitly taught before a task is conducted.

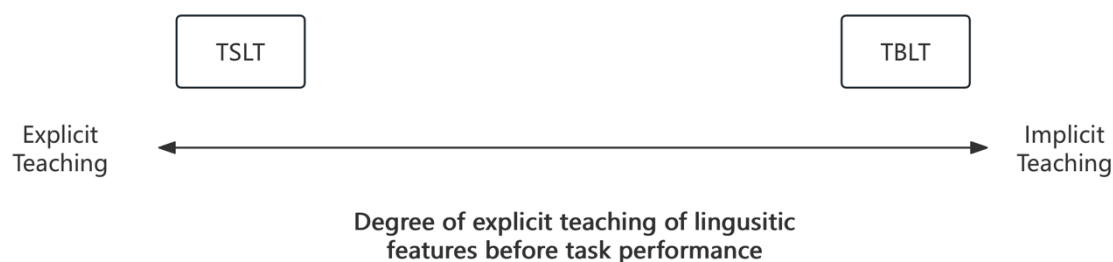


Figure 1 Relationship between TBLT and TSLT

TBLT and TSLT have different theoretical underpinnings. TSLT, which is a PPP approach in nature, draws heavily on skill acquisition theory (SAT). According to DeKeyser et al. (2017), SAT posits that the learning starts with a declarative representation of a linguistic item, which is first proceduralised and then automatized through practice. Such practice is commonly presented in two forms, communicative drills which assist proceduralisation and then tasks, or in most cases, activities which facilitate automatization. Based on this learning theory, language learning is a linear and sequential process from explicit to implicit. That is how PPP and TSLT organize three Ps steps in teaching. Great importance is attached to the explicit teaching in the first stage. By contrast, TBLT is rooted in SLA theories of usage-based learning, which value interaction, usage-based learning, and incidental acquisition (East, 2021; Ellis et al., 2020; Long, 2015). The main related SLA theories are Input Hypothesis (Krashen, 1985), Output Hypothesis (Swain, 2000), Interaction Hypothesis (Long, 2016; Long, 1985, 2015), and Usage-based Theory (Tomasello, 2003), which share the same premise that there is a natural order and acquisition sequence for linguistic items. Learners follow their own learning path to the target grammar of both L1 and L2, which is termed the “default learning mechanism” by Long (2015, p. 43). In this vein, learning occurs incidentally due to interaction and cannot be pre-determined, which will be further discussed in detail in the following section 2.3.4. Due to the different learning theory underpinning TBLT and TSLT, tasks function differently in these two approaches. In TBLT, tasks aim to provide opportunities for using language naturally in order to achieve a communicative outcome (Ellis, 2019). That is, tasks are the means of defining the teaching contents. In TSLT, however, tasks are used to provide opportunities for learners to practise correct use of an explicitly taught target linguistic item communicatively. In other words, tasks are methodological tools for practising pre-taught linguistic features while learners try to achieve a communicative outcome.

These differences in pedagogical logic and theoretical grounding also shape how TSLT and TBLT position the roles of teachers and learners. Because TSLT follows a PPP-based sequence, instructional control largely rests with the teacher, who pre-selects linguistic targets, determines the instructional order, and directs learners towards accurate production of the predetermined items. TSLT, therefore,

reflects a predominantly teacher-directed orientation (Ellis et al., 2020). In contrast, strong TBLT adopts a more learner-centred stance. Learners draw on their own linguistic resources to complete meaning-focused tasks, and any attention to form engages from their communicative purposes rather than from pre-planned instruction (Long, 2015). This distinction between teacher-directed and learner-centred orientations forms an important conceptual basis for the pedagogical framework proposed later in this thesis.

Although TBLT and TSLT differ in their pedagogical logic and theoretical foundations (See Table 1), they have been combined in some proposals, most notably in Ellis (2019)'s integrated framework. From Ellis (2019)'s point of view, TBLT was problematic in some teaching contexts, so it is imperative to combine task-based and structured-base components. In this framework, the task-based component precedes the accuracy-based structured component. That is, a basic fluency is developed first, and then explicit accuracy-oriented work will be conducted to draw learners' attention to accuracy. Ellis (2019) noted the role of the structural component as a checklist rather than a syllabus, which means teachers can focus on specific grammar issues that become problematic when students perform tasks, rather than strictly following a predetermined lesson plan. In this framework, TBLT can be seen as the dominant approach, and TSLT seems to be an optional component. However, this framework was criticized for two weaknesses, overemphasis on TBLT and insufficient attention to early vocabulary learning (Anderson, 2020). It is argued by Anderson (2020) that TSLT approach can foster both implicit and explicit learning.

Table 1 Comparison of PPP, TSLT and TBLT

Dimension	PPP	TSLT (weak version)	TBLT (strong version)
Pedagogical sequence	Presentation → Practice → Production	Retains PPP sequence; explicit teaching → controlled practice → task	Pre-task familiarization → Task → optional post-task focus on form
Role of tasks	-	A methodological tool to practise pre-selected linguistic features	The central unit through which learning emerges
Timing of explicit teaching	Entirely pre-task (presentation + practice)	Pre-task (front-loaded explicit instruction of predetermined features)	Reactive or retrospective; emerges from learners' task performance
Degree of explicit teaching before task	High	High	Low
Theoretical underpinnings	Skill Acquisition Theory (SAT)	Skill Acquisition Theory (SAT)	Usage-based SLA theories (Input/Output/Interaction hypotheses; Usage-based Theory)

Task function	-	Practises target forms communicatively	Drives learning through meaning-focused use
Definition of teaching content	Pre-determined by teacher	Pre-determined (linguistic syllabus or structural checklist)	Determined by communicative task demands; form arises from need
Teacher role	Highly teacher-directed; teacher selects structures and sequence	Teacher-directed; teacher pre-selects linguistic items and teaching order	Facilitator: teacher responds to learners' needs emerging from task performance
Learner role	Controlled practice of target forms	Accuracy-oriented practice of pre-selected features	Learners draw on their own linguistic resources to meet task demands; attentional focus emerges from communication

In summary, TBLT and TSLT are different due to the distinct use of tasks. TBLT, drawing on usage-based theories of incidental learning, is analytic and process-oriented, which puts the priority on developing fluency. So, for TBLT, tasks aim at facilitating the natural use of language and serve as the core unit of defining the teaching contents. TSLT, on the other hand, rooted in SAT, is synthetic and produce-oriented, where grammatical accuracy comes first. Thus, for TSLT, tasks are vehicles for practising linguistic forms in communications. Current existing studies that compare the effectiveness of TBLT and TSLT cannot draw a definitive conclusion. Despite the differences between these two approaches, they can still work as a combination in one curriculum.

2.3.4. Empirical Research into TBLT

Over roughly the past three decades, research on TBLT has moved from conceptual advocacy to a cumulative evidence based. Early implementation studies consistently demonstrated its positive effects on L2 development. A meta-analysis by Bryfonski and McKay (2019), synthesising 52 studies on the implementation of TBLT programs in authentic classroom contexts, reported a medium-to-large overall effect size across a range of linguistic outcomes and generally positive stakeholder perceptions, which reinforced the argument that task-based programs are not only effective but also well-received across diverse institutional and regional contexts. These findings, echoed in subsequent overviews (e.g., Ellis et al., 2020; Jackson, 2022), support TBLT as a viable and impactful alternative to more form-focused pedagogies such as PPP, TSLT and grammar-translation method.

At the programme level, compared with PPP or TSLT, TBLT generally yields equal or superior outcomes on functional and communicative measures and transfer to new tasks, with differences across studies largely attributable to implementation quality, total exposure, and the type of assessment used knowledge (De Ridder et al., 2007; González-Lloret & Nielson, 2015). At the skill level, a similar

conclusion emerges. Studies focused on speaking have reported advantages for task-based conditions in developing interactional competence and fluency (Harris & Leeming, 2024), while grammar-focused studies have found that gains are greater when attention to form is embedded within tasks rather than front-loaded (Borro, 2021). Research on writing similarly suggests improvements in discourse organisation and overall text quality (Yen Phuong et al., 2015), and vocabulary studies show robust uptake and retention through input–output task conditions (Shintani, 2013). That said, PPP and TSLT can show short-term advantages on accuracy measures tapping explicit knowledge of recently taught forms, an unsurprising result given their model-then-practice sequencing. On balance, however, the cumulative evidence favours well-implemented TBLT for broader communicative performance, transfer, and more durable L2 development.

At the classroom level, most TBLT work clusters around two design dimensions. First, a large body of TBLT work treats task complexity as a design lever, typically framed by Robinson’s Cognition Hypothesis and SSARC pedagogic sequencing and by Skehan’s Limited Attentional Capacity/Trade-off approach (Robinson, 2015; Skehan, 2015). In general, findings from these studies suggest that greater complexity slightly increases accuracy while reducing fluency in monologic speech, reliably increases LREs in interactive tasks, and shows mixed but generally positive effects on writing complexity (e.g., Jackson & Suethanapornkul, 2013; Kim & Taguchi, 2015; Márquez & Barón, 2021; Révész et al., 2017). Second, the mode of tasks often functions as an independent design parameter in TBLT research. Mode refers to whether communication is oral or written and includes hybrid modes having characteristics of both speech and writing, such as computer-mediated communication (CMC) (Jackson, 2022). In general, writing tends to elicit greater syntactic and lexical complexity, speaking tends to yield fewer errors and stronger cohesion, and in CMC, video/multimodal configurations afford richer negotiation and feedback than text-only or audio-only (e.g., Kuiken & Vedder, 2011; Tavakoli, 2014; Vasylets et al., 2017).

The above empirical work on TBLT has largely concentrated on linguistic competence, often examined through grammar and lexis and evaluated with CAF-type performance indices under different task modes and complexity conditions. At the same time, pragmatic competence, a central dimension of communicative competence, has begun to receive attention within TBLT, though the evidence base is still limited. In their 1989–2021 synthesis, Taguchi and Youn (2022) identified only four studies that directly examined TBLT/TSLT and pragmatic development. In these studies, pragmatic appropriateness is treated as a dynamic, jointly achieved property of talk that depends on participants’ continuous, moment-by-moment attunement to both what is said and how it is said as the interaction unfolds (González-Lloret, 2019).

Similar to the linguistic strand of TBLT research, TBLT research on L2 pragmatics also clusters around task modality and task complexity. For research on task modality, it often explores whether oral and written tasks differentially promote pragmatic learning, with mixed findings. Under explicit instruction, gains have been observed for oral production of targeted pragmatic features while parallel gains did not appear for a matched written task, a pattern attributed to different attentional and monitoring demands across modalities (Fukuya & Martínez-Flor, 2008). Other work reports no reliable modality effect when learners complete oral versus written versions of the same task for learning requests (Reagan & Payant, 2018). In terms of research on task complexity, it adapts established TBLT frameworks but meets distinct challenges when the target is pragmatic development. Studies drawing on the Cognition Hypothesis and the Limited Attention Capacity account show that manipulating complexity through contextual reasoning demands can promote negotiation of sociopragmatic factors and help sustain gains at delay even when immediate differences are small (Kim & Taguchi, 2015). Increasing elements and steps can raise the frequency of request and suggestion strategies without necessarily expanding their variety, which points to different pathways by which complexity shapes pragmatic performance (Gilabert & Barón, 2013). Sequencing tasks from simple to complex has not consistently produced superior outcomes, possibly because tasks did not differ enough along the intended dimensions of complexity (Gilabert & Barón, 2018). These findings support defining complexity for pragmatics as a joint function of cognitive and social demands rather than cognitive load alone (Kim & Taguchi, 2015).

It is worth noting that, unlike TBLT research on linguistic outcomes which often shows implicit task-based instruction matches or outperforms task-supported or PPP approaches, studies in L2 pragmatics more often report an advantage for explicit, metapragmatic instruction over purely implicit exposure (González-Lloret, 2019; Plonsky & Zhuang, 2019). This contrast appears to be domain specific. For many grammatical and lexical targets, regularities are relatively stable and locally cue-rich, so meaning-focused task work with contingent or post-task focus on form can drive noticing and automatization. By comparison, pragmatic appropriateness hinges on variable form–function–context mappings and shifting interpersonal goals, which are harder to infer from exposure alone; metapragmatic guidance makes the relevant conditions such as power, distance, and imposition visible and learnable (Taguchi, 2015). In linguistics, target forms and cues are often frequent and salient in classroom input, whereas many pragmlinguistic devices are subtle and sparse; explicit explanation and contrastive examples therefore play a larger role in heightening awareness for pragmatics. Adult learners' L1 routines tend to transfer less problematically for many linguistic forms than for socioculturally embedded norms (Taguchi, 2015; Timpe-Laughlin, 2017); explicit instruction helps remap those norms in pragmatics where negative transfer is more consequential. Finally, real-time performance demands are typically

higher for pragmatic decision-making than for many linguistic targets, since learners must manage social meaning while formulating language; pre-task explication, checklists, and worked examples reduce search costs and free attention for monitoring appropriateness during interaction (Taguchi, 2015).

Across the TBLT literature, whether the focus is linguistic or pragmatic, most empirical studies remain grounded in psycholinguistic and cognitive-interactionist SLA theories that emphasise input, attention, processing, and resource allocation. Many of these studies typically manipulate task features such as complexity, modality, planning and feedback, interactional configuration, or technology mediation, and evaluate effects with CAF-type indices, counts of language-related episodes, or strategy tallies, often using immediate and delayed post-tests. This feature has generated comparable findings, yet it tends to treat the task as an external stimulus and pays relatively little attention to how tasks are enacted in real time during implementation.

2.3.5. Mainstream TBLT pedagogical frameworks and contextual adaptations

Different task definitions and the theoretical underpinnings, along with diverse contextual considerations, lead to different implementations of TBLT and thus give rise to the proposals of different task-based pedagogical frameworks. Generally, these frameworks take task selection, task sequencing and task implementation into consideration (Ellis et al., 2020). Among these frameworks, Prabhu's framework, Long's framework, Willis' framework and Ellis' framework are most adopted by TBLT scholars in their research in classrooms. These four frameworks are analysed as follow, with a brief comparison made in Table 2.

Prabhu (1987)'s framework – development of grammatical competence

Prabhu (1987)'s framework has its origins in the “Communicational Language Teaching Project” which took place in the context of Indian primary and secondary school in early 1980s. In his TBLT framework, tasks were designed based on the topic areas. Task selection relies heavily on the teacher's intuitions about what is interesting and challenging for their learners. That is, in Prabhu's framework, there was no clear account of task selection. In terms of task sequencing, it was done in accordance with the cognitive demand of the tasks. Prabhu distinguishes three levels of procedural demand. Tasks at the bottom level, information transfer, only require learners to transfer the information related to the topic, for example identify a location on a map. At the second level, reasoning, learners need to derive new information from the given information with rationales. At the top level, opinion provision, learners are required to identify and articulate their personal preferences, feelings, or attitudes in response to a given situation. Turning to task implementation, Prabhu did not provide the related process in detail.

He only provided two vague implementation phrases. In the first phrase, teacher leads the learners to work together in a task. In the second phrase, learners are requested to do a similar task individually. During the whole process, there is no direct teaching of language, but the teacher was expected to scaffold students' participation and to correct production errors in an implicit way. Prabhu's perspective on language learning emphasizes the role of tasks in creating conditions where learners are encouraged to communicate. He claimed that this would be sufficient for the development of grammatical competence to occur without any explicit teaching of grammatical items. To sum up, in Prabhu's TBLT framework, tasks are selected by teachers based on their understandings of students' interests, demands and preferences. Tasks are sequenced in accordance with the cognitive demands, from simply information transfer, to reasoning and then to opinion providing. In task implementation, a task is conducted collaboratively by the teacher and learners, followed by learners' individual attempts at another similar task. The focus of tasks in Prabhu's TBLT framework is develop learners' general language competence.

Long (1985, 2015)'s framework

Long (1985, 2015) approaches TBLT differently from Prabhu. He insists that TBLT courses should start from Needs Analysis (NA). Therefore, tasks are selected based on learners' real needs in the outside world. According to Long (2015), there are three stages of task selection. In the first stage, what learners will need to do in everyday life is identified. Those authentic needs are turned into a list of raw tasks, which are termed as target tasks by Long (2015, 2016), because they are what learners need to be able to complete after the course. The second stage is to group the target tasks based on their common features to generate task types. In the third stage, for each task type, pedagogic tasks are created. That is, tasks are selected based on learners' authentic needs which generate a list of task types. Subsequently, pedagogic tasks are designed in according to the task types. Regarding task sequencing, tasks are initially sequenced according to the necessities and the frequencies of the tasks in the real world. According to Long (2015, p. 233), how tasks are sequenced is based on 'the relative frequency and/or criticality of the task as determined by the needs analysis'. Besides, the secondary sequencing criterion is in accordance with the task intrinsic complexity, which relates to the inherent, unchanging qualities that make tasks more or less challenging. Here, linguistic complexity is not included. More often, as summarized by Ellis et al. (2020), the complexity is related to the number of steps or components of a task and the dislocation in time and space of the task content in relation to the speaker. This is similar to Prabhu's (1987)'s cognitive demands. In terms of task implementation, Long (1985, 2015) did not provide a concrete workplan for the task implementation stage. Instead, he emphasized the importance of attention to form during interaction.

Willis' (1996, 2021) framework

Willis (1996, 2021) introduced her framework at the lesson level for lesson plan, which could not provide evidence for task selection and sequencing but for task implementation only. It was noted by Willis (2021) that the teacher plays the role of “facilitator” whose responsibilities are to balance the amount of exposure and use of language, and ensuring they are both of suitable quality. This framework consists of three phases, which are termed by Willis (1996, 2021) as pre-task, task cycle and language. According to Willis (2021), the pre-task stage aims at introducing the topic to the whole class, activating topic-related vocabulary and phrases and giving task instructions. Modelling tasks are accepted in the pre-task stage in this framework. The task cycle is composed of three sub-phases: task, planning and report. In the sub-phase of task, learners draw on their own linguistic resources to conduct the task first without any teacher intervention. Willis (2021) suggested that tasks are conducted in pairs or small groups, which emphasised the importance of peer interaction. In the planning stage followed, they plan their report of the task under the guidance of the teacher and receive feedback to improve their language. In the last sub-phase, they present the report orally or in written form and feedback is provided if needed. The task cycle offers learners a holistic experience of language use. In the third phase, learners have a closer study of some specific linguistic forms naturally occurring during the task cycle. They explore these forms in discussion (i.e., analysis) and the teacher conducts practice (i.e., practice) during or after the analysis (Willis, 1996, 2021). These three components within this framework can be weighed differently and adapted to suit learners' needs. According to Willis (2021), for example, for learners who are very familiar with the topic, the pre-task stage could be relatively short, while for language beginners, the report stage could be removed due to the lack of sufficient linguistic resources. As Willis (2021) suggested, the three phases of this framework can be conducted in one lesson and, alternatively, can be split between two or more lessons. For example, the language focus phase, even the planning in task cycle, can be a part of homework and reviewed during the next lesson.

Ellis et al. (2020)'s framework

Ellis et al. (2020)'s framework is more comprehensive than the frameworks mentioned above. It provides detailed descriptions of options in task selection, task sequencing and task implementation. Ellis et al. (2020) claimed that tasks for specific-purpose learners should be selected based on NA, but for general-purpose learners, tasks are selected based on learners' interest and their previous learning experience. It can be found that the task selection process draws on both Prabhu's framework and Long's framework. How tasks are selected does not influence how they are sequenced. Ellis et al. (2020) set four main criteria for task grading and sequencing. Task are graded based on the input factors,

interactive factors, reasoning factors, and outcome factors. Ellis does not suggest that these criteria should be prescribed in a fixed format. They are just guidelines and teachers can adjust according to learners' behaviours. In terms of task implementation, Ellis's framework follows the three-phase framework by Willis (1996,2021), which includes pre-task phase, during task phase, and post-task phase. Ellis et al. (2020) shared the same view with Willis (1996, 2021), clarifying that the three TBLT phases can either occur in a single lesson or occur in different lessons and even one phase can be done in two or more separate lessons. However, different from Willis' framework, Ellis believes that focus on form could appear in all three phrases.

In Ellis et al. (2020)'s task-based framework, the pre-task phase serves to motivate learners, prepare them for the upcoming main task, and provide opportunities for initial language engagement (Ellis, 2003; Ellis et al., 2020). A range of options is available, including exposure to task models, activities that facilitate comprehension or provide linguistic support, and strategic planning to enhance performance. These forms of support may also incorporate focus on form where relevant. This contrasts with Willis's view, which cautions that pre-teaching grammar at this stage may undermine the "taskness" of the activity by turning it into practice of the pre-taught items Willis (1996, 2021). In the main task phase, Ellis et al. (2020) emphasise opportunities for learners to focus on form while engaged in meaningful communication. Corrective feedback is considered the primary instructional tool for supporting such attention, and teachers are encouraged to employ a range of feedback strategies rather than rely on a single technique. Additional supports include within-task planning and task formats designed to facilitate communicative performance. The post-task phase aims to consolidate learning by encouraging performance repetition, reflection, or form-focused work (Ellis, 2003; Ellis et al., 2020). Although task repetition can take multiple forms, procedural repetition, which refers to repeating the same procedure with new content, has been found particularly effective. Post-task focus on form may also be realised through feedback or the presentation of a model to highlight effective language use (See Table 2 for an overview of instructional options across the task cycle).

Table 2 Instructional options and pedagogical aims across the task cycle in Ellis et al. (2020)'s task-based framework

Phase	Pedagogical aims	Instructional options
Pre-task	Motivate learners Prepare for task demands Provide initial learning opportunities	Similar-task performance Provision of a model Comprehension/language support (e.g., vocabulary, background info) Strategic planning
Main task	Promote meaningful communication Facilitate performance while focusing on meaning	Corrective feedback (various strategies) Within-task planning Supportive task formats

Post-task	Consolidate learning Promote reflection Extend linguistic development	Task repetition (exact / procedural / content) Post-task feedback Providing a model
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Note. Based on Ellis et al. (2020)

In brief, the four TBLT pedagogical frameworks discussed above although share some similarities in terms of task selection, task sequencing and task implementation, they have different emphasis. For Prabhu's framework, it works better for general English courses, while Long's framework suits English for Specific Purposes more. In terms of Willis' and Elli's frameworks, they provide more insights on task implementation. That is how a task-based language teaching lesson can be conducted.

Table 3 Comparison of four task-based pedagogical frameworks

Framework	Task selection	Task sequencing	Task implementation focus	Key pedagogic emphasis
Prabhu (1987)	Topic-based	Cognitive complexity (broad)	Teacher-led → individual practice	Proceduralisation through meaning-focused work
Long (1985, 2015)	Needs analysis → real target tasks	Frequency + task complexity	Attention to form during task	Authenticity + needs-driven design
Willis (1996, 2021)	Needs analysis	Less explicitly specified	Pre-task → Task cycle → Language focus	Taskness and delayed FoF
Ellis et al. (2020)	Needs, experience & motivation	Detailed sequencing factors (input/conditions/reasoning/outcome)	Pre-task, Main-task, Post-task (+ CF)	Flexible FoF embedded across task cycle

From the TBLT literature above, there cannot be a uniform approach to implement TBLT and there is no proof of a single successful version of TBLT (Ellis, 2018). Thus, as Ellis et al. (2020) suggested, any TBLT framework should not function to dictate the exact procedures used in classroom, but instead, it should provide teachers with resources to address the needs in their authentic classrooms. Under the drive of this principle, the TBLT framework has been adapted and developed in different teaching and learning contexts. Three representative studies, which show that TBLT is a set of flexible principles, not a fixed script, are reviewed below. Generally, in practice, teachers add pre-task input and strategy guidance, intervene during tasks, and sometimes repurpose tasks to practise pre-taught forms while balancing authenticity with local constraints.

One representative study is Ji and Pham (2020)'s design-based study, where pedagogical practices for TBLT were developed to make TBLT culturally appropriate in the Chinese context. Ji and Pham (2020)

claimed that TBLT cannot be implemented without teaching English grammatical features in the context of China, where there is an exam-oriented culture. When they implemented TBLT, four main factors hindered its implementation. These factors are the students' difficulty in acquiring implicit knowledge without explicit description, their reliance on teacher-centred presentations, their reluctance to engage in group activities, and their insistence on specific grammatical input before doing a task. They attributed the rise of these hindering factors to the exam-oriented education system, habituation to traditional teacher-centred PPP teaching methods and the lack of peer interaction strategies. To address these challenges, several adaptations were made. In the pre-task stage, grammatical input was added by providing learners with reading texts with the target linguistic features. Additionally, learners were taught explicitly the strategies of giving peer corrective feedback, which aimed to reduce students' reluctance to participate in group work. In the task performance stage, the task of introducing a house for sale was replaced by the task of communicating grammatical items itself. That is, the task required learners to work collaboratively to compare and analyse sentences where targeted grammatical features were used in correct and erroneous ways. During the discussion, the teacher, performing as a facilitator, rather than standing back, provided corrective feedback. The language focus stage did not have significant revision. The teacher explained the language rules explicitly followed what is suggested in Willis's and Willis's frameworks.

The findings and the specific strategies proposed to adapt the TBLT framework evidenced that when TBLT is implemented in the context of China, adaptations should take the exam-oriented cultural and learners' learning habit of teacher-centred teaching methods into consideration. The most significant adaptation of TBLT in this study seems to be that the task of introducing a house for sale was replaced by discussing the grammatical errors of the sentences provided. This adaptation reduced the "taskness" of the TBLT approach to some extent. The task of discussing the grammatical errors of the sentences provided are not situational and authentic; instead it focuses on language practice. In essence, identifying and correcting the grammatical errors in sentences is slightly like a practice of a particular grammatical items rather than using the target language for meaning-focused communication. The main reason could be that learners did meaning negotiation passively based on the grammatical error provided by the teacher. They did not negotiate for their own meaning and draw on their own linguistic resources. From this point, Ji and Pham (2020)'s adaptation moved the position of the approach from a TBLT end to a TSLT end.

The second adaptation was made by Bourgoin and Bouthillier (2023), who adapted the TBLT framework for young language learners in a French Immersion classrooms. The adaptation of the framework was informed by the Gradual Release of Responsibility Model rooted in SCT. Bourgoin and Bouthillier (2023) coined the adapted framework as task-based oral language teaching and learning framework. Within

this framework, there are three phases, which correspond to the pre-task, main task, and post task stages in Will's and Ellis's TBLT framework. The first phase is Language Exposure and Language Scaffolding, which involves pre-task activities where students are introduced to the language and scaffolds necessary for the upcoming communicative task. Teachers model language use, engage in guided practice and provide explicit instruction where needed. In the second phase, Language Experimentation and Communicative Tasks, young learners engage in authentic tasks that allow them to experiment with the language in a supportive environment. Bourgoin and Bouthillier (2023) emphasized that the nature of the phase was not language exploration but language experimentation. That is, learners experimented with the language they learned in the first phase. The final phase, Language Extension and Language Reinvestment, involves revisiting the language used during the tasks to reinforce and extend learning. This phase includes celebrating language achievements, monitoring language use, providing additional instruction, and recycling tasks for further practice.

As this framework is adapted for teaching young language learners, the emphasis of this framework is the gradual move of the responsibility from phrase 1 to phrase 3. The task in this framework, although it is authentic from the outside world, functions as a tool for learners to experiment with the language use that they learned in the pre-task stage. From this point, the task here somewhat serves the function of practising the pre-taught language. Bourgoin and Bouthillier (2023) also admitted that the pre-teaching of some linguistic features could be explicit if needed. These features of the adapted framework also move it from the TBLT end to the TSLT end, but it cannot be simply regarded as TSLT because the task phase still pursues communicative goals and interactional negotiation, and explicit attention to form is embedded within a task cycle rather than replacing it.

Another representative development in TBLT framework is provided by Anderson (2020), who proposed the TATE framework adapted from a weak version of TBLT. Anderson (2020) identified two weaknesses of Ellis's TBLT framework. Firstly, the framework neglected vocabulary learning. Secondly, the framework overly emphasized the negative impact of pre-teaching grammar on implicit learning. He suggested that tasks in a synthetic grammar curriculum can still foster meaningful, holistic language learning. For example, a task like storytelling to practise past tenses may also allow learners to implicitly learn other untargeted linguistic structures. To overcome these two weaknesses, Anderson (2020) proposed the TATE framework which includes four phases, Text, Analysis, Task, and Exploration. Briefly, in the 'Text' phase, learners engage with written or aural texts to develop receptive skills; 'Analysis' involves a learner- or teacher-led focus on specific grammatical and lexical items from the texts; 'Task' phase allows for productive skills practice with meaningful use; and 'Exploration' is for evaluating and form-focused exploration of the task performance. If this framework is mapped onto

the TBLT framework, the phrases of Text and Analysis correspond to the pre-task stage, Task is the task stage, and Exploration is the post-task stage.

When comparing TATE with TBLT framework, the most significant distinction lies in the Analysis phrase. For TBLT framework (not TSLT framework), there is no explicit teaching of any linguistic features before the task to protect the “taskness”. On the contrary, there is a specific phrase targeting on teaching both grammatical and lexical knowledge after doing a reading or listening activity of a text. This is consistent with TSLT. That is, the TATE in nature follows the TSLT framework, which details how to do the pre-teaching of grammar and vocabulary explicitly.

In summary, from the three adaptations of TBLT framework discussed above, it seems that these adaptations all move the teaching approach from TBLT to something closer to TSLT due to learners’ needs in authentic classrooms. In these adaptations, although the “taskness” decreases which turned the task into as practice of pre-taught linguistic features, they still maintained some functions for meaning negotiation to some extent especially the TATE framework and task-based oral language teaching and learning framework. It can be concluded that pure TBLT cannot always meet learners’ needs in real situations, and thus, adaptations which draw on some TSLT features may enable TBLT to be appropriate in some teaching and learning contexts.

2.4. Teaching second language writing through TBLT

This section maps L2 writing within a task-based paradigm. In TBLT, writing is taught and learned through purposeful tasks that prioritise meaning while creating opportunities for attention to form during task performance. A task cycle typically involves preparation, performance, feedback, and revision, with assessment focusing on whether the text achieves its communicative purpose for a specific audience. This view resonates most strongly with process-oriented approaches to writing (Long, 2018), yet it remains compatible with genre sensitivity and product standards when these are integrated in ways that preserve the task’s communicative orientation.

2.4.1. Process-based, product-based, or genre-based approach to L2 writing in TBLT classrooms?

L2 writing instruction has been shared by three major pedagogical orientation, product-, genre- and process-oriented approaches, which highlight different understandings of what L2 writing is and how it develops. The product-oriented approach in teaching L2 writing centres on the final written piece, prioritizing the structure, coherence, and grammatical accuracy over the creative processes of idea development, information organization, and language refinement (Hyland, 2019). Rooted in behaviourist learning theory, the product-oriented approach conceptualises writing as the mastery of

linguistic forms, and views development as the imitation and reproduction of model texts provided by the teacher (Badger & White, 2000). Badger and White (2000) summarised the process of learning to write into four stages: familiarisation, controlled writing, guided writing, and free writing. In these four stages, as Hyland (2019) claimed, learners who are taught in a product-oriented approach are often presented with exemplar texts as models and are guided to produce comparable writings by following established structures and formulas. This linear and form-focused sequence closely reflects the PPP approach, in which L2 writing is typically treated as a one-off performance after teacher-directed presentation and controlled practice of target forms. Therefore, the main object is to enable students to create well-crafted written works in a single attempt by adhering to prescribed guidelines. The approach may harm the development of learners' creativity, originality, and critical thinking in L2 writing (Jiang et al., 2023). However, this approach seems to be effective of teaching writing mechanisms, especially in exam-oriented cultures.

Similarly, the genre-oriented approach also emphasises the importance of linguistic features of a writing product. Hyland (2019) pointed out that the genre-oriented approach paralleled product approaches closely in terms of the implementation stages. Learners are often provided with a model writing of a particular genre for analysis in the first place, and then write to practise the relevant language forms before finally producing a short text. Therefore, the genre-oriented approach can be regarded as an expansion of the product-oriented approach. However, the difference lies in its recognition that writing varies depending on the social context in which it is written (Badger & White, 2000). The central element of the genre-oriented approach is the purposes of writing. This view aligns with the argument that writing is inherently genre-oriented and influenced by the norms, expectations, and values of the discourse communities in which texts are produced (Downs & Wardle, 2007).

On the contrary, the process-oriented approach in teaching L2 writing, which is influenced by process theory (Raimes, 1983), offers an alternative perspective on teaching L2 writing. It highlights the writing skills, such as planning and drafting and has less emphasis on linguistic knowledge of grammar, vocabulary, and text structures (Sasaki, 2000). According to Hyland (2019), process-oriented approach commonly follows 'planning-writing-reviewing' model in authentic writing classrooms, which often falls into four cyclical stages, prewriting, drafting, revising and editing (Badger & White, 2000). Teachers adopting this approach primarily facilitate the learners' writing and draw out learners' potential rather than providing input of linguistic features. Thus, process-oriented approach views L2 writing primarily as a recursive and cognitively driven process, where learning takes place through continuous reflection and refinement of ideas. It is worth noting that process-oriented approach does not completely disregard the importance of the product as learners always have a final draft at the end, but the product is not predetermined as a product-oriented approach.

Despite the distinctions among the three approaches to teaching L2 writing, they can be complementary with each other and thus, teachers can adopt a combined approach in their classrooms (Hyland, 2019), because writing is viewed as a set of processes within the social cultural contexts (Riestedberg & Manzano, 2019). Attempts have been made to incorporate features of the genre-oriented, product-oriented and process-oriented approaches. Badger and White (2000) made a synthesis of the three approaches by putting forward their model of process genre approach. This synthesis approach viewing teaching L2 writing as providing learners with the knowledge about language, the knowledge about the context and writing skills of using language in the same class. By adopting this model, the first step involves setting the social context of writing, where learners are encouraged to understand the purpose, the audience, and the structures. In this phase, the teacher, other learners, and the model texts provide necessary input for learners. Next, following the writing process, learners produce several drafts before they produce the final written product. In this phase, learners obtained knowledge input from both text and other learners only. In terms of the final text, learners receive feedback from the teacher and make comparison between their writings and the sample writings. Briefly, Badger and White (2000)'s model views writing as a sequential process, starting with a specific context and culminating in the creation of a written text. In this model, teachers plan a crucial role by providing the necessary input and facilitating the acquisition of relevant knowledge and skills to help learners develop through these stages. Empirical studies across EFL contexts have demonstrated positive effects of combining explicit genre instruction with recursive writing processes. In secondary settings, Pujianto et al. (2014) reported improved control over schematic structure and genre-related language in students' report writing following process-genre instruction. Similar gains have been identified in tertiary contexts, where Alabere and Shapii (2019) found that learners taught through a process-genre approach outperformed peers in a product-oriented condition in terms of content, organisation and accuracy. Huang et al. (2020) demonstrated sustained improvement in Chinese university students' argumentative writing, particularly in rhetorical structure and idea development. Based on these studies, it is suggested that process-genre pedagogies support more balanced development of textual organisation and communicative purpose than instruction focused solely on textual models or individual drafting.

From the perspective of pedagogical compatibility, the process-oriented approach is highly compatible with TBLT because the task cycle can naturally involve planning, drafting, performance, feedback, and iterative revision (Chimbanga, 2001), whereby learning emerges through engagement in communicative activities rather than pre-taught forms. Empirical studies have confirmed that such recursive work with texts within TBLT cycles can promote learners' development of writing strategies, writing quality, confidence and accuracy (Gonzalez & Pinzon, 2019; Moussaoui, 2024). In contrast, TBLT

does not fully align with product- or genre-oriented approaches, because these, as discussed above, are operationalised through PPP-style sequences in which explicit presentation is provided before task performance. Nevertheless, a product dimension can still surface within TBLT when the final text is treated as evidence of communicative success: learners revise toward a publishable standard, receive post-task feedback focusing on accuracy, coherence, and stance, and assess improvement against explicit criteria or high-quality examples used as benchmarks rather than templates. More importantly, TBLT can also draw on the notion of genre. Existing empirical studies have demonstrated that task-based instruction can successfully integrate genre-focused discourse features, such as audience, purpose and textual organisation, into task design and implementation, leading to learners' gains in textual coherence and rhetorical control (Mall-Amiri & Moradian, 2024; Marlowe, 2025; Yasuda, 2017). Thus, in this study, TBLT is primarily process-focused, yet it remains genre-informed and product-aware.

2.4.2. Collaborative writing

Collaborative writing, as an effective instructional activity, has been widely implemented in L2 classrooms. Storch (2013, 2019) defines collaborative writing as an activity that requires two or more learners jointly produce or co-author one single text by interacting with each other during the writing process including planning, idea generation, text structure discussion, editing and revision. Rather than simply piling up individuals' writing pieces, collaborative writing features interaction, shared decision-making and responsibility, and the co-owned single written product (Storch, 2013, 2019). With the advance of Web 2.0 tools, such as wikis and Google docs, collaborative writing is not limited to face-to-face but can be realized entirely online. Thus, computer-mediated collaborative writing often refers to an online activity in which learners utilize technology tools to interact and co-produce a single online text synchronously or asynchronously (M. Li, 2018). Collaborative writing, containing both interaction and writing, allows learners to pool language resources collectively and co-construct language of language and writing (Rouhshad & Storch, 2016). Viewed within TBLT, collaborative writing can be a convergent task whose outcome is a jointly authored text achieved through meaning-focused activity.

Due to its interactional nature, collaborative writing is theoretically supported by both cognitive-interactionist and sociocultural perspective in the field of second language acquisition/learning (Li & Zhang, 2023; Storch, 2019). On the one hand, informed by Interaction Hypothesis (Long, 2015) and Output Hypothesis (Swain, 2005) from the cognitive-interactionist perspective, collaborative writing provides opportunities for meaning negotiation that draws learners' attention to forms, noticing the gap between the target language and learners' interlanguage, and testing their linguistic hypothesis via peer feedback. On the other hand, informed by sociocultural theory (Vygotsky, 1978), collaborative writing provides the social context for students to share ideas, pool their own language resources,

collectively scaffold each other to form their ZPD and co-construct knowledge of language and writing peer interactions. As TBLT is also grounded in both cognitive-interactionist and sociocultural perspectives, integrating collaborative writing within a TBLT course is theoretically and pedagogically coherent.

Focusing on the writing outcomes, empirical studies exploring the effectiveness of collaborative writing generally indicated a positive impact (Storch, 2005; Strobl, 2014; Wigglesworth & Storch, 2009). Some studies compared the quality of joint writing products and individual writing products by analysing the CAF and test scores for the content and organization of written texts. According to Storch (2005) and Watanabe (2008), joint writing texts have been found to achieve a higher level of linguistic accuracy than those written by individuals. However, results seemed to be slightly different from the Strobl (2014)'s study with learners of German as a L2 in a computer-mediated setting. As Strobl (2014) identified, there was little statistical differences in CAF of written texts but general scores in content selection and organization were higher in collaborative writing. Besides, empirical studies also compared the effectiveness of collaborative writing and individual writing on individual writing development. Those studies commonly adopted quantitative analysis of pre-test and post-test writing texts. According to Bikowski and Vithanage (2016), learners engaged in collaborative writing performed better than those who work individually in post-test writing. Similar results were found in Hsu and Lo (2018)'s study, which showed that collaborative writing posed a significant effect on the content quality and linguistic accuracy of learners' post-test individual writing. Thus, it could be indicated that learners in collaborative writing achieved better writing improvements than those working individually.

Focusing on the writing process, other empirical studies explored how learners interacted in pair or group work. While collaborative writing emphasizes the role of collaboration in peer interaction, researchers have found that learners do not always work collaboratively, demonstrating different patterns of interaction (Li & Kim, 2016; Li & Zhu, 2013; Storch, 2002; Walls, 2018; Watanabe, 2008). Storch (2002) adopted equality and mutuality as two important indexes to understand learner interaction in pair work of collaborative writing. In this study, patterns of interaction were found to be collaborative, dominant-dominant, dominant-passive and expert-novice. Similar patterns of learner interaction were found in Walls (2018) and Watanabe (2008)'s studies, where learners also worked in pairs to conduct collaborative writing tasks. When learner interactions in group work were explored in terms of equality and mutuality, the patterns are similar to peer interactions. Li and Zhu (2013), who also drew on the indexes of equality and mutuality in Storch (2002)'s study to understand learner interaction, found that learners in small groups demonstrated three patterns of interaction. They are collectively contributing/mutually supportive, authoritative-responsive, or dominant-withdrawn. It is

worth noting that in Storch (2002) and Li and Zhu (2013)'s studies, the interactional patterns, once established, were found to be relatively stable over time and tasks. However, in Li and Kim (2016)'s study, the patterns of interaction were provided to be changeable among the same group of learners. Despite the differences in group size and the debate over the changes in interactional patterns, all these studies have a consensus that learners tend to benefit more from collaboration-oriented peer interactions.

Additionally, further empirical studies explored learners' perception on collaborative writing. Most learners are reported to be positive about collaborative writing, claiming that it benefits L2 learning, although they encountered some challenges at the same time. From learners' perspective, collaborative writing is reported to develop their individual writing skills and L2 (Lee, 2010; Li & Zhu, 2013; Rahimi & Fathi, 2022). Learners commonly stated in semi-structured interviews or surveys that they were motivated by collaborative writing and become more confident in L2 writing. Undeniably, collaborative writing also poses challenges for some learners. Learners sometimes struggle with merging different collaborative writing processes (Bikowski & Vithanage, 2016; Lee, 2010; Rahimi & Fathi, 2022).

As a whole, collaborative writing sits naturally within a task-based approach. Conceptually, it can be designed as a convergent task with a clear outcome (a jointly authored text) and implemented through a pre-task–task–post-task cycle that balances meaning-focused work with in-task attention to form via collaborative dialogue. Empirically, classroom implementations that embed collaborative writing within such task cycles report pre- to post- gains in writing quality and positive learner perceptions—for example, an online academic-writing course built around four iterative task cycles of co-drafting, feedback, guided reflection, and redrafting (Thirakunkovit & Boonyaparakob, 2022) and a university collaborative digital-storytelling project structured as a TBLT cycle using smartphone tools (Azis, 2020). These studies provide evidence of the theoretical fit and practical feasibility of integrating collaborative writing into TBLT, which I draw on to structure the collaborative-writing tasks in this study.

This review has consolidated a sociocultural view of learning as mediated participation, outlined task-based language teaching as the organising pedagogy, and examined L2 writing through a task-based lens. Yet mainstream TBLT scholarship remains dominated by psycholinguistic and cognitive-interactionist orientations that privilege design variables and aggregate outcomes, leaving the lived processes of implementation under-described. How TBLT is accomplished in practice is less known. The present study addresses this imbalance by examining the implementation of task-based writing and the learning processes it affords in an adult EFL setting, tracing mediation, co-regulation and

learners' experiences across the task cycle. The next chapter details the research context and the methodological approach used to investigate these processes.

2.5. Summary

This chapter reviewed SCT, TBLT, and research on the teaching of L2 writing through TBLT, which are relevant to the present study. From a sociocultural perspective, L2 learning is understood as a socially mediated and process-oriented activity. Central concepts, such as mediation, regulation, internalisation, appropriation, ZPD and learner agency, highlight the view that language development emerges through participation in interaction and the use of mediational resources. Within TBLT, tasks are conceptualised not as opportunities for controlled practice but as the central unit for learning. Grounded in the principle of learning by doing, TBLT adopts a learner-centred orientation that prioritises authentic, purposeful communication with a primary focus on meaning. As TBLT has been implemented across diverse instructional contexts, a range of pedagogical adaptations have emerged. Most of the existing task-based pedagogical frameworks share a broadly similar lesson structure, typically organised around a pre-task, a main task, and a post-task phase, which together shape how tasks are designed and enacted in classroom practice. Finally, the chapter has examined L2 writing within task-based approaches. It has discussed the ways in which process-, product-, and genre-oriented traditions intersect with task-based principles, and it has reviewed research on collaborative writing in task settings.

However, despite the extensive body of research on task-based language teaching, much of this work has been conducted from an SLA-oriented perspective, with a primary focus on language outcomes, task features, and acquisitional processes. In contrast, relatively limited attention has been paid to examining TBLT through a sociocultural lens that foregrounds learning as a mediated and interactional process. This gap is particularly evident in the area of L2 writing, where few studies have explored how an SCT-informed perspective can inform the design and implementation of task-based writing instruction in Chinese EFL contexts. In response to this gap, the present study adopts a sociocultural perspective to examine task-based L2 writing instruction in a Chinese EFL context. To address this aim, the study employs a qualitative research design that enables close examination of learners' experiences and interactions within task-based writing activities.

Chapter 3 Methodology

3.1. Introduction

This chapter outlines the methodological framework adopted to investigate learners' language development process and their perceptions of their learning experiences, and to examine how the iterative case study-action research process informed the development and refinement of the TBLT framework. Grounded in both social constructivist and interpretivist paradigms, the study employed a qualitative approach combining collective case study and action research to explore learner experience and development in real-time classroom contexts. Following this introduction, Section 3.2 explains the philosophical underpinnings of the study, including the related ontological and epistemological assumptions. Section 3.3 provides a rationale for the adoption of qualitative inquiry, while Section 3.4 details the Case Study–Action Research (CS–AR) design and its implementation across three research cycles. Section 3.5 presents the participant profile, followed by a discussion of the data collection methods in Section 3.6, and the analytic procedures in Section 3.7. Section 3.8 addresses research quality, including trustworthiness and reflexivity, and the chapter concludes with a summary in Section 3.9.

3.2. Philosophical and methodological foundations

This study is philosophically grounded in both social constructivism and interpretivism. Accordingly, this study adopts a combined social constructivist-interpretivist paradigm. Ontologically, both traditions understand social reality as shaped through human interpretation, social interaction, and historically and culturally situated practices, although they emphasise different aspects of this process. From a social constructivist perspective, reality is not discovered but constructed through social practices, cultural traditions, and historical contexts interaction (Berger & Luckmann, 1966; Kukla, 2013). From an interpretivist perspective, reality is likewise not seen as objective, because it is dependent on the meanings individuals attribute to their experiences (Crotty, 2014; Schwandt, 1994). In this view, the social world exists through interpretation and meaning-making.

Epistemologically, social constructivism holds that knowledge is co-constructed through social and cultural processes, where individuals make sense of their world by engaging with others and with the cultural and historical contexts in which they are embedded (Berger & Luckmann, 1966; Kukla, 2013). From an interpretivist perspective, knowledge originates in the interpretations that individuals assign to their lived experiences and social practices (Clark et al., 2021; Schwandt, 1994). Although these traditions emphasise different aspects, the socially constitutive role of interaction in constructivism and the interpretive processes of meaning-making in interpretivism, they converge on the view that

knowledge is not discovered but constructed. Collectively, they provide a coherent paradigm, social constructivist–interpretivist paradigm, which acknowledges knowledge as co-constructed through interpretation and engagement with lived experience. The social constructivist–interpretivist paradigm directly aligns with the research questions of the study, which explore both how learners’ L2 development unfolds in socially mediated classroom contexts and how they make sense of their experiences in a task-mediated writing course. By treating both development and experience as socially situated processes that require interpretation, the paradigm ensures that participants’ perspectives are taken as central to understanding the phenomena under investigation.

On this basis, qualitative inquiry emerges as the most appropriate methodological orientation. Because qualitative research is concerned with contextually situated meaning-making and privileges it as the route to knowledge, it is well suited to capturing the complexity of learners’ developmental trajectories and lived experiences (Creswell & Poth, 2018). It enables the in-depth examination of learners’ experiences, behaviours, and perspectives as situated within a specific context (Creswell & Creswell, 2023). Within this study, such an approach was especially important given its grounding in sociocultural theory, where learning is understood as a socially mediated, context-sensitive, and interaction-driven process (Lantolf et al., 2020; Vygotsky, 1978). To understand this process required rich, descriptive data, which made it possible to interpret how learning unfolded in real time and how participants constructed meaning through interaction (Merriam, 2016).

Within this qualitative orientation, the study draws on two complementary approaches, case study and action research. According to Cohen (2018), case study research recognises that a researched context may be understood from different participant and researcher perspectives, with the researcher’s interpretation representing one situated account of the case. This philosophical orientation renders case study well-suited to the interpretive-constructivist paradigm underpinning this study because it enables an in-depth exploration of how learners construct and interpret their language learning experiences within a specific learning context (Merriam, 1998; Yin, 2018). Action research, in turn, aligns with the paradigm by positioning the teacher-researcher as an active participant in iterative cycles of inquiry, reflection, and adaptation. It treats pedagogical practice not as a neutral backdrop but as a socially constructed and negotiable process responsive to learners’ needs (Kemmis, 2006). Taken together, these approaches extend the paradigm’s philosophical commitments into the research design, ensuring that both knowledge production and pedagogical improvement are firmly grounded in social constructivism and interpretivism. The specific methodological choices and their implementation will be elaborated in Section 3.4., 3.6., and 3.7.

3.3. Research design

3.3.1. pedagogical set-up

3.3.1.1. Pedagogical context

This study was conducted in a private English training centre located in mainland China, primarily serving learners preparing for overseas study. The core offerings of this centre are IELTS and TOEFL preparation courses designed to equip students for standardized language testing. The writing course investigated in this study, however, differed from these core exam-preparation programmes. It was part of a series of elective modules, which students could choose to attend voluntarily as optional supplements to their main test-focused courses. These elective modules covered a range of topics such as daily conversational English and presentation skills, designed to support learners' broader communicative needs for studying abroad, beyond the narrow focus of exam performance. This study focused specifically on the email writing course, which aimed to help learners handle everyday written interactions relevant to their overseas study plans.

The learner population at the centre consisted predominantly of adult EFL learners, including university students, high school students, and working professionals, all with the shared goal of pursuing international education. While most learners possessed a foundational level of English proficiency, their language abilities varied. Importantly, many of these learners were accustomed to teacher-centred, exam-oriented instructional practices and were relatively unfamiliar with learner-centred, collaborative, or exploratory learning approaches. Details regarding participant characteristics and recruitment are discussed in Section 3.5.

3.3.1.2 Design and evolution of the course across research cycles

The three online writing courses developed for this study were built on consistent pedagogical foundations across three research cycles, even as specific tasks were adjusted to fit the needs of each learner cohort. From the start, the design reflected a socioculturally informed understanding of TBLT, where mediation and scaffolding were positioned as central to supporting learner development. Drawing on this foundation, the courses were conceptualised as SCT-informed TBLT writing courses, designed with the aim of helping learners master key pragmatic functions in English email writing, such as making requests, giving responses, and offering apologies. In addition to developing linguistic accuracy and appropriateness, the course sought to enhance learners' awareness of audience and communicative purpose, supporting them to craft messages that were not only grammatically correct but also socially and pragmatically effective. A further pedagogical goal was to guide learners toward increasing independence and self-regulation, enabling them to gradually shift from relying on external

support to taking greater responsibility for revising and improving their own writing. Accordingly, key pedagogical features were designed to operationalised SCT constructs, with mediational tools supporting learners' engagement with new knowledge, graduated support addressing learners' evolving ZPDs, and collaborative activities creating opportunities for co-regulated development.

All the courses were delivered synchronously online and were taught by me as the teacher-researcher, ensuring consistency across the three research cycles. Each iteration was structured over five weeks, with a total of ten instructional sessions (two sessions per week, each lasting two hours). Each week included one whole-class session, where all learners participated together in collaborative tasks and group discussions, and one individual tutorial, during which each learner received approximately 20 minutes of personalised feedback and guidance. The course followed the classic three-phase TBLT structure of pre-task, main task, and post-task (Ellis et al., 2020; Willis, 2021), with each phase designed to incorporate specific mediational tools and scaffolding strategies. After each cycle, the course was systematically refined using insights from collected data and learner feedback to improve its design.

Initial course design: Cycle 1

The initial design of the Cycle 1 course was grounded in SCT-informed TBLT principles, with the Collaborative Needs Analysis (CNA) incorporated as an early-stage pedagogical activity. Prior to the formal start of the course, focus group discussions were held to elicit learners' perceptions of their needs, challenges, and learning goals related to English email writing. These insights were carefully considered in the formal course design to inform task selection and sequencing, ensuring that the pedagogical focus aligned with learners' identified priorities. Beyond its design function, the CNA also served as a pedagogical tool in its own right, encouraging learners to reflect on their learning needs and goals, and take an active role in co-constructing the course direction.

Building on the analysis of learners' authentic needs collected from the CNA focus group, the Cycle 1 course incorporated four main types of email tasks, including apology, request, complaint, and inquiry. Each task was carefully selected to address key pragmatic and linguistic challenges encountered in real-world communication. The sequencing of these tasks followed Ellis et al. (2020), with particular attention to reasoning demands, namely the number of steps involved. For example, the apology email was positioned in the first lesson, as it required relatively straightforward reasoning and fewer steps, while the inquiry and request email task involved multiple elements and more detailed formulation. The complaint email task was positioned as the final task in the course because it was combined expressions of dissatisfaction with requests for resolution, presenting more demanding reasoning. All tasks followed a consistent three-phase instructional structure.

The pre-task phase was designed to help learners engage with the communicative context of each task and become familiar with relevant vocabulary and pragmatic strategies. From an SCT perspective, which emphasizes learning via mediation, I prepared mediational tools such as pragmatic SCOBAs, writing samples, and short videos to provide learners with cognitive and symbolic resources that could support their engagement with the task. In parallel, consistent with TBLT principles that caution against explicit instruction to preserve “taskness”, I embedded these materials within interactive activities. For example, in Lesson 1, which focused on composing an apology email, learners were requested to discuss the pragmatic SCOBAs (See appendix 1) and the sample writings with peers, collaboratively identifying key politeness strategies and reflecting on how these could be applied in their own writing. In the inquiry task in Lesson 5, learners were asked to read for gist by analysing a sample inquiry email. In Lesson 9, which focused on a complaint email, learners first watched a short video depicting a customer-service complaint scenario and then answered questions designed to prompt reflection on effective expression of dissatisfaction and maintenance of professionalism. These pre-task activities, framed through the lens of SCT, created opportunities for learners to co-construct understanding through interaction before moving into the main task phase.

The main task phase was designed around collaborative writing, reflecting the SCT emphasis on learning in interaction (Van Compernelle, 2015). For each task, learners worked in small groups of three, a configuration chosen to maximise opportunities for joint problem-solving while avoiding the pitfalls of large groups where some participants might become passive. Before the first collaborative writing activity, learners received explicit instruction on how to approach the writing task as a shared, co-constructed process requiring continuous negotiation, discussion, and joint decision-making. The purpose of such instruction was to prevent them from dividing the task into isolated segments for individual completion or assigning the writing solely to one member while others remained passive. Such interaction was designed to facilitate co-regulation, through which learners could support each other’s emerging understanding before developing greater independence. In addition, learners were encouraged to make use of the pragmatic SCOBAs as a reference tool during the main task, drawing on them to guide their language choices, structure their emails, and address pragmatic concerns as they worked collaboratively.

To support collaborative writing effectively, my role as the teacher during this phase was deliberately designed to balance support and learner independence. While learners worked on their drafts, I remained available to join group discussions when questions or challenges arose, providing on-the-spot scaffolding to facilitate progress. Additionally, after groups produced partial drafts, I offered written feedback in highly implicit forms, such as highlighting specific areas, to prompt learners to collaboratively review, discuss, and explore potential improvements together. Such implicit written

feedback was designed to encourage learners' co-exploration and joint problem-solving during the review process. It aligned with the first stage of graduated CF, which mostly occurred in post-task phase, by encouraging them to independently identify and resolve issues before receiving more explicit support.

The post-task phase was designed to consolidate learners' linguistic and pragmatic development by combining teacher feedback, individual follow-up writing tasks, and targeted explicit instruction. The instructional design planned for the teacher to provide CF progressively, moving from implicit to explicit levels as needed. The levels of CF incorporated in the course were adapted from Aljaafreh and Lantolf (1994)'s regulatory scale, which conceptualizes feedback as progressing along a continuum of intervention strategies. Table 4 summarises the key CF levels planned for the post-task phase. This structured continuum allowed the teacher to calibrate feedback intensity based on learners' needs, supporting a scaffolded and responsive approach to error correction. This approach was grounded in the SCT concept of ZPD, with feedback gradually adjusted to provide appropriate support as learners move towards greater self-regulation.

Table 4 Levels of teacher graduated CF in Post-task phase

CF Strategy	Level of explicitness	Description and Suggested teacher moves/prompts
Clarification request	1	Signal confusion or asks the learner to recheck without pointing out the error directly. e.g., "Can you check this sentence again?", puzzled facial expression, eyebrow raise, highlight the area containing errors without comment.
Error repetition	2	Repeat error with rising intonation, e.g., "He go?"
Recasting	3	Naturally restate correct form without marking it as an error. e.g., Learner: "She don't like it." → Teacher: "She doesn't like it."
Questioning	4	Ask guiding questions to lead the learner toward self-correction. E.g., "Is there something missing here?" / "How do we usually say this?"

Metalinguistic Clues	5	Gives metalinguistic hints or clues about the nature of the error, without providing correct form. e.g., “Watch your tense here.”/ “This needs subject–verb agreement.”
Explicit correction	6	Clearly identify the error and provide the correct form. e.g., “It should be ‘goes,’ not ‘go.’”
Metalinguistic explanation	7	Explains the correction and provides a rule or reason. E.g., “It should be ‘goes’ because we add -s for third-person singular in the present simple.”

Task repetition was incorporated as individual writing assignments to be completed outside class, requiring learners to perform procedural repetition (Ellis et al., 2020) by applying the same task type, such as a new request email, to novel topics and content. This arrangement was designed to help learners transfer the strategies and insights gained from group work into independent practice, reinforcing both procedural knowledge and pragmatic awareness. After submitting their individual writing artefacts, learners were expected to first engage in a self-revision cycle, using teacher-provided highlights to identify and address problematic areas on their own. These revised drafts were then brought to one-to-one teacher-learner tutorials, where further graduated CF was provided to scaffold deeper understanding and refinement. Additionally, when recurring challenges were anticipated across groups, particularly regarding the use of pragmatic strategies, the course design included plans for the teacher to provide targeted explicit instruction, often drawing on the pragmatic SCOBAs to clarify and reinforce key concepts.

Iterative adaptation across research cycles.

Building on the initial course design in Cycle 1, the subsequent research cycles (Cycle 2 and Cycle 3) involved a series of iterative adaptations informed by both empirical findings and theoretical reflections. While these adaptations were initially intended to improve the course’s alignment with learners’ needs and task effectiveness, they simultaneously contributed to the development of the task-mediated language teaching (TMLT) framework.

Specifically, from Cycle 1 to Cycle 2, several key changes were introduced in response to emerging pedagogical insights. First, the CNA process was strengthened through the addition of a SCOBAs and a set of sample learner needs. The SCOBAs on focus group participation was designed to help learners

understand the purpose of the focus group and how to participate effectively (See Appendix 3), while the sample needs were included to prompt learner reflection and to prevent unstructured or overly vague responses during the discussion. Changes also were made in task sequencing. In Cycle 2, tasks sequencing decisions took into account not only the reasoning demands of the tasks but also learners' perceptions of task relevance and importance, as identified through the ranking discussion in the CNA session. In the pre-task stage, the discussion of sample writing was removed at this stage to prevent learners from relying too heavily on model texts before attempting their own writing. However, consistent with Cycle 1, the sample writing was retained for reading for gist, that is, for learners to gain a general understanding of the text's main idea rather than analysing its language and structure in detail. In the main task stage, grammatical SCOBAs (See Appendix 4) were added from the third lesson onwards to provide targeted support for sentence-level accuracy. These tools were not pre-designed but developed in response to recurring issues identified in learners' writing artifacts in previous lessons. Collaborative writing tasks were changed from group work to pair work in order to reduce passive participation and promote more focused collaboration. In addition, mini revision tasks were prepared for pairs who completed the main task early, ensuring continued engagement and balanced classroom pacing. In the post-task phase, the use of mediational tools and revision-focused instruction was expanded. Teacher-led explanation and discussion of the grammatical SCOBAs were added to support learners' understanding of form-related issues emerging from their writing. Additionally, revision tasks were incorporated to foreground writing as a process. These tasks included working with learners' own drafts as well as selected authentic emails from online sources and were carried out either in small-group peer editing or teacher-led whole-class review. These revisions aimed to foster greater attention to language choices, text structure, and the iterative nature of writing development.

Further refinements were made in Cycle 3, as the course design continued to evolve in response to classroom realities and learner feedback, such as learners' ability and willingness to adapt teacher-provided SCOBAs and their request for more pre-task preparation time. The CNA process was further enhanced to increase a strong sense of learner contribution in course design. Prior to the CNA focus group session, learners were encouraged to investigate their authentic writing needs through self-reflection and informal research. These individually generated needs were then shared and discussed during the CNA focus group session, leading to the co-construction of a general authentic task list. This collaboratively developed list served as an important reference point for subsequent task selection. In the main task stage, preparation time was extended to allow learners more flexibility in using mediational tools and planning their writing. In the post-task stage, a new activity was added to support learners in summarising and adapting the SCOBAs used during the task. This reflective step

aimed to deepen their understanding of the mediational tools and promote more flexible application in future tasks. For individual writing tasks as part of task repetition, learners were given multiple topic options and were also permitted to propose their own task topics, provided the writing type remained consistent with the course objectives. This change aimed to support learner agency while maintaining task comparability across the group, which reflected the SCT view that learners develop not only through participation in mediated activities but also through increasing control over their own learning process.

Table 5 provides a summary of the major course design adaptations across the three research cycles. These iterative adaptations across cycles reflected a dynamic interplay between practice and theory. As the course design evolved in response to learner needs and classroom interactions, the TMLT framework itself was progressively clarified, expanded, and became more context sensitive. Across cycles, therefore, SCT constructs were progressively translated into pedagogical principles and design features, through which the TMLT framework was gradually clarified expanded, and made more context-sensitive.

Table 5 Course Design Comparison

Design Element	Cycle 1	Cycle 2	Cycle 3
CNA process	Focus group discussion to elicit learner needs; no preparatory support tools.	Added SCOPA on focus group participation; provided sample needs to guide discussion.	Learners researched their own needs before CNA; collaborative task list created to guide task selection.
Task sequencing	Sequenced by reasoning demands (number of steps).	Sequencing based on reasoning demands and learner-ranked importance.	Same as Cycle 2.
Pre-task stage	Sample writing used for gist + discussion; videos and pragmatic SCOBAs provided.	Removed discussion of sample writing to prevent over-reliance; retained for gist reading only.	No change from Cycle 2.
Main task stage	Group writing (3 learners); pragmatic SCOBAs used; teacher gave implicit written feedback during task.	Pair writing instead of group; grammatical SCOBAs added based on previous errors; mini	Extended preparation time to support tool use and planning.

		revision tasks for early finishers.	
Post-task stage	Graduated CF (implicit to explicit); teacher-led feedback; some explicit instruction using SCOBAs. Task repetition was included as individual writing assignments to apply the same task type to new content. Learners revised drafts using teacher highlights and discussed them during one-to-one tutorials.	Added explanation of grammatical SCOBAs; included peer or teacher-led revision using learner drafts and authentic emails. Task repetition was maintained from Cycle 1.	New activity: summary and adaptation of SCOBAs to support reflection and future use. For task repetition, learners selected from multiple topic options or proposed their own topics within the same genre.

3.3.1.3 Linking course evolution to the emergence of Task-Mediated Language Teaching (TMLT) framework.

The TMLT framework was not an a priori model guiding the course design. Rather, it was conceptualised retrospectively as an outcome of the three research cycles, which were initially framed within TBLT viewed from a SCT perspective. The framework emerged gradually through iterative engagement with course design, classroom implementation, and pedagogical reflection. While the initial course in Cycle 1 was informed by principles drawn from SCT and TBLT, its design remained exploratory rather than following any predetermined structure.

As the course evolved across the three cycles, patterns began to emerge in how tasks were designed, how mediational tools were employed, and how learners were positioned as active participants in shaping their learning. These patterns reflected key SCT constructs, including mediation through symbolic and social tools, scaffolding within learners' ZPD, and the development of learner agency through increased participation in the learning process. These recurrent design choices, such as using tasks as both workplans and mediational processes, embedding scaffolded tools for language and strategy development, and emphasising graduated feedback as part of the task sequence, collectively contributed to the eventual formulation of the TMLT framework. By Cycle 3, many of these principles had stabilised as consistent features of the course design, forming the basis of a more coherent pedagogical approach. The TMLT framework itself is presented and discussed in detail in Chapter 5.4,

where its theoretical underpinnings, pedagogical rationale, and relationship to the course design are examined.

The iterative and context-responsive nature of the course design process also shaped the methodological choices of this study. As the course evolved across research cycles, it became increasingly clear that a methodological approach capable of capturing both the situated complexity of each cycle and the ongoing pedagogical refinement was needed. This consideration led to the adoption of a combined case study–action research framework, which is discussed in the following section.

3.3.2. Methodological framework: Case Study–Action Research (CS-AR)

This section outlines the methodological framework adopted in this study. Informed by the interpretive-constructivist paradigm and aligned with the overall research aim, the study employs a collective case study approach supported by principles of action research. The section begins by discussing each approach individually, followed by a rationale for their integration in the context of classroom-based inquiry. It then introduces the structure of the Case Study–Action Research (CS–AR) framework developed to guide the iterative design and refinement of the proposed TMLT framework.

3.3.2.1. Case Study

The case study approach is often expected to provide in-depth examination of a specific instance, situation, or phenomenon to generate exhaustive understanding of its complexities and dynamics in real-life contexts. The concept of a “case” in case study is subject to varying interpretations. Merriam (1998), for example, viewed a case as a thing, a single entity, a unit around which there are boundaries. This leads to a tight definition of the case as a bounded system (Cohen, 2018; Creswell & Poth, 2018; Merriam, 2016; Stake, 1995). In contrast, Yin (2018) argued for a more flexible interpretation, suggesting that the boundary between a phenomenon and its context is blurred. Some scholars even consider the case to be almost anything of interest (Punch, 2013; Tight, 2010). In this study, I follow the tight definition of a case as a bounded system, because it provides a clear and manageable unit of analysis. Defining each case with explicit boundaries, which was based on time, participant group, and instructional setting, supported analytical clarity, and facilitated systematic comparison across cases.

There is also an ongoing debate over whether case study constitutes a method, a strategy, or a research approach. For instance, Yin (2018) conceptualised case study as a research method, defining it as “an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context” (Yin, 2018, p. 16). His methodological stance is reflected in the detailed procedural guide he provides for conducting case study research, approaching it primarily as a sequence of research steps. In contrast,

Merriam (2016) viewed case study as a qualitative methodology and briefly defined it as an in-depth description and analysis. Creswell and Poth (2018) took this further, framing case study as a research approach in which “the investigator explores a real-life, contemporary bounded system (a case) or multiple bounded systems (cases) over time, though detailed in depth data collection involving multiple sources of information, and reports a case description and case themes” (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 97). In this study, I followed Creswell and Poth (2018)’s definition of case study as an approach rather than a discrete method. As Creswell (2023) explained, a research approach encompassed the overarching plans and procedures that span from broad philosophical assumptions to specific methods of data collection and analysis. In this sense, case study in this study serves not as a data collection and analysis method, but as a comprehensive framework guiding how each research cycle was conceptualised, bounded, and examined as a meaningful instance of the development of the pedagogical framework. This broader understanding of case study also enabled this study to incorporate diverse qualitative methods, including interviews, classroom observations, reflexive thematic analysis and microgenetic analysis, under a coherent interpretation that supported depth, contextual sensitivity, and researcher reflexivity.

Moreover, case studies can be categorised along different dimensions. In terms of research purpose, Stake (1995, 2005) distinguished between intrinsic and instrumental case studies. While intrinsic case studies focus on understanding a specific case for its own sake, instrumental case studies use the case as a vehicle to understand a broader issue or refine a theoretical or practical construct. This study adopted an instrumental orientation, as each research cycle serves to explore and develop a task-mediated instructional framework, rather than to investigate the case itself. In terms of scope and structure, this study employed a collective case study design (Stake, 1995), in which three bounded cases are examined to provide insight into a shared pedagogical phenomenon. These cases from what Stake (2013) referred to as a quintain, a conceptual unit that binds the cases together through a common focus of inquiry. According to Maréchal et al. (2010), collective case studies apply a common set of research questions and consistent data collection methods across cases, facilitating both within-case and cross-case comparison. Besides, this collective case study can be sequential in nature (Thomas & Myers, 2015), with each case building on the findings of the previous one, enabling iterative refinement of the instructional framework over time. Rather than conducting the cases concurrently, this temporal design allows for a developmental trajectory across cases, aligning with the exploratory and adaptive ethos of the study. The rationale for this structure, and its integration with action research principles, is elaborated in the following sections.

3.3.2.2. Action Research

Action research is often characterized by a self-reflective inquiry, which can be used in a variety of areas. According to Sáez Bondía and Cortés Gracia (2022), action research has been localized in broad educational contexts to promote greater social justice, school reforms and teacher development and to organize and support local action research communities. In most studies in the context of language learning and teaching, action research aims to address classroom problems and improve teachers' practices. For these action research projects, they always start from a practice-related issue or question in authentic classrooms posited by teachers who wish to explore and improve their own practices. Like case study, action research is also an umbrella term includes many different forms, which for example, can be an individual effort or a collaborative effort.

The models or workplans of action research also exhibit diversity (e.g., Banegas & de Castro, 2019; Elliott, 1991; Kemmis & McTaggart, 1988; Smith, 2015). However, these models share more similarities than differences because most of them are developed from/built on Kurt Lewin's model of action research spiral (Banegas & de Castro, 2019). Generally, many of the models have four stages in common, including plan, act, observe, and reflect. They work collaboratively to generate new ideas to improve the original plan and strengthen the intervention. Specifically, in the stage of planning, interventions or changes are planned. The teacher researcher(s) work on the research purpose, research question, and data collection methods. In the second stage, action stage, the interventions are implemented. In the following stage of observation, data are collected for the reflection or evaluation in the final stage. Based on the reflections in the evaluation stage, new actions are created and planned for the next research cycle. Following such a workplan, teachers are equipped with systematised reflections and rich data to transform, change, improve and contest their own classroom practices.

While this study does not adopt action research as a stand-alone approach, it drew on key principles of action research, particularly its cyclical structure, emphasis on practitioner inquiry, and responsiveness to context. The rationale for integrating these principles within a collective case study framework is discussed in the next section.

3.3.2.3. Rationale for the combination of case study and action research

The integration of case study and action research is not completely novel in the literature, but neither is it common. Bates (2008) proposed the responsive case study as a methodological framework, in which action research is integrated into a case study approach. This design is intended for evaluating and improving courses within an educational programme. In Bates (2008)'s three cycles, working as

three instrumental cases, are designed, drawing on the features of action research. Unlike conventional action research, the participants in each cycle were replaced, resulting in three distinct cases. Bates (2008) argued that such a methodological framework is well suited to courses which were not long enough for action research with several cycles. Similarly, Sáez Bondía and Cortés Gracia (2022) proposed a combined Action Research-Case Study (AR-CS) approach to improve their practice, which was action research in nature with case study being embedded in it. As with Bates (2008), this combination emerged as a response to the rapid turnover of students in short-term courses, making it difficult to retain a consistent participant group across cycles. Treating each cycle as a bounded case enabled the researcher to explore learning processes contextually while still applying the iterative principles of action research.

These two examples of combining action research and case study illustrate that case study and action research are not methodologically incompatible. On the contrary, their distinctive yet complementary features make them well suited for integration in classroom-based inquiry. As previously discussed, case study is widely conducted to provide unique examples of real people in authentic contexts. The primary aim is to gain an exhaustive understanding of a specific subject, which in turn generates knowledge or informs development. Thus, case study research can enable the evaluation of educational actions in real-world situations (Simons, 2009). Action research, in contrast, involves a thorough investigation of classroom scenarios identified by teachers as challenging or in need of improvement. To resolve the challenges identified or improve the situations, iterative cycles of action and reflection are conducted, which is grounded in an in-depth exploration and profound understanding of the entire educational context. In other words, any improvement cannot be achieved without in-depth examination. In this regard, the objectives of action research closely align with the aims of case study research. Therefore, these two approaches work collaboratively and complement each other, with case study research handling the evaluation aspect, and action research taking charge of practice improvement. This provides the rationale for treating each research cycle as a distinct case, which serves as a solution to address the challenges of quick learner turnover in the courses under investigation.

3.3.2.4. The CS-AR methodological framework

The overall aim of this research was to develop a SCT-informed TBLT writing course, thus, involving three iterative research cycles of construction, elaboration, and modification. The Case Study–Action Research (CS-AR) approach was coined to term the methodological framework adopted in this study (See Figure 2). Building upon the methodological frameworks proposed by Bates (2008) and Sáez Bondía and Cortés Gracia (2022), this study adopted a three-cycle research framework, considering

each cycle as an individual case within a collective case study. I labelled this study as a three-cycle iterative case study, which is a collective case study in nature with an action research approach being structured in it. While case study provides the framework for bounding, describing and interpreting each context, action research principles guide the iterative development of instructional framework. In this way, the two approaches work in tandem with case study enabling contextual evaluation, and action research informing instructional refinement. The detailed research procedure of conducting the three iterative case/cycle is demonstrated as follows.

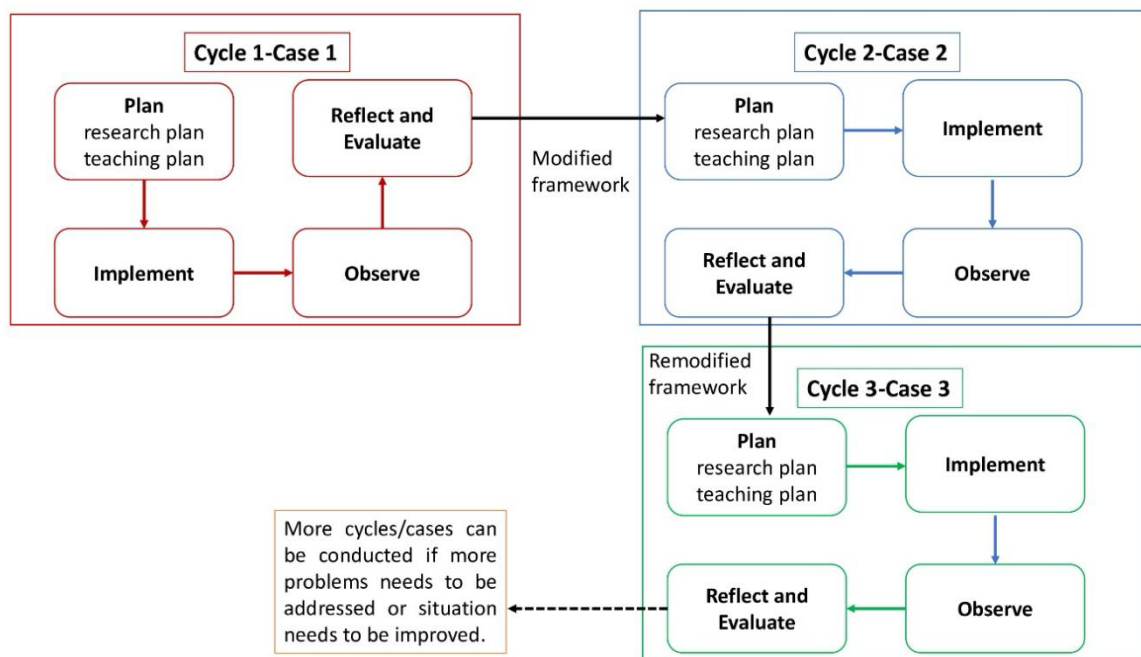


Figure 2 CS-AR approach adapted from Bates (2008) and Sáez Bondía and Cortés Gracia (2022)

The aim of the case study in Cycle 1 was to evaluate and improve the proposed instructional framework. First, this case aimed to evaluate the proposed framework in an authentic online English writing class from the learning perspective. Based on the evaluation, problems needed to be addressed and instructional practices that could be improved were identified. Then, modifications of the original proposed framework were made based on the evaluations in the first step. There were four main stages in this research cycle, including planning stage, implementing stage, observing stage, and evaluating/reflecting stage. In the first stage, planning stage, both research and teaching were planned. The former one referred to formulating the research questions and determining the specific data collection and analysis methods. For the latter one, it meant the instructional planning, where the proposed instructional framework was put into action through detailed lesson plans. In the second stage, implementing stage, the lesson plans were carried out in the online English writing class. In the

stage of observing, data were collected and analysed to generate the findings for further evaluation and reflection in the last stage of this cycle. Based on the evaluation and reflection of these findings, adaptations were made, through which the original instructional framework developed. The modified framework was then evaluated and developed in the next research cycle. Briefly, the first research cycle as a case study is to evaluate and develop the proposed instructional framework based on the in-depth exploration of the case.

The aim of the second research cycle, namely Case 2, was to evaluate the modified instructional framework, and further improve the modified-instructional framework with the second group of learners in a new online classroom. This time, the evaluation was twofold. First, it again evaluated the framework as a whole in the second online writing class. Furthermore, it explored the adaptations made in the first research cycle to explore whether they solved the problems identified or improved the practices. Like the first research cycle, Cycle 2 contained four stages, too. The first stage was the planning stage, including both the research plan and instructional plan. To plan the research, although the research questions and research methods were kept the same, the research tools were modified to cater for the specific evaluation of the adaptations made of the researched framework in this cycle. In this study, more interview questions regarding the adaptations, such as the use of grammatical SCOBAs and provision of sample needs, were prepared in the interview schedule. This modification reflected a key methodological shift between Cycle 1 and Cycle 2. While the overall research questions and qualitative approach remained consistent, the data collection instruments were refined to enable a more focused exploration of specific instructional elements introduced after the first cycle. This change illustrates the adaptative nature of the CS-AR framework, in which research design components evolve in response to findings from previous cycles. By fine-tuning the research instruments, this study aimed to align each data collection phase with the evolving focus of instructional development, thereby strengthening the coherence between research and pedagogical inquiry. As to planning the teaching, the modified instructional framework was applied in the design of the lessons. In the implementing stage, the lesson plans were carried out in the online writing class with the second group of students. The main task for the next stage was to collect and analyse the data to generate findings in this case. In the final stage, evaluating and reflecting stage, new adaptations of the instructional framework were made in according to the identified instructional problems. Thus, the product of Case 2 was the further modified instructional framework, which was evaluated in the third cycle.

The design of Cycle 3 follows the four stages of Cycle 2. In this case, the further-modified instructional framework was evaluated and improved in another online writing class with the third group of learners. The outcome of this case in this study was the final version of the instructional framework. This study

ended with Cycle 3, because of the absence of significant new findings and the time limitation. However, more cycles can be employed if new problems arise.

This study's CS-AR methodological framework shares many elements with what Sáez Bondía and Cortés Gracia (2022) and Bates (2008) proposed. The three proposals all combine case study approach and action research approach, and they all view each research cycle as a single case study with different groups of learner participants due to the short duration of the course. However, there are still some slight differences in the research design due to the nature of each proposal. The purpose of Sáez Bondía and Cortés Gracia (2022)'s proposal is to address the instructional problems and improve teachers' practice in authentic contexts. That is, the research starts from existing problems, which is closely aligned with the primary objective of action research. Thus, this research approach in essence is action research, within which case study is a complementary element. However, the CS-AR approach in this study is essentially a collective case study, which is different from Sáez Bondía and Cortés Gracia (2022)'s approach in nature. Before the start of the first research cycle of the CS-AR approach, there is no specific identified problem that requires to be solved. The start of the research is the case study that evaluates the proposed framework. That is why CS is in front of AR when the approach is termed. Compared to Sáez Bondía and Cortés Gracia (2022)'s research design, the CS-AR approach is more similar to Bates (2008)'s responsive case study which is also in essence a case study. Nevertheless, these two approaches are slightly different in terms of the research plan stage in each research cycle. For responsive case study, which is often used to evaluate courses in an educational programme, the research questions and research methods keep changing in each cycle, while for the CS-AR approach, which is designed for the evaluation and development of an instructional framework, the research questions and research methods are more fixed. This can be explained by the differences between the elements involved in courses in educational programme and an instructional framework. Developing courses in an educational programme is often more intricate, involves more facets and stakeholders than developing an instructional framework for language teaching. For example, a course may contain several different instructional frameworks, all of which may need improvement after evaluation. Therefore, when a course is evaluated and improved in responsive case study approach, changes made in each cycle can vary significantly in terms of their scope and forms, leading to the different research questions and accordingly, different research methods in each research cycle. However, when developing one single instructional framework, although the modifications also involve some different aspects, most of them are within a relatively small scope. So, it is not necessary to change the research questions and methods. Only some research tools, such as the interview questions need to be modified. While the CS-AR framework provided a coherent structure for iterative instructional development, it may also raise concerns. Admittedly, involving different learner cohorts across the

three cycles may raise questions about cross-cycle continuity or comparability. However, this design decision was necessitated by the short-term nature of the writing courses and the need to evaluate the instructional framework across varied learner groups. Rather than undermining the study, this diversity offered opportunities to examine the robustness and adaptability of the framework in different yet comparable contexts.

3.4.3. Pilot study

A three-week pilot study was conducted before the formal three research cycles to evaluate the feasibility of both the instructional design and the research procedures prior to the main study. Six learners participated in the pilot session. In the first week, a needs analysis was carried out through individual interviews, which informed the initial design of the writing course. During the second week, two main lessons and one tutorial were delivered, video-recorded to document learner behaviours and interactional patterns during task implementation. These sessions provided an opportunity to trial key components of the proposed instructional framework, including collaborative writing tasks, teacher corrective feedback, and the use of SCOBAs. In the third week, semi-structured interviews were conducted to gather learners' perceptions on their experience. While data collected during this phase were not formally analysed, the pilot study enabled me to test research instruments, refine instructional materials, and address emerging practical issues. This is consistent with the purposes of pilot studies in qualitative research, which aim to assess feasibility and improve the design of both pedagogical and methodological procedures (Mackey & Gass, 2015).

Several specific issues emerged from the pilot study. First, a practical issue identified during the pilot study concerned the use of individual interviews for needs analysis in course design. While the interviews generated rich data, they proved time-consuming and logistically demanding (Cohen, 2018), as scheduling one-on-one sessions with each learner significantly reduced the time available for designing the course. In response to this, focus group interviews were adopted to replace individual interviews. This change not only improved the efficiency of the needs collection process, but, more importantly, aligned more closely with the theoretical underpinning of this study. From the sociocultural perspective, learning and meaning-making are socially constructed through interaction. Focus group interviews, by facilitating peer discussion and co-construction of needs, resonated more strongly with this perspective than individual interviews.

Second, learners demonstrated inconsistent understanding of what constituted collaborative writing. In the absence of explicit instruction on how to collaborate in writing tasks, different groups adopted divergent approaches. For example, one group divided the text into sections, with each member responsible for writing a different part, while another group had each learner produce an individual

version and then collectively selected the best one for submission. These variations suggested the need for more explicit instruction on collaborative writing practices in the main study.

Third, a notable challenge arose with the SCOBAs. Because the SCOBAs (See the sample SCOA in Appendix 2) included academic relevant concepts, such as speech act, hedging, and mitigation strategies, many learners found them difficult to understand and consequently did not make meaningful use of the tool. In follow-up interviews, students confirmed that they were unfamiliar with much of the terminology and thus lacked motivation to engage with content they perceived as overly technical. Consequently, I revised the SCOBAs for the main study, replacing technical terminology with simpler language and clearer examples. While these changes meant the SCOBAs appeared less academically sophisticated, they became more accessible and practically usable for the learners, aligning better with the mediational function emphasized by the SCT.

Additionally, I encountered a practical issue with data collection through Zoom. While the online classes were recorded via Zoom, breakout rooms could not be recorded directly by the platform. Initially, I asked one learner per group to record their breakout room discussions. Despite agreeing to this arrangement, technical problems frequently occurred, such as missing audio or video or forgetting to start recordings. To solve this issue, I adjusted the procedure for the main study, asking at least two students per group to record simultaneously, thereby ensuring more reliable and complete data collection.

Finally, the pilot study also provided an opportunity to trial the interview and observation procedures. While no major changes were required, the process allowed me as the researcher to confirm that the instruments were suitable for capturing learners' experiences and classroom interaction relevant to the research aims of this study. The pilot study therefore played a crucial role in refining both the instructional and research components of the main study.

3.4.4. Ethical considerations

Ethical approval for this study was granted by the Strathclyde Institute of Education Ethics Committee prior to data collection. All research activities involving human participants were conducted in accordance with institutional ethical guidelines and protocols. The study followed established ethical principles in educational research, including informed consent, voluntary participation, confidentiality, and respect for participants' autonomy (Cohen, 2018).

Participants were fully informed about the nature, purpose, and procedures of the study through a bilingual Participant Information Sheet (PIS) provided in both English and Chinese to ensure clarity and prevent misunderstanding. Written informed consent was obtained from all participants before the

study began. They were assured that participation was entirely voluntary and that they could withdraw from the study or retract their data at any time prior to analysis without any negative consequences.

Given that the researcher also served as the course instructor, particular attention was paid to managing this dual-role relationship. As Cohen (2018) note, power differentials between researcher and participant can create ethical tension, especially in practitioner research. To minimise this, the course was designed as a non-credit-bearing elective, delivered outside participants' formal educational programmes, ensuring that participation would not influence their academic standing. Learners were explicitly informed—both orally and in writing—that their decision to participate or not would have no effect on their learning experience, assessment, or access to feedback.

Data confidentiality and participant anonymity were rigorously maintained. All data were pseudo-anonymised during collection and fully anonymised at the time of analysis. Pseudonyms were used in all transcripts, presentations, and publications. Video recordings of classroom sessions, interviews, and writing artefacts were securely stored on password-protected university-approved cloud storage (OneDrive) and encrypted where applicable. Only the researcher and supervisory team had access to the raw data, which will be securely destroyed five years after the study's completion.

Participants had the right to turn off their cameras at any point during Zoom sessions or interviews. They were also informed that they could refuse to answer any interview questions that caused discomfort or anxiety. For focus group interviews, care was taken to minimise peer-based coercion. The researcher, acting as a facilitator, monitored turn-taking and interactional dynamics, and follow-up individual interviews were offered to participants who were reticent or uncomfortable in the group setting.

Given the online nature of the research, additional attention was paid to digital security. VPN access provided by the university was used, and Zoom sessions were conducted using secure, university-registered accounts with password-protected links. Participants were asked to delete Zoom meeting details after each session and were prohibited from sharing links externally. Writing collaboration was conducted through OneDrive for Business, using university email accounts to ensure secure access and encrypted storage of shared documents.

3.5. Participants

The participants in this study were 17 adult Chinese learners enrolled at a private language training centre, where I was employed as an instructor. All of them had completed an IELTS test preparation course, and most had also taken the official IELTS exam within 6 months by the time of their participation. These learners shared the common goal of preparing for academic study abroad. The

English proficiency levels of these participants ranged from B1 to B2, as determined by their official IELTS scores or institutional mock exams aligned to the CEFR framework. Their current statuses included undergraduates, postgraduates, and working professionals, with study destinations spanning the United Kingdom, Australia, Canada, the Netherlands, Singapore, Malaysia, and Hong Kong. It is worth noting that although the study was conducted in an EFL environment, the inclusion of participants who were already living and studying in English-speaking contexts supports the use of the term L2 writing throughout this thesis. That is, at the time of data collection, some participants had already begun their overseas study journey, including enrolment in pre-sessional English programmes, undergraduate, or postgraduate programmes. Therefore, rather than positioning English as a foreign language, this study recognizes its dynamic and situated role in participants' evolving academic and communicative lives, and accordingly uses the term L2 writing throughout. An overview of the 17 participants, organized by research cycle, is presented in Table 6 below.

Table 6 Overview of Participants across Three Research Cycles

Cycle	Anonymous Name	CEFR Level	Target Destination	Current Status	Overseas
Cycle 1	C1L1	B2	UK	Postgraduate	Yes
Cycle 1	C1L2	B1	Malaysia	Undergraduate	No
Cycle 1	C1L3	B1	UK	Undergraduate	No
Cycle 1	C1L4	B2	Australia	Employed	No
Cycle 1	C1L5	B2	HK	Undergraduate	No
Cycle 2	C2L1	B2	UK	Undergraduate	No
Cycle 2	C2L2	B2	UK	Undergraduate	No
Cycle 2	C2L3	B2	UK	Undergraduate	Yes
Cycle 2	C2L4	B1	Malaysia	Undergraduate	No
Cycle 2	C2L5	B1	Netherlands	Postgraduate	Yes
Cycle 2	C2L6	B2	Netherlands	Postgraduate	No
Cycle 3	C3L1	B2	Australia	Undergraduate	Yes
Cycle 3	C3L2	B2	Singapore	Undergraduate	Yes

Cycle 3	C3L3	B2	Canada	Undergraduate	No
Cycle 3	C3L4	B2	Canada	Undergraduate	No
Cycle 3	C3L5	B1	Australia	Undergraduate	No
Cycle 3	C3L6	B1	UK	Undergraduate	No

The participants were recruited through a voluntary sign-up process within the language training centre where the study was situated. The writing course in which the research was embedded was part of a broader elective programme offered by the centre, which included sub-courses such as essay writing, email writing, oral English for daily life, and presentation skills. Learners could freely choose which courses to join based on their interests and learning needs. The email writing course, which I designed and taught, was clearly introduced as part of a research project. Participation in the research component was entirely voluntary and independent of course assessment, fees, or attendance requirements.

Prior to data collection, learners were provided with full information about the study's aims, procedures, and ethical safeguards. Those who agreed to participate signed informed consent forms. All 17 participants who completed the full research cycles agreed to both classroom observation and semi-structured interviews. This voluntary, opt-in process aligns with a purposive sampling strategy, whereby participants were selected based on their relevance to the research aim (Cohen, 2018). The use of purposive sampling also ensured that participants had a shared experience of IELTS preparation and a clear learning purpose involving study abroad. This provided a coherent, yet diverse sample of learners situated in varying education transitions.

In the context of this study, participants served as key informants whose actions and reflections contributed to the understanding of how the task-mediated writing course functioned in practice. Their involvement spanned both instructional and data collection phases. During classroom sessions, participants engaged in collaborative tasks while being video recorded for microgenetic analysis. These recorded interactions captured moment-to-moment learning processes and mediational dynamics. Following each cycle, all participants also took part in semi-structured interviews, where they were invited to share their perceptions of the course and reflect on their learning experiences. These interviews provided critical insight into how learners interpreted their development, offering complementary perspective to classroom data. As such, the participants were not merely observed but meaningfully engaged throughout the study as contributors to both real-time interactional data and retrospective narrative accounts.

3.6. Data collection

3.6.1. Classroom observation

In this study, classroom observation served as a key method to capture how learning unfolded through interaction in the online writing course. All lessons across three research cycles were video-recorded, including main class sessions and small-group discussions that took place in Zoom breakout rooms. As a teacher-researcher, I employed this method to gain a multi-layered understanding of the participants, the context, and my own teaching practice. Video-recorded classroom observation enables events to be revisited and interactional data to be examined in the fine detail, making it particularly suitable for exploring how learning unfolds through social interaction (Mackey, 2016).

The aim of conducting video-recorded classroom observation in this study is to reveal the process of learning in interaction of the participants. Therefore, the focus of the data collected is on the learner-learner and teacher-learner interactions in language related episodes (LREs) (Dobao, 2014; Ellis & Barkhuizen, 2005) and pragmatic related episodes (PREs) (Taguchi & Kim, 2016). Combined with the examination of learners' writing artifacts which are also recorded in the video, these episodes explore how learners' English develops. Therefore, the video-recorded classroom observations allow for the further analysis of language use in greater depth.

Video-recorded classroom observation was selected for both practical and methodological reasons. Practically, there is no substitute for classroom observation to collect the data on how learners communicatively interact with the teacher and their peers to scaffold their English writing process in LREs and PREs. For teacher-learner interactions, it was almost impossible for me as a researcher to assess to take field notes while I worked as a teacher at the same time. For the peer interactions, as in most cases peer interactions happened simultaneously in breakout rooms via Zoom meetings, I could not have the access to all of them at the same time. Therefore, this study uses recorded videos to obtain the classroom observational data. As Yin (2014) notes, classroom observation could add new dimension for understanding the phenomena under-investigation. Specifically in this study, video-recorded classroom observation is used to collect data on classroom interactions and learners' writing artifacts to see how the teacher and peers scaffold learners' language learning in communicative interactions. Follow-up individual semi-structured interviews offered a complementary perspective by revealing how learners perceived the development of their English language writing during the course. These data jointly addressed the research questions by providing complementary perspectives on learners' development and experiences.

All online lessons were recorded in full, and the breakout-room sessions were recorded by the participants themselves. I watched all the recorded videos for three times to ensure that all teacher-learner oral interactions and peer interactions were transcribed accurately. As participants sometimes mixed used spoken Chinese (their first language) and English, the transcriptions followed the language that the participants used in the real situations, which were then coded and analysed by the data analysis methods.

3.6.2. Semi-structured interviews

Semi-structured interviews were employed in this study to complement the classroom observation data, providing access to learners' subjective perspectives and reflections on their learning experiences. Whereas classroom observation captured the interactional processes of task-mediated learning, the interviews enabled participants to articulate their perceptions, beliefs, and affective responses, offering insights into how they made sense of their development throughout the course.

This data collection strategy is described as a purposeful conversation between interviewer and respondents (Bryman, 2016). For teacher researchers in language education contexts, interviews are widely applied for needs analysis, programme evaluation, individual case studies and mini surveys within an institution (McDonough & McDonough, 2014). Such applications are based on the characteristics of interviews that it can collect data on people's values, beliefs, perceptions and preferences (Cohen, 2018). Thus, interviews were conducted in this study to gather data on participants' perceptions of the effectiveness of online English writing courses informed by the proposed instructional framework. In other words, interviews were employed to collect perceived effectiveness from the learning perspective. Besides, an interview can work as a precursor or follow-up device to complement other research methods (Gray, 2014). For example, an after-survey interview could explore deeper information or reasons of unexpected survey results. Thus, interviews in this study were conducted after classroom observations.

The purpose of interviews in this study is to obtain qualitative data on participants' perceptions. To put it another way, in-depth information on "how" question, namely how learner participants perceive their learning experience of the investigated course, is sought by interviews in this study. Thus, structured interviews do not suit in this case. Unstructured interviews are not the suitable choice, either. It is because the investigation in this study has a clear focus, but unstructured interviews often used to explore a general idea. In this regard, semi-structured interviews, standing between the other two methods, suits this study best. More detailed three design and application factors form the basis of this adoption. Firstly, the semi-structured interview features as the preferred research tool in this study due to its potential for openness. The open-ended questions in the semi-structured interview

allow for individual expressions of how the course under investigation facilitates learners' English writing development. Meanwhile, the open-ended questions make it possible for learner participants to broach new topics, as those questions encourage divergent thinking. In this case, the adoption of semi-structured interviews can yield rich data for this study. Secondly, the great flexibility makes semi-structured interviews apposite in this study. As Bell (2018) suggests, semi-structured interviews give room for comprehension check, which allows interviewers to follow up ideas and probe responses, and thus, maximize the usefulness of the data. As the interviewer can vary the sequence of questions in a semi-structured interview, a more personal context for both the interviewer and the interviewees to exchange information can be created, in which information on their real views may emerge. Finally, semi-structured interviews in this study complemented classroom observations. As both strategies investigate learners' learning processes during the course, they provide complementary perspectives on those processes.

Interviews can be conducted individually or in groups. According to Cohen (2018), conducting a group interview can be cost-efficient and time-efficient than individual interviews. Focus group, as a form of group interviewing, even enables participants to interact with each other to generate new ideas (Cohen, 2018). However, this study did not use group interview as a method to collect learners' perceptions for the following two reasons. For one thing, in each cycle, there were only 5 to 6 participants being interviewed, so it was not that time-consuming if participants were interviewed individually. For another thing the purpose of conducting interviews is to explore participants' own perceptions on the course. There is no need for participants to interact with each other to generate the ideas, and they can generate views based on their own learning experiences during the course. More importantly, it cannot be argued that one-on-one interviews also have their own advantages. Individuals may be more comfortable in a one-on-one setting than in a group, when the research topic is sensitive or personal in nature (Bryman, 2016). Another important merit of individual interview is the more in-depth exploration of a topic. Since the focus is solely on one participant, the interviewer can delve deeper into the experience, perspectives, or emotions. Individual interviews enable researchers to reach a comprehensive understanding of an individual's thoughts or experiences, which becomes the main reason of adopting individual interviews in this study.

Moreover, the semi-structured interviews were conducted online synchronously. One benefit of online interview is that time and location present few or no challenges, although sometimes the speed of the interview may be impacted by the quality and the speed of connection (Cohen, 2018). Besides the flexibility of time and location, the main reason for conducting interviews online is that it is convenient and feasible for me as a teacher researcher. As the writing course in each research cycle was delivered

online, I, as a teacher, have built up the relationship with my learners online. Participants do not need to adjust to a new setting.

Before the semi-structured interviews were conducted, an interview guide had been developed followed the procedures and principles suggested by Bryman (2016). The interview guide includes open-ended questions that allow participants to share their thoughts and experiences in-depth and several follow-up questions (See appendix 1). The interviews were conducted online via Zoom meetings, with each interview took around 40 to 50 minutes. The entire process of interviews was audio recorded by Zoom with the consent of the participants. It is worth mentioned that in order to obtain richer and more accurate responses, the interviews were conducted in participants' L1, Chinese. It is mainly because interviewing in participants' L1 reduces the chances of misinterpretation or miscommunication and participants can easily access the full range of vocabulary and cultural references available to them, which lead to richer and more comprehensive data. The audio-recorded data were transcribed in Chinese. The Chinese transcriptions were translated into English, which then were translated back to Chinese by the researcher. Both of the final version of Chinese transcription and English transcription were sent to the participants for their confirmation before being coded in the data analysis process.

3.7. Data analysis

In line with the interpretive-constructivist paradigm of this study, data analysis was designed to capture both the dynamic process of L2 development and learners' reflective understandings of their learning experience. Microgenetic analysis was used to trace moment-by-moment developmental trajectories observed in classroom interaction, particularly within LREs and PREs. Reflexive thematic analysis was employed to explore learners' perceptions and meaning-making processes as expressed in semi-structured interviews. Both approaches foregrounded the role of the researcher as an active interpreter of the data and were chosen to align with the sociocultural and dialogic foundations of the research.

3.7.1. Microgenetic analysis

This study employed a sociocultural microgenetic approach to examine how learners' L2 developed through mediated interaction within a task-mediated learning environment. Data for microgenetic analysis were drawn from transcribed classroom interactions collected across the three research cycles, including both teacher-learner and peer interactions. LREs and PREs were identified based on their relevance to learners' engagement with linguistic and pragmatic problems. These episodes served as

the primary units of analysis, enabling a close examination of moment-to-moment developmental processes.

Microgenetic analysis is a methodological approach offering fine-grained information for examining changes in a particular competence at the moment the change is actually taking place. Unlike traditional methods such as cross-sectional or longitudinal designs, which focus on end products (Hall, 2011), microgenetic analysis is concerned with how learning unfolds in real time. This methodological orientation aligns closely with Vygotsky's SCT, which asserts that the way to understand higher mental functions is to trace their developmental history (Vygotsky, 1978). In particular, microgenetic analysis provides a way to observe how learners move from other-regulation to self-regulation through mediated interaction within ZPDs.

Originally used in cognitive psychology, this method has been increasingly adopted in educational and applied linguistics research to investigate language learning as a socially mediated process (Aljaafreh & Lantolf, 1994; Swain, 2000). As Chen (2021) highlights, microgenetic analysis enables researchers to examine dynamic changes in learner language by capturing the interactional moments where such changes emerge. These affordances make the method particularly well suited for this study, which explores how learners' L2 develops through scaffolded classroom interactions over time. Rather than focusing on general proficiency gains, the analysis traces how learners appropriate linguistic support from teachers and peers, revealing shifts from other-regulation to self-regulation. In this sense, microgenetic analysis not only aligns with the theoretical commitments of this study, but also offers an empirically grounded lens through which the fine-grained processes of task-mediated L2 development can be traced.

The analysis procedure in this study mainly followed the three-stage approach outlined by Ellis and Barkhuizen (2005). First, LREs and PREs were extracted from classroom observation data. Second, interaction patterns were classified following Storch (2002)'s typology, distinguishing between collaborative, dominant/dominant, dominant/passive, and expert/novice dynamics. Third, learner development was traced by examining shifts in the type and level of mediation provided, with particular focus on changes in regulatory support and learner responsiveness. To investigate microgenetic growth across both teacher-learner and peer interactions, this study adapted the original regulatory scale proposed by Aljaafreh and Lantolf (1994) by incorporating peer feedback strategies outlined by Ohta (2001). While most existing microgenetic studies have focused on a single type of interaction within one task (e.g., Aljaafreh & Lantolf, 1994; Ranjbar & Ghonsooly, 2017; Swain, 2000), this study analysed both types of interaction across multiple tasks and lessons throughout a complete course. The adaptation was necessary to allow consistent coding of mediation moves provided by both

teachers and peers, enabling a more holistic analysis of how these forms of mediation interacted and supported learners' development collectively. It should be noted that, however, the adapted regulatory scale was more frequently applicable to teacher-learner interactions, where the full range of graduated CF strategies could be systematically observed. This is because I, as the teacher, deliberately implemented graduated CF throughout the course, ensuring that mediational moves reflected varying levels of support along the implicit-explicit continuum. In contrast, peer feedback emerged more spontaneously and was therefore less predictable and less likely to follow the full regulatory sequence. Nevertheless, peer feedback was still considered a mediational resource in its own right, and episodes involving peer interaction were analysed in terms of their supportive and co-regulatory potential, even if not all feedback moves could be classified precisely along the adapted scale. The combined scale preserved the original continuum of explicitness, ranging from implicit prompts to direct metalinguistic explanation, and comprised seven levels (See Table 7). Each mediational move was coded according to this continuum, allowing the study to trace learners' shifting reliance on external support within their ZPDs across tasks and interlocutors.

Table 7 Regulatory scale for measuring the quality of intervention (Adapted from Aljaafreh and Lantolf (1994) and Ohta (2001)).

Regulatory scale for measuring the quality of intervention (adaped from Aljaafreh & Lantolf (1994), Ellis (2019) and Ohta (2001))			
CF Strategy	Level of explicitness - from least explicit (1) to most explicit (7)	Description of Teacher CF	Description of Peer CF
Clarification request	1	The teacher asks the learner to read, find the errors, and correct them independently. Or, raise confusion caused by the errors. (e.g., "Please double check these sentences"; "What do you mean here?")	The peer indicates that the expression/message is not understood. (e.g., "Sorry:" , "What do you mean by writing/saying that?","I don't understand".)
Error repetition	2	The teacher repeats the learner's error and adjusts intonation to draw learner's attention to it. (e.g., "a email?")	The peer repeats the error to remind the partner of the error.
Recasting	3	Without directly indicating that the learner makes an error, the teacher reformulates the learners' error.	The peer reformulates the learner's error by providing the right form without indicating the error.
Questioning	4	Indicating the problem - The teacher indicates that something may be wrong in a segment (e.g., Is there anything wrong in this sentence?) Eliciting - The teacher directly elicits the correct form from the student by asking questions (e.g., How do we say that in English?)	Learners co-construct the right form by asking questions within the pair.
Metalinguistic clues	5	The teacher indicates the nature of the error. (e.g., Pay attention to the tense here.)	The peer points out the nature of the problem. (e.g., I think the tense is wrong)
Explicitly Correction	6	The teacher clearly indicates that something is incorrect and then provides the correct form.	The peer clearly indicates that something is incorrect and then provides the correct form.
(Metalinguistic) explanation	7	The teacher not only corrects the error, but also provides examples of useage or metalinguistic explanations.	The peer explain the rationale of correcting the error. (e.g., "I don't think it is There is many student use this app. It should be using rather than use, because in a sentence there shouldn't be more than one verbs."

However, as the analysis progressed, it became evident that certain aspects of learners' participation extended beyond the initial deductive framework. These unanticipated insights included their agentive

behaviours and co-regulatory interactions. To capture these emerging features, additional inductive coding was carried out. The coding process was conducted manually, following Saldaña (2021) emphasis on the interpretive and iterative nature of manual coding in qualitative research. Inductive codes were generated through close engagement with the data and interpreted through a sociocultural lens, with particular attention to mediation, responsiveness, and development as participation (Van Compernelle, 2015). These inductive codes were then compared, grouped and refined to identify recurring interactional features that reflected learners' increasing agency and co-regulatory involvement. This interpretive process focused on how learners' contributions shaped the direction and intensity of mediation in real-time, thereby complementing the structured analysis of regulatory shift. Thus, beyond tracking regulatory shifts, the study extended Ellis and Barkhuizen (2005)'s microgenetic analysis approach to include learners' agentic participation in interactions. As classroom data revealed, learners often shaped mediation by seeking clarification, pausing feedback sequences, or offering self-initiated revisions. In one example, a learner interrupted the teacher's feedback to attempt a self-correction before further assistance was given, illustrating their active role in shaping the interaction. These behaviours were analysed as signs of co-regulation, whereby the direction and nature of mediation emerged through reciprocal engagement rather than unidirectional scaffolding.

3.7.2. Reflexive thematic analysis (RTA)

RTA was employed to analyse semi-structured interview data in this study primarily because of its suitability of exploring learners' experiences in an interpretive and situated way. This study aimed to explore how learners perceived and engaged with a task-mediated writing course, and how they made sense of their own development over time. These aims required an analytic approach attentive to complexity, variation, and meaning-making processes, qualities that RTA offers through its focus on co-constructing patterns of shared meaning via interpretive engagement.

Thematic analysis (TA) is a widely used approach for identifying and interpreting patterns of meaning within qualitative data. It is best understood as an umbrella term encompassing a range of different approaches to theme development, including codebook TA, coding reliability TA, and reflexive thematic analysis (RTA) (Braun & Clarke, 2022). Unlike coding reliability TA, which emphasises coding consistency, inter-coder agreement, and objective theme identification, or codebook TA, which relies on a predefined coding frame to support structured yet flexible interpretation, RTA conceptualises analysis for qualitative dataset as an interpretive, reflexive, and theory-informed process (Braun & Clarke, 2020, 2021, 2022; Byrne, 2022).

Positioned within the “Big Q qualitative tradition”, emphasises a fully qualitative paradigm grounded in interpretivist and social constructivist assumptions (Braun & Clarke, 2022, p. 7). Accordingly, it explicitly embraces the researchers’ active role in knowledge production and treats subjectivity and reflexivity as resources that enrich interpretation. In RTA, subjectivity refers to the idea that the researcher’s theoretical assumptions, disciplinary background, and lived experiences shape the analytic process (Braun & Clarke, 2022). In this study, my dual role as the teacher-researcher, along with my commitment to SCT, informed the questions I asked of the data, the meanings I prioritised, and the ways I interpreted participants’ accounts. Rather than attempting to bracket these influences, I acknowledged them as integral to the meaning-making process. Reflexivity, closely linked to subjectivity, denotes the ongoing process of critically examining how my position, assumptions, and decisions influence the analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2024). It involved consciously reflecting on why certain themes resonated with me, how my familiarity with the classroom context shaped what I saw as meaningful, and how my theoretical orientation framed the analytic lens. These reflexive considerations were documented through memo writing and returned to iteratively during theme development.

My role as a teacher-researcher further shaped the suitability of RTA for this study. Deeply involved in course design, delivery, and data generation, I occupied an embedded position that made researcher detachment neither possible nor desirable. RTA does not require neutrality or coding consensus; instead, it treats subjectivity and reflexivity as analytic resources. This allowed me to draw on pedagogical insight and contextual knowledge as part of the meaning-making process. Importantly, the development of the pedagogical framework of TMLT was itself an interpretive endeavour grounded in practice. Rather than testing a predefined model, I aimed to develop TMLT through iterative reflection on classroom experience, theory, and learner feedback. RTA supported this form of situated pedagogical inquiry by enabling theory-informed interpretation without imposing rigid analytic constraints.

Finally, beyond its practical strengths, RTA was also philosophically aligned with the study’s theoretical stance. Informed by SCT, this study conceptualises language development as a mediated, socially situated process. RTA similarly views themes as interpretively constructed rather than objectively discovered, and it recognises analysis as shaped by the researcher’s theoretical commitments. This theoretical-methodological coherence reinforced the appropriateness of RTA for a study concerned with both understanding learner experience and innovating pedagogical practice.

This study followed the six-phase analytical process of RTA outlined by Braun and Clarke (2022). All coding and theme development were conducted independently by me, consistent with RTA’s emphasis

on subjectivity and reflexivity. Interview transcripts were translated into English prior to analysis, and the translations were checked by another Chinese PhD student at the university for accuracy. The analysis was recursive rather than strictly linear, involving movement back and forth between coding and theme development. Themes were constructed through sustained attention to patterns of meaning in the data, guided by the research aims, research questions and the theoretical orientation of SCT. My dual role as a teacher-researcher also informed my engagement with the data, acknowledging that interpretation was shaped by my pedagogical involvement and theoretical positioning.

Phase 1 involved immersive familiarisation with the interview data. I began the familiarisation process by listening to each interview recording in full before initiating transcription. This initial active listening helped me recall participants' tone, hesitations, and mannerisms, which later contributed to my interpretation of how they narrated their learning experiences. I then manually transcribed each interview in Mandarin and translated the transcripts into English. This act of translation was treated not as a mechanical task but as an interpretive process, requiring attentiveness to nuance, expression, and meaning. Once the transcripts were finalised, I read each of them multiple times. During these readings, I wrote informal familiarisation notes to capture emerging impressions, recurring ideas, and early interpretations related to the research questions. While not used as codes, these notes supported the initial analytic engagement and contributed to the later development of codes and themes (Braun & Clarke, 2022).

Phase 2 involved a detailed process of coding, which was conducted manually using Microsoft Word and Excel. The coding task was conducted independently by me, which aligns with RTA's non-positivist stance that does not require inter-coder reliability. For data collected in Cycle 1, I adopted an inductive coding approach to explore how learners described their experiences without relying on predefined categories. Although my thinking was informed by concepts from sociocultural theory, I did not apply them as fixed analytical lenses at this stage. For data collected in Cycle 2, I began with a more abductive strategy, combining deductive coding based on the existing code set from Cycle 1 with inductive coding to capture new ideas and patterns emerging from the second cohort. For data collected in Cycle 3, the approach that I used in Cycle 2 continued. That is, I used the evolving coding set from Cycles 1 and 2 as a guide but remained open to new codes or adaptations prompted by the third dataset. This cumulative strategy allowed the coding set to develop organically while staying theoretically sensitive. Both semantic and latent codes were employed, depending on the depth and context of each data item. Semantic codes were used to capture the surface meaning or explicit content of participants' accounts, while latent codes were applied to interpret underlying assumptions and conceptual framings embedded in what was said (Braun & Clarke, 2022; Byrne, 2022). Following Byrne (2022)'s

practical implementation of RTA, semantic and latent codes were not treated as exclusive, and individual data items were sometimes coded at both levels to reflect both what was said and what was implied. Initial coding was carried out in Microsoft Word using the comment function, which enabled close, context-sensitive annotation of relevant data extracts. This process allowed me to remain immersed in the narrative flow of each transcript, make analytic notes in situ, and begin exploring semantic and latent meanings directly within the textual context. I also used Microsoft Word to write early analytic memos alongside key extracts, capturing my immediate interpretations, emotional responses, and theoretical reflections. Codes and associated quotations were then transferred into an Excel spreadsheet, where they were collated, compared, and tracked across the three research cycles. The spreadsheet supported both the structural organisation of codes and the documentation of their development over time. It also served as a space to record revisions, merging decisions, and memo entries, enabling transparent tracking of analytic shifts and the emergence of potential theme clusters. As my understanding of the data deepened, some codes were redefined, merged, or discarded. For example, a code initially labelled as “learner improvement” was later split into more specific codes such as “gains in lexical variation” and “improved writing fluency” to better reflect participants’ perspectives. Other codes, initially distinct, were later combined when I recognised a shared underlying pattern of meaning. These coding changes were recorded systematically, with memos documenting the rationale for major coding decisions. Throughout this phase, I prioritised interpretive depth over code frequency or formal consistency. Codes were treated not as fixed entities but as evolving constructs shaped by my reflexive engagement with the data, and my positioning as a teacher-researcher within the research context.

After completing the initial coding, I proceeded to Phase 3, which involved generating initial themes from the coded data. I reviewed the entire set of codes from each research cycle and began clustering them based on conceptual similarity, the emotional or narrative tone of the data, and their relevance to the research questions and sociocultural constructs such as mediation, internalization, and appropriation. Rather than treating them as fixed categories or descriptive summaries of participant accounts, I approached them as tentative and evolving constructs that reflected how learners made sense of their development in a task-mediated writing context. For example, codes related to peer feedback, collaborative writing, and model texts were initially clustered into a broad theme concerning the mediational role of social and material resources. I treated themes as interpretive tools for understanding their experiences, often framing them as provisional conceptual ideas, such as, peer-supported appropriation or resistance to teacher mediation. Initial theme construction was carried out separately for each cycle to preserve cohort-specific patterns. However, I also made early notes on possible cross-cycle continuities and contrast. This stage involved considerable recursive movement

between codes, extracts, early memos, and the developing themes, which laid the ground work for further review and refinement in the next phase.

Phase 4 involved a critical review and refinement of the initial themes constructed in Phase 3. In line with Braun and Clarke (2022), this phase was featured by recursive movement between candidate themes, supporting data extracts and the broader dataset. I undertook a two level review process (Braun & Clarke, 2022; Byrne, 2022). At the first level, I examined the internal coherence of each theme by evaluating whether its associated codes and extracts formed a consistent and meaningful pattern. At the second level, I reviewed the distinctiveness of each theme across the dataset to ensure conceptual clarity and avoid redundancy. This evaluative process was guided by the reflective questions proposed by Braun and Clarke (2022, p. 222), such as: Is this a theme or merely a code? Does it offer interpretive insight into the research questions? Are its boundaries clear? Does it have sufficient analytic depth? Bryant (2022) recommends using such questions not only to assess the quality of individual themes, but also to determine how they relate to each other and whether their internal structure can be meaningfully sustained. As a result of this review, some initial themes were refined to enhance conceptual clarity and analytic depth. For example, in Cycle 1, a preliminary theme labelled “positive and negative emotions” was found to lack internal coherence. Although learners frequently referred to both positive emotions, such as enjoyment, confidence, and a sense of belonging, and negative emotions, such as frustration, these accounts did not cohere around a single interpretative idea. Upon closer examination, it became evident that what had been coded as “negative emotions” were not simply affective reactions in opposition to positive ones, but were more meaningfully connected to learners’ perceived challenges in completing tasks, collaborating with peers, or managing feedback. To capture these distinct yet complementary dimensions, the original theme were refined and divided into two separate themes of “positive emotions shaping learning experiences” and “perceived challenges marking learning experiences”. This reorganisation aligns with Braun and Clarke’s (2022, p. 222) emphasis on reviewing whether themes offer “interpretive insight” and represent distinct patterns rather than thematic clusters of related but analytically diffuse content.

Phase 5 involved refining the thematic framework by clarifying the conceptual focus of each theme and assigning analytically meaningful names. Guided by Braun and Clarke (2022) and Byrne (2022), I reviewed the internal coherence and distinctiveness of each theme, asking what each theme was really about and how it advanced understanding of learners’ experiences in the task-mediated context. Some themes were split, merged, or renamed to reflect their theoretical significance, for example, “perceived writing development” was renamed “reframing writing development as multidimensional growth” to foreground its sociocultural function. Theme names were revised to highlight interpretation rather than description, occasionally drawing on evocative participant language. I also

began selecting data extracts to support each theme, following Bryant's (2022) recommendation that extracts should not merely illustrate but deepen the analysis. These refinements laid the foundation for presenting themes as coherent, theory-informed narratives in the final write-up.

The final phase involved writing up the analysis as a theory-informed and interpretive account. Rather than simply reporting participant views, I constructed a narrative that explained how learners made sense of their development in a task-mediated learning context. Each theme was introduced with an analytic focus and supported by carefully selected extracts that advanced the interpretation, not merely illustrated it (Bryant, 2022; Braun & Clarke, 2022). I reflected on my role as a teacher-researcher and drew on sociocultural constructs such as mediation and appropriation to interpret patterns of meaning. The write-up thus aimed to present the themes as coherent, theoretically grounded insights into learner experience, shaped through reflexive engagement with the data.

3.8. Quality in qualitative practitioner research

Ensuring research quality is essential in qualitative practitioner research, particularly when the researcher plays an active role in both pedagogical design and data collection. Unlike quantitative studies, where quality is often assessed through validity and reliability (Cohen, 2018), qualitative inquiry calls for alternative criteria that reflect the interpretive, contextual, and socially constructed nature of knowledge (Nowell et al., 2017). To address these concerns, this study draws primarily on the trustworthiness framework developed by Lincoln and Guba (1985, p. 837), which proposes credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability as four interrelated criteria. These dimensions provide a coherent and widely accepted standard for evaluating the rigour of qualitative research. In addition to these established criteria, the chapter also considers the role of the researcher, including reflexivity and positionality, as a key aspect of quality in practitioner research. As I took on the role of both the teacher and the researcher, it was important to reflect critically on how this dual role may have influenced the research process, data interpretation, and the construction of knowledge.

3.8.1. Trustworthiness

3.8.1.1. Credibility

Credibility refers to the extent to which research findings are trustworthy, plausible and grounded in participants' experiences and the data itself (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Nowell et al., 2017). It involves ensuring that the representations of participants' perspectives are coherent, well-substantiated, and meaningfully connected to the evidence. In this study, credibility was supported through crystallisation, multivocal interpretation, careful engagement with cross-language data, transparent analytical procedures, and participant review of interview transcripts.

The use of different data sources and analytical approaches in this study was informed by the principle of crystallisation. Crystallisation recognises that a complex phenomenon can be approached through different facets, with each form of data or analysis illuminating a particular dimension of the research context (Ellingson, 2009; Tracy, 2010). In this study, classroom observations and learner-produced texts provided insight into how interaction, mediation, and language development unfolded during classroom activities, while post-course semi-structured interviews offered retrospective accounts of how learners interpreted their experiences. These sources were therefore used to develop a richer and more contextually situated understanding of learners' development and experiences within the SCT-informed TBLT course. Points of correspondence, difference, and tension between the different accounts were all treated as analytically meaningful.

This study also incorporated multivocality, which calls for the deliberate inclusion of diverse participant voices (Tracy, 2010). Rather than relying on a single account, the interview analysis involved comparisons across multiple learners within and across each cycle, highlighting both converging themes and individual divergences. This comparative lens allowed the study to represent a fuller understanding of learners' developmental processes and perceptions, while avoiding the over-reliance on isolated perspectives.

Given the bilingual nature of the research context, cross-language verification was another important step to support credibility. I translated all interview transcripts and selected classroom interactions from Chinese into English. To ensure that the meanings remained faithful to participants' original expressions, a fellow doctoral researcher in the Education department of the University of Strathclyde, also a native speaker of Chinese, reviewed and cross-checked the translated texts. In selected cases, we conducted back-translation into Chinese as an additional verification measure. This collaborative process helped minimise interpretive distortion during translation and strengthened the plausibility of English-language interpretations (Temple & Young, 2004).

Following this, transcript-based member checking was conducted to support credibility. After each interview, participants were provided with both Chinese and English versions of their transcript and invited to verify the accuracy of their recorded accounts. This process allowed participants to confirm that their views were faithfully captured (Birt et al., 2016; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Collectively, these strategies contributed to the credibility of this study by grounding the analysis in diverse data sources, multiple learner perspectives, and careful attention to cross-language meaning protection.

3.8.1.2 Transferability

According to Lincoln and Guba (1985), transferability refers to the extent to which the findings of a qualitative study can be applied or transferred to other contexts, settings, or groups. It is not the researcher's responsibility to claim generalizability; rather, it is their task to provide sufficient descriptive detail for others to assess whether the findings are applicable to their own settings (Nowell et al., 2017).

To support transferability, this study provides detailed contextual information about the instructional setting, learner characteristics, and pedagogical approach. For example, the thesis outlines the nature of the private language training centre in China, the learning goals of participants (preparation for study abroad), and their background with proficiency levels. The TMLT course is described in terms of its sequence of tasks, feedback mechanisms, and integration of sociocultural tools such as SCOBAs. These details enable readers, particularly those who work in task-based or L2 writing contexts, to consider the potential applicability of the findings in their own contexts.

Moreover, the iterative action research design and thick documentation of classroom adaptations (e.g., changes to grouping strategies, feedback types, and post-task activities) offer insights that may resonate with practitioners working in similarly dynamic instructional environments. Rather than claiming generalisability, this study invites readers to engage with the detailed pedagogical accounts provided and make informed judgements about their relevance to other contexts (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Tracy, 2010).

3.8.1.3 Dependability

Dependability, as conceptualised by (Lincoln & Guba, 1985), refers to the stability, coherence, and logical traceability of the research process. It emphasises the need for the procedures used in qualitative inquiry to be clearly documented and consistent over time so that others can understand how the research was conducted and how findings were derived. Unlike the notion of reliability in quantitative research, which focuses on replicability, dependability in qualitative work values methodological transparency and the researcher's ability to provide a detailed and auditable account of the study's progression (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Shenton, 2004).

In this study, dependability was ensured through comprehensive documentation of the research design, instructional implementation, and data collection procedures across the three iterative research cycles. The overall research design remained stable, with a consistent focus on developing and evaluating the TMLT framework through classroom-based action research. Each cycle followed a structured process involving course planning, in-class implementation, and post-course data collection

through classroom observations and semi-structured interviews. Research decisions, instructional materials, and reflective notes were carefully maintained to ensure process transparency and coherence.

While the core research design remained unchanged, instructional-level adjustments were made as part of the iterative action research process. These included shifting from individual interviews to focus groups following the pilot study, and adapting collaborative tasks, scaffolding strategies, and grouping arrangements across the main research cycles. Such changes were driven by pedagogical reflection and learner responses and were systematically recorded and justified in the thesis, thereby reinforcing the transparency and internal consistency of the research process.

Dependability was further enhanced during the analysis phase through the use of consistent coding procedures in both thematic and microgenetic analysis. For example, interactional data were coded using an adapted regulatory scale to identify CF levels and learner response moves, ensuring that the analysis followed a stable, theory-informed structure across all three cycles. In thematic analysis, a structured multi-cycle coding process was adopted, where each research cycle applied a comparable sequence of inductive and deductive coding to ensure analytic consistency across phases. Analytic decisions were documented through code tables and memos to create a transparent audit trail. In addition, regular supervisory discussions provided critical review of emerging interpretations, helping to maintain coherence and accountability throughout the analytic process.

3.8.1.4 Confirmability

Confirmability requires researchers to demonstrate how interpretations are clearly derived from the data (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Nowell et al., 2017; Tobin & Begley, 2004). In this study, analytic procedures in both thematic and microgenetic analysis were transparently documented through structured coding tables and analytic memos. These tools provided a traceable link between raw data and emerging themes, ensuring that findings were not based on personal impressions but grounded in visible patterns within the data.

Finally, Lincoln and Guba (1985) argue that confirmability is achieved when credibility, transferability, and dependability have also been established. This study has taken deliberate steps to ensure each of these dimensions, including the use of multiple data sources, member checking supported credibility, thick descriptions aided transferability, and clear documentation of iterative decisions to support dependability. Confirmability in this study, therefore, emerges from the overall integrity and transparency of the research process.

3.8.2. The Role of the Researcher

In this CS-AR practitioner research, I occupied a dual role as both the teacher who designed and delivered the writing course and the researcher who systematically examined the instructional process and its outcomes. This dual positioning created a unique point that enabled close access to participants, rich contextual understanding, and opportunities for sustained interaction. However, it also introduced specific challenges related to power dynamics, potential role conflict, and the interpretation of data.

As the course instructor, I was responsible for planning lessons, managing classroom interactions, and supporting learner development. This instructional role positioned me as an authority figure in the classroom, which may have influenced how learners responded during both classroom activities and research interviews. In particular, participants may have altered their behaviour or shaped their feedback in ways they believed were expected, thereby affecting the authenticity of their responses. To mitigate this potential effect, I carefully emphasised voluntary participation and confidentiality when collecting interview data and encouraged participants to speak candidly about both positive and negative aspects of their learning experiences in this course.

At the same time, my insider position allowed me to observe nuanced aspects of learner development that might have been less visible to an external observer. My familiarity with learners' backgrounds, linguistic needs, and learning trajectories enabled more informed interpretation of classroom events and more responsive instructional design. Rather than being a limitation, this insider status became a strength of the study, particularly in the context of iterative action research cycles that required ongoing pedagogical adaptation and interpretive engagement.

Nonetheless, the convergence of pedagogical and research responsibilities demanded ongoing awareness of my influence on the research process. As discussed in the following section, reflexivity was a central tool in addressing these tensions. I engaged in continuous reflection on how my beliefs, assumptions, and instructional decisions shaped both the learning environment and the knowledge produced through the study.

3.8.3. Reflexivity

Reflexivity refers to the researcher's ongoing critical engagement with how their positionality, assumptions, and actions influence the research process and the construction of knowledge (Berger, 2015). In qualitative practitioner research, where the researcher is simultaneously immersed in the research context and co-constructing the meaning of data, reflexivity is not optional but foundational to ensuring transparency, trustworthiness, and interpretive integrity. Rather than seeking neutrality or

detachment, reflexive inquiry acknowledges the researcher's embeddedness in the field and embraces subjectivity as a resource for insight, not a threat to rigour.

In this study, reflexivity was embedded across multiple stages of the research process, particularly through the dual role I occupied as both the teacher and the researcher. Drawing on Farrell (2018)'s framework of reflection-in-action, on-action, and for-action, I engaged in continual self-evaluation of my teaching practices and their impact on learners. For example, when feedback strategies failed to prompt uptake, I made moment-to-moment pedagogical adjustments (reflection-in-action). After lessons, I examined learner responses to inform the design of future tasks (reflection-on-action). In planning subsequent activities, I drew on insights from earlier cycles to anticipate learner needs (reflection-for-action) (Farrell & Kennedy, 2019). These reflective processes supported my instructional decision-making, but they also initiated a deeper level of inquiry into my evolving beliefs about teaching and learning.

Reflexivity extended beyond technical adjustments. As the study progressed, I began to critically examine how the process of implementing the TMLT framework was not only shaping learner development but also reshaping my own professional identity. Originally viewing myself as a facilitator responsible for designing effective tasks, I came to see the act of teaching as a form of professional learning. The practical experimentation with feedback, group structures, and mediational tools constituted a kind of learning-by-doing, echoing sociocultural principles that posit development as unfolding through participation. This realisation prompted a shift in how I conceptualised teacher learning, which was not as something acquired through external training alone, but as something constructed through reflective engagement with real classroom dilemmas. This identity-level reflexivity contributed not only to pedagogical responsiveness, but to a broader reconceptualisation of the teacher's role as a learner within the sociocultural landscape of classroom practice.

Reflexivity also played a key role in reframing my understanding of unpredictability in learner responses. In early stages, I perceived deviations from planned instructional pacing as disruptions. However, as I engaged more deeply with learners' varied trajectories and task interpretations, I came to view this unpredictability as a hallmark of learner-centred, socially mediated instruction. Rather than resisting variability, I began to anticipate it as a condition of effective mediation, consistent with ZPD. This critical reconceptualization of "challenge as opportunity" emerged not from detached theorising, but from sustained reflexive engagement with my own reactions, assumptions, and professional values.

Additionally, reflexivity underpinned the entire process of data interpretation in this study. In adopting RTA (Braun & Clarke, 2022), I understood themes as constructed rather than discovered, which are

shaped by my sociocultural orientation, classroom experience, and evolving pedagogical stance. This reflexive stance became most apparent during theme generation. For instance, an initial theme such as “valuing teacher feedback” was later reworked as “constructing learning through dialogic mediation” after I recognised that my early coding privileged teacher authority and overlooked learner agency and emotions. Across cycles, I frequently revisited assumptions about autonomy, mediation, and development, resisting overly neat conceptualisations in favour of themes that embraced ambiguity and contradiction. These decisions were not technical but interpretive, arising from ongoing reflection on how my positionality influenced what counted as meaningful. Analytic memos and teacher journals further supported this reflexive practice by capturing shifts in thinking, uncertainty in theme boundaries, and the tension between theoretical framing and learner voice. Rather than being an afterthought, reflexivity was integral to ensuring that the themes remained contextually grounded, theoretically coherent, and ethically responsive to participants’ experiences.

Overall, reflexivity in this study functioned as a mechanism for navigating the complex intersections between teaching, researching, and learning. It enabled me to move beyond technical reflection toward a critical interrogation of my assumptions, positionality, and professional growth. In doing so, it strengthened the coherence between the theoretical foundations of the study, the methodological approach, and the constructed nature of the findings.

3.9. Summary

Taken together, the methodological design presented in this chapter demonstrates a coherent and context-sensitive approach grounded in an interpretive-constructivist paradigm, which views knowledge and learning as socially constructed and open to multiple interpretations. By integrating a collective case study with an action research orientation, the study captured both the situated complexity of each research cycle and the iterative refinement of the course. This dual design allowed a balance between empirical depth and practical responsiveness, reflecting the study’s commitment to examine learning in authentic and evolving classroom settings.

The use of multiple qualitative data resources enabled a multi-perspectival understanding of language development and learner experience as evidenced in interactions. Both the microgenetic analysis and RTA further strengthened the interpretive depth of the findings, allowing both moment-to-moment language development and learners’ meaning-making to be explored in a theoretically coherent manner.

Overall, this integrated and reflexive research design provides a robust methodological foundation for addressing the three research questions asked by this research, enabling a nuanced examination of

how language learning develops through doing tasks, how learners experience this process, and how the pedagogical design evolves through iterative, evidenced-informed reflection.

Chapter 4 Findings

4.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the findings in the three iterative research cycles of this study. To reflect the cyclical and developmental nature of the research design, the findings are reported cycle by cycle. Within each cycle, the findings are organised in accordance with the two primary data sources introduced in Chapter 3, classroom interactional data and semi-structured interview data. The classroom interactional data, drawn from video-recorded classroom observation, provides microgenetic evidence of learners' language development and sheds light on the processes through which they engaged in the task-mediated online writing course. The semi-structured interview data captures learners' perceptions of their learning experiences and offers insights into how they made sense of participating in the course. In addition to these two sources, my role as a teacher-researcher afforded opportunities for ongoing reflection on the implementation of the SCT-informed TBLT framework. These reflections, although not analysed as a separate dataset, informed modifications made at the end of Cycle 1 and Cycle 2 to refine the course design and feed into the implementation of the subsequent cycle.

4.2. Cycle 1 – An initial SCT-oriented trial of TBLT in the online writing course

As outlined in Chapter 3, Cycle 1 trialled the initial SCT-oriented design of the task-mediated online writing course with five participants. The course incorporated four types of email tasks (apology, request, complaint, and inquiry), sequenced by reasoning demands, and followed a three-phase structure of pre-task, main task, and post-task activities. Drawing on SCT principles, the design integrated mediational tools (such as pragmatic SCOBAs), collaborative writing tasks, and teacher graduated corrective feedback (CF) to support learners' L2 writing development. As the initial attempt to apply TBLT purposefully through a sociocultural lens, Cycle 1 aimed to explore the pedagogical potential of this design and to generate insights into learners' engagement with task-mediated activities.

The five learners in this cycle were adult Chinese students enrolled in the online writing course at the private language training centre, all preparing for overseas study. Their proficiency ranged from B1 to B2 on the CEFR scale, and they represented a range of academic and professional backgrounds, including three undergraduate students, one postgraduate student, and one working professional. The course was delivered fully online via Zoom over a five-week period, with two sessions each week. One session was a two-hour group class that involved pre-task, main task, and post-task activities. The other session was an individual tutorial of 20–25 minutes per learner, which functioned as an extension of

the post-task stage, focusing on teacher graduated corrective feedback on learners' individual writing tasks. Learners interacted using both English and Chinese, and the overall learning environment promoted active engagement and provided opportunities to closely observe learners' linguistic and pragmatic development.

4.2.1. Findings from video-recorded classroom interactional data

4.2.1.1 Microgenetic development in linguistic and pragmatic knowledge and performance

The microgenetic analysis of LREs and PREs identified growth in learners' linguistic competence, including grammatical, lexical, and discursive competence, and pragmatic competence. Such development is evidenced by the decrease in learners' reliance on the mediator's help. That is, the development is indicated by the reduction in the level of explicitness in CF strategies provided by the teacher or other learners in the classroom. The following examples illustrate these four areas of development. For analytical clarity, individual trajectories are presented in detail, but comparable patterns were also observed across other participants in the cycle.

First, all five learners demonstrated observable grammatical development in Cycle 1 to different extent. Among the different instances, Excerpts 1.1 and 1.2 are presented here as a representative example of such progress, focusing on C1L3's evolving use of non-restrictive relative clauses. The first interaction (Excerpt 1.1) was drawn from a tutorial in Lesson 6, where C1L3 was revising a sentence containing a non-restrictive relative clause. It illustrates the extent of support required for C1L3 to recognise and correct an error in his writing.

Excerpt 1.1

	EXCERPT FROM LESSON 6	TRANSLATION
01	T: 你这句话的意思是？ (The teacher pointed at the sentence <u>The breakdown of the oven ruined my party which made me unsatisfied.</u>)	What do you mean here?
02	C1L3: Em...烤箱坏了毁了我的 party，我很不爽	The breakdown of the oven ruined my party. I am unhappy.
03	T: The broke down of the oven ruined my party, and it made me unsatisfied.	

	(The teacher wrote down the sentence <u>The broke down of the oven ruined my party, and it made me unsatisfied.</u>)	
04	C1L3: Em, 是，是这个意思，但是我想用 which。我写的时候觉得自己写得挺好的，特地用了个 which，不想写成两个句子。	<i>Em, yes, that is what I mean, but I would like to use which. I thought I wrote it quite well when I was writing. I deliberately used 'which' so as not to write it as two separate sentences.</i>
05	T: 那这个 which 的句子有没有什么问题？	<i>Have you spotted any problem here?</i>
06	C1L3: 我定语从句又写错啦？哈哈	<i>Did I make a mistake with relative clauses again? [laugh]</i>
07	T: 它是跟 which 有关，是个定语从句相关的语法问题。	<i>It's related to 'which,' it's a grammar issue related to relative clauses.</i>
	C1L3: Which...which...	<i>Which...which...</i>
08	T: 让你不高兴的是什么事情？是烤箱坏了毁了 party 让你不开心，还是 party 让你不开心？	<i>What made you unhappy? The broke down of the oven or the party itself?</i>
09	C1L3: 烤箱坏了毁了 party，这件事情。	<i>The breakdown of the oven ruined my party. The thing.</i>
10	T: 那么，这里的 which 指代的是什麼？	<i>So, what does "which" refer to here?</i>
11	C1L3: 有点混乱。	<i>I am confused.</i>
12	T: OK, 如果按你现在的写法，是 party 让你不开心，因为这个 which 这里指代的是 party 而不是整件事情。	<i>OK. According to your current sentence, it is the party that made your unhappy, because the which here refers to the party rather than the whole thing.</i>
13	C1L3: 所以？	<i>So?</i>
14	T: 这个时候我们需要使用非限定性定语从句，在 which 前面加一个逗号，这样	<i>At this point, we need to use a non-restrictive relative clause. Add a comma before 'which,' so that 'which' refers to the entire situation, not just the party.</i>

		which 指代的就是整件事情，而不是指代 party 了。	
15	C1L3:	Oh! 非限定性定语从句。所以是写成这样, 对吧? (C1L3 added a comma before which.)	<i>Oh! Non-restrictive relative clause. So, is it written like this?</i>
16	T:	Yes.	

Excerpt 1.1 (Lesson 6) shows that C1L3 required a relatively high level of explicit CF to resolve the error related to the non-restrictive relative clause. Despite initial prompts to clarify meaning, he could not identify the issue until I directly explained the grammatical rule and demonstrated the correct form. His emphatic “Oh!” (in Line 14) indicated sudden understanding. In this episode, the minimum assistance he required thus corresponded to the most explicit level of CF at level 7.

After one week in Lesson 8, according to the episode of Excerpt 1.2, C1L3 and I engaged in an exchange to correct a similar error related to the non-restrictive relative clause, from which the development of his grammatical competence was identified.

Excerpt 1.2

EXCERPT FROM LESSON 8		TRANSLATION
01	T:	Next sentence. Any problems? (The teacher pointed at the sentence <u>I don't have these books which make it difficult to write my thesis.</u>)
02	C1L3:	Em...I don't have these books which make it difficult to write my thesis. 我觉得是定语从句出了问题，我看 看。 <i>I think it's a problem with the relative clause. Let me check.</i>
03	T:	Yes.
04	C1L3	Em...我觉得读得挺顺得...which make it difficult to write my thesis. <i>I feel it is quite well.</i>

05	T:	What do you mean here ?	
06	C1L3:	没有这些书，我很难写论文	<i>Without these books, it is difficult for me to write the thesis.</i>
07	T:	So, any problem here?	
08	C1L3:	Oh! Oh! No,no,no! 不是 books, 这些书怎么会让我写作困难呢，哈哈。	<i>Oh! Oh! No,no,no! Not books. How can those books make writing difficult. [laugh].</i>
09	T:	很好，怎么改呢？	<i>Good, how to revise it?</i>
10	C1L3:	Em....是什么让写作变困难？没有书让写作很困难。没有书是一个 situation。这个 situation 让写作很困难。(C1L3 started to reproduce a sentence by typing in <u>I don't have</u>)	<i>Em...What made writing difficult? I have no books, which makes writing difficult. The situation is that I have no books. The situation makes writing difficult.</i>
12	T:	很好，写写看。	<i>Good. Try to write it down.</i>
13	C1L3:	OK (C1L3 wrote a new sentence, <u>I don't have these books, which make it difficult to write my thesis.</u> at the bottom of his writing.)	
14	T:	Check it again.	
15	C1L3	Oh! Makes! The situation makes, makes!	
16	T:	Very good.	

This time, after initially struggling, he used his L1 to clarify meaning to himself and laughed at the implausibility of his first attempt, before successfully reformulating the sentence. Notably, in Line 10 he verbalised the situation to himself, which functioned as private speech and helped him reorganise meaning during the repair. In this episode, only minimal teacher support, error repetition (level 2), was required to guide his final correction. Taken together, Excerpt 1.1 and Excerpt 1.2 showcase an improvement in C1L3's ability to self-correct and understand the grammatical item of non-restrictive relative clauses. Initially requiring a high level of CF (level 7) to correct the error, he later demonstrated

an ability to self-identify and corrected similar error with a relatively lower level of teacher help (level 2). Thus, the development of C1L3's grammatical competence with non-restrictive relative clauses is evident through the reduced need for CF strategies across these two tutorial sessions.

Second, lexical development was also observed in many learners, particularly in learners' refinement of contextually appropriate expressions. One of the examples is C1L1's evolving control of the temporal marker "recently", as shown in Excerpt 1.6 (Lesson 2) and 1.7 (Lesson 10).

Excerpt 1.3

EXCERPT FROM LESSON 2		TRANSLATION
01	T: Look at these two sentences. Any problem? (The teacher pointed at the sentences <u>Please let me know if there is anything I need to do recently. I will finish and contact you as soon as possible.</u>)	
02	C1L1: Em...No. 看不出来	<i>Em... No. I can't tell.</i>
03	T: There is a logic problem here.	
04	C1L1: Em...Please let me know if there is anything I need to do recently. I will finish and contact you as soon as possible. Em...我需要在两个句子之间加上连接词吗？	<i>Em...Please let me know if there is anything I need to do recently. I will finish and contact you as soon as possible.</i> <i>Em...Do I need to add a linking device between these two sentences?</i>
05	T: What do you mean by recently here? (The teacher highlighted 'recently' in the first sentence).	
06	C1L1: 就是接下来我要做什么。	<i>That is what I need to do next.</i>
07	T: 但是 recently 表示的不是接下来。表示的是过去还是将来呢？	<i>But recently does not refer to the next. Does it refer to the future or the past?</i>

08	C1L1:	Oh. The past. Oh... 我知道了。要用 next 之类的。	<i>Oh. The past. Oh... I see. I need to use next or something similar.</i>
09	T:	所以，怎么改？	<i>So, how to revise it?</i>
10	C1L1:	Em...Please let me know if there is anything I need to do next, and I will finish and contact you as soon as possible. Next 或者 soon?	<i>Em...Please let me know if there is anything I need to do next, and I will finish and contact you as soon as possible. Next or soon?</i>
11	T:	Yes, both are fine.	

Excerpt 1.3 (Lesson 2) shows that C1L1 initially failed to notice any problem when using “recently” in the sentence “Please let me know if there is anything I need to do recently”. With the teacher’s questioning, she realised that recently referred to the past rather than the future, and with further explanation was able to revise the sentence to use next or soon. At this stage, her correction still relied on teacher CF at level 4.

Excerpt 1.4

EXCERPT FROM LESSON 10		TRANSLATION
01	T: 这里还有一个问题 (The teacher pointed at the sentence <u>May I ask whether I can refund it if I terminate the membership recently</u>)	<i>There is still a problem here.</i>
02	C1L1: 词汇语法改完了应该没问题，那就是逻辑问题？	<i>The vocabulary and grammar should be correct now, so is it a logical issue?</i>
03	T: Yes.	
04	C1L1: recently?	
05	T: Yes.	
06	C1L1: If I terminate the membership recently. Em..., 不是 recently，如果我最近想结束	<i>If I terminate the membership recently. Em..., not recently, If I would love to terminate it soon, if I would love to</i>

		会员，如果我想提前，提前结束会员， in advance。	<i>terminate it in advance, terminate it in advance, in advance.</i>
07	T:	Good! The whole sentence in the chat box, please.	
08	C1L1:	OK. (C1L1 wrote down <u>May I ask whether I can refund it if I terminate the membership in advance?</u>)	
09	T:	Yes. Good.	
10	C1L1:	Recently 也可以换成 soon 对吧?	<i>Recently can also be replaced by soon, is that right?</i>
11	T:	Yes. recently 表示的是过去，soon 表示将来。In advance 也可以。	<i>Yes. Recently refers to the past, and soon refers to the future. In advance is also fine here.</i>
12	C1L1	Oh, 对对对。我要问的是接下来我如果要终止的话，而不是过去已经终止了。所以不能是 recently.	<i>Oh, yes, right. What I want to ask is if I terminate it in the future, not that it has already been terminated in the past. So, not recently.</i>

By Lesson 10 (Excerpt 1.4), she displayed greater independence. When I highlighted a similar problem, she quickly recognised that “recently” was inappropriate and reformulated the sentence with more accurate alternatives (soon, in advance). She even did a metalinguistic explanation on her own after doing the error correction successfully, noting that she wanted to refer to a future event rather than a past one. This time, she only needed the least explicit teacher CF (Leve 1). Briefly, these interactions in Excerpts 1.6 and 1.7 show her increasing ability to monitor lexical appropriateness, which reflected by the decreasing level of the explicitness of teacher CF (from Level 4 to Leve 1).

Furthermore, most learners’ discursive competence developed during the TMTL course, too. Excerpt 1.8 and Excerpt 1.9 forming the example to reflect learners’ development of logical relations.

Excerpt 1.5

EXCERPT FROM LESSON 4

TRANSLATION

01	T:	好，接下来，看这个句子。这句话你想表达什么？ (The teacher pointed at the sentence <u>I really need these books because I need to write my thesis and the books include all the details I need.</u>)	<i>OK. Let's move to this sentence. What would you like to express here?</i> <i>(The teacher pointed at the sentence I really need these books because I need to write my thesis and the books include all the details I need.)</i>
02	C1L5:	Em...我看下哦。有点不记得了哈哈。I really need these books because I need to write my thesis...and the books include, include all the details I need. 我写了好多 need 这里，哈哈。	<i>Em... Let me see. I kind of don't remember [laugh]. I really need these books because I need to write my thesis...and the books include, include all the details I need. I wrote so many 'need' here, [laugh].</i>
03	T:	What would you like to say here?	<i>What would you like to say here?</i>
04	C1L5:	Emmm.... I need these books... because I need to write...emmm...就是我需要这些书嘛，因为我要写论文嘛，然后这些书里面都是我写论文需要的一些内容。就是这个意思。	<i>Emmm...I need these books...because I need to write ... emmm. That is, I need these books because I need to write my thesis. And then, these books contain the contents that I need in my thesis.</i>
05	T:	OK. Tell me the real reason why you need the books. 你真正需要这些书的原因。	<i>OK. Tell me the real reason why you need the books. The real reason why you need the books.</i>
06	C1L5:	写论文，因为书里面有论文需要的内容。	<i>Write the thesis because the books contain the contents needed in the thesis.</i>
07	T:	Think about the question whether writing the thesis is a purpose or a reason. Is it a purpose or a reason?	<i>Think about the question whether writing the thesis is a purpose or a reason. Is it a purpose or a reason?</i>
08	C1L5:	A reason... 啊，不对，the purpose, the purpose! The reason 应该是我需要书里面的内容。	<i>A reason... ah, no, the purpose, the purpose! Reason should be that I need the contents in the books.</i>
09	T:	So?	

10	C1L5:	I really need these books...in order to...in order to...write my thesis. and...it is because, the books include...	<i>I really need these books...in order to...in order to...write my thesis. and...it is because, the books include...</i>
11	T:	Write it down please.	<i>Write it down please.</i>
12	C1L5:	OK. (C1L5 wrote down <u>I really need these books in order to write my thesis. It is because the books include all the details I need.</u>)	<i>OK.</i> (C1L5 wrote down <u>I really need these books in order to write my thesis. It is because the books include all the details I need.</u>)
13	T:	两个句子可以合并吗？	<i>Can you merge these two sentences?</i>
14	C1L5:	Em... Oh! (C1L5 revised the sentence into <u>I really need these books for my thesis, because the books include all the details I need.</u>)	<i>Em... Oh!</i> (C1L5 revised the sentence into <u>I really need these books for my thesis, because the books include all the details I need.</u>)
15	T:	很好，下次写的时候想想原因到底是什么。不是所有的逻辑关系都是因果关系。	<i>Very good, next time when you write, think about what the actual reason is. Not all logical relationships are causal relationships</i>
16	C1L5:	好，我就是很习惯用因果关系，哈哈。	<i>OK. I just get used to using causal relationships. [laugh]</i>

Excerpt 1.6

EXCERPT FROM LESSON 7

TRANSLATION

01	C1L5:	我觉得这句有点问题。 (C1L5 pointed at the sentence <u>We have uploaded the slides because of the requirement.</u>)	<i>I feel this sentence is problematic.</i>
02	C1L4:	什么？	<i>What?</i>
03	C1L5:	我感觉不是 because of	<i>I don't think it should be 'because'.</i>

04	C1L4:	因为要求上传... Because we are requested to upload the slides.	<i>Because we are requested to upload... Because we are requested to upload the slides.</i>
05	C1L5	We have uploaded the slides because we are requested...太长了	We have uploaded the slides because we are requested...It's too long.
06	C1L4:	那 due to 跟 because of 一样的。那我们换个说法？	<i>'Due to' is the same with 'because of'. Or shall we change the way to make similar meaning?</i>
07	C1L5:	我们按照要求上传文件。那改成 We upload the document as required. 怎么样？	<i>We upload the document according to the requirement. What about 'We upload the document as required.'?</i>
08	C1L4:	可以。Oh...确实不像是因果关系。	<i>OK. Oh...It is really not like a causal relationship.</i>
09	C1L5:	嗯，可以不是吧。As required 还是 according to the requirement?	<i>Em, it could not be a causal relationship. As required or according to the requirement?</i>
10	C1L4:	都可以，都差不多。	<i>Both are fine. They are almost the same.</i>

In Excerpt 1.5 (Lesson 4) C1L5 and I discussed the use of causal relationships in her individual tutorial session. When prompted to clarify her intended meaning, she struggled to distinguish between purpose and reason until my questioning guided her toward a more appropriate construction (*I really need these books in order to write my thesis, because the books include all the details I need*). In this episode, the explicitness level of CF that C1L5 required was at level 5. By Lesson7, as seen in Excerpt 1.6, she was able to identify a similar problem during peer interaction. In essence, the peer, C1L4, did not recognise the discursive problem at first (Line 04 and Line 06), and thus, did not provide very clear direction for solving the issue. However, C1L5 recast the sentence in her L1 and then translated it into English. After that, both of them confirmed that the causal relationship in the sentence was incorrect and agreed to accept the recast as the correct form. Therefore, it can be seen that C1L5 solved the discursive issue with very limited assistance from the peer by discussing the meaning they intended to provide (Level 1). From the episodes of Excerpt 1.8 and Excerpt 1.9, the development of discursive competence can be evidenced by the change in the CF strategies from Level 5 to level 1.

Similarly, alongside gains in grammar, lexis, and cohesion, these five learners also demonstrated development of pragmatic competence to some extent, particularly in their use of appropriate terms

of address, making proper apology, making request properly and correctly sign-off in email writing. Excerpt 1.7, Excerpt 1.11, and Excerpt 1.12 form a clear example showing how C1L3 develop his control over the terms of address in email writing through teacher graduated CF and collaborative writing with his peer.

The teacher-learner interaction occurred in Lesson 2, the first individual tutorial, in Excerpt 1.7. Prior to this, learners had already encountered terms of address in collaborative writing tasks and had access to related SCOPA as a reference tool.

Excerpt 1.7

EXCERPT FROM LESSON 2		TRANSLATION
01	T: Let's start from the first line. Any problem? (The teacher pointed at <u>Dear Dr. Kate,</u> .)	
02	C1L3: 是不是少了 hi?	<i>Is hi missing here?</i>
03	T: So?	
04	C1L3: Hi Doctor Kate?	
05	T: If you use hi here, what do you think of the relationship between you and her?	
06	C1L3: 比较熟悉，亲近。	
07	T: How could we address the person we are quite familiar?	
08	C1L3: Hi, Dr. Kate? 我不知道，哈哈。	<i>Hi, Dr. Kate? I don't know [laugh]</i>
09	T: No. Hi Kate, without the title Doctor. (Write down <u>Hi Kate,</u> simultaneously.) hi	
10	C1L3: OK	
11	T: 如果你跟这个人不是第一次联系，关系可以认为相对比较亲近了，你可以用她的名直接称呼她，不需要用 Doctor。如果用 Doct[or]	<i>If you do not contact this person for the first time, you are thought to be close to the person, and you can call the first name of the person directly without Doctor. If with Doct[or]=</i>

12	C1L3:	=那如果是很不熟悉的老师怎么办？就可能刚上课认识的, 可以用 Doctor Kate 吗？	<i>If we are not that familiar with each other, say we just met in the class, could I use Dr. Kate?</i>
13	T:	Use the last name if you use doctor. 如果你用称呼她为 doctor 某某人的话，用的是她的姓, 而不是名。	<i>Use the last name if you use doctor. If you call her doctor sb., we use the last name rather than the first name.</i>
14	C1L3:	姓，嗯...Wall. 哦！后面那个。	<i>Last name, em... Wall. Oh! The one at the back.</i>
15	T:	Yes. The title and then the last name. Dr. Wall.	
16	C1L3:	OK.OK. Dear Dr. Wall. (C1L3 wrote down <u>Dear Dr. Wall,</u> .)	

In this exchange, when asked to check the problem, C1L3 mistakenly identified the problem of the lack of salutation. Through progressive clearer clues, he eventually recognised that the title should be paired with the last name. This was achieved only after I researched the most explicit level of CF (Level 7). It is worth noting that in the subsequent turns, the direction of the exchange was no longer solely driven by me. C1L3 took the initiative by raising a question (in Line 12), which shifted the focus of the interaction and showed his active role in addressing the problem. There was a noteworthy moment of self-regulation when he verbalised the connection between “last name” and “the one at the back” (Line 14). This private speech was not intended for the teacher but served as a way of consolidating his own understanding before arriving at the correct form.

One week later in lesson 4 as shown in Excerpt 1.8 (see below), C1L3 encountered the same error related to terms of address again. This time, I indeed did not use any explicit CF strategies. I only indicated there might be a problem (Level 1) and C1L3 successfully identified the problem and corrected it by himself (in Line 06). When further questioned about possible alternatives, he also provided the appropriate form, accompanied by a brief metalinguistic explanation to himself.

Excerpt 1.8

EXCERPT FROM LESSON 4			TRANSLATION
01	T:	Any problem here?	<i>Any problem here?</i>

02	C1L3	让我看看。称呼吗？	<i>Let me see. Terms of address?</i>
03	T:	Yes. Any problem with the terms of address here?	<i>Yes. Any problem with the terms of address here?</i>
04	C1L3:	Dear Dr. Steve... 没有 Doctor...	<i>Dear Dr. Steve. No Doctor...</i>
05	T:	没有 doctor?	<i>Without doctor?</i>
06	C1L3:	Steve... Dear Steve,	<i>Dear Steve,</i>
07	T:	Yes. Dear Steve. 或者？	<i>Yes, Dear Steve, or?</i>
08	C1L3:	或者？	<i>OR?</i>
09	T:	<u>Dear doctor?</u>	<i>Dear doctor?</i>
10	C1L3:	Dear doctor, doctor last name...doctor, 我来看看他 last 是什么	<i>Dear doctor, doctor last name... doctor, let me check what his last name is.</i>
11	T:	Yes.	<i>Yes.</i>
12	C1L3:	Steve Kirk. 所以应该是 dear doctor, doctor Kirk. 对，doctor Kirk.	<i>Steve Kirk. So, it should be dear doctor, doctor Kirk. Yes, doctor Kirk.</i>
13	T:	Good. Kirk is the last name. Dear Dr. Kirk, or dear Steve.	<i>Good. Kirk is the last name. Dear Dr Kirk, or dear Steve.</i>

Later in Week 3 (see Excerpt 1.9 below), C1L3 produced the same error again when he wrote collaboratively with his peer. The peer's clarification request drew C1L3's attention to the form, which enabled C1L3 to notice the error (Line 05). Then, the peer recast the error without indicating the problem caused by the confusion of first name and last name, but it seemed that C1L3 did not follow his peer's conversation. Rather, C1L3 still focused on the use of 'professor' to address the person. After making a simple metalinguistic explanation to his peer and himself, he worked out the problem and arrived at the correct error of terms of address successfully.

Briefly, across these three excerpts, C1L3 moved from requiring highly explicit mediation (level 7) to responding appropriately to a minimal prompt (level 1). In the peer exchange (Excerpt 1.9), he was

even able to notice and resolve the issue almost on his own. This trajectory illustrates development in the use of terms of address.

Excerpt 1.9

	EXCERPT FROM LESSON 5	TRANSLATION
01	C1L3: 先写称呼吧。Professor Joanna. (C1L3 wrote down <u>Hi Prof. Joanna,</u>)	<i>Let's write the terms of address first. Professor Joanna. (C1L3 wrote down <u>Hi Prof. Joanna,</u>)</i>
02	C1L2: 这里要不要用她的全名？	<i>Do we need to use her full name here?</i>
03	C1L3: 不用。	<i>No.</i>
04	C1L2: 真的吗？Professor Joanna？	<i>Really? Professor Joanna?</i>
05	C1L3: 哦...可能不是 Joanna。	<i>Oh...It may not be Joanna</i>
06	C1L2: Hi Joanna？	<i>Hi Joanna?</i>
07	C1L3: Yeah...Professor 姓，last name。	<i>Yeah...Professor last name, last name.</i>
08	C1L2: Em...yes, last name 是 Green. 那么...	<i>Em...yes, the last name is Green. So...</i>
09	C1L3: 那么就应该是 Professor Green. (C1L3 deleted <u>Joanna</u> and wrote <u>Green</u> instead)	<i>So, it should be Professor Green. (C1L3 deleted <u>Joanna</u> and wrote <u>Green</u> instead)</i>
10	C1L2: Oh, 好的。	<i>Oh. OK.</i>

In summary, across grammatical, lexical, discursive, and pragmatic domains, learners' development in Cycle 1 was marked by a gradual reduction in reliance on external mediation. The decreasing levels of corrective feedback required, and the shift from teacher or peer scaffolding toward greater self-initiated problem solving, point to increasing internal control over language use. Private speech observed in several excerpts further illustrates this process. Learners sometimes verbalised partial rules or meanings to themselves, such as clarifying reference in Excerpt 1.2 or distinguishing first and last names in Excerpt 1.7, which functioned as self-mediation to consolidate new understanding. These findings support the movement from externally regulated performance to internally regulated control, a trajectory that will be revisited in the discussion chapter.

4.2.1.2 Co-construction of learning via mediation

The microgenetic evidence of linguistic and pragmatic development presented above was closely tied to the interactional processes through which it unfolded. Rather than being achieved individually, these developments emerged in classroom interaction and were mainly achieved through teacher graduated CF and peer collaborative dialogue. They allowed learners to gradually move from relying on external support towards achieving self-regulation in language use. During these processes, learners' shared L1 played an important role as well.

As demonstrated in the excerpts above, error correction was typically not achieved in a single move but unfolded across several turns of interaction, during which the teacher adjusted the type and explicitness of feedback in response to the learner's reactions. Informed by the nature of graduated CF, the identification of the minimal level of support was therefore not immediate but gradually established through the interaction itself. In Excerpt 1.1, for example, C1L3 only succeeded in correcting the non-restrictive relative clause after the CF strategies were progressed from implicit prompts to a metalinguistic explanation, which finally triggered the correct use of the structure. In Excerpt 1.3, C1L1 replaced "recently" with *next* once prompted to reconsider the temporal meaning of the word, showing how a well-timed question could reorient her understanding. It is worth noting that the process of corrective feedback could not be delivered as a fixed sequence of levels but was responsive to learners' evolving contributions. Excerpt 1.7 illustrates this clearly. After C1L3 produced the corrected form "Hi Steve," he raised an additional question about the use of the title "Doctor." This led to further scaffolding until he arrived at the more formal "Dr Kirk." In this way, the provision of graduated CF was dynamically shaped by both teacher moves and learner initiatives, with successful outcomes reached through the gradual adjustment of support across the interaction. Such interactions show that graduated CF was less a predetermined sequence of steps than a jointly negotiated process.

Beyond error correction itself, teacher graduated CF also offered strategies that learners later recycled in subsequent interactions. For example, in Excerpt 1.1, I prompted C1L3 to clarify the reference of the relative clause by asking, "What made you unhappy?". In the later episodes in Excerpt 1.2, when revising a similar structure, C1L3 produced a similar self-directed question, "What made writing difficult?", using it as a tool to guide his own correction. This suggests that he recycled the earlier mediating move as a resource for self-regulation.

Alongside teacher graduated CF, peer collaborative dialogue provided another important form of mediation where learning was jointly constructed. For example, in Lesson 5 (Excerpt 1.9), when C1L3 wrote "Professor Joanna", his peer C1L2 immediately questioned the appropriateness of the form. This led to a short sequence of negotiation, through which they collaboratively identified the correct

version *Professor Green*. The clarification request from C1L2 was crucial in prompting C1L3 to re-examine his choice, and the final revision emerged from their joint effort rather than from teacher intervention. A similar process was observed in Lesson 7 (Excerpt 1.6), where C1L5 pointed out a problem with the sentence “We have uploaded the slides because of the requirement”. His peer initially offered alternatives that did not resolve the issue, but through successive proposals and evaluations the pair converged on “We upload the document as required”, agreeing that the expression no longer implied an incorrect causal relationship. These episodes show that peer interaction created spaces where problems were not solved individually but through collaborative exploration, with learners supporting each other’s revisions and refining linguistic and pragmatic choices together.

Notably, similar to the way learners recycled mediating strategies from teacher feedback, in peer collaborative dialogue they also took up linguistic resources introduced by their peers. Excerpt 1.10 and 1.11 below exemplifies the uptake of the phrase “*at your earliest convenience*”. In Lesson 3 (Excerpt 1.10), C1L1 suggested the phrase during group writing as a more polite and formal alternative. C1L2 immediately recognised its usefulness, commented on its appropriateness, and agreed to adopt it in their draft, explicitly saying “I learned it.” In the following lesson (Excerpt 1.11), C1L2 produced an incorrect version (*at your convenient*), indicating that she was already attempting to use the new phrase even though its form was not yet accurate. Such uptake shows that she was keen to learn from others and actively tried to expand her language use.

Excerpt 1.10

	EXCERPT FROM LESSON 3	TRANSLATION
01	C1L1: 这里我有一个可能更合适的。可以用来 说 as soon as possible when you are convenient.	<i>I may have a more appropriate (sentence) here to say “when you are convenient”.</i>
02	C1L2: 最后一句吗？是什么？	<i>The last sentence? What is that?</i>
03	C1L1: Em... Please contact me at your earliest convenience. (C1L1 wrote down <u>please contact me at your earliest convenience. after C1L2’s original sentence</u>)	

04	C1L2:	At your earliest convenience. Em...这个看起来不错，很高级，而且更礼貌吗？哈哈。	<i>At your earliest convenience. Em... this looks good, and classy. And more polite? [laugh]</i>
05	C1L1:	那我们用这个？	<i>So, shall we use this?</i>
06	C1L2:	好。Please contact me at your earliest convenience, at, at...your earliest...convenience. 学到了	<i>OK. Please contact me at your earliest convenience, at, at... your earliest...convenience. I learned it.</i>

Excerpt 1.11

EXCERPT FROM LESSON 4

TRANSLATION

01	T:	看看最后一句话，Please email me at your convenient.	<i>Look at the last sentence. Please email me at your convenient.</i>
02	C1L2:	OK. 这个我从别人那里学来的。 嗯...Please email me at your convenient, at your soonest convenient...	
03	T:	Convenient?	
04	C1L2:	Oh, at your earliest convenient... earliest.	
05	T:	OK, earliest is fine. Convenient 是什么词性？	<i>OK, earliest is fine. What part of speech is 'convenient'?</i>
06	C1L2:	Convenient 是形容词	<i>Convenient is an adjective.</i>
07	T:	At your earliest -?	
08	C1L2:	Earliest 然后名词？	<i>Earliest and then noun?</i>
09	T:	Yes. So?	
10	C1L2:	Convenience? At your earliest convenience?	
11	T:	Exactly. At your earliest convenience.	

12 | C1L2: 哈哈，好的，原来我记错了。

[laugh] OK. Turns out I remembered it wrong.

It merits attention that learners heavily relied on their shared L1, Chinese, in classroom interaction. Findings suggest that L1 was used for meaning clarification in most cases when they failed to negotiate meaning clearly in English. For example, C1L3 used Chinese to clarify the meaning of a sentence in Line 02 in Excerpt 1.1. As observed, a typical pattern that emerged in this cycle was that learners alternated between L1 and English to fully understand and structured their ideas, before entirely translating them into English. In addition, L1 was also used in private speech to mediate self-regulation. In Excerpt 1.2, C1L3 verbalised in Chinese that it was “the situation” rather than “the books” that made writing difficult, which guided him towards revising the clause correctly. Similarly, in Excerpt 1.10, he uttered “last name, the one at the back” in Chinese to reinforce his understanding of the term. Furthermore, learners adopted their shared L1 most of the time for task management when engaging in collaborative writing tasks. For example, in Excerpt 1.5 at Line 01, C1L2 suggested in L1 composing the final sentence of the email. That is, L1 was employed to facilitate both the planning and execution phases of the writing task, showing L1 served as a critical tool for idea organization and task completion in this cycle.

4.2.1.3. interactional patterns during the task-mediated online writing course

Cycle 1 in this study found several types of interactional patterns during the online writing course, which, while not the primary focus of the research questions, still constitute an important finding for understanding how learners engaged in collaborative writing. Broadly, teacher–learner interactions typically followed an authoritative–responsive structure, whereas peer interactions showed greater variation, ranging from fully collaborative to authoritative–responsive, and in some cases, passive participation.

Teacher–learner interaction was typically characterised by my initiating exchanges to identify errors or areas for improvement in learners’ drafts, followed by feedback whose explicitness varied according to their responses. These interactions often took the form of graduated corrective feedback, progressing from implicit prompts to more explicit metalinguistic explanations when necessary. Learners generally responded by attempting self-correction based on these prompts. This structured interaction enabled me to scaffold the learning process and supported learners in addressing complex grammatical and pragmatic challenges, particularly in situations where peer mediation or self-correction alone was insufficient.

In terms of peer pair work, the interactional pattern was in most cases collaborative. Learners contributed jointly to the written product, supporting each other through the exchange of ideas about content and the refinement of language use. Another common pattern was authoritative-responsive, where one learner took primary control of the task while the other actively responded. A representative example was the interaction between C1L4 and C1L5 in Lesson 4, where C1L4 initially drafted the email alone, proposing most of the content and linguistic choices, while C1L5 reviewed the draft and provided detailed feedback sentence by sentence. They reached consensus on most issues through discussion, although C1L4 retained her original writing on a few contested points. In very rare cases, a dominant-passive pattern emerged, where one learner carried out the task with minimal input from the other due to unstable internet connections. Overall, peer pair work largely fostered active collaboration, enabling learners to co-construct their written texts.

As for group work, more varied interactional patterns were observed. In some cases, learners collaborated evenly, sharing responsibility for content and language choices. In others, an authoritative-responsive pattern emerged, with one learner leading the task while the others contributed feedback. For example, in Lesson 5, C1L3 proposed most of the initial ideas while the other two members responded to his drafts. At times, however, participation was uneven. In Lesson 1, C1L2 contributed minimally to a group with C1L1 and C1L3, responding only briefly when asked, producing a collaborative-passive pattern. A similar imbalance was seen in Lesson 9, when C1L3 led the task, C1L5 responded actively, and C1L1 participated only marginally, forming an authoritative-responsive-passive pattern.

It is interesting to see that participation also shifted across types of interaction. Learners who were passive in group work sometimes engaged more actively in pairs. For instance, C1L2 was largely silent in group work in Lessons 1 and 7 but became more engaged when paired with C1L1 in Lesson 3 and with C1L3 in Lesson 5. C1L1 likewise showed limited involvement in some group tasks but participated more when working in pairs. These observations suggest that a learner who was passive in a group setting was not always be so when working in a pair, and vice versa, an active learner in pair work was not always be active in a group. That is learners' engagement was not fixed but varied across interactional contexts.

4.2.1.4. SCOBAs: Facilitating Task Completion and Language Imitation

The analysis of the video-recorded interactional data also reveals how learners made use of the SCOBAs during the main task stage in the SCT-informed TBLT writing course. In general, SCOBAs were used to facilitate task completion, often working as a reference for learners in this research cycle.

Firstly, SCOBAs are found to be used as a guide for some learners in the planning stage. Evidence can be found in Excerpt 1.13, where C1L3 initiated the task by suggesting that they should refer to the SCOBA first. It seems that C1L3 turned to the SCOBA because he might not know how to conduct the task, or more specifically, structure the email. C1L1 offered to share the screen to examine the SCOBA in more detail, which indicates that both learners agreed to treat the SCOBA as a referring tool. As they reviewed the SCOBA, C1L3 pointed out that the first sentence of the email should clarify the purpose of the writing and the second sentence should providing the reasons. The self-simplified summary in L1 can be interpreted as both collaborative dialogue and private speech. That is, C1L3 not only provided his interpretation of the SCOBA to the peer, but also to himself. The final agreement on starting from these two sentences shows that both learners decided to apply the guidance from SCOBA to their writing. In this exchange, the learners were engaging with the SCOBA, using it as a referencing tool for the content and to structure their email.

Excerpt 1.13

	EXCERPT FROM LESSON 1	TRANSLATION
01	C1L3: 我觉得我们先看下老师给的这个流程图吧。不能就一句 I am sorry 然后结束吧。	<i>I think we should first take a look at the flowchart provided by the teacher. We can't just write a simple 'I am sorry,' can we?</i>
02	C1L1: 嗯，肯定不能就光道歉了，其他什么也不干。我来 share screen 一起看吧。 (C1L1 shared the SCOBA in the breakout room.)	<i>No, we can't simply say sorry and do nothing else. Let me share my screen and we can look at it together. (C1L1 shared the SCOBA in the breakout room.)</i>
03	C1L3: 哦，第一句要写这个写信的目的。然后...然后写理由解释...	<i>Oh, the first sentence should write about the purpose of this email. Then...then... write reasons for explaining...</i>
04	C1L1: 那先把这俩写了呗?	<i>Shall we right these two first?</i>
05	C1L3: 哦，好，没问题。	<i>Oh, OK, no problem.</i>

Second, SCOBAs are found to be used as a checklist in the phase of reviewing. As it is shown in Excerpt 1.14, after C1L1 and C1L2 finished drafting the email, C1L1 suggested to review their writing according to the SCOBA. That is, the main purpose of using SCOBA is still for the content and writing structure, but at the phase of reviewing.

Excerpt 1.14

EXCERPT FROM LESSON 3

TRANSLATION

01	C1L1: 好了，我们来检查一下。要不我们对照着老师给的写作流程图看一遍看看有什么格式上漏掉的？	<i>Alright, let's check it out. How about we go through the given chat to see if we've missed anything?</i>
02	C1L2: 可以呀。我来说需要写的东西，然后你来核对怎么样？	<i>OK. Let me say what needs to be written, and then you can check them. How does it sound?</i>
03	C1L1: 可以。	<i>No problem.</i>

Last, SCOBAs are found to be used as a linguistic pool for learners during the drafting phase. An illustration of this is seen in Excerpt 1.15, where C1L4 and C1L5 drew on the sentence structure “I was wondering if...” from the SCOBAs to their own writing. The original sentence ‘Would you please inform us of the requirements?’ was independently produced by C1L5, and C1L4 proposed an alternative sentence which was not focused on error correction. The reason might be that C1L4 would like to try the sentence or the expression that they had not used before, at least in this email. It seems that both learners intentionally imitated from the SCOBAs, which could indicate the growth of L2 knowledge.

Excerpt 1.15

EXCERPT FROM LESSON 5

TRANSLATION

01	C1L4: Would you please inform us of the requirements? Would you please...em...这句话没问题，但是能不能用这个，感觉也挺礼貌的？ I was wondering 这个。	<i>Would you please inform us of the requirements? Would you please... Em... This sentence is fine, but shall we use ‘I was wondering’ instead? I feel it is also polite.</i>
02	C1L5: 哪个？在哪里？	<i>Which one? Where is it?</i>
03	C1L4: 嗯，老师给的这个文件上，make a request 那里第二个例句。	<i>Em, in the chart, the second sample sentence under ‘make a request’ item.</i>
04	C1L5: OK. I was wondering 然后呢？	<i>OK. I was wondering then what ?</i>

	(C1L5 wrote down <u>I was wondering</u>)	(C1L5 wrote down <u>I was wondering</u>)
05	C1L4: If you can inform us of. 你看那个例句。	<i>If you can inform us of. Have a look at the sample sentence.</i>
06	C1L5: 哦，好。	<i>Oh, OK.</i>

In general, SCOBAs were used as a resource pool for learners, which provided resources for writing contents, writing structures and linguistic resources. In most collaborative writing tasks, the majority of learners referred to the SCOBAs at least once, particularly during the pre-task stage. At different writing phases, learners are found to use the SCOBAs differently. However, no matter for what purpose of using the SCOBAs, it can be believed that SCOBAs provided opportunities for learners to imitate.

4.2.2. Findings from semi-structured interview data in Cycle 1

Complementing the observational findings, the interview data provided further insights into learners' experiences and perceptions. The Cycle 1 interviews revealed a nuanced picture of learners' experiences in the task-mediated online writing course. Their accounts highlighted four interrelated areas. First, they described writing development as a multi-dimensional process that went beyond grammatical accuracy to encompass discourse organisation, pragmatic appropriateness, vocabulary refinement, and a process-oriented approach to writing. Second, they credited their progress to the mediation provided by course tools, teacher feedback, and peer collaboration, which they perceived as forming a mutually reinforcing learning loop. Third, learners emphasised the importance of positive emotions of feeling respected, accomplished, and engaged in sustaining their participation. Finally, they also identified challenges that needs refinement in subsequent cycles.

4.2.2.1. Theme 1: Reframing writing development as multi-dimensional growth.

All learners in Cycle 1 consistently described their writing development not as a single improvement in grammatical accuracy only but as a broader transformation in how they understood what it means to write effectively. Instead of viewing progress as producing fewer errors, they spoke of growth across several dimensions, mainly including structuring ideas, addressing readers appropriately, monitoring grammar, refining vocabulary, and approaching writing as a process. Their reflections suggest that the course encouraged them to reframe writing development as a multi-dimensional journey rather than a narrow technical skill.

Learners in this cycle consistently described their first and most immediate change as a shift from writing emails in a disorganised, almost conversational manner to viewing them as structured pieces

of communication that required coherence at multiple levels. What previously resembled jotting down unconnected sentences began to be understood as constructing a message that needed logical order and cohesion. This transition was often framed as moving away from treating English emails “like text messages” towards a more deliberate and audience-oriented organisation. As C1L3 admitted, “I used to treat emails like text messages, but now I know how to structure an email like a real email” (Extract 1-1). His words capture the sense of reorientation shared by many of his peers, who acknowledged that they had overlooked structure in their earlier practice. Several participants went further to describe the surprise of discovering logical flow not only at the level of overall organisation but also in the relationships between sentences. C1L5 reflected on this change by saying that

I have made significant progress in terms of logic. Before the course, I always wrote down what came to my mind without a good logical frame. I didn't pay attention to the logical relationship of two adjacent sentences. Now, I think I have become more sensitive to the relationship between sentences, which is a surprising improvement for me (C1L5, Extract 1-2).

This perception was echoed by another participant, who said,

In the past, I always focused on checking whether I made grammatical and lexical errors and tried my best to use the so-called advanced grammar and vocabularies. The logical links among sentences were not required to be targeted in the lessons I took before. Now, I have formed a sense that it is equally important to ensure the sentences are logically linked (C1L4, Extract 1-3).

Across these accounts, it appears that these learners moved from writing in a spontaneous and fragmented fashion to recognising coherence and cohesion as indispensable features of effective communication. Their comments suggest that the course created opportunities for them to see writing not simply as producing grammatically accurate sentences, but as crafting connected texts that needed to “make sense” at the level of passage, paragraph, and sentence. In this sense, discursive improvement was not experienced as a minor technical gain but as a fundamental reorientation in how learners thought about the nature of writing itself.

Alongside this growing sensitivity to coherence, two learners also described rethinking what it meant to be polite in email communication. Before the course, most of them felt that simply inserting *please* was sufficient, equating politeness with a single lexical choice. As C1L5 reflected, “Before (the course),

I just said ‘I want something’, or ‘please do something’. I felt it would be polite as long as I used ‘please’ in the sentence” (C1L5, Extract 1-4). Through the course, however, learners reported discovering a much richer repertoire of strategies for making requests and a greater awareness of how politeness varies in degree. As C1L1 proudly explained, “I can at least use three different ways to make a polite request now, rather than only using ‘May I’” (C1L1, Extract 1-5). The ability to distinguish levels of politeness was described as both new and empowering, as C1L1 went on to add, “I didn’t know before whether my writing was polite enough or too polite. From the course, I not only learned different ways to make a polite request, but I can distinguish the degree of the politeness in different expressions” (C1L1, Extract 1-6). These responses indicated that learners’ understanding of politeness shifted from a narrow focus on single words to a more context-sensitive awareness of communication. Politeness was no longer perceived as a simple lexical add-on but as a flexible resource that could be adapted to the audience, purpose, and tone of an email. In reframing their view of politeness in this way, learners began to see it not as a matter of inserting “magic words” but as strategic choice shaping how their meaning would be received.

Learners also spoke of changes in their grammatical competence, though their reflections revealed both progress and continuing frustration. A recurring theme was a shift from relying on external correction to developing a more active role in noticing and monitoring their own errors. C1L2 explained, “Before, I couldn’t find many of the grammatical errors in my writings, but after the course, I became more sensitive to those problems, although I still make these errors sometimes” (C1L2, Extract 1-7). Similarly, C1L3 remarked, “Although there will be problems of grammars, now I pay more attention where I might have problems where I often make errors, then do a check and correct by myself” (C1L3, Extract 1-8). These accounts illustrate how learners saw grammatical improvement not only as producing fewer errors, but as becoming more capable to identify and address them independently. At the same time, learners voiced concerns about the limits of this progress. While they felt more confident handling common mistakes, they continued to struggle with advanced or less familiar forms. C1L3 reflected on the uncertainty he still experienced. He said that “I am still not quite sure about whether I made the right use of some tenses, such as present perfect and past perfect. I think my knowledge of them is quite fragmented” (C1L3, Extract 1-9). In a similar vein, C1L1 acknowledged limited gains in more complex features by saying that “I didn’t have very impressive progress in some difficult grammar, like how to use I wish, um, oh the subjunctive mood I mean. We focused more on completing the emails in the course, and the teacher taught little about grammar during the class time” (C1L1, Extract 1-10). These accounts suggest that learners’ views of grammatical development combined a sense of increased self-monitoring with an ongoing recognition of gaps in advanced grammar. Progress was not described as complete mastery but as an evolving awareness: they were

beginning to notice and correct their own errors, even while remaining uncertain about more complex structures.

Learners also commented frequently on their lexical development, often framing it as moving from limited, repetitive word use to a broader and more flexible vocabulary repertoire. For several participants, this meant being able to draw on a wider range of expressions when writing, which gave them a sense of richness in their language. As C1L1 reflected, “I found my English expressions become richer than before. Before the course, I always kept using the same expressions and words in writing, but now I can write with more alternatives” (C1L1, Extract 1-11). Her words illustrate the way learners contrasted their earlier reliance on a narrow set of familiar phrases with a growing ability to vary their vocabulary more deliberately. For others, particularly those with higher proficiency, vocabulary improvement was described less as expansion in number but more as refinement and precision in choice. C1L5 highlighted this change in orientation. She said thoughtfully, “before the course, I would like to use the ‘big’ words, which were uncommon. After the course, I developed an idea that it is better to use the words precisely rather than pursuing the use of ‘big’ words” (C1L5, Extract 1-12). This shift reflects a move from equating lexical sophistication with complexity to valuing appropriateness and precision.

Across these accounts, learners portrayed lexical improvement not only as quantitative growth but also as qualitative refinement, especially in making more precise and contextually appropriate choices. The course encouraged them to see vocabulary use less as a display of advanced words and more as the ability to select expressions that accurately fit the communicative purpose. In this way, their accounts reframed vocabulary development from “more and big words” to “better and more precise words.”

A further change some learners emphasised was in how they perceived writing as a process. Rather than treating writing as a one-off act of producing a finished text, they began to describe it as a series of stages, including planning, drafting, revising, and editing that they consciously work through. C1L4 contrasted her habit with that of her peers by stating that

Sometimes, we worked in different ways. We had different writing habits when we worked together. I preferred to write down the key points or key ideas and started to write the email, but others, might like to prepare everything carefully before writing (C1L4, Extract 1-13).

Her comments illustrate that, while learners adopted different strategies, they all nevertheless recognised the importance of planning before writing. Other learners highlighted how their attention to revising and editing had expanded. As C1L1 reflected, “After the course, I checked for grammatical issues, logical coherence, and whether my writing was appropriately polite” (C1L1, Extract 1-14). Her words suggest a broader awareness of what effective revision involves, moving beyond simple error correction to considering cohesion and pragmatic appropriateness as part of the editing process. All these accounts together indicate that learners depicted a reorientation from producing text in a single attempt to seeing writing as a multi-stage and recursive process. While individual strategies varied, they all revealed a heightened awareness of writing as a process of refinement rather than a one-off product.

4.2.2.2. Theme 2: Mediation as perceived driver of learning

Sub-theme 1 – Valuing tools that made writing manageable

All learners in Cycle 1 credited most of their progression in the task-mediated online writing course to the forms of mediation they experienced. They explained that their development as writers was not achieved in isolation but was supported through both material resources and social interaction. Course artefacts such as SCOBAs, writing samples, and short videos were seen as practical guides that helped them navigate different stages of planning, drafting, and revising emails. At the same time, teacher feedback and peer collaboration were described as equally important, encouraging reflective thinking and problem-solving.

Participants particularly valued SCOBAs as the most significant tool that made email writing more manageable, especially when it came to structuring their messages and ensuring appropriate politeness. They described how SCOBAs served as reliable guides at different stages of the writing process during both collaborative and individual writing tasks. C1L1 remarked, “SCOBAs provided good guidance, and I often referred back to them to ensure I was on the right track, whether drafting with others or on my own” (C1L1, Extract 1-15). Similarly, C1L3 recalled their role during planning, noting, “I explored the writing process step by step with the assistance of a SCOA alongside other students” (C1L3, Extract 1-16). Beyond providing overall structure, the sample sentences embedded in SCOBAs were said to have clarified how politeness could be expressed, helping learners to apply these expressions in their emails. This perception was echoed in classroom observations (see Section 4.2.1), where SCOBAs were frequently seen in use throughout planning, drafting, and reviewing. Learners relied on them to outline structure at the start, to check format in the reviewing phase, and incorporating language resources while drafting.

Writing samples were another mediational resource that most learners valued, particularly as benchmarks against which they could evaluate their own writing. Most learners preferred to consult the samples after completing their own work, believing that comparing their writing to the samples helped facilitate their learning of English writing. One participant shared, “I always went back to the writing sample after I finished individual writing tasks to see if I could make it more sample-like” (C1L5, Extract 1-17). Another echoed this sentiment, stating,

It was good in the course that we had a writing sample each time after we wrote collaboratively. In this situation, we had something that could be compared to our own writing. I think finding the differences of gaps between what we wrote was another way to learn English writing as well. (C1L4, Extract 1-18)

However, C1L1 wondered whether providing writing samples before the task would be more beneficial. She believed that drawing on ideas, writing structures, and language expressions from a model performance prior to the collaborative task would better support her writing development, based on her prior learning experiences. This view, however, was challenged by other participants. They argued that providing samples before the task could hinder the thinking process and reduce opportunities for authentic language use. As C1L3 said,

If the sample is provided before the task, I will possibly imitate or even copy the sentence in the sample, which will minimize the opportunities for the writing problem exposure. So, for me, it is better to have samples after my own writing (C1L3, Extract 1-19).

Another participant added,

It is because, for me, I may be strongly influenced by the writing sample. This influence may not be a positive one. I will unconsciously imitate or copy the way to write an email in the writing sample, which in turn will minimize the opportunity to use my own language. I don't think I am still in the early stage of learning by imitation. Providing writing samples at the start may suit English beginners (C1L5, Extract 1-20).

These findings reveal that learners’ perceptions of the optimal timing for using writing samples were tied to their prior learning experiences. In the interviews, all participants mentioned that the PPP

approach was the primary method used in their prior English learning. However, despite their similar learning backgrounds, these experiences led to differing perspectives. Their views on whether to provide writing samples before the task were largely shaped by their contradictory interpretations of Presenting Stage of PPP. Specifically, C1L1 favoured receiving samples prior to tasks, possibly because she had become accustomed to the PPP approach, in which learning often occurred through explicit teaching and then imitation of provided samples. In contrast, C1L5 and C1L3 felt that pre-teaching restricted their ability to use language freely and limited the opportunity for authentic language production, and thus hindered language learning. Additionally, these findings suggest that learners were not only reflecting on the course content but also evaluating the instructional methods being employed. This illustrates that learners were not passive recipients of teaching strategies; rather, they actively engaged with the pedagogical choices I made in the classroom, contributing to the evaluation and adaption of the task-mediated online writing course.

Some participants also viewed the short videos provided in the pre-task stage as useful mediational tools. The videos were described as enhancing the authenticity of tasks by connecting them to real-world writing scenarios. Learners reported that watching the videos helped them better understand the context of the email tasks, and in some cases, even provided lexical support for their writing. For example, two participants explained that the videos introduced relevant vocabulary that they could later draw upon in drafting their emails. In this way, the videos offered both contextual framing and language resources that mediated learners' engagement with the tasks.

Briefly, these responses show that learners attached significant value to course artifacts as mediational tools. SCOBAs, writing samples, and videos were all credited with making the writing process more structured, meaningful, and achievable, even if learners expressed different views about the most effective ways to use them.

Sub-theme 2 – Appreciating teacher feedback as scaffolding.

Mediation by the dialogues with others, is another significant form of mediation in the classroom that all learners valued. Teacher feedback is a typical form of such mediation. Many participants remarked on both teacher written and teacher oral feedback, often describing how these forms of support encouraged them to engage more actively with their writing. As explained in Chapter 3, teacher written feedback was provided on both group and individual tasks in the form of implicit correction, with errors underlined rather than directly corrected. This was usually followed up in the class with oral feedback, where I guided learners through the correction process, moving from implicit clues to more explicit explanations depending on their needs.

Generally, most learners in this cycle regarded teacher CF as the most important mediation during the course and placed particular emphasis on the benefit of implicit CF. They frequently described how underlined errors create opportunities for them to reflect on their errors. C1L5 illustrated this reflective process, commenting that

The errors were underlined firstly, and then I was asked to think why the sentences or expressions were not suitable here. It enabled me to think and solve the problem on my own. [...] So, the underlined words or sentences pushed me to think what problems they were and how to correct them (C1L5, Extract 1-21).

This response demonstrates how the underlining of errors without explicit correction pushed learners to actively engage with their errors, fostering independent problem-solving. Another participant echoed a similar sentiment,

I firstly read the written feedback in annotations, and it enabled me to reflect on the errors. I would think about what the errors were. Although I often failed to notice and correct the errors, it still created a process of thinking (C1L2, Extract 1-22).

Here, the participant highlighted that even when she struggled to immediately correct the errors, the implicit feedback still facilitated a reflective process, encouraging deeper engagement with the material. The same reflective stance was evident when learners spoke about graduated oral feedback. C1L3 recalled enjoying the way the teacher began by prompting self-correction. He said,

I enjoyed that you always started your feedback by asking if I had noticed any issues in a specific sentence or expression [...] I think it would be a very good process in which I thought about these potential errors proactively (C1L3, Extract 1-23).

Such reflections suggest that implicit CF, whether in written form or as part of the initial stages of oral graduated CF, provided them with the time and opportunities to independently reflect on the highlighted errors. This process of reflection was seen as essential for developing self-initiative and encouraging more profound cognitive engagement.

Sub-theme 3 – learning with and from peers.

All learners highlighted the role of peer collaboration in supporting their writing and language development, describing collaborative dialogue as an indispensable part of the course. They explained that collaborative writing tasks allowed them to support one another and to engage more deeply with the writing process. From their perspective, peer talk, much similar to teacher CF, encouraged reflection and critical thinking, thereby contributing to their progress as writers.

In the task-mediated online writing course, extensive peer collaborative talk occurred when learners did collaborative writing tasks in the main task stage. Participants explained that their peers provided certain amount of new linguistic-related, content-related, and even pragmatic-related writing resources that they can draw on. For instance, one participant shared that “as I often had a very fixed written sentence structures or language I mean, I learned different expressions from my partners. Of course, I think I also provided good expressions” (C1L4, Extract 1-24). Another participant emphasized the benefits of brainstorming in peer collaborative talk, explaining how new writing ideas emerged through collaborative dialogue. He said that “we often got something new when these ideas collided, and I learned a lot during such process” (C1L3, Extract 1-25). In this way, learners co-constructed a shared resource bank for their writing.

Much of the collaborative dialogue took the form of peer corrective feedback. Many participants highlighted the collaborative nature of these exchanges, describing how they sought, received, and provided CF. They reported consciously seeking corrective feedback from the peers. For example, one participant shared the importance of asking for peer feedback during collaborative writing by stating that,

I think they are more experienced than me in terms of writing emails. They had the experiences of writing emails before, but I didn't. So, when I wrote with them, I always asked whether it could be OK or not to write like this or that. I think if I could ask some questions, it can be proved that I kept thinking, which was good for learning. And their confirmation and error correction assisted me to develop my writing (C1L2, Extract 1-26).

While peer CF was often sought, some participants also noted that peer CF was not limited to requests. Often, peers provided CF proactively. As another participant explained,

They (the peers) kept questioning the sentences I produced, which I think helped me greatly to think which expression could be more precise and then got

improvement (C1L4, Extract 1-27).

Based on these responses, it is evident that participants are united in the belief that the peer-provided CF helped to develop their English writing in this course. This CF, much like teacher CF, addressed feedback on grammatical, cohesive, pragmatic, and logical problems, which were also corroborated by findings from classroom observations (see Section 5.2.1).

Beyond seeking and receiving peer CF, learners also saw providing feedback as a valuable learning opportunity in itself. Correcting peers' errors often pushed them to revisit the linguistic and pragmatic knowledge, which in turn reinforced their understanding. As C1L4 and C1L5 reflected,

When I corrected my peer's sentence, I realized I had made the same mistake in my own writing before. By explaining the issue to them, I had to think carefully about the grammar rules, which helped me understand them better (C1L4, Extract 1-28).

It was really helpful when I explained why I thought certain sentence structures or expressions were better, because it helped me review the knowledge again (C1L5, Extract 1-29).

These responses indicate that providing corrective feedback prompted students to engage with the linguistic rules they might otherwise overlook. When learners explained why certain expressions or structures were incorrect, they were pushed to engage in deeper cognitive processes. This explanation process not only solidified their understanding but also encouraged reflection on their own language use. Indeed, it was the interactional nature of seeking, receiving and providing peer feedback that created opportunities for talk about the knowledge of language. During the peer CF process, learners negotiated, debated, persuaded, and compromised to reach a shared understanding. They engaged in talking about the particular writing contents, grammatical rules, lexical options, and politeness issues.

Taken in combination, the three different forms of mediation reported in Theme 2, tools, teacher feedback, and peer dialogue, were perceived as mutually reinforcing stages in learners' writing development. Several participants described how these forms of mediation linked and interacted with each other. For example, C1L2 reflected on how her peers' questions during collaborative writing tasks prepared her to better grasp teacher explanations. She said, "my peers helped me to notice the problem, which laid a background, but the teacher helped me to understand it fully" (C1L2, Extract 1-

30). Similarly, C1L5 explained that after listening to the teacher CF, she was able to return to the related SCOBAs with new insights. In her words,

After the teacher explained it, I went back to the SCOBAs again, and this time I felt I could understand it better. It was not just rules on the paper, but something I could think about and use in my own way (C1L5, Extract 1-31).

These views suggest that learners did not see tools, teacher feedback, and peer collaborative dialogue as separate or sequential, but as complementary elements that reinforced one another. This interconnected perception of mediation was captured in C1L4's reflection: "I feel all elements in this course formed a complete learning loop" (C1L4, Extract 1-31).

4.2.2.3. Theme 3: positive emotions shaping learning experiences.

When reflecting on their learning experiences of the task-mediated writing course, learners often framed their accounts through the lens of positive emotions. They did not simply describe what they had learned, but highlighted how the course made them feel respected, accomplished, and delighted. These emotions were presented as central to their satisfaction with the course and to their willingness to participate actively, showing that for learners, affect was not a by-product of learning but an integral part of the process.

Among the positive emotions that learners described, a strong sense of respect emerged from the learner centred design of the course, which many contrasted with their previous experiences. They felt respected, particularly in the way their learning needs were considered, which is something that they had not experienced before. One participant summarised that "the course was not like the English courses I took before, where there were only teachers' voices and thoughts. It respected me as a unique learner, considering my individual learning purposes, my current language level, and my learning preference" (C1L5, Extract 1-33). Many participants commented that the learner-centeredness exceeded their expectations. They identified two key practices that embodied this respect. The first was the needs analysis session at the start of the course, which allowed them to openly express their learning purposes, current language level, and learning preferences. As C1L3 shared,

I didn't expect there would be a session for me to discuss my needs with other classmates. That is what I didn't experience before. I am so grateful to be respected in this way. This made me feel the course was tailored for me (C1L3, Extract 1-34).

The second was the provision of personalised feedback, which further reinforced their sense of being respected. Feedback was carefully tailored to both collaborative and individual writing. As illustrated by the following comment,

I really appreciated the feedback, no matter for group writings or individual writings, because I haven't got much feedback on writing during my previous English writing learning. I think it works and is important (C1L1, Extract 1-35).

These responses reveal that respect was not simply a spoken value, but something enacted through the course design, which made learners feel recognised as unique learners and respected in their needs.

Alongside this sense of being respected, learners derived a strong sense of achievement from their participation in the course. This feeling often stemmed from successfully completing writing tasks without relying on explicit teacher presentation. For example, when learners utilised SCOBAs as a referencing tool to independently produce a piece of writing, they felt a notable sense of fulfilment. As C1L2 shared, “I didn’t expect that I would be able to write an English email independently and confidently” (C1L2, Extract 1-36). Another participant similarly expressed that

[...] but now I am so glad to see that I can write many emails if I am asked to do so. I mean I am so proud of myself I become more confident in English email writing (C1L5, Extract 1-37).

Beyond independent task completion, learners also associated this sense of achievement with collaborative problem-solving. For instance, C1L3 highlighted how working with peers to address feedback and revise their writing led to an even deeper sense of accomplishment. He said,

Besides, what I found was quite interesting is that after we got written feedback from the teacher of collaborative writing, we were more focused and desperate to figure out the problems. I got more sense of achievement if we got the right revision. We didn't do it individually but worked together in most cases (C1L3, Extract 1-38).

These accounts illustrated that the sense of achievement was both a result of independent task completion and effective collaboration during problem-solving. Learners felt empowered by their ability to navigate writing challenges and gain confidence in their writing skills.

In addition to respect and achievement, learners frequently mentioned the enjoyment they derived from most of the course activities, especially collaborative writing tasks and individual feedback tutorials. They often described the course as “fun,” “enjoyable”, and “interesting”. While learners reported a sense of enjoyment, they also acknowledge that these activities could sometimes be accompanied by moments of stress. One participant remarked as follows when talking about teacher’s oral CF.

I would say I suffered and enjoyed it when you provided corrective feedback step by step for me, moving from unclear hint to a clear answer. I suffered because most of the errors that I couldn't notice or correct immediately had troubled me when I wrote the email. I mean I was trapped by the problem twice actually, which would be stressful for me. I think I am just that kind of person who seems to be unwilling to expose my problems to the public. However, I knew it was very helpful and necessary (C1L5, Extract 1-39).

Such mixed feelings may stem from her unfamiliarity with receiving oral graduated CF on her individual writing. Based on her previous learning experiences, most of the courses that she attended before were teacher-dominant, in which the teacher may use direct and explicit CF strategies. This meant she rarely had the opportunity to independently spot and gradually correct errors. Another possible reason is that her reluctance to expose personal mistakes may be related to her experience in exam-based English classes, where teachers acted more as examiners than as supporters in the learning process. Despite the emotional difficulty, C1L5 consciously tried to embrace the process because she recognised its necessity and value and found the CF process to be rewarding and beneficial. While the experience was stressful at times, she acknowledged that the CF led to deeper reflection and self-correction, ultimately promoting her development. This demonstrates that enjoyment was not always straightforward. Instead, it could be intertwined with challenge, which ultimately made the learning experience more rewarding.

4.2.2.4. Theme 4: Perceived challenges marking learning experiences.

While learners generally reported the language improvement and positive emotional responses to the course, their experiences also raised certain challenges that shaped how they engaged with the new pedagogical approach. These challenges did not overshadow their overall satisfaction, but they did draw attention to possible directions for improvement in the course design for the next cycle.

One of the main challenges learners faced was their unfamiliarity with the NA session, which affected both their ability to participate effectively in the focus group and their clarity about their own learning needs. For all participants, this was their first time attending in a focus group, and the lack of prior experience with the focus group format left them feeling uncertain about how to express their needs. One participant said that he felt somewhat lost without clearer guidance on how to navigate this new setting as follows.

However, I would like to mention that I was not quite familiar with the form that needs were collected. I didn't quite participate well in the so-called focus group for needs analysis. I don't know whether I attended in the right way or not, but it might be better if I was provided with more information about how to participate in a focus group to present my needs (C1L4, Extract 1-40).

Another participant shared a similar feeling of uncertainty, explaining that the group setting and the lack of familiarity with the NA process made it difficult for her to fully engage.

OK, I would say group discussion was supposed to be useful, but we were too shy at first to interact with each other. So, I just thought about the questions you asked for the interview without much attention to others' responses. I think I didn't know much about how to participate in a group discussion for interviews, as I never attended such kind of activities before. So, if I got more instructions on it, I think it would be easier for me to interact with others (C1L5, Extract 1-41).

These reflections illustrate that while the oral explanation introduced the purpose of the session, it was not enough to prepare learners for a format that was completely new to them. Compounding this unfamiliarity was the challenge of identifying their own specific learning needs. Some participants expressed that they only had a general sense of what they might require but struggled to articulate more concrete needs during the NA session. This difficulty was therefore not about lacking the language to express their needs, but more about recognising and defining very concrete needs precisely in the first place. This uncertainty may stem from their position in an EFL context, where they had not yet faced authentic tasks that would naturally generate concrete learning needs. Instead, they relied on common sense and prior assumptions to speculate about what their needs might be.

Another challenge some learners noted was the confusion with advanced grammatical features. While they acknowledged improvements in their overall grammar use, several participants expressed

frustration at still feeling uncertain about more advanced grammatical features. One participant noted that “I am still not quite sure about whether I made the right use of some tenses, such as present perfect and past perfect. I think my knowledge of them is quite fragmented” (C1L3, Extract 1-42). Learners themselves often attributed this difficulty to the limited amount of explicit grammar instruction during the course. As C1L1 put it,

I didn't have very impressive progress in some difficult grammar, like how to use I wish, hmmm, oh the subjunctive mood I mean. We focused more on completing the emails in the course, and the teacher taught little about grammar during the class time (C1L1, Extract 1-43).

Such views suggest that, from the learners' perspective, the focus on completing email tasks left less room for detailed explanation, or teaching new words or advanced grammar.

In addition to these two challenges mentioned above, the most significant issue learners faced was related to uneven levels of participation during collaborative writing tasks. Frustration arose when some learners had to work with silent or less participatory peers. For those who preferred active collaboration, the lack of engagement from others reduced their motivation. As one respondent shared, “I didn't want to entirely dominant the whole task and acted in a one man show. It reduced my enthusiasm for completing tasks” (C1L1, Extract 1-44). When confronted with peers who were reluctant to speak, some learners attempted to draw them into the group work. However, these attempts were not always successful, which in turn added to their sense of frustration. C1L5 described her sense of failure when trying to encourage a silent member. As C1L5 shared, “I know little about encouraging others to work with me [...] I felt frustrated and embarrassed when I failed to invite the silent person to the discussion” (C1L5, Extract 1-45). Some active learners tried to understand why some of their peers remained silent. For example, C1L3 perceived that low participation might possibly result from a lack of confidence in English or habits formed in teacher-dominant classrooms. In his words,

Sometimes, we had a group member who was unwilling to participate or to talk. [...] I guessed it might because he or she was not confident in his or her English or lack ideas. They may not want to participate in collaborative writing tasks. [...] I can totally understand those who were unwilling to take part in, because they may get used to the learning mode in which the teacher talks a lot and they just need to listen (C1L3, Extract 1-46).

Quieter learners themselves acknowledged their limited participation but explained it in slightly different ways. C1L2 stated that “although sometimes I didn’t talk much but mostly listened, I still enjoyed and learned from the process, especially when we discussed language points” (C1L2, Extract 1-47). She admitted that speaking in English during group tasks was uncomfortable and that her group often switched to Chinese to ease the pressure. She explained that “I was a little bit embarrassed to talk in groups [...] When we did collaborative writing, we chose to speak Chinese, which made me feel better. Nevertheless, I was not as active as others” (C1L2, Extract 1-48). C1L4 offered another explanation by connecting her quietness to personality and a reluctance to expose her problems. As she expressed, “As I said before, I was unwilling to expose my problems to the public, so I was always an observer rather than a participant” (C1L4, Extract 1-48).

In some cases, their reluctance was reinforced by the group’s reactions. As C1L4 recalled, “sometimes, I said something, but only received few words of responses” (C1L4, Extract 1-49). Although she did not explicitly state that the lack of expected responses made her more unwilling to participate, when considered alongside her earlier description of preferring to remain an observer, this account can be interpreted as an indication that limited peer acknowledgement reduced her enthusiasm for further participation.

These responses reveal that frustration was not limited to one side of the interaction. Vocal learners felt discouraged when their attempts to encourage participation was unsuccessful, while quieter learners experienced similar frustration when their efforts to join the discussion received little response. This suggests that the problem did not come from a persistent unwillingness to collaborate, but rather from a lack of effective strategies to manage uneven participation. The difficulty may reflect learners’ limited prior experience with collaborative writing, as their previous English learning had been largely teacher-dominated and focused on completing writing individually.

4.2.3. Teacher reflection and pedagogical adjustments

After completing the five-week teaching programme in Cycle 1, I did not move immediately to the next cycle of teaching and data collection. Instead, I took time to reflect on the findings that had emerged from Cycle 1 and engaged with further reading in order to explore possible solutions to the challenges identified. The purpose of this reflection was to understand and make sense of my teaching experiences and research observations in Cycle 1, and to turn these insights into concrete revisions for the next iteration of the course. The revisions focused on task selection, through modifications to the CNA process; task sequencing, by reconsidering the principles for ordering tasks; and task implementation, including adjustments to pre-task, main-task, and post-task stages.

The first area concerned the process of conducting the CNA. In Cycle 1, the focus group discussion revealed several difficulties. Learners reported in the interviews that they were unfamiliar with how to take part in such an activity, and as the facilitator I also observed that the session often resembled a group interview rather than a genuine peer-to-peer interaction, even though I had explained the procedure orally. Reflecting on this, I realised that learners needed more scaffolding to participate effectively. Therefore, one adjustment I made was to design a SCOBAs on how to take part in a focus group, outlining both the purpose, the process and possible language resources to support learners' participation. In my interpretation, this also served a secondary purpose. Since learners would later encounter SCOBAs regularly in the main course, their early exposure during the CNA session provided an initial orientation to the format and purpose of these mediational tools. Another difficulty that emerged from the CNA was that learners were unsure about what specific needs to articulate, largely because they had limited awareness of the authentic email-writing situations they might encounter during their future overseas study. To address this, my adjustment was to prepare sample needs as guiding examples. Rather than prescribing what their needs should be, these examples were intended as prompts to stimulate learners' thinking and to give them inspiration for articulating their own ones.

The second area concerned the sequencing of tasks. In Cycle 1, I arranged the email tasks by placing those with fewer reasoning steps earlier in the course and those with greater reasoning demands later, on the assumption that this would provide a gradual increase in task complexity. However, through further literature review during the research process, I came to realise that what also mattered for sequencing was the extent of the importance of the tasks for the learners. From my perspective as the teacher, the email tasks did not differ greatly in their intrinsic difficulty, so ordering them purely by reasoning demand was unlikely to create a meaningful developmental progression. My adjustment, therefore, was to incorporate learners' priorities into the sequencing process by asking them to rank the tasks according to perceived importance. In this way, sequencing could be based on both reasoning demands and learner relevance, which I expected would enhance their motivation and engagement.

The third area concerned the use of writing samples during the pre-task stage. In Cycle 1, I introduced a sample text for gist reading and discussion before learners began the collaborative writing task. However, the interviews revealed contrasting learner perceptions of this practice. While one participant preferred having the sample available beforehand, others felt that early exposure would encourage imitation and reduce opportunities for authentic language use. Reflecting on this, I realised that providing the sample prior to task performance blurred its pedagogical function. Instead of serving as a tool for critical comparison, it may risk being treated as a model for reproduction. At the same time, my interpretation of the classroom interactions and interviews was that the learners were

not strongly bound by a traditional PPP mindset. On the contrary, they showed enthusiasm for exploring and constructing their own language output to some extent. My adjustment, therefore, was to relocate the writing sample to the post-task stage, where it could be used as a benchmark for reflection and analysis after learners had first attempted the task independently.

The fourth area concerned the group size for collaborative writing in the main-task stage. As presented in the findings above, classroom observations showed that triads frequently included a “silent person”, but who was not consistently silent when working in pairs. The interview data added information that active learners reported that they lacked strategies to encourage quieter peers to participate, and they sometimes felt frustrated when participation was uneven. From an SCT perspective, I interpret this pattern as a breakdown of peer mediation. Possibly due to individual personalities and prior learning histories, learners found it challenging both to request and to offer mediation in group settings; attention also tended to flow toward already-active members, making it difficult to distribute support equitably. With this interpretation in mind—while recognising that participation is shaped by multiple factors beyond group size—one adjustment I made was to reconfigure collaborative writing as pair work to heighten mutual accountability and create space for co-regulation. A second adjustment was to strengthen opportunities and quality of peer mediation by embedding brief, explicit supports, including an interactional SCOPA with prompts for requesting/offering help (e.g., Could you talk me through your idea?, Can I try a different wording here?), simple turn-taking and role-rotation routines (writer/reviewer; idea-giver/editor), and quick “peer-mediation check-ins” (e.g., invite—echo—extend moves) during drafting. The aim was to make mediation more doable and visible within the activity, so that learners could engage in co-regulation more reliably rather than relying on teacher intervention to resolve participation gaps.

The final area centred on learners’ persistent challenges with more complex grammatical structures. Interview data indicated that although learners felt the course supported their grammar overall, progress on higher-complexity points remained limited. Learners themselves often attributed this struggle to a lack of systematic explanations and explicit instruction, similar to what I read in the TBLT literature. From my perspective as the teacher, this tension seems linked to the nature of TBLT, which prioritised task completion and interactional work over the presentation of rules. Grammatical items were addressed in the post-task phase, but typically through my graduated corrective feedback rather than through extended, teacher-led exposition. For learners accustomed to teacher-dominant environments where rules are systematically explained, this design created a perceived gap. It may be that some learners tacitly view explicit, systematic rule presentation as the “proper” way to teach grammar, particularly for tackling advanced problems. In response, I concluded that grammar-related mediation needed to sit closer to task performance and be oriented to recurring pain points, so that

learners could work within their ZPD through interaction and with the aid of mediational tools. My adjustments therefore had two strands. First, I designed brief revision tasks using authentic emails that embedded not only grammatical issues but also register, cohesion and pragmatics, tailored to error patterns observed earlier. Second, I prepared grammatical SCOBAs to be available during writing as on-demand orienting tools for those same pain points, guiding pairs' decision-making while composing. Together these changes were intended to shift grammar work from teacher-led correction after task completion to in-task, learner-mediated problem solving, supporting appropriation and a gradual movement from other-regulation to self-regulation, while still acknowledging learners' desire for clearer, more systematic points of reference.

4.3. Cycle 2 – The implementation of the first adapted task-mediated online writing course

4.3.1. Findings from video-recorded classroom interactional data

The findings from video-recorded classroom interactional data in Cycle 2 are presented in two main parts. The first part summarises the findings that echo those observed in Cycle 1, despite the shift in learner cohorts. The second part explores new findings in Cycle 2, where learners demonstrated novel adaptations of SCOBAs and personalized writing tasks, which offer fresh insights into how they engage with the course.

4.3.1.1 Recurrent Findings in classroom interaction with Emerging Variations

In Cycle 2, the analysis of classroom interactional data revealed several findings that resonated with those observed in Cycle 1. Learners once again demonstrated microgenetic growth across grammatical, lexical, discursive, and pragmatic competence, continued to rely on their first language (L1) as a support for collaborative writing, and engaged in familiar peer interactional patterns. This consistency across cycles suggests that such set-up facilitated comparable developmental pathways even when applied to different learner groups. Notably, closer examination uncovered new variations within these recurrent findings (See Table 8 for a summary).

Table 8 Nuanced variations in recurrent interactional patterns across Cycle 1 and Cycle 2

Focus	Cycle 1	Cycle 2	Key Variation
Linguistic and pragmatic development	Steady progress with reduced explicit CF	Similar growth; occasional backtracking	Slight fluctuation in need for CF

L1 use	Frequent for task management	Strategic for clarification and peer negotiation	More functional, less dependency
Classroom interaction	Mostly pair-based, some reticence	Mix of pair/group; varied participation	Greater mutual adjustment in participation patterns

As in Cycle 1, learners in Cycle 2 displayed microgenetic growth across grammatical, lexical, discursive, and pragmatic competence, indicating comparable developmental trajectories. Evidence of this growth was found in the gradual reduction of teacher support required during corrective feedback. For instance, in both Lesson 3 and Lesson 7, C2L3 made a similar error with the past perfect tense. In Lesson 3, he wrote *"I have finished the report before the meeting."* I responded with an explicit metalinguistic explanation (CF Level 7) about the correct use of the past perfect, after which he successfully revised the sentence to *"I had finished the report before the meeting."* By Lesson 7, however, when he again produced *"I have sent the email before the deadline,"* only a minimal prompt ("Any problem here?" at CF Level 1) was needed for him to self-correct to *"I had sent the email before the deadline."* Similar patterns were observed in learners' lexical and discursive development, where reduced scaffolding from the teacher indicated an increased capacity to internalize and apply new forms. Instances of private speech also emerged, suggesting that learners were actively using self-directed strategies to regulate their performance during writing tasks. At the same time, some variations from Cycle 1 were noted. In particular, occasional cases of backtracking were observed, where learners' reliance on corrective feedback temporarily increased after earlier signs of progress. For instance, C2L5 initially progressed from requiring highly explicit support (CF Level 7) to responding successfully to more implicit prompts (CF Level 3). However, in a later lesson, he again required a metalinguistic explanation (CF Level 7) in order to resolve a similar issue. Although such instances were not common, they illustrate that development did not always follow a steady, unidirectional trajectory and that learners' need for support could fluctuate across tasks.

Also, learners' frequent use of L1 in this cycle remained an important tool in classroom interaction, echoing findings observed in Cycle 1. Early in the course, learners frequently relied on their shared L1 to manage tasks and clarify meaning when they encountered difficulties expressing ideas in English. For example, C2L1 used Chinese to organise the sequence of ideas and discuss the overall structure of a writing task before switching back to English for drafting. L1 was also used privately as a tool for self-support, as when learners verbalised difficult points to themselves in Chinese before attempting to

articulate them in English. As the course progressed, a shift became evident. Learners increasingly attempted to articulate their intended meanings in English first, resorting to L1 mainly to explain or confirm what they meant. For example, C2L5 presented an idea in English but briefly switched to Chinese to ensure that his peers understood his intended meaning. On another occasion, C2L5 and C2L6 drew on L1 collaboratively to refine lexical choices, moving between Chinese and English to test alternatives and confirm the most appropriate expression. These findings suggest that while L1 continued to be used as a supportive tool, its role extended beyond task management. It was embedded in peer dialogue as a means of clarifying meaning, resolving uncertainty, and jointly refining language use. In this sense, L1 supported learners in sustaining collaborative interaction and ensuring mutual understanding during joint work.

Similar to Cycle 1, a collaborative interactional pattern was evident in this cycle, with learners co-constructing understanding through collaborative dialogue. For example, in Excerpt 2.6, C2L3 initial questioning of the word “bad” prompted C2L4 to reconsider its appropriateness, leading to a negotiation for meaning over the precise wording. As C2L3 and C2L4 evaluated different alternatives, each contribution prompted the other to reconsider and adjust their linguistic choices, leading to a more refined expression. Excerpt 2.7 further presents the learners’ movement from initial uncertainty to a shared understanding of the appropriate grammatical structure. In this excerpt, C2L5’s initial observation about word order led C2L6 to reconsider the sentence structure. As they discussed the appropriate form of an embedded question, the learners clarified the use of declarative word order and the placement of the question mark. The exchange culminated in the formulation of “Could you tell me where the meeting room is?”, followed by a verbal summary of the rule governing indirect questions. These findings highlight the role of peer dialogue in facilitating mutual support and the construction of shared understanding.

Excerpt 2.6

EXCERPT FROM LESSON 5		TRANSLATION
01	C2L4: 我们可以写 I feel bad about this situation.吗?	Can we write “I feel bad about this situation”?
02	C2L3: Bad 好像太笼统了吧? 感觉不够具体	“Bad” seems a bit too vague, doesn’t it? It doesn’t feel specific enough.
03	C2L4: 嗯, 对, 有点太简单了。那换什么?	Yeah, you’re right. It’s a bit too simple. So what should we change it to?

04	C2L3: 要不要用 disappointed? 感觉比 bad 更准确点。	What about “disappointed”? It feels more precise than “bad”.
05	C2L4 嗯, disappointed 是有点事网的意思, 但是我们是不是更想说不满意?	Hmm, “disappointed” suggests a sense of let-down, but aren’t we trying to express dissatisfaction instead?
06	C2L3 对, “不满意”更正式一点。那是不是 “dissatisfy”	Right, “not satisfied” sounds more formal. So would it be “dissatisfy” ...?
07	C2L4 嗯, 用 dissatisfied 听起来更合适, 形容词。	Yeah, “dissatisfied” sounds more appropriate — it’s the adjective form.
08	C2L3 对, 那我们写 I am dissatisfied with..., 然后具体说下原因?	Right, so we can write “I am dissatisfied with...” and then explain the reason more specifically?
09	C2L4 好, 这样更具体, 我感觉也比较礼貌。	OK, that’s more specific. I think it also sounds more polite.

Excerpt 2.7

EXCERPT FROM LESSON 5		TRANSLATION
01	C2L5: 这句话我觉得前面是问句的情况, 后面好像要换一下顺序?	I think the first part is a question, so shouldn’t we change the word order in the second part?
02	C2L6: 对, 简介问句后面要用陈述语序对吗? 那就是 where the meeting room is, 这样吗?	Right, in an indirect question we should use declarative word order, right? So it would be “where the meeting room is”, like this?
03	C2L5: 嗯, 对。那最后还是用问号对吧?	Yeah, that’s right. But we still use a question mark at the end, don’t we?
04	C2L6: 对, 问号是给“could you tell me...”这个部分的, 因为它本身是个问句。	Yes, the question mark belongs to “Could you tell me...”, because that part itself is a question.
05	C2L5: 明白了, 那完整的就是 could you tell me where the meeting room is? (C2L5 wrote down the sentence)	Got it. So the full sentence would be “Could you tell me where the meeting room is?” (C2L5 wrote down the sentence.)

06	C2L6: 对, 这样就对了。那规则就是说, 一个问句插入另一个问句, 后面需要调换位置。	Yes, that's correct. So the rule is that when one question is embedded in another, the word order needs to change.
07	C2L5: 对, 当一个问句插入另一个问句的时候, 从句用陈述语序, 以问号结尾。	Yes, when one question is embedded within another, the subordinate clause takes declarative word order, and the sentence ends with a question mark.

At times, the process of arriving at shared understanding extended beyond peer collaboration and took place within teacher-learner group interaction. Excerpt 2.8 provides one such case focusing on the use of the past perfect in a complaint email. My initial elicitation ("Is there any problem with this sentence?") was met with tentative responses, with one learner suggesting that the time order was unclear but unable to specify further. In response, I narrowed the focus by asking learners to identify the actions involved and determine which occurred earlier. As the discussion progressed, learners proposed the use of the past perfect and collectively reformulated the sentence as "because I hadn't uploaded the photos." During this process, learners contributed in different ways, with some focusing on clarifying the sequence of events and others formulating the grammatical rule. Through these successive exchanges, the class arrived at a clearer and more explicit understanding of the grammatical structure.

Excerpt 2.8

EXCERPT FROM LESSON 3		TRANSLATION
01	T: 我们看这句话: "When I contacted customer service, they refused to refund me because I didn't upload the photos." 这句话有问题吗?	Let's look at this sentence: "When I contacted customer service, they refused to refund me because I didn't upload the photos." Is there any problem with this sentence?
02	C2L1: 嗯.....感觉时间顺序有点问题?	Hmm... it feels like there's a problem with the time order?
03	T: 时间顺序哪里有问题?	What do you mean by a problem with the time order?
04	C2L1: 就是.....看不太出来哪个动作是先发生的。	Well... it's not very clear which action happened first.

05	T	很好，都有什么动作？	Good. What actions do we have in this sentence?
06	C2L2	一个是 contacted customer service，一个是 refuse to refund me，还有一个是 upload the photos。	One is “contacted customer service”，one is “refused to refund me”，and another is “upload the photos”.
07	T:	对。那哪个动作更早？	Right. So which action happened earlier?
08	C2L2 & C2L1	没 upload the photos 更早。	Not uploading the photos happened earlier.
09	T:	那如果我们想更清楚地表达“先发生的动作”，可以怎么做？	So if we want to express the earlier action more clearly, what can we do?
10	C2L6:	过去，过去完成时。	Past... past perfect?
11	C2L1:	Had done 过去的过去。	“Had done” — the past of the past.
12	T:	很好，过去完成时，用在哪个动作上？	Good. So where should we use the past perfect?
13	C2L1 & C2L2 & C2L6	Upload the photos	Upload the photos.
14	C2L1	Had not uploaded the photos	“Had not uploaded the photos.”
15	C2L6	因为 upload 是在 refuse 之前发生的	Because uploading happened before they refused.
16	C2L2	这样对吗？我写在 chat box 里了(C2L2 wrote in the chat box: When I contacted customer service, they refused to refund me because I hadn’t uploaded the photos.)	Is this correct? I’ve written it in the chat box. (C2L2 wrote in the chat box: “When I contacted customer service, they refused to refund me because I hadn’t uploaded the photos.”)
17	T:	大家看一下	Everyone, take a look.

In addition to the collaborative mode, the authoritative-responsive mode also emerged in peer interaction, as in Cycle 1. For instance, in one session, C2L4 took the lead in proposing ideas for their

group's email draft, while C2L5 responded with suggestions for improvement, demonstrating an authoritative-responsive dynamic. Some learners, such as C2L2, who appeared relatively more vocal in pair work settings, adopted a more passive role during group tasks, contributing primarily when prompted. Still, it is difficult to attribute this solely to the group work structure itself.

4.3.1.2 Learner-Initiated Adaptations: Tasks and SCOBAs in Cycle 2

Learner-adapted tasks

While many findings in this research cycle align with those from Cycle 1, two exciting new findings emerged. First, some learners personalised teacher-assigned writing tasks by modifying them to better fit their immediate needs. Second, learners engaged with SCOBAs in creative ways, moving beyond their intended role as reference tools to rework or extend them in ways that supported their own understanding.

A notable new finding in Cycle 2 was that several learners began to adapt teacher-assigned tasks to their own immediate needs. This development emerged from the third week onwards and was not anticipated in the original lesson design. Instead of following the assigned topics exactly, learners created more personally relevant versions of the tasks after obtaining permission. For example, when asked to write an inquiry email about the requirements of a presentation, C2L5 redirected the task to compose an email to a potential PhD supervisor at the University of Amsterdam. Similarly, C2L1 wrote to a lecturer at his university to ask about research opportunities, and in another lesson, both C2L1 and C2L2 modified the "lost baggage" email task. C2L1 turned it into a request to a librarian for academic resources for writing a research proposal, while C2L2 inquired about the status of her university application. These cases indicate that learners' needs could not fully be foreseeable at the outset. Although all learners had provided their learning needs in the NA session before the lessons, it appears that they developed more specific personal needs as the course progressed and actively brought them up themselves.

This study finds that learners treated teacher-assigned and learner-adapted tasks somewhat differently. In teacher-assigned tasks, they often simplified or even abandoned their initial ideas when linguistic resources were lacking. For instance, in one pair discussion (See Excerpt 2.1 below), C2L5 and C2L6 initially considered using illness as an excuse for requesting an extension, but soon abandoned the idea because they found the medical vocabulary too difficult, and instead settled on a simpler explanation. That is, they sacrificed the original meaning they wanted to express just to complete the task. In such cases, task content was constrained by linguistic limitations, reducing opportunities for learning.

Excerpt 2.1

EXCERPT FROM LESSON 3		TRANSLATION
01	C2L5: 我们想个合理的延期留有吧	<i>Let's make a good reason for the extension.</i>
02	C2L6: 不然我们说生病了吧？得了新冠怎么样？	<i>Shall we say we got sick? How about saying we caught COVID?</i>
03	C2L5: 可以，我刚也想到这个。但是好像描述生病的症状有点复杂，很多词不会啊。不然我们换个理由吧，就说作业太多无法完成怎么样？	<i>Okay, I just thought of that too. But it seems a bit complicated to describe the symptoms of being sick. There would be many unknown words. Otherwise, let's find another reason, how about we say that there is too much homework to complete?</i>
04	C2L6: 好，我觉得有道理。这个比较好说。	<i>Good, I think that makes sense. This one is easier to explain.</i>

In contrast, in learner-adapted tasks, C2L5 was more persistent in their original ideas, even when faced with linguistic challenges. While working on a self-adapted task, he struggled to express the concept of "premise" in English. However, rather than abandoning his original idea, he continued to pursue it, as shown in Excerpt 2.2. At line 03, C2L5 explained his intended meaning in L1, outlining the context in detail. Despite his limited linguistic resources, he initially used "on the top of" but quickly realized it wasn't the right phrase and sought teacher mediation to find the correct term. Through teacher guidance, he learned and incorporated "with the premise that," demonstrating that the meaning he wanted to convey took precedence over linguistic ease. This persistence in maintaining his idea, even when facing language barriers, led to more opportunities for teacher mediation. By contrast, in teacher-assigned tasks, learners tended to abandon or simplify their ideas when confronted with similar linguistic challenges, which limited opportunities for mediation and reduced the complexity of the task content.

Excerpt 2.2

EXCERPT FROM LESSON 6		TRANSLATION
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01	C2L5: 我们可以先看下这个句子吗？我觉得这里我没写好，但是我不知道要怎么改。	<i>Can we take a look at this sentence first? I feel like I didn't write it well, but I don't know how to revise it.</i>
02	T: OK. What would you like to say here?	<i>OK. What would you like to say here?</i>
03	C2L5: 在这句话之前我写的是我的一些科研经历，这里我想说的是，因为我有这些科研经历，所以我可以更快适应新的环境。但是这个的前提是我可以加入这个研究团队。但是这里我不太会说前提，而且觉得哪怕准确使用了前提，好像也没说清楚我想说的意思。 (C2L5 highlighted the sentence <u>Because I have the related research experiences, I can adjust to the new living environment and lab work very quickly on the top of joining the research team.</u>)	<i>Before this sentence, I wrote about my research experiences. What I want to say here is that, because of these research experience, I am able to adapt more quickly to new environments. However, this is predicated on the assumption that I can join this research team, but I am not sure how to express 'predicated on the assumption' in English correctly, and even if I use it accurately, it seems like it doesn't clearly communicate what I mean.</i> <i>(C2L5 highlighted the sentence <u>Because I have the related research experiences, I can adjust to the new living environment and lab work very quickly on the top of joining the research team.</u>)</i>
04	T: Do you mean if you can join the research team?	<i>Do you mean if you can join the research team?</i>
05	C2L5: Oh！对哦，我可以用条件状语从句来表达这个意思。但是我还是想知道前提条件这个怎么说？这个 on the top 可以嘛？	<i>Oh! Yes. I can use a conditional clause to express this meaning. However, I still want to know how to say 'premise.' Can 'on top of' be used?"</i>
06	T: "On the top" means "on the surface of something" or "in addition to".	<i>"On the top" means "on the surface of something" or "in addition to".</i>
07	C2L5: No, 那不是我想要的。	<i>No, that is not what I want.</i>
08	T: 你可以用 Premise 这个词。	<i>You can use "Premise".</i>

09	C2L5: 哈哈，我不认识它。	<i>Haha, I don't know it.</i>
10	T: OK. (The teacher wrote down <u>Because I have the related research experiences, I can adjust to the new living environment and lab work very quickly, with the premise that I am able to join the research team</u>)	<i>OK.</i> <i>(The teacher wrote down <u>Because I have the related research experiences, I can adjust to the new living environment and lab work very quickly, with the premise that I am able to join the research team</u>)</i>
11	C2L5: Oh...with the premise that, with the premise that ... 谢谢	<i>Oh... with the premise that, with the premise that...</i> <i>Thanks</i>

Another difference in how learners engaged with self-adapted and teacher-assigned tasks became evident in the teacher-learner tutorials. In one-on-one tutorials, feedback on teacher-assigned tasks was usually initiated by the teacher through clarification requests and then developed within teacher-led graduated CF. In other words, these tutorials were typically teacher-led. In contrast, tutorials on learner-adapted tasks more often became learner-led. For example, in Excerpt 2.2, at Lines 01, 03, and 05, C2L5 repeatedly initiated the interaction by asking for help with his writing, thereby steering the direction of the exchange rather than waiting for teacher prompts.

Closer examination of these learner-initiated tutorials revealed two common strategies: requesting proofreading and seeking approval. Still in Excerpt 2.2, C2L5 began by asking the teacher to refine his sentence, while in Excerpt 2.3 he directly sought confirmation about his use of the phrase *adjust to*. Other learners showed similar approaches. In Excerpt 2.4, C2L1 employed the proofreading strategy but extended it by pointing out the issues he had already noticed, explaining his reasoning, and clarifying the difficulties he faced so that the teacher could respond more effectively. Likewise, in Excerpt 2.5, C2L2 combined the two strategies by first asking for approval and then requesting revision.

Excerpt 2.3

EXCERPT FROM LESSON 6

TRANSLATION

01	C2L5: 还有一个问题，就是这里我说适应环境嘛，我用的是 <i>adjust to the living environment and lab work</i> . <i>Adjust to</i> 可以吗？	<i>Another question. When I write about adapting to the environment here, I used 'adjust to the living environment and lab work.' Is 'adjust to' okay?</i>
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02	T: 你可以用 adjust to 或者 adapt to.但是 , 想一想你之前写的科研经历这里的 living environment 和 lab work 之间的关系。	<i>You can use adjust to or adapt to. However, think about the relationship between the previous research experience you wrote earlier and the living environment and lab work.</i>
03	C2L5: Em...好像跟 living environment 没有关系。	<i>Em... It seems to have no relation to the environment.</i>
04	T: 很好。句子写一下。	<i>Very good. Write down the sentence.</i>
05	C2L5: OK. (C2L5 wrote down <u>I might adapt to the lab work quickly if I can join the research team.</u>)	<i>OK. (C2L5 wrote down <u>I might adapt to the lab work quickly if I can join the research team.</u>)</i>
06	T: Where is the research experience?	<i>Where is the research experience?</i>
07	C2L5: 哦对 ! Because...em... Due to 吧 (C2L5 wrote down Due to my previous research experience, <u>I might adapt to the lab work quickly if I can join the research team.</u>)	<i>Oh, Yes ! Because...em...Due to. C2L5 wrote down Due to my previous research experience, <u>I might adapt to the lab work quickly if I can join the research team.</u>)</i>

Excerpt 2.4

EXCERPT FROM LESSON 6

TRANSLATION

01	C2L1: 麻烦你能不能帮我看下这两个句子之间的连接。我感觉他们除了因果关系，是不是还可以有其他更自然的关系，因为后面又接了一个因果关系的句子，我觉得一直这样重复不好，但是又没有好的修改方法？	<i>Could you please help me look at the connection between these two sentences? I feel that besides a causal relationship, could there be other more natural relationships between them? Because the sentence that follows also has a causal relationship, I don't think repeating this pattern would be good, but I can't find a good way to modify it.</i>
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02	T: 好。你先把在这段里面所有你想表达的意思，单独写下来，我们一起来重新规划一下。	<i>Sure. First, write down separately all the points you want to express in this section, and we will plan them together again.</i>
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Excerpt 2.5

EXCERPT FROM LESSON 10		TRANSLATION
01	C2L2: 我想问问我这里使用 have waited 对不对。I have waited for almost three weeks.	<i>I want to ask if the use of 'have waited' here is correct. I have waited for almost three weeks.</i>
02	T: 对，到现在为止你依然在等，对吧？	<i>Yes, you are still waiting up to now, right?</i>
03	C2L2: 对，但我前面写了这句“我是三周前申请”，我觉得有点重复了。怎么办？	<i>Yes, but it is a bit repetitive as I have wrote the sentence that I applied three weeks ago. What can I do?</i>
04	T: 想想怎么合并呢？	<i>Think about how to merge them?</i>
05	C2L2 没想到，哈哈。	<i>No idea.</i>
06	T: Try to use 'since'.	<i>Try to use 'since'</i>
07	C2L2: Oh! Em...I have waited for almost three weeks since...since...I made the...application.	<i>Oh! Em... I have waited for almost three weeks since...since...I made the...application.</i>
08	T: <u>Good.</u>	<u><i>Good</i></u>

These examples demonstrate that in learner-adapted tasks, learners assumed a more agentive role in tutorials. By initiating interaction and employing strategies such as requesting proofreading and seeking approval, they positioned themselves as dialogic and active participants in the feedback process, thereby engaging in co-regulation rather than relying solely on teacher direction.

Finally, when the writing products of these two task types are compared, their length differed. Texts produced for learner-adapted tasks were generally longer than those for teacher-assigned tasks. Close inspection of the artefacts shows more detailed statements, elaboration,

and reasoning in the former. For example, C2L1's emails for learner-adapted tasks in Lessons 8 and 10 were around 500 words, compared with 200–300 words in other emails. The increased length created more opportunities to use the L2 and to request and receive feedback, thereby supporting development. It also points to greater willingness to write, likely because the adapted tasks were closely tied to learners' immediate academic concerns. These findings suggest that when learners have the flexibility to personalize tasks according to their needs, they become more interactive, which promotes more opportunities for meaningful language use and contributes to greater L2 development.

Creative engagement with SCOBAs

Another surprising finding in Cycle 2 was that three learners engaged with SCOBAs in creative ways that went beyond their intended use as reference tools only. Rather than simply consulting the provided charts, they took the initiative to rework or extend them in ways that reflected their own understanding and emerging needs. Two examples below illustrate this process.

The first example came from C2L4, who demonstrated initiative in the second week of the course. After Lesson 4, he produced his own written summary of the tense rules, drawing directly on the grammatical SCOBAs used in class. What made this distinctive was that he annotated the rules in his first language (Chinese), added example sentences in English, and sketched timelines to illustrate the temporal relations between events. He then approached me to request feedback, noting that he was unsure about the accuracy of his summary. This example suggests that C2L4 was not simply consulting the SCOBAs but actively transforming them into a personalised artefact that combined L1 and L2 resources to support his consolidation of the target structures. An excerpt from his learner-created summary is shown in Figure 3 below.

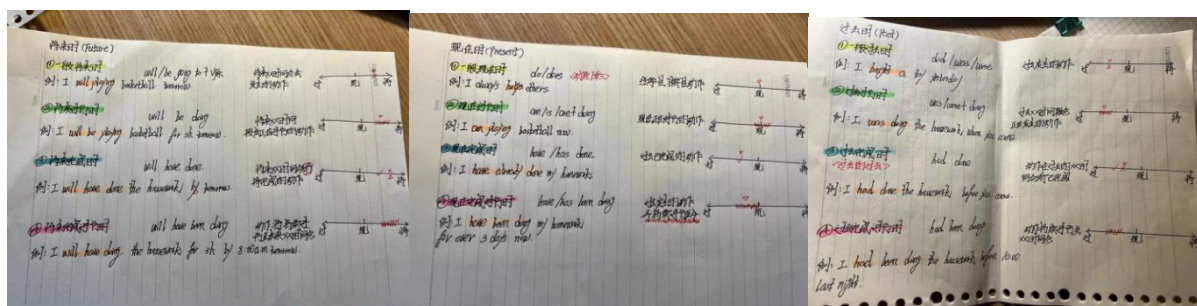


Figure 3 Learner-created summary of tense rules combining Chinese annotations and English examples (C2L4)

The second example occurred during a post-task activity in which learners were asked to review and summarise the grammatical SCOBAs. While most pairs limited their work to a verbal explanation of

the teacher-provided chart, C2L1 and C2L2 went further by adapting the material into a different format. The original SCOBA (see Figure 4) presented the rules for the use of *wish* in the form of a detailed chart with explanations and model sentences. C2L1 and C2L2 simplified this input by stripping away the lengthy descriptions and focusing instead on the core temporal contrasts. They then reorganised the rules into a visual timeline (see Figure 5), using coloured blocks and arrows to represent present and past regrets. In doing so, they transformed an abstract rule-based chart into a schematic representation that highlighted the time relations more directly. Finally, they used this adapted version as a reference in their oral presentation to the class, demonstrating how the visual tool supported both their own conceptual grasp and their ability to communicate the rules to others.

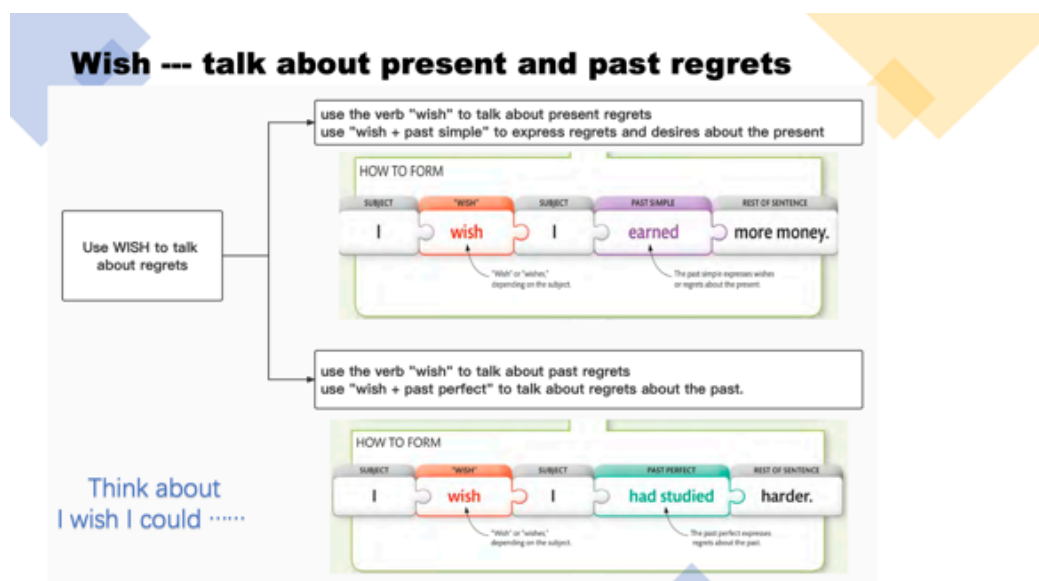


Figure 4 Teacher-provided SCOBA on the use of wish (present and past regrets).

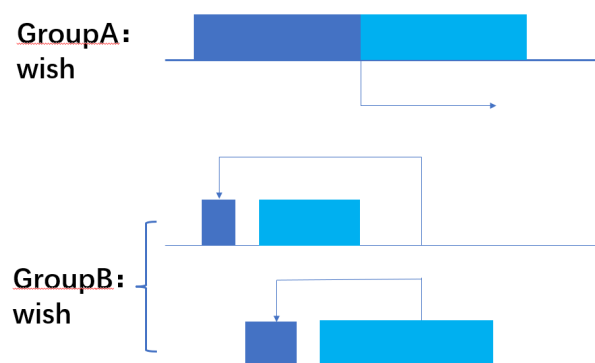


Figure 5 Learner-adapted version of the SCOBA on wish (C2L1 & C2L2).

Overall, these examples indicate that in Cycle 2 learners took a more agentic role in their engagement with the SCOBAs than Cycle 1 learners. Rather than treating them as fixed reference materials, they

reworked the SCOBAs in personalised ways, either by creating new artefacts or by reshaping the original design. Such engagement illustrates learners' recycling of the tools as a means of consolidating their understanding and communicating it to others.

4.3.2. Findings from semi-structured interview data in Cycle 2

4.3.2.1 Theme 1: Reframing writing development as multi-dimensional growth

Learners in Cycle 2 continued to describe their development in writing as extending across multiple dimensions, reinforcing the theme identified in Cycle 1. While many of the same areas of growth re-emerged, their reflections also introduced new emphases that extended the scope of this theme. Learners again emphasised progress in structuring and logically connecting their writing, describing greater awareness of how to organise emails into coherent messages. Several participants contrasted their earlier tendency to write in a scattered fashion with a new orientation to order and clarity. For example, C2L6 commented that before the course her emails were written by simply "thinking of something and then writing it down, (Extract 2-1)" whereas afterwards she explained that she would first consider "what order and structure could express the meaning in the most logical way. (Extract 2-2)" Such reflections mirror those of Cycle 1 learners, but in this cohort, they were sometimes framed more broadly, as improvements in "clarity" or "organisation," rather than detailed accounts of cohesion at sentence or paragraph level.

Politeness also remained an important area of pragmatic competence development. As in Cycle 1, participants explained that they had moved beyond equating politeness with the single word *please*, and now had a broader repertoire of expressions. C2L2 reflected that she now knew several different ways to soften requests, and C2L5 explained that he had become more confident adjusting his tone to the situation. These accounts suggest that pragmatic awareness continued to be shaped by the course, enabling learners to make more context-sensitive choices in email communication.

In grammar, participants again pointed to increased ability to notice and correct their own mistakes, while recognising continuing struggles with complex structures. C2L4 described how he now tended to check his own drafts more carefully for "the small mistakes I often made before, (Extract 2-3)" while another (C2L6) admitted she still lacked confidence with advanced tenses. This suggests a situation similar to Cycle 1. That is, learners valued their progress in self-monitoring but also acknowledged the limits of their grammatical knowledge.

Lexical development, however, was perceived less uniformly than before. Some learners reported richer vocabulary and felt they could use more varied expressions, while others doubted whether the course had changed their word use at all. C2L3 reflected: "*I didn't feel my vocabulary grew much*

because, for writing emails, I just needed to focus on getting the message across clearly. I didn't need to use any fancy new words. (Extract 2-4)" These comments indicate that, in Cycle 2, learners often equated vocabulary development solely with acquiring new words, and thus judged their progress as limited. This stands in contrast to Cycle 1, where vocabulary growth was described more positively and often included the refinement of word choice.

Beyond these continuities, two new dimensions of development emerged in Cycle 2. The first was development of writing fluency. Several participants described moving from a slow, translation-heavy way of composing to writing more smoothly and quickly. C2L4 compared his earlier writing to "squeezing toothpaste", where every sentence felt laborious to construct, but after the course he was able to write "with more ease and flow." Such metaphors captured the sense that writing itself had become less effortful, with learners experiencing greater confidence and fluidity in expressing ideas.

The other new dimension was the recognition of transferable skills. Learners reported that the practices they developed in the course extended beyond English writing. C2L1 explained that he had begun creating his own SCOBAs to help him summarise content in other subjects, after finding them useful in this course: *"I like doing summaries, and I found it practical to create a SCOBAs to help me summarise by myself (Extract 2-5)."* C2L5 described how collaborative email tasks had helped her become "more capable of cooperating with others," highlighting specific strategies such as raising concerns, making suggestions, and persuading peers, skills he anticipated would be valuable for his future PhD studies abroad. These reflections show that learners saw the impact of the course not only in linguistic terms but also in broader academic and interpersonal competencies.

Across these responses, the theme of reframing writing development as multi-dimensional growth remained central in Cycle 2, but with notable shifts in emphasis. Learners continued to highlight discursive, pragmatic, grammatical and lexical development, while also extending the theme to include writing fluency and transferable skills. Their reflections suggest that the experience of the course encouraged them to see writing development not as confined to language alone but as part of a wider trajectory of academic and personal growth.

4.3.2.2. Theme 2: Mediation as perceived driver of learning

Learners in Cycle 2 mirrored the experiences of those in Cycle 1, reaffirming the central role that mediation played in their English writing development. Both object mediation and other mediation emerged as key factors in their learning experience.

Sub-theme 1 – Valuing tools that made writing manageable.

Compared with Cycle 1, Cycle 2 revealed an expanded range of tools and more differentiated ways in which learners engaged with them. In addition to the structural and pragmatic SCOBAs that had been valued previously, new SCOBAs were introduced in this cycle to address grammatical knowledge and focus group participation. Learners reported that these resources provided clear guidance while leaving sufficient space for independent exploration. The grammatical SCOBAs, in particular, were described as a clear and straightforward, enabling learners to consult them and work out problems on their own rather than waiting for explicit teacher instruction. As C2L1 explained,

The SCOBAs for grammatical knowledge were not very complex. Sometimes, when we encountered grammatical issues that we were unsure about, we referred to these SCOBAs. They not only gave us the necessary input on the grammar rules but also allowed us to explore and understand these rules independently, without direct teacher instruction (C2L1, Extract 2-6).

Similarly, the SCOBAs designed for focus group participation facilitated learners' engagement with the NA Session. For many, this was the first time for them to take part in a focus group, and the visualised, step-by-step representation helped them navigate the process with greater confidence. As one participant commented that "[...] I knew what we needed to discuss, and more importantly, I became to know what I could do step by step" (C1L2, Extract 2-7). In this way, the newly added SCOBAs not only supported linguistic development but also facilitated learners' participation in unfamiliar classroom activities, empowering them to take greater ownership of their learning.

Writing samples were again viewed as helpful resources, but learners in Cycle 2 expressed a clearer consensus about how they should be used. Unlike in Cycle 1, where views were divided, participants in this cycle consistently emphasised that samples were most beneficial when consulted after producing their own drafts. They felt that post-task comparison enabled them to identify gaps between their writing and the model without limiting opportunities for authentic language use. As C2L3 explained, comparing her draft with the sample *"made me realise the differences and think about how to improve writing"* (C2L3, Extract 2-8).

However, in contrast to Cycle 1, where videos were highly regarded as an effective object mediation tool, learners in Cycle 2 had more mixed views. They acknowledged the effectiveness of mediation via watching videos, but to varying extents. For instance, C2L6 reflected on the differences between his expressions and those in the video, which helped him improve both his English speaking and writing. In contrast, C2L3 expressed that she merely went through the new vocabulary introduced in the videos,

which, however, was rarely used in the subsequent writing tasks. Another participant, C2L2, further explained the limited role of videos for her as follow.

I think watching videos just made me familiarize with the topic. Learning via watching video is more passive, because it just provided information for me, and I just accept without any reflection and thinking. Discussion would be more proactive (C2L2, Extract, 2-9).

From these responses, it seems that participants exercised their learner agency in how they approached the learning activities, making choices on how to engage with the videos. This variation in approach led to different perceptions of the mediational function of videos. However, it cannot be denied that watching videos fulfilled the basic purpose of familiarising learners with the context and relevant vocabulary.

Additionally, another notable finding was the use of sample needs as tools during the NA session. Learners reported that the list of potential needs helped them clarify their own needs, especially when they lacked prior experience living abroad. As one learner expressed, *"I haven't lived abroad before, so I didn't have a clear idea of the situations I need to communicate with others. Others' needs provided a direction for me to think about my own needs"* (C3L5, Extract 2-9). This indicates that the provision of sample needs served as a referencing tool, aiding learners in identifying and articulating their personal needs.

Sub-theme 2 – Appreciating teacher feedback as scaffolding.

In Cycle 2, all of the learners also emphasised the importance of teacher CF, particularly its role in promoting self-reflection and independent thinking. This was in line with findings from Cycle 1, where participants pointed out that implicit feedback encouraged them to engage more deeply with their writing. Most participants in both cycles shared the view that having errors underlined, without direct correction, pushed them to think critically about their mistakes and take ownership of their writing process. This stood in contrast with their previous learning experiences, where teacher feedback was rarely provided, let alone graduated CF. Instead, the teacher CF they typically received were fixed, explicit, and direct.

Beyond this continuity, it is interesting to notice a new point raised by some learners in Cycle 2 about the mediational role of teacher CF. They noted that implicit written CF provided for collaborative writing products spurred deeper discussions on errors and related linguistic knowledge among the peers. For instance, C2L1 recalled that when the teacher underlined errors in their collaborative work,

the group discussions naturally gravitated towards these errors, prompting them to engage in metalinguistic explanations. This demonstrates that written CF served more than just as a corrective tool, but as a catalyst for collaborative discussing of related language knowledge. As learners gathered to unpack the reasons behind the errors and actively drew on their own resources to figure out the problem, the CF transformed into a springboard for extended peer interaction, allowing them to collaboratively explore the linguistic intricacies of the task. Besides, I have an additional interpretation regarding this. The written CF stimulated learner autonomy, as learners took the initiative, made decisions, and collaborated with their peers to overcome writing challenges. In other words, feedback is no longer a one-way process, but it empowers learners by giving them more agency, helping them engage in language learning more independently.

In addition, some learners euphemistically expressed that they would appreciate more teacher feedback for an additional round of task repetition. For instance, one participant commented:

I really appreciated the extra written feedback the teacher gave me on my emails, though sometimes I felt a bit embarrassed because it added to the teacher's workload. What I want to say is that having written feedback first allowed me to reflect, and then the oral feedback gradually guided me step by step. After revising, receiving clear written feedback again made the whole process progressive, and I could clearly feel my own improvement (C2L1, Extract, 2-10).

Another learner echoed this statement by sharing that

After I talked with some classmates, I found out that some of them revised their writing after getting oral feedback from the teacher, then submitted it again for written feedback. I felt like I should have done that too—it seemed like it would have really helped improve my writing and made the whole learning process more complete (C2L6, Extract, 2-11).

These responses reflect learners' desire for more extensive feedback opportunities. Specifically, they preferred to first receive implicit written feedback in the form of underlined indications of errors, followed by oral feedback for clarification. After revising their work, they hoped to receive explicit written feedback on the revised version. This finding further provides evidence that learners valued teacher CF, but beyond that, it demonstrates that learners see the importance of iterative and developmental feedback process, and their own English writing developmental process. It also

suggests that learners were taking an active role in shaping how they receive feedback, aiming for deeper engagement and more meaningful improvement in their English writing.

Sub-theme 3 – learning with and from peers.

Consistent with Cycle 1, peer collaborative talk was valued by all learners in Cycle 2 as an important form of support. They shared that they learned from each other by sharing ideas and linguistic resources, which encouraged meaning negotiation. Seeking and providing CF was the most frequently mentioned form of collaborative dialogue. For most of the learners, this feedback process often resulted in discussions around writing content, grammar, vocabulary, coherence, and cohesion.

A notable extension in Cycle 2 was learners' stronger emphasis on language-focused discussion within collaborative dialogue. Several participants talked about how their group discussions moved beyond deciding what to write to negotiating how to phrase meanings appropriately. That is, they prioritised refining their language use, especially in crafting appropriate tone and phrasing with correct grammar and sentence structures, over merely completing the writing task. One participant's response could well demonstrate it as follows.

We often focused more on the “how to write?” question in an email. For example, in the last lesson, we struggled with the ending sentence in the email. We had different sentence structures to express the similar meaning. In most cases, it was quick for us to agree on what to write, the content or meaning of the sentences, but we discussed a lot of how to write it. I mean the way to express the meaning (C2L1, Extract 2-12).

Another participant further supported this as follows.

It was not just about getting ideas down, but making sure that each sentence conveyed the exactly “feeling” we want to express and the correct grammar. We spent more time discussing how to phrase things in a polite, correct, and natural way, rather than just finishing the task quickly (C2L2, Extract 2-13).

According to these learners, they gained such languaging opportunities not only in collaborative writing tasks; rather, also in the newly added collaborative revision tasks. Learners reported that they mainly communicated about the potential errors of grammar, and sometimes of politeness and writing logics with their peers. This finding echoes with findings from classroom observation, where more LREs were found in collaborative revision tasks than collaborative writing tasks.

These responses suggest that learners were attentive to both meaning-focused and form-focused aspects of writing. They also demonstrate an important shift in how learners approached collaborative writing tasks, where the focus is not merely on completing the writing task or generating content, but on a more nuanced process of discussing and refining language to convey meaning with precision and appropriateness. By emphasising the “how” of writing, learners engaged in deeper cognitive processes, where the construction of meaning became central to their writing tasks. This shift may point to a growing metalinguistic awareness, with learners becoming more conscious of the choices they make in terms of pragmatics, grammar, vocabulary, coherence, and cohesion.

4.3.2.3. Theme 3: Positive emotions shaping learning experiences.

All the participants in Cycle 2 also expressed generally positive emotions towards the writing course, echoing several findings identified in Cycle 1. They again described feeling respected due to the learner-centred design of the course, particularly in how needs analysis, feedback, and materials responded to their progress. As C2L2 explained, “The grammatical SCOBAs were not pre-determined. They were provided based on our common errors [...]. Really appreciated such respect” (C2L2, Extract 2-14). Similarly, a sense of achievement was derived from producing written artefacts, identifying errors, and mastering new expressions, while enjoyment was often linked to the authenticity of tasks, which contrasted with test-oriented drills: “The exercises for the English tests killed the enjoyment ... I really enjoyed the tasks related to my real life in the future” (C2L6, Extract 2-15).

Beyond these familiar findings, Cycle 2 also revealed new emotional dimensions. One was a feeling of self-reliance, particularly associated with the SCOBAs for focus group participation. This positive emotional response emerged as learners became more confident in navigating the learning tools independently. Learners claimed that the SCOBAs used during the NA session served more functions than just mediation; it acted as an early introduction to SCOBAs before the first formal lesson. This preliminary exposure allowed them to familiarize themselves with the structure and purpose of using SCOBAs, laying a foundation for subsequent lessons. As one learner expressed,

It (SCOBAs for focus group participation) made me feel more independent. I became familiar with the learning tools early on, which made me feel prepared and confident for the upcoming lessons (C2L5, Extract 2-16).

Another learner expressed that “I really appreciate that the teacher let me experience using the SCOBAs before the classes began” (C2L3, Extract 2-17). These reflections indicate that early exposure to SCOBAs positively influence their emotional readiness for subsequent lessons, which build a

foundation of confidence and might reduce anxiety, contributing to a more positive learning experience.

A second new finding was a strong sense of belonging, arising from opportunities to contribute directly to the course. Some learners appreciated that the teacher allowed them to modify the writing tasks according to their preferences and provided feedback on additional submissions outside of regular assignments, such as C1L4's summary of tenses and C1L1's extra email practice. What stood out even more was the teacher seriously reflected on how they acted in learning activities and made use of learners' written output, which then led to adjustment of the teaching approach and content. For example, C2L1 recalled that "I was glad that you added the new activity of re-do the SCOBAs after Jiaxin and I adapted the SCOBAs provided. I felt so proud that I could contribute something to the classroom" (C2L1, Extract 2-18).

I interpret this sense of belonging as a representation of learners' active involvement in shaping the course, which empowered them to feel valued and acknowledged, and thus a sense of belonging. It is important to note that this collaborative dynamic between the teacher and the learners went beyond a learner-centred nature, evolving towards a more learner-directed one where students felt that their voices and actions mattered. By contributing to the course content and classroom activities, learners were not just passive recipients of instruction, but co-creators of the learning experience. This mutual respect and agency fostered a deeper connection to the course, enhancing their sense of belonging within the learning community.

4.3.2.4. Theme 4: Perceived challenges marking learning experiences.

Although some challenges from Cycle 1 persisted, such as uncertainty about advanced grammar and frustration with uneven participation in group tasks, learners in Cycle 2 offered new perspectives. In particular, silence during collaborative writing was not always explained by shyness or lack of confidence. Some participants viewed speaking less as a way to keep the task efficient, avoiding unnecessary complications when the group was already progressing smoothly. One learner explained, "I didn't feel the need to speak up during the task because everything was progressing smoothly. Adding more opinions might have complicated things, so I stayed quiet unless something crucial came up" (C2L3, Extract 2-19). Another learner connected silence to task simplicity, noting that fewer contributions were needed when the content itself was straightforward (C2L6, Extract 2-20). These reflections show that silence could be a considered choice linked to task management, rather than disengagement.

The 6 learners in this cycle also reported three new challenges in this cycle, which includes feeling underprepared for NA session and collaborative writing tasks, uncertainty in preserving author intent, and the confusion caused by the format of SCOBAs. These challenges, to varying degrees, impacted learners' overall experience in the course.

First, students faced the challenge of feeling underprepared to participate in the NA session due to insufficient time for reflecting on their learning needs and reviewing relevant materials. As C2L4 suggested, if the sample needs and SCOBAs of focus group could be provided before the NA session, he could have made better preparation. He expressed,

When I participated in the NA session, I felt both excited and anxious. I had never participated in this kind of activity before. The teacher prepared a lot of materials, and I spent too much time reviewing them, ending up not clearly expressing my own needs (C2L4, Extract 2-21).

This response was echoed by that of another participant, who said that

If I had materials like other's needs and guidelines on how to participate in the NA session, I could have reviewed them in advance and prepared more thoroughly to express my needs during the session (C2L3, Extract 2-22).

These responses suggest that while the learners appreciated the importance of the SCOBAs provided and the sample needs, they still felt underprepared due to the insufficient preparation time. That is, when they were not given enough time to reflect on the provided materials, they might struggle to fully understand them, and thus they could not use them effectively to articulate their authentic needs, leaving them feeling unprepared and less confident in their contributions.

In a very similar vein, some learners also made a request for more individual preparation time for the collaborative writing tasks in the main task stage. One learner remarked,

If we had more time to prepare individually before starting the group writing, I would feel more ready to contribute ideas. Sometimes, during the collaborative writing session, I felt rushed and wasn't able to organize my thoughts clearly before we started discussing as a group (C2L6, Extract 2-23).

I would argue that insufficient preparation time led to a limited understanding of the tasks and materials, which in turn left learners lacking the confidence and strategies to participate fully. As a result, they became more dependent on teacher or peer support rather than relying on themselves, thereby diminishing their sense of agency.

The second challenge pointed out during the interviews is related to the newly added collaborative revision tasks. One participant raised his concern, which was confirmed by other two participants. C2L6 said that “I was not sure whether the email still met the author’s intent after I had revised it, as I didn’t have any chance to communicate with the author” (C2L6, Extract 67). That is, he revised the teacher provided email and did not have a chance to see if he changed something critical to the original meaning. Indeed, as a teacher, I do not think it is a very serious problem, because people cannot always have the same interpretation, and thus, there is a need for further clarifications in authentic communications. Yet, this reflection shows the development of metacognitive awareness, as he was not passively making basic changes or simply using fancy words and complicated grammar to do the revision but was actively conserving how the edits might affect the overall message. In other words, both focus-on-form and focus-on-meaning were achieved.

4.3.3. Teacher reflection and pedagogical adjustments

After completing the teaching programme in Cycle 2, I did not move immediately to the next round of teaching and data collection. Instead, as in Cycle 1, I took time to reflect carefully on the findings that had emerged and to engage further with the literature. Overall, my strongest impression from this cycle was the extent to which learners demonstrated a sense of ownership over the course (e.g., adapting SCOBAs, tailoring tasks to their needs, initiating additional feedback and resubmissions). This development was both encouraging and rewarding for me as a teacher, and it led me to consider how subsequent course design could build more systematically on learners’ agency. The purpose of this reflection, therefore, was not limited to evaluate the effectiveness of the adjustments made after Cycle 1, but also to explore how the course could be further revised to provide greater space for learner participation and co-construction. Since the adjustment to task sequencing in Cycle 2 appeared to work well in practice, I made no further modifications in this respect, and my reflections here therefore focus on task selection and task implementation.

The first area of reflection and adjustment focused on task selection, specifically the process of conducting the CNA. In Cycle 2, the CNA process was strengthened through the introduction of a SCOPA on focus group participation and the provision of sample needs. Learners evaluated these resources positively, as they offered clearer guidance and made it easier for them to articulate their needs. At the same time, however, findings suggest that the addition of these materials created a new

difficulty. Because learners encountered them for the first time in class, much of the focus group time was spent reading and trying to understand the resources before meaningful discussion could begin. This reduced the depth and clarity of the needs they were able to express. Reflecting on this, I realised that learners needed the opportunity to engage with the materials in advance so that the classroom time could be devoted to discussion rather than comprehension. My adjustment, therefore, was to provide the SCOBAs and sample needs before the CNA session, so that learners could prepare their ideas individually in advance. In addition, I adjusted the CNA procedure itself by introducing a collaborative step. Instead of only reporting their own needs, learners would compare, negotiate, and synthesise their views into a joint task list. This task list would then serve as the foundation for task design, ensuring that selection was not only responsive to learners' needs but also co-constructed. In this way, CNA moved to a more collaborative process, encouraging both ownership and shared responsibility for the course design. In addition, I hoped that the process of generating a shared list of needs could also function as an authentic task in its own right, providing early experience of collaboration even though no L2 output was required.

The second area of reflection and adjustment focused on the main task stage, particularly the collaborative writing tasks. Learners in Cycle 2 reported that they often felt underprepared when moving directly into collaborative writing tasks, as they had insufficient time to reflect individually on the task and the supporting materials. This left some learners less confident and less able to contribute actively, which in turn might reduce the potential for balanced participation. Insights from the literature on task preparation helped me interpret this challenge more clearly. I learned from the studies on pre-task planning that giving learners sufficient planning time allows them to offload some of the processing demands of the task, leading to more confident and effective engagement during performance. From a SCT perspective, I think such preparation time can also be seen as providing learners with space to moving towards self-regulate before entering collaborative interaction. My adjustment, therefore, was to extend the individual preparation time before collaborative writing. By allowing learners to generate and organise their ideas in advance, I aimed to enhance their readiness and confidence, so that the subsequent collaborative work could draw more fully on each learner's contribution.

The next area of reflection and adjustment concerned the use of SCOBAs in the post-task stage. In Cycle 2, I asked learners to work in small groups to discuss how to explain selected grammar points using the SCOBAs, and then to give a brief oral presentation of their summary. This activity encouraged learners to engage more actively with the SCOBAs rather than treating them as static reference sheets. Building on the observations discussed earlier, I recognised that several learners had taken the initiative to modify the SCOBAs to suit their own understanding, for instance, by simplifying structures

or reorganising information visually. This finding highlighted for me that course refinement should not rely solely on top-down planning. Learners' own initiatives can offer valuable insights for ongoing improvement. This prompted me to integrate learner adaptation of SCOBAs into the post-task stage as a structured activity, allowing students to consolidate their understanding by reworking the tools and sharing their outcomes with peers.

The final area of reflection and adjustment related to learners' adaptation of tasks. During Cycle 2, I noticed that students were able to articulate very specific needs and sometimes suggested very concrete tasks they hoped to complete. Importantly, these needs were not always apparent at the outset of the course but often emerged gradually as learners engaged with the lessons. On several occasions, learners even took the initiative to adapt tasks in order to align them more closely with their own purposes. This made me reflect on the dynamic nature of learner needs and the potential for task design to be co-constructed rather than predetermined. While the CNA at the start of the course remained valuable, it became clear that learners' authentic needs could evolve over time and that responding to these emerging needs could deepen their sense of ownership. At the same time, I interpreted their willingness to adapt tasks as evidence of strong motivation to learn and an eagerness to engage with the course on their own terms. Rather than remaining passive recipients, these learners positioned themselves as active contributors to the learning process, taking responsibility not only for their individual progress but also for shaping the direction of the course. My adjustments, therefore, were twofold. First, when assigning individual writing as post-task activities, I provided multiple task options so that learners could select the one most relevant to their personal goals. Second, I opened space for learners to adapt tasks themselves, provided that they informed me in advance. These adjustments aimed to recognise learners' willingness and capacity to contribute actively to the course and to channel that initiative into a structured process that supported both individual needs and collective learning.

4.4. Cycle 3 – The implementation of the further adapted task-mediation online writing course

4.4.1. Findings from video-recorded classroom interactional data

In Cycle 3, most of the classroom interactional data pointed to microgenetic growth, particularly in linguistic and pragmatic competence, consistent with the progress seen in earlier cycles. This growth was manifested in learners' increasing independence, as evidenced by the general decrease in the amount of scaffolding required over the course. Interaction patterns also remained largely consistent, with peer talk mostly characterised by active collaboration and teacher-learner interactions following

an authoritative-responsive pattern. As in the previous cycle, learner-initiated interaction was again evident in feedback tutorials, reflecting learners' growing agency in guiding the corrective feedback process. Based on these recurring patterns, it can be further confirmed that the task-mediated online writing course supported L2 development regardless of the specific learner group involved. Alongside these familiar developments, however, new patterns emerged in this cycle. In particular, some learners began to generate self-simplified metalinguistic summaries, which allowed them to consolidate teacher feedback and make it more accessible for peer uptake. Furthermore, the role of L1 expanded beyond its previously observed cognitive and interactional functions, taking on an additional role as a form of emotional support during task engagement.

4.4.1.1. Non-linear Trajectories of Learner Development

While both linguistic and pragmatic growth was evident, the learning process was not always linear. For example, C3L5 initially required Level 7 CF strategy to address an error involving a non-restrictive relative clause. That is, I had to provide a detailed metalinguistic explanation before the learner could correct the error. In the subsequent session, she demonstrated progress, needing only clarification request (Level 1) to recognize a similar error. Despite this improvement, C3L5 later reverted to needing more explicit CF (Level 6) when faced with the same issue in a later session. Similarly, another learner, C3L6 experienced a comparable trajectory with verb tense errors. In an early session, she needed CF at level 6 to correctly use the present perfect tense but later required much less support to address similar issues. However, as the course progressed, she once again needed higher levels of CF, reflecting the fluctuating nature of their progress.

Although this non-linear progression in learner performance was not explicitly observed in previous cycles, I would like to note that this does not necessarily mean it was absent. I do not attribute this non-linear progression to the adaptations made in the third cycle. Instead, I would argue that it appears to be an inherent aspect of the learning process, independent of the changes introduced between cycles. One possible explanation is that, in previous research cycles, learners might not encounter the same types of errors more than once or twice, limiting opportunities for this kind of fluctuation in feedback needs to manifest. These two learners' trajectories demonstrated the cyclical and dynamic nature of learning, where progress can be followed by temporary regressions, requiring varying levels of support at different stages.

4.4.1.2 Emergence of learner-produced metalinguistic summaries

In Cycle 3, some learners began to generate simplified metalinguistic summaries during classroom interaction. These learner-produced summaries were often articulated in their first language and

served to condense teacher feedback into concise rules. By doing so, learners were able to consolidate their own understanding of complex grammatical structures and, in some cases, make the feedback more accessible for peers.

In Lesson 5, for example, when I pointed out a problem in the indirect question *“Could you please tell me what’s the dress code?”*, the grammatical explanation was given in Chinese as *“在这里我们需要使用陈述语序，因为它是一个间接疑问句”* (“we need to use declarative sentence order because it is an indirect question”). Instead of repeating this abstract rule, C3L2 reformulated it into a simpler version: *“哦，我需要把动词放到后面去是吧？”* (“Oh! It needs to move the verb to the back, doesn’t it?”). Later, in Lesson 10, when facing another indirect question (*“I will be grateful if you could advise me on how could I get my suitcase back”*), he again drew on her simplified summary, saying: *“动词放到后面去，交换主语和谓语动词的位置”* (“Move the verb to the back, exchange the positions of the subject and the verb”). In both cases, he condensed the more abstract metalinguistic explanation into a concrete and memorable procedural rule, which he could recall and apply independently.

This example demonstrates that learners were not simply memorising grammatical rules but actively working to make sense of them. By transforming the abstract explanation into a simplified and procedural rule, they showed an effort to understand the concept and reshape it into a resource that supported their own use. These simplified summaries made the rules easier to recall and apply in practice, and also more communicable to others.

4.4.1.3. The Multifaceted Role of L1 in Cycle 3

In Cycle 3, L1 revealed an additional dimension to its role, functioning as a form of emotional support. Learners drew on L1 to express frustration, seek reassurance, inject humour, offer reassurance, and lighten the atmosphere during collaborative writing tasks and off-task conversations. These exchanges often helped to reduce frustration, ease tension, and maintain a positive group communication.

For example, during the revision stage of a collaborative writing task, C3L3 said in Chinese, *“我觉得越改越有问题”* (“I feel like the more we revise, the more confusing this sentence gets”), voicing her frustration with the difficulty of the task. C3L4 responded reassuringly, *“没关系，一会回来看看。生活处处有惊喜，哈哈”* (“It’s fine. Let’s come back to it later. Life is full of unexpected turns. Ha-ha”), which seemed to comfort her and prevent the anxiety from escalating. In another case, C3L4 remarked,

“我觉得我们写的有点幼稚·哈哈” (“I think what we are writing sounds a bit childish, ha-ha”), and C3L6 lightheartedly replied, “那就先幼稚点吧·以后再成熟也不迟” (“Let’s be childish for now, plenty of time to sound mature later”). This exchange injected humour into the task and helped the group continue in a more relaxed and cooperative spirit. Similarly, when C3L1 joked, “我的大脑罢工了·我得点一杯咖啡外卖” (“My brain’s not working anymore, I think I need to order a coffee delivery”), C3L2 quipped, “咖啡能续命·但不一定能救大脑·哈哈” (“Coffee can keep us alive, but I’m not sure if it’ll help our brains, ha-ha”), providing a humorous break that allowed both learners to momentarily disengage from cognitive strain before refocusing on the task. These examples suggest that L1 mediated not only the cognitive aspects of task performance but also the emotional climate of the classroom. By voicing frustration and receiving reassurance, or by introducing humour at moments of tension, learners used L1 as a tool for emotional regulation. In doing so, they helped sustain motivation and created a supportive environment for collaborative learning.

4.4.2. Findings from semi-structured interview data in Cycle 3

Learners’ perceived improvement, learners’ perceived learning through interaction, and positive emotional responses were still three clearly reported themes in Cycle 3. However, in this cycle, learners did not share much about their challenges; instead, they proposed some suggestions for future courses, which became the new themes in this research cycle.

4.4.2.1. Theme 1: Reframing writing development as multi-dimensional growth

Learners in Cycle 3 continued to describe their development in writing as multi-dimensional, reinforcing the theme identified in earlier cycles. As in Cycles 1 and 2, they reported clearer structuring and more coherent organisation of emails, greater confidence in using polite forms appropriately, enhanced self-monitoring of grammar, and increased fluency in composing messages. These continuities suggest that the perceived impact of the task-mediated course was robust across cohorts, as learners consistently framed their writing progress in terms of discursive, pragmatic, grammatical, and fluency-related dimensions.

Within these continuities, however, learners in Cycle 3 added new emphases that refined the theme. One of the most notable was an expanded sense of pragmatic competence that went beyond developing a repertoire of polite expressions to include awareness of audience. C3L3 explicitly pointed out that she now thought more carefully about “who I was writing to and what kind of tone was suitable” (Extract 3-1) while C3L4 reflected, “When I write an email now, I first consider the

relationship with the reader before deciding how to organise my sentences” (Extract 3-2). These reflections indicate that learners began to connect appropriateness not only with word choice but also with tailoring their communication to the recipient, extending pragmatic competence into a broader awareness of audience.

Vocabulary development was again perceived ambivalently. While some learners described feeling more comfortable with certain expressions and producing more natural phrasing, others felt that growth was limited. As C3L2 put it,

The email we wrote in the course only required us to use very basic words in daily life, and there was not a list of new vocabulary for each kind of emails. So, there were few new words or usages for me (C3L2, Extract 3-3).

This echoes the more mixed perceptions already seen in Cycle 2, with learners often equating progress in vocabulary with acquiring explicitly taught items, and thus overlooking subtler gains in accuracy or contextual appropriateness.

Fluency also took on a slightly different emphasis in Cycle 3. Learners not only described writing more quickly and smoothly, but also associated this with a stronger sense of confidence. For some, the ability to compose an email without excessive hesitation or translation was itself evidence of progress. As C3L5 explained, after the course she felt she could “finish an email in one go” rather than labouring over every sentence. This suggests that fluency was framed not just as efficiency, but as a psychological shift towards greater assurance in writing.

Overall, while Cycle 3 learners reiterated many of the developmental dimensions voiced in earlier cohorts, their accounts extended the theme in two ways: by reframing pragmatic competence to include audience awareness, and by construing fluency as a matter of confidence as well as speed. At the same time, their mixed views on vocabulary highlighted the persistence of uncertainty about what counts as progress in lexis. Taken together, these refinements suggest that learners in Cycle 3 experienced writing development as both continuous with earlier trajectories and uniquely shaped by their own perceptions of communicative purpose and confidence.

4.4.2.2. Theme 2: Mediation as perceived driver of learning

All learners in Cycle 3, consistent with those in Cycles 1 and 2, strongly attributed their progress to mediational tools such as SCOBAs, writing samples, and sample needs in the NA session, as well as teacher feedback and peer collaboration. Building on these familiar perceptions, however, several new emphases emerged in this cycle. It is impressive to find that some participants began to demonstrate

a growing independence from these object mediational tools as the course progressed. That is, over time, some participants, such as C3L1 and C3L2, noted a reduced dependence on these tools. As C3L1 explained "It (the list of potential needs) worked for me. I might not notice some of my needs if I didn't go through the list" (C3L1, Extract 3-4). This gradual shift is a surprising and exciting sign because it marks a significant development from the SCT perspective.

In terms of other mediation, all participants in Cycle 3 appreciated the importance of teacher CF and peer collaborative talk, which encouraged self-reflection. In general, these findings were consistent with those from earlier cycles, where learners acknowledged the usefulness of these mediational means in facilitating their writing development. A notable finding was that learners believed they could better engage in collaborative writing tasks and produce higher-quality collaborative talk when given sufficient self-preparation time before the tasks. In cycle 3, many emphasised the necessity of pre-task self-preparation time for them to reflect on the writing topic, review task requirements, and consider how they could contribute to the upcoming collaboration. For instance, C3L1 shared that

"It makes sense for it (five minutes of task self-preparation) to be there. I often made use of the time to review the topic and think how I could make my own contribution in the following collaborative work" (C3L1, Extract 3-5).

Similarly, C3L2 noted that

It (five minutes of task self-preparation) was necessary for me. I think everyone need time to go through the writing topic and the task requirements before working with others. I also went through the diagrams (SCOBAs) (C3L2, Extract 3-6).

Besides, learners also mentioned the emotional value of such preparation time. C3L6 explained that "It allowed me to move more comfortably into collaboration. [...] I think it would be embarrassing if I started without preparation on my own" (C3L6, Extract 3-7). In a similar vein, C3L3 emphasised this emotional buffer sharing that "It helped to avoid much embarrassment. [...] The preparation time was essential for me to write down the key information I would like to discuss with other students" (C3L3, Extract 3-8). These responses suggest that the 5-minute self-preparation time served as both a cognitive and emotional buffer for learners. Cognitively, the time was used to interpret task requirements, review SCOBAs, and conceptualise how to contribute to the collaborative writing tasks. Emotionally, it reduced the discomfort of starting collaborative tasks without a clear direction. In

essence, the cognitive preparation facilitated emotional readiness, as learners were able to rely on their individual preparation to engage more confidently in collaborative talk.

Building on the single object mediational means and other mediational means presented above, a new and intriguing finding emerged in this cycle: the interplay between object mediation and peer collaborative talk. This exciting finding was evident through the implementation of the newly developed activity of SCOBAs discussion and reshaping in the post-task stage. This activity evolved from the original SCOBAs discussion in Cycle2. This time, learners did not just discuss the SCOBAs to create a verbal summary; instead, they engaged in peer discussions to explore the content of SCOBAs and then collaboratively reshaped them to fit their personal ways of thinking and preferences. C3L1 remarked on this activity by saying that “SCOBAs discussion and adaptation [...] both the SCOBAs and my peers played an important role in helping to create a version that suited my learning style better” (C3L1, Extract 3-9). This view was confirmed by C3L2, who noted that “The SCOBAs gave me a clear, step-by-step guide to break down tough concepts, and working with my peers helped us tweak it to fit our understanding better” (C3L2, Extract 3-10). Based on these two responses, it can be suggested that the process of SCOBAs discussion and reshaping allowed both SCOBAs and peer collaborative talk to serve as mediational tools within a single learning activity. During this process, the SCOBAs continuously provided guidance for breaking down complex concepts of the particular linguistic or pragmatic items, while peers contributed diverse perspectives for reshaping the SCOBAs. I would argue that this interplay between structured guidance and collaborative reshaping allowed learners to achieve a deeper understanding and created a more personalised SCOBAs that could be used in future tasks.

Although the usefulness of SCOBAs discussion and reshaping was acknowledged by the participants in this cycle, they did not agree on the best mode of conducting this leaning activity. As mentioned before, this activity was conducted in pair work in the course in Cycle 3, which received appreciation from some participants. However, one participant questioned the shared version of the adapted SCOBAs. She preferred working individually to reshaping the SOCBA after discussion, noting that everyone has their own preferences, and even small differences, such as the layout or the sample sentences used in the SCOBAs, could make the shared version feel less comfortable or personalised enough for each learner. She explained that

Sometimes I tend to be more reserved and take longer to process things, so I don't always get the chance to contribute as much to the reshaping of the SCOBAs. While

I can understand the version my partner created, I sometimes felt it didn't fully align with my preference (C3L6, Extract 3-11).

While this view was not widely shared within these learners, it nonetheless merits attention and analysis, because it signals a potential breakdown in mediation during collaborative work. On the surface, it must be acknowledged that everyone truly has their own preferences, and it is difficult to create a perfect SCOBAs that suits everyone's tastes and habits. However, I would argue that C3L6's comment reveals an underlying issue, a potential breakdown in mediation through peer collaborative work during the SCOBAs discussion and reshaping activity. When such breakdowns occurred, the interaction leaned towards being more imbalanced, turning to a dominant-passive interactional pattern. Her preference for individual work seems to stem from these mediation issues, not from an inherent opposition to collaborative work or the activity itself. In other words, if the peer collaborative talk had successfully mediated her learning process, she might not have preferred individual work. This interpretation is supported by her positive responses to collaborative writing tasks, where she acknowledged the benefits of working with peers. Thus, it is not the working mode (collaborative or individual) but the quality and balance of peer interaction that shaped her preference. Given this analysis, it might be worth exploring potential modifications to this activity in the SCT-informed TBLT framework. In this case, retaining the SCOBAs discussion and reshaping could still be valuable, but an additional individual SCOBAs reshaping activity assigned after the class might help accommodate different learning preferences and further support learner agency.

4.4.2.3. Theme 3: positive emotions shaping learning experiences.

Emotional responses to the activities in the course in Cycle 3 were overwhelmingly positive, which is similar to what was reported in Cycle 1 and Cycle 2. A key aspect mentioned by almost all learners was their feeling of being respected due to the learner-centred nature of the course. The NA session played a significant role in this, as it allowed participants to voice their learning needs and felt that their individual preferences were taken into account. It is important to mention that the newly developed NA session in Cycle 3 gave learners the opportunity to research and self-explore their needs before the session. Learners felt that this arrangement was a genuine attempt to understand their real needs, rather than a superficial exercise designed to make them feel as though the course was tailored to them. Just as C3L5 expressed, she appreciated that the process was not about collecting needs on the surface but about truly valuing her input and integrating it into the course design in a meaningful way, which fostered a strong sense of being respected. Besides, the authenticity of the tasks, tailored to their real-world needs, further contributed to this sense of respect. Another consistent subtheme was the sense of achievement learners experienced as they progressed through the course. Many

participants mentioned the progress they made in their writing skills and the pride they felt from overcoming challenges. They also pointed out the fulfilment that come from helping others in collaboration. These responses were echoed in both Cycle 1 and Cycle 2, where learners similarly emphasized these emotional aspects. Besides, learners expressed their enjoyment in working collaboratively with both the teacher and their peers, which aligns closely with responses from earlier cycles.

Alongside the previously reported emotional responses, some learners in Cycle 3 demonstrated a more expansive and agentic sense of belonging within the course. In Cycle 2, belonging largely stemmed from the recognition they received when their contributions informed pedagogic adjustments, creating a feeling of being valued and included in the learning community. In Cycle 3, however, this sense of belonging became more participatory and co-constructed, as learners proactively shaped task content and pedagogic focus, positioning themselves as contributors to their learning experience. This expanded experience of belonging was evidenced in three interrelated aspects. This sense of belonging, according to learners' responses, was evidenced in three aspects. First, the heightened sense of belonging in Cycle 3 stemmed from the contributions these learners made in the newly developed NA session. As described at the end of the findings in Cycle 2 (see Section 4.3), in this revised NA session, the learners were asked to conduct initial research on their potential email communication needs and bring these to the session for focus group discussion. They conducted initial research through internet searches, consulting alumni, and seeking advice from teachers. This engagement fostered a sense of belonging, as they felt more connected to the course. One participant noted, "conducting my own research made me feel like I was part of the process from the very beginning, and it helped me connect with the course on a deeper level" (C3L4, Extract 3-12). Another shared, "by doing my own research, I felt like I had something valuable to offer in the discussion, which made me feel like I belonged in the group" (C3L5, Extract 3-13). Their contributions were valued, as the shared needs directly informed the development of pedagogical tasks by the teacher. One participant noted that "I was glad to see that my input had a real impact on the course, making me feel like I was part of its design" (C3L3, Extract 3-14). Another learner shared a similar view that "the group discussions allowed me to see how my needs aligned with others, and together we created tasks that felt more relevant to everyone" (C3L5, Extract 3-15). These responses highlight how the contributions made in the NA session helped to cultivate a stronger sense of agency, which in turn deepened their sense of belonging. By proactively shaping the course content based on their authentic needs, learners felt not only that they had voice but also that their participation played a meaningful role in the learning community. In a very similar vein, the sense of belonging came from the flexibility learners experienced in adapting individual writing tasks to satisfy their evolving needs. They spoke highly of

this flexibility. One participant commenting on individual writing tasks in the post-task stage, expressed that “I felt I was ‘the owner’ of this course because I had the right to choose the tasks and adjust my own learning path during the course” (C3L5, Extract 3-16). This sense of belonging reflects learners’ awareness of their role in shaping their learning experience. Finally, learners in Cycle 3 attributed part of their sense of belonging to the opportunity to adapt teacher-provided materials to accommodate their own learning preferences and situations. Participants expressed that having the flexibility to modify resources such as SCOBAs and sample writings with support from the teacher to verify their adaptations allowed them to create personalized learning tools. C3L3’s explanation can be a very good example to demonstrate this.

I was very grateful that I could modify the diagram. I found it really helpful to adapt the teacher’s diagram because it better aligned with my own way of thinking, making it easier for me to use in the future (C3L3, Extract 3-17).

This process of developing materials on their own further reinforced their sense of ownership and belonging within the learning environment.

Overall, the learners’ sense of belonging in Cycle 3 was closely tied to their growing recognition that their choices and contributions had a significant impact on both the course and their personal development. By actively participating in task design and adapting materials to cater for their needs, learners felt more connected and invested in the learning process.

4.4.2.4. Theme 4: Agentive pedagogical suggestions initiated by learners

Unlike in Cycle 1 and Cycle 2, where learners reported challenges related to activities in the course, the learners in Cycle 3 did not report the same type of challenges. Instead, some of them focused more on providing constructive suggestions for improving the course. One possible reason for this shift could be that learners in Cycle 3 may have still encountered challenges, but the course provided ample opportunities for them to voice their concerns, and thus, these challenges were addressed and solved during the course, leaving learners without the need to formally report them in the interviews. This is my own optimistic view, as learners did not explicitly mention this, but I would argue it could possibly suggest that the course allowed for more immediate problem-solving and feedback, which contributed to their focus on offering suggestions rather than reporting difficulties. I interpret this shift in focus, from challenges to suggestions, marks a sense of ownership in the course.

It is particularly noteworthy that some participants in this cycle proactively proposed incorporating opportunities to share their own email writing artefacts beyond the course assignments, signalling a shift in how they positioned themselves within the learning process. For example, C3L1 stated that

We can upload any written artifacts related to the course that we would love to receive feedback on from others to an online platform, and everyone in the class could give their suggestions or feedback anytime, and the teacher provides the final comments on both the writing itself and the peer feedback as well (C3L1, Extract 3-18).

Participants C3L4 expressed a similar thought.

Sometimes, I submit extra writings apart from the assignments. I really appreciate that you took time to give feedback on them. I think these writing could be helpful for other students in the class as well, and I am more than happy to share them. If others are interested, they could even join my individual tutorial sessions, but I am not sure if this would increase your workload (C3L4, Extract 3-19).

My interpretations of these responses for the suggestion are twofold. First, the suggestion highlighted a growing sense of ownership. By proposing ways to incorporate their personal writing artefacts and authentic communication needs to create more learning opportunities for the whole class, learners demonstrated a deeper engagement with their learning process and a desire to shape the course according to their real-world needs. This suggestion indicates a shift from a learner-centred but teacher-led approach to a more learner-directed framework, where learners actively take charge of their own development. Second, the suggestion to create opportunities for peer collaboration through sharing personal email tasks on an online platform point to an evolving sense of community among the learners. The idea that classmates could give asynchronous feedback on each other's work reflects a growing recognition of learning in peer interactions and peer collaboration. I would argue that learners have embraced the concept of learning in interaction, which is the major principle of the SCT-informed TBLT online writing course. By recognising the value of peer collaboration and trying to expand it, learners have demonstrated an understanding and acceptance of the core philosophical value of the course. This twofold interpretation points to a common theme, that is, learners were taking greater ownership of their learning by actively contributing to the development of a collaborative, community-driven learning environment that aligns with the core value of the task-mediated online writing course.

4.5. Summary

In summary, the findings from the three research cycles reveal both consistent patterns and evolving emphases in learners' experiences of the task-mediated online writing course. Across all cohorts, learners reported multi-dimensional growth in writing competence, emphasising discursive, pragmatic, grammatical, lexical, and fluency-related gains. They consistently highlighted the mediating role of tasks, tools, teacher feedback, and peer collaboration, while also expressing positive emotions of respect, achievement, and enjoyment. At the same time, each cycle introduced distinctive developments that reflected the iterative refinement of the course and the changing orientations of learners. Cycle 1 brought to light initial struggles with grammar and group dynamics. Cycle 2 saw learners begin to adapt tasks to their own needs and to articulate more proactive engagement. Cycle 3 extended these trajectories by foregrounding audience awareness in writing, framing fluency as confidence, recognising the cognitive and emotional value of pre-task preparation, and offering constructive suggestions for future course development. Overall, the findings indicate that while the course provided a stable foundation for L2 development, learner perceptions and practices evolved in ways that underscored growing agency and ownership. The significance of these patterns will be further examined in the following discussion chapter, where they are interpreted through the lens of sociocultural theory and situated within the wider literature.

Chapter 5 Discussion

5.1. Introduction

Chapter 4 presented the findings from Cycle 1 to Cycle 3 of this study. This chapter provides discussion of the key findings structured in accordance with the three research questions posted. These findings are discussed in relation to literature in the field of TBLT implementation and teaching L2 writing, with special attention to those studies investigating learning through interaction and learning via mediation underpinned by SCT. Section 5.2. answers the first research question, examining how learners' English language development unfolded during the SCT-informed TBLT online writing course, with a focus on their trajectory from other-regulated to increasingly self-regulated language use. Section 5.3. responds to the second research question, discussing learners' perceptions of their language-learning experiences during the online writing course. Section 5.4. illustrates how the action research–case study approach enabled iterative refinement of the pedagogical framework, closing the whole chapter by presenting the final version of TMLT framework which has been developed in this study.

5.2. How does learners' L2 develop during the process of the task-mediated online writing course?

As detailed in Chapter 4, learners demonstrated notable improvements in both their linguistic and pragmatic competences in L2 writing over the SCT-informed TBLT online writing course. However, rather than cataloguing these improvements, this section explores the underlying processes through which such development occurred. Drawing on SCT in the analysis of the findings, I have interpreted learners' development as following a gradual and scaffolded trajectory from other-regulation to self-regulation, characterised by fluctuations and non-linear progress. This developmental process involves the emergence of co-regulation, the appropriation of linguistic resources and mediation strategies, and the mediational function of L1.

5.2.1. L2 developmental trajectory

Understanding the trajectory of learners' L2 development provides a foundation for analysing the sociocultural mechanisms that shaped their linguistic and pragmatic growth throughout the SCT-informed TBLT writing course. From a sociocultural perspective, language learning is a socially mediated process that unfolds through interaction (Lantolf et al., 2018; Storch, 2017; Vygotsky, 1978). It is not merely an individual cognitive process but rather a socially constructed activity, where the L2 typically develops from other-regulation to self-regulation (Aljaafreh & Lantolf, 1994; Ellis & Barkhuizen, 2005; Poehner & Lantolf, 2024). Several findings from this study illustrate how learners shift from

external scaffolding in social interaction towards independently managing and controlling their language use. For example, learner C1L3 in Cycle 1 exemplifies this movement. Initially, he heavily relied on explicit metalinguistic explanation from the teacher to construct grammatical accuracy (See Excerpt 1.1, Section 4.2.1.1), but progressively, he began using private speech to mediate his own language production (See Excerpt 1.2, Section 4.2.1.1). This shift reflects the internalization process described by Poehner and Lantolf (2024), in which the learner shifts from the stage of regulation by others (“I-You” communication) to the stage where he mediates himself (“I-Me” dialogue). The developmental trajectory was also reflected in learners’ self-reported improvement. It has been found that learners increasingly perceived themselves as capable of identifying errors, monitoring their language production, and correcting errors (see Section 4.3.2 theme 2). These perceptions reinforce the behavioural evidence observed in classroom interactions, illustrating that learners’ L2 development within the SCT-informed TBLT writing course involved a socially mediated process of internalization, moving from interpersonal regulation to intrapersonal regulation.

Of note, other-regulation itself is not a static state. It evolves as learners gradually reduce their reliance on external scaffolding, so the transition from other-regulation to self-regulation is not an abrupt shift but a gradual and scaffolded process. Therefore, self-regulation should not be regarded as the sole indicator of language development. In other words, the non-attainment of self-regulation does not imply a lack of progress in language learning. A learner’s decreasing dependence on external support, reflected in the changes in the amount or level of scaffolding required, also signifies learners’ L2 development (Aljaafreh & Lantolf, 1994; Ellis et al., 2020; Lantolf et al., 2016). In this study, findings from all three research cycles reveal many such changes. That is, although sometimes, learners could not independently identify and correct the same error in two teacher CF processes. However, it is evident that their reliance on external support clearly decreased across the two excerpts, as reflected in the shift of the CF strategies from more explicit to more implicit. Therefore, these findings reveal that learners’ English language development is a gradual and scaffolded process.

Nevertheless, language development does not always follow a steady and unidirectional trajectory. In this study, some learners exhibited occasional backtracking, where their reliance on external mediation initially decreased but later increased again. For example, the learner C2L5 first moved from requiring CF strategies at level 7 to level 3, only to later required more explicit CF again at Level 6. Even more strikingly, the learner C3L6 initially reduced their reliance on slightly, moving from Level 9 to Level 7, only to later revert to Level 9. Such fluctuations may reflect ongoing reorganization rather than regression, as learners redistribute attention and cognitive resources during development (Qin et al., 2025). From a traditionally linear view, these fluctuations would be viewed as regression, suggesting that the learners had not made progress in L2 development (Erlam et al., 2013). However, closer

examination of both classroom observation and interview data challenges this view. The fluctuation of the CF level does not always stand for a lack of progress. It has been found that although sometimes when learners needed high CF strategies, they demonstrated active participation during the CF process. For example, in Excerpt 2.3 (see Section 4.3.1.2), learner C2L5 questioned the recast made by the teacher. Although this led to a metalinguistic explanation, a high level of CF, his questioning demonstrated his own reflection and how he made use of resources to actively mediate himself. Similarly, a finding from the interview data also provides evidence. It has been found that sometimes learners asked for more detailed explanation of a particular linguistic feature, leading to a higher level of CF, was not due to a lack of understanding. It was a strategic effort to confirm their own interpretation of it (see Section 4.3.2). That is, they were not passively dependent on CF but were actively engaging in the mediation process to refine their linguistic understanding. This perspective is consistent with Lantolf et al. (2016), who consider learner active responsiveness to mediation, such as seeking approval and negotiating mediation, can serve as an additional indicator of development. Therefore, while acknowledging that the developmental process is not always straightforward and can involve regressions sometimes, it is also important to consider how learners interact with the CF strategies. Rather than interpreting increased reliance on CF as mere regression, it should also take learner responsiveness to mediation into consideration.

Briefly, this study provides empirical support for sociocultural accounts of L2 development as a gradual and socially mediated movement from other regulation toward greater self-regulation (e.g., Lantolf et al., 2020; Poehner & Lantolf, 2024). Also, it empirically challenges interpretations that equate instances of regression with an absence of development (e.g., Erlam et al., 2013), by demonstrating that fluctuations and regressions can form part of a broader, non-linear developmental trajectory.

5.2.2. Co-regulation: learners' contribution to the regulation process during learners' L2 development

As outlined in the literature review (see Section 2.2.2.), co-regulation is understood within SCT as a jointly managed, reciprocal process through which participants shape one another's actions during mediated interaction (Van Compernelle, 2015; Van Compernelle, 2022). The findings of this study similarly show that learners did not simply receive mediation but actively contributed to the regulatory process. In the movement from other-regulation toward greater independent control, learners often participated as co-constructors of mediation, influencing how feedback unfolded and how interactional support was negotiated during tasks.

A key site where co-regulation became visible in this study was the provision of graduated CF. Findings from this study indicate that graduated CF processes were collaboratively constructed by the teacher

and learners. These interactions can be understood as instances of co-regulation, because the feedback process unfolded as a shared endeavour, where learners were not only mediated by the teacher, but also responded to, shaped, and at times redirected the mediation provided by the teacher. For example, in Excerpt 1.1 (see Section 4.2.1.1), the learner's hesitation and prolonged silence led me, as the teacher, to hold off on further mediation and instead shift to using L1 to reframe the question as another attempt to elicit a response. While some instances of co-regulation involved subtle cues, such as hesitation and silence (as in Excerpt 1.1), in many other cases, learners responded more directly to the teacher's mediation, by explicitly requesting adjustments in the feedback process. These requests, including pausing the mediation (See Excerpt 2.2 in Section 4.3.1.1), seeking confirmation, and asking for further metalinguistic explanation (see Excerpt 2.3 in Section 4.3.1.2), made the co-regulation process more explicit. These findings reveal that teacher graduated CF is not a one-way process in which the teacher delivered corrections and the learner passively received them. Instead, the feedback process unfolded as a reciprocal and dialogic interaction, jointly shaped by both teacher and learner (Jang & DaSilva Iddings, 2010; R. Zhang, 2019). The co-regulation in graduated CF reveals the one-sidedness of relying solely on either explicit or implicit CF strategies (Erlam et al., 2013; Rassaei, 2014), because neither approach alone fully accounts for the importance of learners' responsiveness and contribution during the feedback process. It is the interplay between CF and learner reaction that determined the direction of mediation. Pedagogically, these findings offer practical guidance for the implementation of graduated CF. Rather than following the regulatory scale from level 1 to level 9 in a linear and mechanical manner, teachers are encouraged to treat the scale as a flexible referencing tool. The overall direction, from implicit to explicit, can serve as a guiding principle, but teachers should feel free to explore multiple strategies within a given level, make larger leaps when appropriate, or backtrack to previous levels based on learners' responsiveness. This perspective reframes graduated CF not as a fixed sequence, but as a responsive and co-regulated process that evolves in real time (Aljaafreh & Lantolf, 1994; Lantolf et al., 2016). By interpreting corrective feedback through a co-regulatory lens, this study extends existing CF research, which has traditionally focused on the effectiveness of feedback strategies, moving attention to the interactive negotiation through which mediation is jointly constructed.

In addition to teacher-learner co-regulation discussed above, my study finds that peer interaction during collaborative writing tasks is also a co-regulatory process. Learners engaged in mutual support and joint problem-solving. For example, the exchange in Excerpt 2.6, where C2L3 and C2L4 negotiated the most appropriate wording to express their dissatisfaction in a precise manner, illustrates the process of how they co-regulated each other in interactions (see Section 4.3.1.2). As C2L3 and C2L4 evaluated different alternatives, each learner's contribution regulated the other's linguistic choices,

gradually refining the expression through mutual mediation. Excerpt 2.7 provides another example, where C2L5 and C2L6 collaboratively revised a written piece (see Section 4.3.1.2). In this exchange, C2L5's recognition of the word order issue led C2L6 to reassess the sentence structure, sparking a collaborative effort to refine the formulation of an indirect question. Through this negotiation, both learners actively engaged in regulating each other by, pooling their own resources, acknowledging and building on each other's clarifications of this grammatical item, gradually co-constructing a shared understanding of the grammatical structure. These peer interactions, in which they collaboratively addressed both meaning- and form-related issues, reflect a co-regulated process of language use and development, because they responded to, built on, and adjusted their linguistic choices in relation to each other's contributions. These findings align with recent peer co-regulation research in collaborative writing, which has shown similar forms of mutual monitoring, evaluation and joint problem-solving among learners (Mohammadi Zenouzagh, 2023; Su et al., 2023). Rather than working independently, or relying on teacher guidance, learners jointly managed the cognitive and linguistic demands of tasks through reciprocal support and shared decision-making. This co-regulation is realised through collective scaffolding (Donato, 1994), whereby learners, even as novices, temporarily draw on their relative strengths to guide and support each other's understanding. In the absence of a definitely more knowledgeable other, learners pool their resources, question and clarify each other's contributions, and co-construct linguistic knowledge in interaction (Li, 2013; Su et al., 2023). These findings expand the traditional view of the ZPD, which only emphasise on mediation provided by a more knowledgeable other (Vygotsky, 1978), by showing that peer interaction, through co-regulatory processes, can also serve as a site of L2 development.

Beyond the individually discussed teacher-learner and peer co-regulation, this study also demonstrates that both forms of co-regulation could co-occur within group CF, resulting in multi-directional and distributed regulation. Excerpt 2.8 exemplifies this by showing how my CF strategies were shaped by responses from multiple learners, while the learners simultaneously built on one another's contributions to clarify the grammatical concept of the past perfect. My initial elicitation was met with tentative or partial responses from several learners, prompting me to adjust the level of explicitness and offer additional scaffolding in subsequent turns. At the same time, learners responded to one another's clarifying the temporal sequence, suggesting rule-based explanations, and building on examples. These processes collectively constructed their shared understanding of the past perfect. The mediated learning process emerged as a distributed, dialogic process shaped by the group as a whole. This group-level, distributed configuration of co-regulation received comparatively limited attention, extending current discussions beyond dyadic teacher-learner co-regulation or peer co-regulation (e.g., Jang & DaSilva Iddings, 2010; Su et al., 2023; R. Zhang, 2019). From a sociocultural

stance, the primary purpose of CF is not to correct errors per se, but to mediate learner development by offering scaffolding via providing CF (Poehner & Lantolf, 2024). The finding of the overlapping teacher-learner and peer co-regulation during group CF illustrates this mediational function in action. Therefore, teachers are encouraged to facilitate group-level meaning-making by triggering learner contributions and supporting collective knowledge building. This finding also provides the pedagogical potential of group CF as a space where both teacher-learner and peer co-regulation can unfold simultaneously. This is particularly relevant in large class settings, where teachers often find it difficult to provide individual feedback during task-based language teaching (Carless, 2004; Li & Thomas, 2023). Group graduated CF, when structured dialogically, offers a practical and socially grounded alternative for supporting multiple learners through shared regulation.

Briefly, these findings on co-regulation reveal that mediation is not a static, one-directional process in which the more knowledgeable unilaterally provides mediations. Rather, it is negotiable and co-constructed, shaped by the reciprocal contributions of the learners in this study. While existing SCT research has established the importance of co-regulation in teacher-learner or peer interactions, findings in this study extend the literature by documenting how co-regulation unfolds across teacher-multiple learner classroom interactions. This study refines current understandings of how shared co-regulation operates in classroom practice and offers pedagogical insights for providing group-based CF.

5.2.3. Appropriation during the process of L2 development

Drawing on existing SCT-informed research, studies on appropriation have highlighted learners' active role in taking up mediated resources and transforming them into tools for learning (e.g., Chen & Li, 2021; Jiang & Yu, 2022; Van Compernelle & Henery, 2014; Wen et al., 2015). However, prior work has differed in where appropriation is located, with some studies focusing on the uptake of linguistic or conceptual resources in interaction, and others emphasising learners' agentic engagement with mediational tools and practices across tasks (see Section 2.2.3). These perspectives point to appropriation as both developmental and agentic. Aligned with these perspectives, findings from this study illustrate how learners' appropriation of mediated resources unfolds as both a developmental and agentic process.

At a basic level, the findings show that learners appropriated linguistic resources by drawing on expressions and formulations introduced by others and reusing them in new writing contexts, a process that aligns with interactional accounts of L2 learning emphasising situated uptake and reuse of linguistic resources (e.g., Kasper & Wagner, 2011). When reflecting on their learning experiences in semi-structured interviews, learners frequently reported drawing on external linguistic resources, such as sentence structures and expressions, from teachers, peers, and learning materials, and reusing

them in their own writing (see Sections 4.2.2.2 and 4.3.2.2). Learners commonly indicated that they benefited from exposure to others' language use and consciously attempted to incorporate useful expressions from peers, SCOBAs, and writing models into their own writing. These accounts suggest that learners viewed linguistic input not as fixed forms to be copied, but as resources to be selectively taken up and adapted for their own purposes. Classroom interactional data further illustrate this process of appropriation. Across multiple episodes, learners took up expressions introduced by others, commented on their pragmatic appropriateness, and attempted to incorporate them into their own written production (see, for example, Excerpts 1.10 and 1.12 in Section 4.2.1.3). Learners' attempts to reuse these expressions were sometimes inaccurate, reflecting ongoing processes of adjustment and reorganisation; however, from a sociocultural perspective, such partial or tentative uses can be understood not as failure, but as evidence of learners' efforts to integrate external linguistic resources into their developing L2 systems. Importantly, this take-up was not automatic or unreflective. Learners often evaluated newly encountered expressions in relation to their perceived communicative value, for example by judging whether an expression sounded more polite or appropriate in context. Learners' attempts to reuse these expressions were sometimes inaccurate, reflecting ongoing processes of adjustment and reorganisation. However, such partial or tentative uses can be understood not as failure, but as evidence of learners' efforts to integrate external linguistic resources into their developing L2 systems (Lantolf et al., 2016). Such evaluative activity indicates that appropriation involves active engagement with linguistic resources rather than mechanical repetition (Van Compernelle, 2015). Beyond linguistic resources, the findings indicate that learners appropriated mediational tools by modifying and reorganising pedagogical artefacts, such as SCOBAs, to support their own writing processes. In Cycle 2, for example, C2L1 and C2L2 adapted the SCOBAs related to perfect tenses to facilitate their understanding and presentation of grammatical meanings (see Section 4.3.1.2). Rather than simply taking in conceptual information, these learners reshaped the representational tools in ways that aligned with their own cognitive processing, illustrating appropriation as a process of transformation rather than transmission (Van Compernelle & Henery, 2014).

Most notably, the findings in this study reveal that learners appropriated mediational strategies by recycling interactional prompts and feedback moves previously used by teachers or peers to regulate their own writing. This finding aligns with Jiang and Yu (2022)'s view of appropriation as an agentic process, but draw attention to a different analytical focus. In their study, appropriation was examined in terms of learners' strategic responses to mediated feedback, including their selective engagement with feedback, the revision operations through which feedback is realised in text, and the ways feedback use is regulated across tasks. Appropriation, in this sense, is primarily evidenced through

how learners act on feedback and the outcomes of those actions in subsequent writing. By contrast, findings in this study traced appropriation at the level of mediational processes themselves. Rather than focusing on how learners respond to feedback, the findings highlight how learners appropriate the means of mediation, that is, the interactional procedures through which feedback and guidance are delivered. For example, questioning prompts initially used by me as the teacher to guide learners' attention to grammatical problems were later recycled by learners as self-directed prompts to organise their own problem-solving during writing (see Section 4.2.1.1). Similar patterns were observed in Cycle 3, where learners condensed teachers' abstract grammatical explanations into simplified, procedural summaries, which were later reused to regulate their own writing (see Section 4.4.1.2). Through participation in teacher- and peer-mediated interaction, learners thus began to recontextualise mediational strategies originally enacted by others and redeploy them in self-directed ways. This interaction-to-self trajectory suggests that learners appropriated not only feedback outcomes, but the mediational procedures that organise regulation. In doing so, the study extends existing accounts of appropriation by showing how mediational strategies can be learned, taken over, and redeployed as resources for self-regulation within task-mediated L2 writing activity.

5.2.4. The mediational role of L1 in the process of L2 development

In the L2 development process, mediation plays a key role, through which language serves as both a communicative tool and a cognitive resource, enabling learners to engage in meaning-making (Kozulin, 2023; Poehner & Lantolf, 2024). My study has found that learners seamlessly and naturally relied on their L1 to manage tasks, to explore meaning-form relationships, to generate and evaluate ideas, to mediate their feelings and to maintain interactional relationships with their interlocutors (see Section 5.3.3.1 and 5.4.3.1). These findings align with many previous studies on the functions of L1 (e.g., Bao & Du, 2015; Kim et al., 2020; Sato & Angulo, 2020), providing further evidence for L1 as a mediator in L2 development. Specifically, these findings correspond to the three types of L1 mediation summarised by Li (2023) and Wu (2018), including cognitive mediation, affective mediation, and interactional mediation.

Language is a tool for thought (Lantolf et al., 2020; Vygotsky, 1978), through which mediation can be verbalised. When L1 is used as a verbal mediating tool for learners to comment, reflect, and evaluate the ongoing activities in both private speech and collaborative dialogue, it plays the role of cognitive mediator. Intrapersonally, for example, it is common to see that learners did not hesitate to use their L1 in private speech to regulate their thought and language via metalinguistic explanation. They made their own metalinguistic explanations in L1 to talk about their linguistic knowledge (See Extract 1.2 and 1.7 in Section 4.2.1.1) when they dealt with their linguistic errors, which facilitated their regulation of

misunderstanding and the regaining of self-regulation in face of the L2 linguistic features. Interpersonally, L1 is frequently used in collaborative dialogue for the exploration of meaning-form exploration and writing content management (Kim et al., 2020). For example, in this study learners frequently switched to L1 when they wrote in L2 to negotiate the meaning of a particular word (See Excerpt 1.8), to clarify their meaning of the sentences they had made or planned to make (See Excerpt 2.3) and provide metalinguistic explanation (See Excerpt 3.1). From the SCT lens, both L1 and L2 can become linguistic and cognitive resources for learners to make meaning and construct ideas (Kim et al., 2020; W. Li, 2018). By utilizing L1, learners gain cognitive support that helps them recognize and evaluate the target language, collaboratively construct understanding, and plan effective strategies for completing L2 tasks (Bao & Du, 2015; Li, 2023).

Building on the concept of unity of affect and cognition (Swain, 2013; Vygotsky, 1978), the role of L1 in L2 learning cannot be reduced to only cognitive mediation; instead, it also functions as an affective mediator (Li, 2023; Wu, 2018), providing learners with emotional security and fostering motivation. In this study, L1 as an affective mediator is particularly evidenced in the emotional support generated. For example, C3L3's expression of confusion, “我觉得越改越有问题” (“I feel like the more we revise, the more confusing this sentence gets”) was met with a reassuring response from C3L4, “没关系，一会回来看看。生活处处有惊喜，哈哈” (“It's fine. Let's come back to it later. Life is full of unexpected turns. Ha-ha.”). In the interview, C3L3 mentioned this L1 exchange, commenting that it helped him to reduce frustration and maintain engagement with the task. Similarly, the humorous off-task exchanges among peers in L1, such as C3L1 and C3L2 joking about coffee as a survival tool (see Section 5.4.2.1), reflect how L1 mediated learners' feelings, creating a more relaxed learning environment. These affective uses of L1 supported emotional regulation at moments of frustration, which Swain (2013) highlights as essential for maintaining cognitive engagement in L2 learning, rather than as a separate or secondary concern. These findings suggest that allowing space for affective L1 use may help foster a supportive classroom climate, particularly during cognitively demanding tasks.

In this study, L1 also functions as an interactional mediator in collaborative dialogue. That is, learners used L1 within real-time interaction to scaffold each other's understanding, manage uncertainty, and co-construct solutions to linguistic and task-related problems. For instance, C2L5 and C2L6 jointly refined their lexical choices through L1-L2 translation, where they provided and received scaffolding through the use of L1. Similarly, in Excerpt 3.2, learners employed L1 to explain indirect question structures to one another providing metalinguistic clarification in interaction that consolidated the shared grammatical understanding. These interactions exemplify what has been termed interactional

mediation by Li (2023) and Wu (2018), in which L1 plays a central role in scaffolding processes in ZPD. Unlike the use of L1 solely for communicative purposes in interaction, the interactional mediation role of L1 underscores the scaffolding process in L1 which is realised in interaction. Therefore, L1 as an interactional mediator often accompanies its cognitive mediational function in collaborative dialogue.

5.2.5. Summary

In summary, this section has discussed how learners' language developed during the SCT-informed TBLT online writing course by examining their regulatory trajectories, the dynamics of co-regulation, and the multifaceted roles of L1. The analysis supports the view that L2 development is a socially mediated process that gradually shifts toward individual control. However, this shift is not a binary or linear transition but a complex and scaffolded process characterised by moments of progression and regression. The discussion of co-regulation further illustrates that mediation is co-constructed through the reciprocal contributions of all parties in the classroom, where learners actively engaged with and shaped the mediational process. Finally, the analysis of L1 use reveals its cognitive, affective, and interactional role of mediation.

Collectively, these findings provide empirical evidence for the developmental trajectory from other-regulation to self-regulation, as proposed in SCT. More importantly, they offer a richer account of how this progression unfolds in interaction. By attending to the role of co-regulation and incorporating learners' use of L1 as a mediational means, the study expands current understandings of the regulatory process. Rather than viewing development as a shift in regulatory status alone, the findings highlight the interactional, scaffolded, and resource-mediated nature of this process.

5.3. How do learners perceive their language-learning experience in the task-mediated online writing course?

This section addresses the second research question: How do learners perceive their learning experiences during the TMLT online writing course? Rather than offering a surface-level appraisal of course effectiveness or learning outcomes, the discussion examines how learners described and interpreted their experiences of learning and participation within a task-mediated instructional environment. Drawing on reflexive thematic analysis of interview data across three iterative research cycles, the discussion offers a thematic interpretation of learners' accounts, highlighting the social, cognitive, and emotional dimensions of their engagement. The discussion is organised around three interrelated themes: (1) Learning to write for communication: rethinking improvement in the TMLT classroom; (2) Constructing learning through mediated interaction; and (3) Experiencing emotional support in learning: interaction between emotional experiences and learner agency. These themes

reflect learners' evolving understandings of writing, their experiences of teacher and peer mediation, and their affective investment in the course. Together, they offer a nuanced interpretation of learner experience that informs both the pedagogical evaluation and the conceptual development of the TMLT framework.

5.3.1. Learning to write for communication: rethinking improvement in the TMLT classroom.

Across all three research cycles, learners described their perceived development in English language use, particularly in relation to textual coherence, grammatical control, and lexical precision. Learners reported becoming more conscious of paragraph structure and the logical flow of ideas within and across sentences, the skills they had previously overlooked. They described making fewer grammatical errors and developing greater awareness of their own mistakes. While several learners acknowledged that the vocabulary demands of email writing were relatively limited, they described a shift in their approach to word choice. Instead of striving to use advanced or “fancy” words, they began to prioritise clarity, precision, and contextual fit. This shift was especially salient in Cycle 2 and 3, where learners reflected on how their views of “good writing” had changed. These reflections align with Chen and Yu (2019), in which learners moved away from lexical display and toward accurate and meaningful expressions. Besides, some learners noted that they were able to complete emails more quickly and with greater ease by the end of the course. While this perception was not expressed as a focus on writing fluency per se, it nonetheless points to increased efficiency in written production, likely stemming from greater familiarity with the genre, improved planning strategies, and more confident language use. In addition to these linguistic dimensions, learners across all three cycles described improvements in their pragmatic awareness in relation to writing polite and context-sensitive emails. Participants explained that they became more aware of tone and audience expectations and felt better equipped with strategies and expressions for softening request, signalling indirectness, or hedging statements. For instance, some learners (see Cycle 1 and 2) reported moving beyond fixed expressions such as “please” or “may I” and experimenting with more nuanced formulations tailored to different recipients. These shifts reflected a growing awareness that effective writing is not just about correctness, but about appropriateness within specific communicative contexts. Further, some learners (See findings in Cycle 1) described becoming more engaged with writing as a process, adopting planning, drafting, and revising strategies that supported more purposeful and reflective text construction. For these learners, writing was no longer seen as a one-step task, but as a recursive process of shaping meaning over time.

Considered as a whole, the self-perceived improvements described by learners in this study, while broadly consistent with previous TBLT research that have documented gains in linguistic and pragmatic

competence under task-based conditions (Kim et al., 2023; Nguyen & Jaspaert, 2021; Nguyen & Luu, 2018; Wei & Zhao, 2024), point to a deeper shift in how they understood the nature and purpose of writing. Rather than striving for advanced vocabulary, grammatical perfection, or rigid adherence to fixed formats, learners increasingly saw writing as a means of communicating appropriately and effectively in real-world situations. This shift was marked by greater attention to tone, audience, and context, as well as a growing preference for clarity and precision over linguistic display. Many participants no longer equated “good writing” with “fancy” words or flawless grammar, but with the ability to convey meaning purposefully and appropriately for the intended recipient. Moreover, learners also redefined what it means to produce “good writing,” recognising that it is not the result of a single act of composition, but a recursive process involving planning, drafting, and revision. In this sense, their learning trajectory involved not just doing writing better, but thinking differently about what writing is for.

Notably, this reframing of writing emerged through learners’ engagement with authentic, goal-oriented tasks that reflected their own communicative needs. In the TMLT course, the email writing tasks were designed around real-world purposes, which prompted learners to consider not just how to write, but why and for whom. These tasks provided meaningful contexts in which learners could apply their developing pragmatic competence and make situated language choices to achieve communicative goals (Kim et al., 2018). By drawing on their own lived experiences and needs, learners were also encouraged to critically evaluate what content mattered and how best to express it, thus deepening their awareness of audience, tone, and communicative relevance (Wei & Zhao, 2024). Through these situated task experiences, learners’ perceptions of writing shifted from viewing it as a static product of correct and fixed form to a purposeful, context-sensitive process of meaning-making.

5.3.2. Constructing learning through mediated interaction

SCT emphasises that learning occurs through mediated interaction (Van Compernelle, 2015), a view also supported by learners’ reflections in this study. Participants consistently associated their development in language use and writing ability with teacher graduated CF and collaborative writing. These two instructional practices were frequently cited as key contributors to their language development, both linguistically, pragmatically and in terms of how they approached writing.

Learners from all three cycles consistently highlighted the value of teacher graduated CF. Learners praised the graduated CF because it provided them with possibilities for reflective thinking on the written errors they made, enabling them to analyse the root causes of the errors and make attempts to correct them on their own. When discussing graduated CF, what they mentioned the most was, “It stimulated my own reflective thinking,” and “I became aware of my own introspection” (see Section

5.2.2). These comments point to a shift in how learners engaged with feedback from passively accepting corrections to actively reflecting on the underlying causes of their errors. This transition was important to them not simply because it led to correct answers, but because it encouraged a deeper awareness of their own language use. For many, the value of graduated CF lay in how it positioned them as agents in the learning process, giving them space to identify, question, and resolve issues themselves rather than relying solely on the teacher's judgement. This finding corroborates the finding in Ai (2017)'s study, where learners expressed their preference of graduated CF due to its personalisation and encouragement of self-error identification and correction. In Ai (2017)'s study, learners believed that it was the implicit strategies that enabled them to figure out the linguistic issues by themselves. Ai (2017) made the explanation from the SLA perspective, claiming that implicit CF requires more language processing in short-term memory. However, findings in my study expanded Ai (2017)'s finding, suggesting that the implicit CF strategies within graduated CF as well as the gradual nature of the way these strategies are implemented that foster learners' reflective thinking and self-correction of errors. That is, it was the dynamic unfolding of support, adjusted to the learner's level of need, that encouraged learners to revisit their errors, leading to reflection and self-correction of errors. As C3L6 put it, "I often failed with the first few hints provided by the teacher which allowed me to think but not enough. With the teacher's adjustment of the hints, my reflective thinking became clearer helping me to get the correct answer." Therefore, it was not any single implicit strategy that prompted learner reflection; rather, their introspection was built upon a series of continuous and evolving prompts from the teacher, that is graduated CF. Throughout this process, they analysed the root reasons for their errors and how they would move toward the correct forms. This is an iterative process that was scaffolded by evolving prompts. From the sociocultural perspective, one plausible explanation can be that through graduated CF, the learner and the teacher co-construct the learner's ZPD (Lantolf et al., 2018; Nassaji & Swain, 2000), during which the learner does not receive the knowledge passively, but proactively constructs and explores the knowledge in interaction. It is the co-construction of ZPD that enables the learner to do the so-called "reflective thinking" and pushes him or her to do error correction on his or her own.

In addition to teacher-mediated interaction, learners also experienced collaborative writing as a space for peer-mediated learning. While teacher feedback offered structured prompts for reflection, collaborative writing enabled learners to negotiate meaning, articulate ideas, and pool resources with peers in real time. In line with Storch (2019), peer feedback in this study took forms of counter-suggestion to a proposed idea or a way of expressing an idea, a response to an explicit request for assistance, a confirmation or disconfirmation in response to expressed uncertainty, an other-correction or reformulation of a word or a segment of the joint text. All learners in this study reported

that they pooled linguistic-, content- and pragmatic resources from their peers when receiving feedback (see Sections 4.2.2 and 4.3.2). This finding is consistent with those in Storch (2005), Shehadeh (2011) and Li and Zhu (2013)'s studies, where learners gain more writing perspectives and various expressions due to peer interactions in collaborative writing. Some learners highlighted that learning became impactful due to the discussion rather than simply being provided with the expressions and linguistic knowledge. This indicated that learning occurs in interaction when learners were continuously challenged and supported just beyond their current abilities via peer feedback. This aligns with concept of ZPD in SCT, where optimal learning occurs as students engage with tasks slightly above their independent capabilities with the assistance of the more knowledgeable person (Lantolf et al., 2018). This may also explain why learners believed learning via peer interaction was more impactful than being provided with a writing sample.

Apart from receiving peer feedback, learners also found providing peer feedback beneficial (see Chapter 4 Section 4.1.2 and Section 4.2.2). They believed that providing peer feedback allowed them to enhance their understanding of particular linguistic features and sometimes identify the unnoticed knowledge gap. This role of providing peer feedback can be explain by the role of languaging (Swain & Watanabe, 2020). Verbalisation of the particular linguistic features scaffold the feedback providers to review the knowledge and mediates better internalization. Generally, these findings support the sociocultural argument that learners contribute uniquely to a group when working collaboratively. Since no two learners share same knowledge and strengths, the group can achieve a performance level that exceeds the capabilities of any individual member (Dobao, 2014; Li & Zhang, 2023).

5.3.3. Experiencing emotional support in learning: interaction between emotional experiences and learner agency

According to findings in this study, learners across all three research cycles reported experiencing various forms of positive emotional support throughout the course, which, however, is not an unexpected finding. In fact, many studies in the TBLT literature have highlighted that learners often perceive task-based lessons as supportive, engaging, and motivating learning environments (e.g., Kim et al., 2017; S. Zhang, 2019), and thus TBLT is frequently associated with increased learner involvement, reduced anxiety, and greater satisfaction, particularly when tasks are perceived as meaningful and aligned with learners' goals. This study similarly found that learners frequently described positive emotional states, particularly a sense of belonging and a sense of achievement, as key aspects of their learning experiences. However, rather than treating these emotions as mere indicators of satisfaction, the findings highlight an interplay between emotional experiences and learner agency, suggesting that

emotion shapes how mediation is taken up and enacted, thereby influencing how learners perceived their participation in the course.

Findings indicate that learners' strong sense of belonging functioned as a resource that supported and sustained their agentic engagement throughout the course. Many participants explicitly stated that this feeling stemmed from having their voices heard and valued in the classroom. They appreciate that their input during the CNA session was meaningfully integrated into the course. They valued the teacher's efforts to tailor graduated corrective feedback to their individual challenges, as well as the respect and consideration shown by peers during collaborative writing. These positive emotional experiences gave rise to a perception that they were respected as individuals and that their participation mattered, which fuelled a deep sense of belonging. More importantly, this sense of belonging supported learners in taking more proactive roles within the learning process, because learner agency can be triggered by the processes of social recognition (Duff, 2013). In this case, when learners feel acknowledged as an important part of the course, they are more likely to act with purpose and initiative. Some learners acknowledged that such a sense of belonging encouraged them to participate more actively in the following lessons (see Section 4.3.2). This may explain why, in Cycle 2, learners proactively adapted SCOBAs (C2L1 and C2L2), requested feedback on additional learner-generated tasks (C2L5) and created visual summaries (C2L4); and why, in Cycle 3, they actively used Word comments to pose questions and seek targeted feedback from the teacher. In this sense, positive emotional experiences appeared to shape learners' orientation to mediation, influencing how they took up and enacted feedback, task tools, and opportunities for interaction. Existing empirical studies similarly show that positive emotions can enhance learners' willingness to take initiative and explore new learning strategies (Chen et al., 2025; Resnik & Dewaele, 2023). These findings illustrate how a sense of belonging can serve as an emotional foundation for agentic behaviours, supporting the view that learner agency is socially situated and responsive to classroom recognition (Duff, 2013). In this respect, positive emotions played a mediating role that transformed recognition into sustained engagement, shaping learners' uptake of mediation and enabling more agentic participation.

While most positive emotional experiences supported learner agency, emotional responses in this study were not uniformly positive. In particular, some learners reported feeling stress and anxiety during the process of graduated CF, especially when they were unable to respond successfully after several prompts. This might be explained by their perception of teacher's role in the classroom, which seems to be influenced by the Chinese Confucian-heritage tradition. In common teacher-centred classrooms shaped by the Chinese Confucian-heritage tradition, there are 'hierarchical relations between teachers and students' (Hu, 2013, p. 2). Thus, teachers are often regarded as the authority (Liu et al., 2021; Yu et al., 2016). Keeping such a belief in mind, learners may view receiving implicit CF

as an assessment while treat receiving explicit CF as the transmission of knowledge. Under the exam-oriented educational system in China, some Chinese EFL learners may have a fear of being assessed by the authority, which generates anxiety. Therefore, during the process of receiving graduated CF, learners' anxiety may stem from the feeling that they are constantly being assessed by the authority and failing when the teacher kept questioning them with different CF strategies. Rather than withdrawing, however, these emotions sometimes acted as mobilising forces that spurred agentic behaviours. Here, emotional discomfort appeared to play a mediating role in learners' engagement with graduated CF shaping whether mediation was taken up as a threat to be avoided or as a challenge to be worked through. For example, C3L5 acknowledged that the mental pressure pushed her to concentrate and try harder to overcome the challenge. Similarly, C1L5 described this pressure as triggering a sense of competition, which made her more committed to the task. In both cases, the emotional discomfort, like positive emotions, supported learner agency, too. These accounts support Swain (2013) observation that emotions such as frustration or stress may, under certain conditions, serve as productive forces in learning. They also align with Chen et al. (2025), who argue that emotional experiences, whether positive or negative, can function as agentic resources, enabling learners to sustain effort and deepen engagement when supported by a responsive learning environment.

In addition to feeling accepted, this study also finds that learners derived a strong sense of achievement from exploration and problem solving, which represent forms of agentic engagement. This was frequently reported as an emotional reward. For example, learners described their excitement of exploring and adapting SCOBAs on their own terms, experimenting with potential corrections in response to graduated CF, and jointly constructing texts in collaborative writing without receiving teacher step-by-step instruction. Some of them noted that, when doing tasks, they occasionally chose risks or less familiar expressions instead of relying on safe language, in the hope of receiving more feedback, thus creating more learning opportunities. C1L3 referred to this experience as a kind of conquest, achieved not through instruction, but through their own efforts. That is, such a sense of achievement stemmed from learners' ability to rely on themselves and strategically draw on available resources to accomplish a task, discover a solution, or overcome a challenge. Here, a sense of achievement played a mediating role by reinforcing learners' willingness to take risks and persist in exploration, thereby deepening their engagement with feedback and task tools. This suggests that learners' agentic engagement also reshaped how mediational resources were taken up and enacted, as learners actively explored, adapted, and extended available task tools. Exploration, in this context, can be understood as an agentic behaviour, where learner take initiative, make independent decisions, and act purposefully in responses to the learning environment (Van Lier, 2008). Therefore,

the findings indicate that these agentic behaviours themselves served as a source of positive emotional experiences.

Taken together, these findings related to emotional experiences illustrate a reciprocal relationship between emotion and agency. As Chen et al. (2025) argue, emotions in language learning can function both as resources for, and outcomes of, learners' agentic actions. While this perspective highlights the mutually reinforcing nature of emotion and agency, the present study further specifies how emotional experiences shape agency in task-mediated learning by mediating learners' uptake of pedagogical mediation. In particular, feelings of belonging and achievement, as well as moments of discomfort or pressure, influenced how learners oriented to feedback, task tools, and interactional opportunities, shaping whether these mediational resources were taken up as supportive affordances or experienced as constraints. This highlights the need to view emotional experience not as a secondary by-product of instruction, but as an integral part of the conditions through which agency can emerge and develop in task-mediated learning.

5.4. How does the case study-action research approach promote the development and revision of the TBLT framework?

Given the accuracy-oriented and teacher-led learning histories of the Chinese adult EFL learners in this study, writing was often treated as a product to be evaluated rather than a developmental process, leaving limited opportunities for strategic awareness and reflective control. The TMLT framework therefore embeds mediation within the task cycle to support both task completion and the gradual development of learner ownership. This section examines how the case study-action research approach enabled the TMLT framework to be progressively developed and refined through the SCT-informed TBLT writing course, constituting the study's key pedagogical contribution. In this design, action research offered a structured mechanism for cycle-by-cycle pedagogical revision through iterative planning, implementation, and reflection, while the case study lens provided a contextualised understanding of why particular adaptations became necessary for this learner group.

Building on these methodological affordances, the following subsections trace the framework's developmental trajectory from conceptualisation to refinement. I first clarify what I mean by "task-mediated" in the TMLT framework, which builds on and extends a task-based logic by incorporating the SCT notion of mediation into TBLT. Then, I explain why this framework is positioned between TBLT and TSLT by clarifying the rationale for their interconnection. Following this, I define what constitutes a task in this framework by outlining the criteria of this definition. Next, I discuss the methodological components of this framework that were shaped by empirical insights from the three research cycles in detail, which aims at guiding teachers from task design to task implementation. After that, I discuss

the foundational principles underlying the TMLT framework, which are grounded in TBLT but were further informed by insights generated through the implementation of this study. Finally, the chapter concludes by synthesising the framework through a summarising figure (Figure 7) that brings together the key principles and procedures.

5.4.1. Defining TMLT

5.4.1.1. Task as mediation: The conceptual core of TMLT

Through three iterative research cycles, this study moved from refining an SCT-informed task-based writing course to conceptualising a coherent pedagogical framework. I termed this framework task-mediated language teaching (TMLT) to underscore the role of mediation as its central organising principle. This conceptualisation does not depart from established TBLT understanding of tasks as meaning-focused, goal-oriented activities, but extends them by underscoring the mediational processes through which learner development occurs within and through completing tasks. It reflects a shift from viewing tasks primarily as units of classroom work to understanding them as mediational process and spaces through where language development is shaped by the interplay of both physical and symbolic tools (Poehner & Lantolf, 2024; Swain et al., 2015) in social interactions. In this framework, I conceptualise the concept of task as mediation in two complementary ways.

First, a task brings together a range of mediational means into a single activity space. Drawing on Kozulin (2023)'s interpretation, activities can function as mediators when they integrate a range of mediational means, such as materials, symbols, and humans, into a unified context. In this sense, tasks in the TMLT framework serve as sites where multiple mediated processes unfold. This interplay was evident across all three research cycles. Learners did not engage with SCOBAs, peer feedback, or teacher guidance in isolation. Rather, these mediational tools and interactions were activated concurrently within the task space. For example, during collaborative writing tasks, learners frequently referred to pragmatic SCOBAs and model texts while simultaneously negotiating their language choices with peers. As one participant in Cycle 1 explained, "We looked at the SCOBA together and talked about which sentence was more polite. Sometimes we changed the sentence after we read the example sentences again" (see Section 4.2.2). This illustrates how object-mediated tools and symbolic resources were co-deployed within peer dialogue. Tasks in the TMLT framework do more than sequence classroom activities. They serve as orchestrated spaces in which various mediational means converge and interact.

Second, the task itself functions as a cultural tool that mediates learners' activity. Tasks carry embedded norms, purposes, and affordances that shape how learners approach language use. Over

the course of this study, learners not only drew on mediational tools but also changed the way they engaged with the task itself. For example, as evidenced across all three cycles, they started to try out new ways of doing tasks, became more aware of how their writing sounds to others, and grew more comfortable with working collaboratively. This suggests that tasks in TMLT are not just sites of different types of mediation, but also play a role in helping learners change how they communicate, write, and work with others.

This dual interpretation of tasks as both sites and instruments of mediation extends the conceptual role of tasks in TBLT beyond structuring meaning-focused activity. It highlights the pedagogical value of task design not only as a means to structure activity, but as a dynamic vehicle for learner development within sociocultural contexts.

5.4.1.2. Positioning TMLT: Between and beyond TBLT and TSLT

Before moving to the pedagogical implementation of TMLT framework, it is essential to clarify how TMLT relates to existing instructional task-based approaches, particularly TBLT (Ellis et al., 2020; Long, 2015) and TSLT (Ellis, 2003, 2017, 2019). I argue that TMLT occupies a conceptual space between these two approaches because these approaches derive from distinct theories of learning – not because of any common theoretical underpinning, as has been analysed in the literature review (see Section 2.3.3.). The rationale for locating TMLT between TBLT and TSLT lies in the varying degrees of pre-task instruction they require and thus the different roles that tasks play in these approaches. I interpret their relationship as a spectrum (See Figure 6), with TBLT at one end, where tasks organize the entire learning process without explicit pre-teaching, and TSLT at the other end, where tasks are preceded by explicit instruction and serve as tools to practice pre-taught linguistic features. TMLT, with its moderate degree of explicitness in pre-task instruction, more explicit than TBLT but less explicit than TSLT, is positioned between these two approaches, incorporating mediation as a central principle in task design. While this continuum reflects the pedagogical positioning of TMLT, it does not capture its full conceptual orientation. In theoretical terms, TMLT also moves beyond the TBLT–TSLT spectrum by foregrounding mediation as the core developmental mechanism, rather than viewing tasks as vehicles for input, output, or automatization.

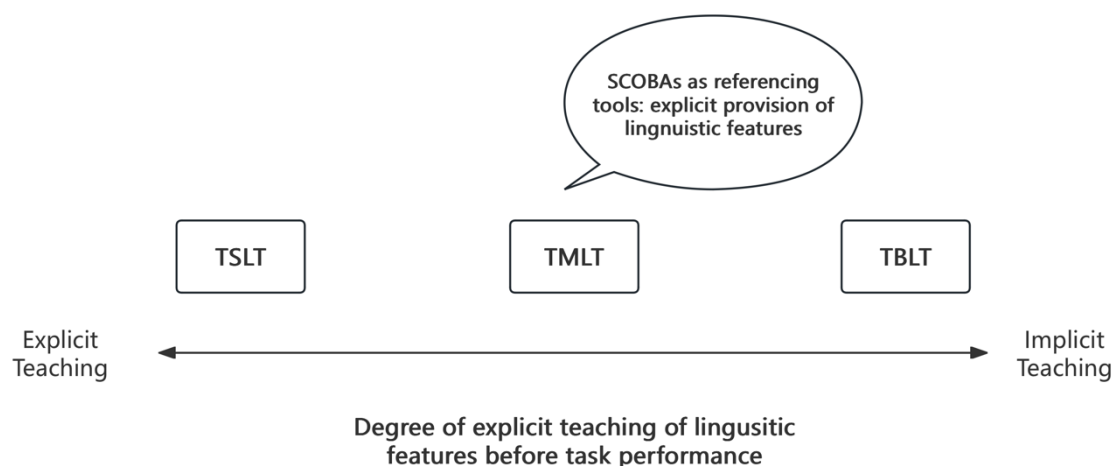


Figure 6 Positioning TMLT between TBLT and TSLT

This figure illustrates the degree of explicit instruction embedded in each approach, but it should be noted that it only represents their relative pedagogical configurations. It does not reflect the deeper theoretical distinctions, particularly TMLT's grounding in Sociocultural Theory which sets it apart as a conceptually distinct framework.

In fact, as presented in the literature review chapter (see Section 2.2.1), explicit teaching of linguistic features exists in both TBLT and TSLT. However, the timing of such explicit teaching differs in these three approaches due to the different underpinning psycholinguistic theories. TBLT rejects the concept of pre-teaching because it is grounded in psycholinguistic theories that advocate for a natural learning order (Long, 2016). In other words, the same language or syllabus may not suit all learners, and learners may not always be developmentally prepared to integrate specific language forms into their L2 repertoire at predetermined points (Long & Ahmadian, 2021). Informed by this theoretical perspective, pre-teaching serves little pedagogical value and can even undermine students' task performance by shifting their attention toward linguistic form rather than communicative meaning during task performance (Willis, 2021). As a result, TBLT delays the explicit teaching to its post-task stage (Ellis et al., 2020; Willis, 2021), thereby preserving the task as the central vehicle for language input and output, where learners rely on their own resources to achieve communicative goals through meaning-focused interaction. On the other hand, TSLT, which follows the PPP (Presentation, Practice, Production) model, is rooted in another psycholinguistic theory, Skill Acquisition Theory (SAT), which posits that language learning is a linear process from explicit to implicit knowledge. Here, tasks are used after explicit instruction to provide learners with opportunities to practice pre-taught linguistic features (Erlam & Tolosa, 2022). The task functions primarily as a tool to consolidate learning rather than as the primary medium for learning itself.

I would argue that TMLT occupies a middle ground between TBLT and TSLT because it also allows for explicit teaching. As an SCT-informed instructional framework, TMLT aligns with Poehner and Lantolf (2024)'s emphasis on well-structured, systematic teaching that provides learners with conceptual knowledge of language, particularly those complex and subtle features that are difficult to acquire through immersion alone. However, what distinguishes TMLT from both TBLT and TSLT is when and how the explicit instruction is integrated into the task cycle. In TMLT, the teaching of linguistic features is distributed across all stages of the task cycle. During the pre-task and main task stages, instruction of linguistic features is not directly delivered by the teacher. Instead, learners are provided with conceptual tools, such as SCOBAs, which function as referential resources to support their independent exploration and peer-mediated problem-solving. It is through this self-directed engagement that learners begin to explore the linguistic and pragmatic concepts. More teacher-led, detailed explanation takes place in the post-task stage, where explicit corrective feedback, whole-class clarification, and other activities consolidate learning. In this way, TMLT, like TBLT, maintains "taskness" by avoiding frontloaded instruction, while still offering structured support across the cycle. It thus avoids the pitfalls of TSLT in the Chinese ELF context, where pre-task explicit teaching often leads to memorization, formulaic language use, and limited learner agency (Hasnain & Halder, 2023; Liu et al., 2021).

More notably, as strongly framed by SCT, TMLT underscores a unique element, mediation, which is neither present in TBLT nor in TSLT. From the sociocultural stance, tasks create social contexts where learners engage in mediated interactions with peers and the teacher to co-construct knowledge. This re-conceptualisation of tasks further distinguishes TMLT as a framework that not only bridges existing approaches of TBLT and TSLT but also introduces a qualitatively different vision of how learning unfolds. This was clearly reflected in learner experiences across the research cycles. In Cycle 1, for instance, learners collaboratively revised their writing by drawing on peer negotiation and SCOBAs, treating the task not as a fixed exercise but as a space for joint exploration. As C1L3 described, "We didn't just write and move on. We had to discuss the tone, and then we looked back at the example. That changed how we said it." Similarly, in Cycle 2, post-task teacher feedback prompted learners to re-evaluate their initial linguistic choices, leading to deeper conceptual understanding. C2L5 reflected that "When the teacher explained why my sentence was a bit too direct, I understood it better than if I just copied a polite phrase. I saw the reason." These episodes illustrate how tasks in the TMLT framework became dynamic sites of mediated learning, where understanding was progressively constructed through interaction with tools, peers, and teachers.

5.4.1.3. Redefining the Task: Dual roles and design principles in TMLT

Based on the relationship and interconnections between TMTL, TBLT and TSLT discussed above, the term “task” in the TMLT framework calls for its own distinct definition and criteria. While SLA-informed TBLT has tended to privilege the task-as-workplan in defining what constitutes a task (see Section 2.3.1), particularly to ensure that tasks can be clearly specified and designed (Ellis et al., 2020), TMLT gives greater conceptual weight to the relationship between task-as-workplan and task-as-process. As learning from sociocultural perspective is inherently social and mediated (Kozulin, 2023; Lantolf et al., 2020; Poehner & Lantolf, 2024), it occurs not simply through pre-designed materials, but through the interactive, dynamic negotiation of meaning in real-time task performance. Tasks remain pedagogically designed units that specify goals, input, and expected outcomes, ensuring coherence and intentionality at the syllabus level. At the same time, learning is understood to unfold within the task-as-process, as learners actively co-construct meaning and develop language proficiency through social collaboration and mediation. By holding these two dimensions together, TMLT treats tasks not merely as instructional blueprints, but as structured yet open-ended sites of mediated development. In this respect, TMLT extends existing TBLT conceptualisations of tasks by treating the workplan and process not as competing perspectives, but as complementary dimensions of a task through which mediated development is both pedagogically designed for and interactionally realised.

In light of such theoretical foundations, I define tasks in the TMLT framework through three key criteria, which reflect the dual nature of tasks as both workplan and mediated process. The first criterion is that a task must entail interactive meaning-making, where meaning is co-constructed through interaction. This criterion acknowledges the focus on meaning, as proposed by Ellis et al. (2020) and Long and Ahmadian (2021), and further emphasises how meaning should be focused. Meaning co-construction embraces the importance of collaboration and social negotiation in the learning process, becoming the core to TMLT framework. This criterion was operationalised in the design of tasks that required learners to collaboratively produce context-sensitive written communication, such as formal request emails to unfamiliar professors or group replied to peer enquiries. These tasks were inherently meaning-focused, with no single correct answer, and demanded active interaction among learners to clarify intentions, evaluate appropriateness, and negotiate language choices. Learners need to jointly decide how to express tone, manage politeness, and ensure their messages aligned with communicative goals.

Secondly, tasks should support mediated learning. Tasks are designed to provide learners with mediational means, including but not limited to those implemented in this study: language, cultural artifacts, visual aids, teacher feedback, and peer collaboration, that facilitate language learning. The

task-as-workplan ensures that these means are embedded in the task, while the task-as-process allows learners to engage flexibly with these means during their interactions. Importantly, tasks themselves function as mediated activities, where the act of completing the task becomes a process of learning through mediation. As learners interact with these mediational tools, the task serves as a dynamic platform for negotiating meaning and developing linguistic and conceptual understanding.

Lastly, a task is expected to afford opportunities for collaboration. That is, a task can foster peer collaboration that enables learners to share knowledge and co-construct understanding through peer interaction. The workplan sets up collaborative structures, while the process allows these interactions to unfold dynamically, with learners contributing actively to each other's development. In this study, this principle was realised through collaborative writing tasks, where learners worked in triads to compose formal emails in real-world scenarios, such as requesting feedback from a professor or responding to a peer enquiry. These tasks required shared planning, joint decision-making, and ongoing negotiation of linguistic choices. Interview data revealed that learners frequently consulted one another on tone, phrasing, and content, with several participants noting that they gained new insights through peer collaborative work.

Briefly, tasks in the TMLT framework are collaborative, real-world activities designed to mediate language learning through meaningful communication. These tasks require learners to use language for communicative purposes, while engaging in the co-construction of meaning through interaction. They combine both the structured design of a workplan, which provides mediational tools, and the dynamic process of interaction, where learners adapt and negotiate to achieve an outcome. Effective mediation, whether through language, cultural artifacts, peer collaboration, or teacher feedback, guides learners in gaining control over the new language and using it to create meaning. In essence, tasks in TMLT bridge the gap between planned structure and interactive learning, promoting collaboration, interaction, and knowledge co-construction in alignment with SCT principles.

5.4.2 Stepwise Approach in Action: Instructional strategies for task design and implementation

As a pedagogical framework, TMLT provides a systematic approach to designing and implementing tasks in L2 writing classrooms. Grounded in SCT, it promotes learning through mediated interaction and offers a set of instructional strategies that support both task-as-workplan and task-as-process. These strategies include collaborative task selection, needs-informed sequencing aligned with learners' task priorities, pre-task conceptual preparation, interactive and tool-mediated main task work, and scaffolded post-task reflection and feedback. According to this framework, task design involves task

selection and task sequencing, while task implementation unfolds through three pedagogical phases of pre-task, main task, and post-task.

5.4.2.1. Task Design: Task selection

Following most task-based syllabi where tasks function as the primary unit in selecting and sequencing course content (Ellis et al., 2020; Long, 2015), TMLT framework assigns tasks the same central role in these two aspects. Given both the learner-centredness and learner-directedness of the TMLT framework, tasks should be selected and sequenced by the collaboration of the teacher and the target learners of the language course. Such collaboration is mainly facilitated through NA. Different from NA in TBLT (Long, 2015) where learners are only the recourse for needs collection, TMLT requests the target learners to participate as co-constructors in the NA process. Here, I term the NA in this framework as Collaborative Needs Analysis (CNA), which in essence, functions as the backbone of task design. I propose a three-phase process for conducting CNA, including individual needs exploration, collaborative needs and task negotiation, and pedagogical task development.

In the first phase of the CNA process, both teachers and learners are encouraged to gather information about learners' authentic needs to inform the discussion of potential target tasks for the course in the next phase. Teachers are advised to consult in-service learners, domain experts, applied linguists, other teachers, and administrators (Alhadijah, 2021; Gilabert & Malicka, 2021; González-Lloret, 2016). In addition to these conventional recommendations in the NA practices in literature, TMLT framework further requires teachers to prepare an information kit to assist learners in exploring their needs. This may include providing a SCOPA of focus group participation to guide the learners through the focus group and a list of sample needs to inspire them to identify and articulate their own needs more effectively. Learners, in turn, are encouraged to conduct research on their needs prior to the NA session, such as consulting senior peers, searching for common needs in similar contexts online, or reflecting on relevant experiences. To support this process, a preparatory guidance sheet that included sample needs and suggestions for independent exploration, such as key terms to search and sources to consult can be provided. While no formal training was given, this support resource offered light scaffolding to promote learner reflection. In the second phase of collaborative needs and task negotiation, learners are invited to a focus group where they share the preliminary insights that they developed during the individual needs exploration stage. Rather than simply reporting these ideas, learners are encouraged to draw on their personal experiences to explain, contextualise, and expand on their needs. This process supports the collaborative generation and refinement of potential target tasks. To facilitate fuller participation, the use of L1 is permitted, allowing learners to express themselves more freely and negotiate meaning more precisely. Teachers use the provided SCOPA of focus group participation to

guide the discussion, helping learners focus on tasks they need or want to perform, and collaboratively rank these tasks based on perceived importance. The outcome is a list of raw target tasks, constructed through negotiation, which will then be designed into pedagogical tasks by teachers. In the third phase of pedagogical task development, teachers refine these raw target tasks into pedagogical tasks. This includes designing pre-task, main-task, and post-task activities based on the collected information. The refined tasks are presented to learners for confirmation.

In this study, the three-phase CNA process was substantially operationalised in Cycle 3. The modifications made to CNA were grounded in challenges that emerged from NA sessions in Cycle 1 and Cycle 2, such as learners having difficulty articulating their needs, experiencing uncertainty about what to prepare, and lacking confidence in participating in focus group interaction (see Sections 4.2.2.4 and 4.3.2.4). Prior to the focus group session, learners received a preparatory guidance sheet that included sample needs (e.g., writing to request thesis feedback and addressing unclear rental terms or unexpected extra charges) and suggested keywords to support independent research (e.g., academic email communication, administrative and institutional email communication). During the focus group discussion, learners drew on the SCOPA of focus group participation to engage with one another's ideas. For instance, they used strategies in the SCOPA such as expressing agreement while expanding on peers' ideas. C3L2, for example, noted that while she had written initial emails before, she had never written replies and hoped the course can cover this. C3L5 responded that replying might be more difficult than imitating an email, as it often lacked a clear structure and required more nuanced judgment. This point was supported by C3L3 and C1L1, the latter of whom added that following up on emails that had not received a response was even more challenging than writing an initial or follow-up email. These insights directly informed the pedagogical task design in Lesson 6 and 8, where tasks were created around composing follow-up request emails and responses to ongoing inquiry email exchanges.

It is important to note that the collaborative NA proposed in TMLT differs from the NA, particularly TBNA, in the literature in two aspects. For one thing, while previous NA studies highlight that needs should be derived from various sources, not solely relying on learners (Gilabert, 2023; González-Lloret, 2016; Serafini et al., 2015), teachers were primarily responsible for collecting this information. In contrast, in the TMLT framework, learners actively participate in the needs collection process, sharing the responsibility with teachers in this study. This represents a departure from traditional language teaching where needs are typically pre-determined by the teacher or institution. It must be acknowledged that this shift towards shared responsibility in needs identification requires learners to understand both *what* they are expected to do and *how* to do it. When implementing CNA within the TMLT framework, teachers may draw on the tools used in this study, such as concrete sample needs,

suggested keywords to guide their preparation, and SCOBAs to support productive participation in the focus group discussion. These tools help ensure that learners can confidently take on their role as co-constructors of task goals rather than solely relying on teacher direction. Where feasible, teachers may also dedicate classroom time to explicitly clarifying expectations and modelling interaction strategies, further facilitating learners' meaningful engagement in the task selection process.

For another thing, TBNA typically employs a combination of qualitative and quantitative tools to validate data. As presented in the literature review, Serafini et al. (2015) emphasize the importance of "source x method" interactions in TBNA, where various sources should be investigated via the same method, and both quantitative and qualitative methods should be applied to each source. This approach is more likely to be appropriate for implementing large-scale NA at the curriculum level, because such analysis often involves a large number of learners, requiring generalization to identify common needs and trends across the population. Achieving reliable generalization necessitates scientific rigor, including the use of validity checks and triangulation through multiple methods and data sources to ensure the credibility of the findings. However, for small-scale NA at the course level, especially in small-size classrooms or when faced with certain authentic constraints, "source x method" interactions are not always necessary because the focus is not on generalizing patterns to a broader population, but on addressing immediate, situated needs of a small group. I interpret the key difference between TBNA in previous studies (Gilabert, 2023; González-Lloret, 2016; Serafini et al., 2015) and the collaborative NA in the TMLT framework as rooted in the concepts of learner-centredness and learner-directedness. In TBNA, teachers are responsible for all information collection and analysis, with learners only serving as information providers, which reflects learner-centredness to some extent. In contrast, collaborative NA in TMLT framework emphasizes active learner involvement in task design, positioning learners as contributors to the course, thereby fully embodying learner-directedness.

Indeed, NA itself has represented a valuable pedagogical advancement, particularly in educational contexts such as China, where classroom authority has traditionally been vested in the teacher and learners are often positioned as passive recipients of knowledge. By incorporating learner perspectives through methods such as interviews and surveys, NA, especially TBNA, foregrounds the importance of learner voice in curricular design and offers more alternative to top-down, textbook-driven approaches (Gilabert, 2023; Serafini et al., 2015). In this respect, NA constitutes a meaningful shift toward learner-centeredness in the educational settings where such perspectives have historically been overlooked. Building on this important foundation, the CNA proposed in the TMLT framework further extends the role of the learner from a source of information to a contributor to the course. While NA emphasises listening to learners, CAN emphasises working with learners. This shift is not merely procedural but

conceptual. It reflects a commitment to learner-directedness, wherein learners are no longer treated as passive recipients of knowledge but are actively involved in deciding what and how they learn. In the Chinese educational context, long-standing pedagogical traditions that prioritise teacher control, rote learning, and exam-oriented instruction have often limited learners' opportunities to express individual needs or participate in curricular decisions (Lou & Restall, 2020). CAN introduces a more participatory and empowering stance by challenging these norms and promoting shared agency in instructional design. Rather than replacing TBNA, CAN builds on its strengths while reconfiguring the teacher-learner relationship to promote greater ownership of the learning process.

5.4.2.2 Task Design: Task sequencing

Next, the co-selected pedagogical tasks are sequenced according to the learner-perceived importance and the intrinsic challenge. Indeed, SCT offers little to task sequencing (Ellis et al., 2020), because it primarily emphasizes the process of learning through mediation and social interaction, rather than viewing tasks as static products to be sequenced. From an SCT perspective, learning is dynamic and developmental, and thus, learners' needs are likely to evolve over time, as demonstrated in this study. This implies that the NA process is ongoing throughout the course, with both teachers and learners continuously adapting tasks and instructional strategies to meet changing needs. This view aligns with the concept of "contingent needs analysis" proposed by Mochizuki (2017). As Ellis et al. (2020, p. 115) point out, "a task-based course informed by SCT will, at best, have a provisional syllabus, which is redeveloped as the course progresses." Therefore, SCT does not provide specific guidelines for sequencing tasks in a fixed manner based on cognitive complexity as suggested by Robinson (2015), Ellis et al. (2020) and many other TBLT scholars (e.g., Révész, 2021). Instead, task sequencing is grounded in learners' needs, much like Long (2015)'s approach. Both Long (2015) and I prioritised tasks based on the needs identified through NA, although we approached task design from different theoretical perspectives. Following Long (2015), who sequences tasks in terms of their importance and intrinsic complexity, TMLT suggests sequencing tasks by considering both their perceived importance to learners and their communicative complexity, which was operationalised in this study as the number of communicative issues learners need to address in a given task. One case from Cycle 3 illustrates this sequencing rationale. Although learners identified follow-up communication as highly important, the task entailed greater communicative complexity than more formulaic activities. For this reason, it was positioned later in the course, reflecting a balance between perceived importance and communicative demands.

5.4.2.3 Task Implementation: Options for pre-task, during task and post-task stages

The task implementation in the TMLT framework follows a similar methodological structure to the TBLT frameworks proposed by Ellis et al. (2020) and Willis (1996, 2021). It includes the pre-task phase, the main-task phase, and the post-task phase. The options for implementing tasks in each of these phases are informed by the empirical findings from this study and theoretical justifications from the perspective of SCT. These options are not meant to be executed within a single lesson but can be distributed across two or even three consecutive lessons, particularly in intensive language courses where the three lessons could be completed within one week.

Pre-task stage

Activities in pre-task phrase aim at preparing learners for the main task (Ellis, 2003; Ellis et al., 2020; Willis & Willis, 2007; Willis, 1996, 2021). Similar to what Willis (1996, 2021) and Ellis et al. (2020) suggest, pre-task activities can take the forms of video watching, group discussion, reading for gist and any preparational activities that help to familiarise learners with the context and related vocabulary. Notably, as previously discussed in Section 5.5.1.2, in order to protect the “taskness”, TMLT does not advocate explicit pre-teaching linguistic features, such as a specific grammatical rule or sentence pattern, during the pre-task stage. However, it does not mean no information about linguistic features, pragmatic features, and writing structures, is provided. Task-related SCOBAs are recommended to be provided to learners during the individual main task preparation time. These SCOBAs can be designed based on common language problems encountered in the previous lessons, teaching aims, or even learner-raised needs. The selection of which linguistic items should be designed into SCOBAs is based on the common language problems learners encountered in the previous lessons, the teaching aims, or even the learners’ requests. Learners are allowed to have some time to explore the provided SCOBAs independently as part of their task preparation. As discussed in Section 5.5.1.2, the provision of SCOBAs places TMLT conceptually between TBLT and TSLT.

To support meaningful engagement with the SCOPA, learners are encouraged to first explore it individually and then draw on it during subsequent peer or group interaction. While no direct instruction is provided at this stage, the teacher plays an active mediating role by circulating, observing learner engagement, and offering individualised prompts when necessary. For example, if a learner seems unsure how to interpret a pragmatic strategy in the SCOPA, the teacher may pose guiding questions such as “Where in your draft might this be relevant?” or “Can you think of a place where this expression could be used?” In some cases, mini peer-sharing moments are introduced to allow learners to exchange interpretations of the SCOPA and see how others make use of it in practice. If learners choose not to use the SCOPA or appear disengaged, the teacher may revisit its relevance

during post-task reflection, prompting learners to consider whether and how these mediational tools could have supported their performance. In this way, learners are not forced to use the SCOBAs in a prescribed manner but are gradually socialised into viewing it as a resource that can be flexibly and strategically drawn upon.

Main task stage

In the main task stage, collaborative writing in pair work is suggested. During this stage, task-related SCOBAs serve as referencing tools. While learners are engaged in collaborative writing, the teacher can use the comment feature in Microsoft Word's collaborative mode to offer online written CF. This CF is embedded within the planning-drafting-revision cycle of the collaborative writing task, rather than delivered as a separate instructional episode.

Crucially, the collaborative writing task itself functioned as a mediational space. By requiring learners to jointly plan, draft, and revise texts, the task naturally provided opportunities for co-regulation, negotiation of meaning, and mutual scaffolding. The task process inherently prompted learners to articulate their linguistic choices, justify decisions, and co-construct their understanding of language. Thus, mediation occurred not only through teacher-provided CF but also through task-generated peer interactions, positioning the task itself as a pivotal mediational tool in the TMLT framework. While tasks themselves create valuable mediational opportunities, the practical challenge remains regarding precisely how and when CF should enter into this process.

The use of CF during main task stage, an option of “within-task focus on form” (Ellis et al., 2020), has been the subject of ongoing debate in TBLT research. Willis (1996, 2021) takes a relatively more meaning-focused stance, arguing that interrupting the task with CF can hinder learners' communicative fluency and autonomy. Thus, Willis (1996, 2021) insists that CF should be withheld until the post-task phase to avoid shifting attention away from meaning-making. However, scholars, such as Long (2015) and Ellis et al. (2020), support the use of CF during the main task stage, although they differ in how it should be implemented. Long (2015) proposes that CF should be reactive, providing only in response to errors during task performance, while Ellis et al. (2020) supports both pre-emptive and reactive CF, addressing anticipated issues and online real-time errors.

Essentially, these contrasting views raise two questions: whether CF should be given during task performance, and if so, what form it should take. I interpret the key pedagogical challenge to be one of balancing support and learner autonomy: how to help without undermining learner control over the task. In this study, I argue that CF can be integrated into task performance, particularly in writing tasks, where the process tends to involve natural pauses for planning, drafting, and revision. Notably,

it must remain highly implicit, functioning more as a prompt for reflection than a direct correction. This perspective aligns with the sociocultural view of learning as an interactionally mediated process, where feedback serves not as evaluation but as a scaffold that supports problem-solving (Poehner & Lantolf, 2024). This design is grounded in sociocultural theory (SCT), with the intention that implicit CF serves as a mediational tool during the reviewing stage, aiding learners in independently identifying and correcting errors after the drafting process. While implicit CF may not always lead to immediate error identification and correction, it promotes collaborative languaging, encouraging learners to engage in discussions about the language and jointly explore solutions. Findings from semi-structured interviews with learners in Cycle 2 (see Section 5.3.2) supported this design, as learners noted that implicit CF spurred deeper peer discussions and metalinguistic reflections. These interactions helped them co-construct their understanding of language, enhancing both their autonomy and collaborative problem-solving abilities. Thus, implicit CF not only functioned as a corrective tool but also acted as a catalyst for meaningful language exploration among learners.

Post-task stage

In the post task stage, I proposed six instructional options (see Table 9 below), but it does not mean all of them need to be adopted in every lesson. These options provide flexibility, allowing teachers to adapt according to the specific situations in the language teaching classrooms. Some options, such as teacher graduated CF and task repetition, can be used more frequently, while others, such as SCOBAs discussion and reshaping, teacher-led modelling, and collaborative revision tasks may be employed selectively based on the learners' progress or focus areas.

Table 9 Summary of pre-post task instructional options in the TMLT framework

Instructional option	Brief Description
Teacher graduated CF	Dynamic, interactional CF following task performance
Task repetition	Individual writing task repetition combining content and procedure to support self-regulation.
Individual Tutorials	Follow up one-to-one sessions providing graduated CF on learners' individual writing drafts.
SCOBAs discussion & reshaping	Peer analysis and adaptation of SCOBAs
Teacher-led modelling	Retrospective demonstration of writing process
Collaborative revision tasks	Peer or teacher-led revision of written texts

Teacher graduated CF is suggested to be a staple in the post-task stage of every lesson, typically provided to groups or the whole class immediately after the main task stage. As has been discussed in Sections 5.2 and 5.3, graduated CF is a crucial component within the TMLT framework, offering high-quality mediation through teacher-learner interaction. Notably, this post-task graduated CF builds on the implicit written CF provided during the main task stage. As has previously been discussed in the main task phase above, CF during task performance functions as a low-key prompt, often delivered via highlights or margin comments, allowing learners to notice issues independently without disrupting the collaborative writing flow. This written feedback serves as a preliminary entry point into a longer feedback trajectory, with the post-task graduated CF functioning as its interactionally rich follow-up. Teachers, especially those new to using graduated CF, can then use the regulatory scale to tailor their oral feedback, gradually adjusting the level of support based on learner responses. Focus on forms can be realized through the teacher graduated CF in this stage, which will not harm “taskness” anymore (Ellis et al., 2020; Jackson, 2022).

Task repetition, often assigned as homework, is another key player on the must-do list for each lesson. Most previous TBLT studies draw on either a psycholinguistic perspective or a cognitive psychological perspective as the theoretical underpinning for task repetition (see Section 2.3.4). The former typically focuses on how task repetition influences learners’ attention and cognitive load, as seen in Robinson (2015)’s SSARC model and Skehan (2015)’s LAC, while the latter emphasizes the proceduralisation of knowledge through repeated practice, as seen in DeKeyser (2020)’s SAT (Bui & Yu, 2022). However, TMLT, which is heavily shaped by SCT, regards task repetition as an opportunity for learners to transition from other-regulation towards self-regulation. While the collaborative writing in the main task stage and teacher graduated CF focus on external support and other-mediation, task repetition allows learners to take greater control over their own learning by independently applying what they have learned, thus helps moving to self-regulation. As has been discussed in the literature review chapter (see Section 2.3.4), previous studies have revealed an overall positive effect of task repetition, especially procedural repetition, on the improvement of learners’L2 performance (Ajabshir & Poorebrahim, 2021; Bryfonski, 2020; Cui & Luo, 2024; Ellis et al., 2020; Kim & Li, 2024; Namkung & Kim, 2024).

In terms of the repetition types, TMLT draws on the mixed content and procedural repetition strategy proposed by Ellis et al. (2020), where both the writing content and procedure from the tasks in the main task stage are retained to some extent. Unlike the collaborative writing in the main task stage, task repetition requests individual writing. Learners are expected to complete the writing task independently, making the repetition procedure distinct from the collaborative nature of the main task, but still maintaining a similar writing purpose, such as composing an inquiry email. Regarding the

writing content or topic, teachers are suggested to offer learners two or more options based on the pre-sessional NA or even provide the flexibility for learners to design their own topics with teacher approval. This is based on the idea that learner-generated content, in contrast to teacher-generated content, appears to enhance personal investment in the learning process, leading to greater cognitive, social, and emotional engagement during performance (Lambert, 2023). This design decision is also supported by findings from Cycle 2 of this study, where learners expressed higher motivation and demonstrated deeper engagement when working on writing tasks that they had developed themselves (see Section 4.3.2.3). In addition to completing individual writing tasks, learners are encouraged to mark any language points they find confusing or areas where they require further instruction. This provides teachers with valuable insights into learners' needs, helping to inform more targeted and learner-directed instruction during the follow-up individual tutorials and subsequent lessons.

In recent studies of task repetition, the joint effect of task repetition and teacher CF on L2 writing development has been empirically demonstrated (Khezlou, 2020; Kim & Li, 2024; Kim et al., 2022). Therefore, the TMLT framework builds on this combination, incorporating teacher graduated CF in a follow-up individual tutorial session after the completion of individual task repetition. Specifically, TMLT framework suggests teachers provide implicit written feedback after the submission of the individual writing task, marking the beginning of the graduated CF process. This initial written CF aims to prompt learners to reflect before the follow-up individual tutorial. During the individual tutorial, graduated CF strategies are suggested to be provided again, with the regulatory scale serving as a reference tool to guide the CF process. It is worth noting that feedback may not always be initiated or led by the teacher; learners, like those in Cycle 2 (see Section 4.3.1.2), may also take an active role in directing the feedback process by seeking approval and clarification or requesting additional mediation on specific issues. The interplay between teacher-led and learner-directed feedback points to a more reciprocal model of mediation. Rather than relying solely on teacher guidance, these learners demonstrated self-reflection and took the initiative to seek clarification or additional support. These actions suggest the feedback process had begun to evolve into a co-regulation space where agency and responsibility were shared.

In addition, SCOBAs discussion and reshaping is a flexible option that can be integrated into post-task stage when learners encounter particularly challenging linguistic items. This activity is a typical focus-on-form activity, which generates interactional opportunities for languaging. Learners are requested to first discuss the features of a linguistic SCOBAs with peers, and then adapt the SCOBAs based on their own shared understandings. Learners can choose to develop their own SCOBAs either collaboratively or individually. The adaptation of SCOBAs may include, but is not limited to, changes in visual

presentation, modifications to sample sentences, and the addition of new metalinguistic explanations. After that, the teacher can provide either written or oral feedback on the adapted SCOBAs to assess whether learners have developed a correct understanding of the linguistic concepts.

Teacher-led modelling is a flexible option in the post-task stage, where the teacher demonstrates the process of constructing, drafting, and revising a text, providing learners with a clear example of how to approach writing tasks. Unlike in Ellis et al. (2020)'s framework, where modelling is typically placed in the pre-task stage, it is positioned in the post-task stage to protect the "taskness" of the main task. This ensures that learners engage with the task independently, without being overly influenced by the teacher's model before attempting the task themselves. To make learning more interactive and personalized, the teacher can deliberately create errors that students have made in previous tasks in the writing sample, encouraging the class to identify and correct them.

Another flexible post-task option is collaborative revision, which can be either teacher-led or peer-based. These involve learners revising writing samples, either anonymised drafts from classmates or texts from previous cohorts, through group discussion. Unlike the revision phase within the main task stage, where learners collaboratively improve their own jointly produced texts, post-task collaborative revision requires working with external texts. This adds complexity, as learners must infer the writer's intentions and negotiate revisions without full knowledge of the original meaning. For example, in Cycle 3, learners revised an anonymised peer email requesting thesis feedback. As they discussed how to clarify intent and adjust tone, C3L1 noted, "It's hard to change this because I don't know what she really meant," highlighting how such tasks prompted attention to audience, pragmatics, and collaborative negotiation.

Viewed as a whole, task selection, task sequence and task implementation jointly determine the overall direction of the course, the development of tasks over time, and the organisation of classroom interaction. In practice, teachers may draw on these strategies selectively, adapting them in response to contextual constraints and learner needs.

5.4.3. Foundational Principles of TMLT

Building on the task-based principles proposed by Long (2015) and Ellis et al. (2020), the TMLT framework retains the core pedagogical principles of TBLT while extending them through a sociocultural orientation. Accordingly, the first three principles of TMLT are adapted from the foundational principles of TBLT, reflecting their shared emphasis on meaningful communication and real-world language use. The remaining two principles, however, mark a theoretical shift by foregrounding mediation and learner agency as central mechanisms of development in SCT, which are

operationalised in unique pedagogical guidelines within the TMLT framework. Together, these five principles guide teachers in designing and implementing tasks that support effective and purposeful L2 learning.

P1: Promote Learning by doing through process-oriented language development

The first foundational principle of the TMLT framework is to promote learning by doing through process-oriented language development. At its core, this principle is grounded in the widely recognised educational notion of “learning by doing”. This principle draws on multiple traditions that converge around a shared process-oriented view of learning.

From a TBLT perspective, learning takes place through task performance rather than for task performance (Ellis et al., 2020; Long, 2015). That is, tasks are vehicles of language development, where performance is not the goal but the site of learning. From a Deweyan experiential view, learning arises through reflection and action (Miettinen, 2000). Meanwhile, a social constructivist paradigm, which underpins this study, further emphasizes that knowledge is socially constructed through interaction, contextualised experience, and shared meaning-making. Together, these perspectives shape a coherent understanding of “learning by doing” in the TMLT framework. Tasks are not instructional endpoints, but dynamic spaces of mediated development. Learning is understood as an emergent, socially embedded process in which learners construct knowledge through doing, revising, and reflecting, often in collaboration with others. Rather than front-loading content or isolating discrete forms, this principle positions tasks as lived experiences where learning unfolds in action. In this sense, “learning by doing” is more than a procedural choice. In fact, it reflects an underlying view of learning as experiential, co-regulated, and enacted through purposeful task engagement.

“Learning by doing” is a principle that guides both learner development in TMLT and sets expectations for teachers. This framework requires teachers to enact, observe, and adjust instruction in response to emergent learner needs, rather than rely solely on pre-planned scripts. In this sense, teaching itself becomes a dynamic and situated activity of doing and reflecting, mirroring the developmental processes it seeks to support in learners. Embracing this principle also entails a view in how professional learning is understood. It is not as the passive acquisition of pedagogical knowledge, but as an active, ongoing process of refining practice through classroom experience. Thus, learning by doing functions as both a pedagogical and a professional imperative within the TMLT framework, reaffirming its core commitment to meaningful, adaptive, and experience-driven development for all participants in the classroom.

P2: Encourage individualized instruction.

The principle of “encourage individualized instruction” is carried forward from one of Long (2015)’s methodological principles. Ellis et al. (2020) also propose a similar principle of individual difference, requiring teachers to consider learners’ aptitude, motivation, and personal profiles. The TMLT framework builds on these ideas and is further grounded in SCT, which the role of scaffolding as a core mechanism of learning. In this framework, individualised support in learning is not just a matter of general differentiation, but also of providing tailored scaffolding that aligns with each learner’s ZPD. First, the framework requires teachers to consistently attend to learners’ evolving needs throughout the course in order to adjust tasks accordingly. Second, it requests teachers to provide graduated CF, which is tailored to individual ZPD, particularly in individual tutorials, ensuring effective and targeted learning support. In this way, scaffolding becomes the operational form of individualised instruction in TMLT, enacted through both pedagogical decisions and moment-to-moment feedback.

P3: Uphold Task authenticity

The next principle is the situational authenticity of tasks, a concept elaborated in the literature review (see Section 2.3.1), where task authenticity is understood as comprising both situational and interactional dimensions (Ellis, 2017; Willis & Willis, 2007). While interactional authenticity focuses on language processing during communication, situational authenticity concerns the real-world nature of the task itself. This principle is similar to the principle of “relevance” proposed by Ellis et al. (2020). As Ellis et al. (2020) do not request tasks to be situationally authentic from the real-world outside the classroom, they use the term relevance to describe the relationship between tasks and real-world communicative demands. However, in TMLT, tasks generated based on learners’ needs outside the classroom, present learners with real-world communicative demands directly. The design of tasks is intended to enable learners to use the language in real communicative situations, thereby developing their communication skills in a real-life language environment.

P4: Promote collaboration in both peer and teacher-learner interactions

The fourth principle of the TMLT framework is collaborative learning, which emphasises the central role of interaction in language development. This principle holds that language learning occurs in interaction with others, reflecting the idea of the co-construction of knowledge. Informed by this principle, TMLT writing lessons include collaborative writing as the pedagogical task in the main task stage, where learners work collaboratively to co-construct texts by negotiate meaning and solving linguistic challenges. Furthermore, collaboration also occurs between the teacher and the learners. TMLT provides ample opportunities for teachers and learners to co-construct the learning experience, including but not limited to task design, material development and the feedback process.

P5: Shaped by the learner-directed nature, supporting an agentic role for learners throughout the course

Built on Willis (1996, 2021)'s TBLT framework which emphasises learner-centredness, the TMLT pedagogical framework further deepens this aspect by elevating it to a learner-driven nature, making this the final yet strongest principle rooted in SCT. Learner-centredness in TBLT, as explained by Long (2015) from the psycholinguistic perspective, is demonstrated by designing course content around learners' communicative needs and addressing linguistic issues based on their psycholinguistic readiness. Learner-directedness also acknowledges need-based task design proposed by learner-centredness but sees it only as part of the manifestation of learners' agentic role, placing greater emphasis on their active involvement. In this sense, TMLT builds on the learner-centred orientation of TBLT by placing greater conceptual emphasis on learner agency throughout the learning process. In practice, this principle requires providing learners with control over the direction of their learning. This includes, but is not limited to, designing tasks that offer flexibility for learners to make co-decisions, set their own goals, and influence how they engage with the tasks. For example, learners could be encouraged to be involved in selecting authentic tasks, adapting learning materials, or orienting feedback process by seeking clarification and confirmation. This principle guides teachers to design conditions that support learners' agency, providing opportunities for them to take responsibility for their own learning process, thereby developing a strong sense of self and ownership throughout the course.

Although none of these principles are unique to TMLT in isolation, its conceptual contribution lies in bringing together and theoretically reorganising principles found across existing TBLT approaches and adaptations within a coherent sociocultural framework. The first principle defines the developmental orientation of learning as processual and enacted through task activity. Task authenticity specifies the conditions under which such activity can meaningfully function as a site of development. Individualised mediation and collaborative interaction organise how support is structured within that activity. Finally, the learner-directed principle clarifies how learners are positioned within this system, highlighting agency in process. In combination, these principles form a coherent, multi-layered framework rather than a collection of discrete pedagogical features.



Figure 7 TMLT pedagogical framework

5.4.4. Summary of the TMLT pedagogical framework

Figure 7 summarises the TMLT pedagogical framework. As previously discussed, this framework is governed by five pedagogical principles that guide teachers in enacting task-mediated teaching.

Among the five principles underpinning the TMLT framework, learning by doing, individualised instruction, and task authenticity retain TBLT's long-standing commitments to meaning-focused, learner-relevant task engagement, while collaboration and learner-directedness further foreground SCT-informed understanding of mediation, co-construction, and learner agency as mechanisms for development. Functioning together, these principles ensure that tasks operate as mediational processes and spaces, where learners are scaffolded, challenged, and empowered to regulate their learning through purposeful participation in meaningful and real-world communication.

In terms of pedagogical realisation, the TMLT framework includes task design and task implementation. Task design includes task selection informed by the results of CNA, and task sequencing based on the inherent complexity of tasks and learners' perceived importance of each task. Task implementation follows a tripartite structure widely recognised in TBLT scholarship (Ellis et al., 2020; Willis, 2021), comprising pre-task, main task, and post-task phases. Collaborative writing is adopted as the core main-task modality, accompanied with carefully designed pre-task and post-task activities and tools providing scaffolding to prepare learners for performance and promoting language development.

Chapter 6: Conclusion

6.1. Summary of the Study

Informed by SCT, this study aimed to develop a pedagogical framework for teaching L2 writing through the instructional adaptation of the TBLT frameworks proposed by Ellis et al. (2020) and Willis (1996, 2021). Building on the TBLT frameworks, the TMLT framework was iteratively developed, adapted, and refined over three research cycles based on empirical classroom interactions and learners' responses. This study was qualitative, grounded in the paradigms of social constructivism, aiming to understand how learners' language developed and how they perceived their learning experiences during the TMLT writing course.

Following an integrated case study and an action research design, this study was conducted over three iterative research cycles, each informing the development and refinement of the TMLT framework. I, as the teacher-researcher, conducted this study in a private language training centre in China, with participants being adult students aiming to study abroad. A total of 17 participants took part in the study, with 5 in Cycle 1 and 6 in Cycle 2 and Cycle 3 respectively. In each cycle, video-recorded classroom interactional data and semi-structured learner interview data were collected and analysed to trace learners' English language development and explore their perceptions of the course. Microgenetic analysis was employed to trace learners' English language developmental trajectories. Interactional features, such as who initiated mediation processes and how dialogues unfolded during collaborative tasks, were also documented when they emerged during the analysis. Semi-structured interview data were thematically analysed to explore learners' perceptions of their learning experiences.

This study finds that learners' English language development throughout the TMLT writing course followed a gradual trajectory from other-regulation to self-regulation. While the overall progress was evident, the development was non-linear, with occasional regressions. During the other-regulation process, they were not passively mediated, but engaged in co-regulation with the teacher and their peers in interaction. Learners progressively appropriated not only linguistic and pragmatic resources but also mediation strategies from the teacher, their peers, and the learning tools, such as writing samples and SCOBAs. Additionally, L1 played an important mediational role, serving cognitive, affective, and interactional functions during the TMLT writing course. Regarding the main findings on learners' perceptions of their learning experiences, learners generally reported positive experiences across several dimensions. They recognised notable improvement in their linguistic and pragmatic competences, especially grammatical accuracy, discursive organisation, and pragmatic appropriateness, as well as gains in writing fluency and transferable skills such as collaboration and

summarisation. They expressed strong recognition of the mediation received throughout the course, valuing both object mediation and human mediation. Positive emotional responses were consistently reported, including feelings of respect, achievement, enjoyment, and an emerging sense of ownership and belonging. Across the three cycles, learners progressively took more active roles in shaping their learning experience, reflecting an increasing sense of learner agency.

6.2. Contributions of the Study

The most significant contribution of this study is the development of the TMLT framework, which enriches TBLT by embedding mediation, learner agency and socially co-constructed learning processes into task design and implementation. By offering a structured yet flexible pedagogical model grounded in SCT, TMLT addresses the practical needs of L2 writing instruction for adult EFL learners. In addition to this pedagogical contribution, this study contributes to theoretical understandings of using tasks from a sociocultural perspective and proposes a methodological innovation by developing a three-cycle iterative case study-action research framework suitable for dynamic settings with transient cohorts.

Pedagogically, this study makes a significant contribution by enriching the TBLT approach through the development of the TMLT framework. Rather than rejecting TBLT outright, this study builds on its established strengths, particularly its emphasis on meaning-focused interaction, and integrates insights from SCT to expand its pedagogical reach. Specifically, the TMLT framework foregrounds the concept of mediation as central to language learning, recognising that learning is not merely the result of task engagement, but is deeply shaped by the tools, artefacts, and social interactions embedded within tasks. Incorporating SCT into TBLT, the TMLT framework emphasises that tasks are not just opportunities for communication but also structured mediational activities through which learners develop metacognitive awareness and linguistic competences. This enriched perspective underscores the interactional nature of task performance, where learning occurs through co-regulation between teacher, peers, and learners themselves, ultimately promoting the transition from other-regulation to self-regulation.

A key pedagogical innovation introduced in this study is the development of collaborative needs analysis, which reconceptualises traditional needs analysis (Gilabert, 2023; Long, 2015) as a developmental and interactional process. Rather than serving solely as a procedural step to determine course content (Long, 2015), collaborative needs analysis was implemented as a reflective and socially mediated activity through which learners articulated their goals, negotiated priorities with peers, and contributed to the shaping of subsequent tasks. This participatory structure fostered learner agency, enhanced task relevance, and enabled the learners in this study to assume an active role in co-

constructing their learning process. As such, collaborative needs analysis functioned not only as an initial planning tool, but as a sustained mediational mechanism that supported learner ownership and repositioned learners as contributors within the task cycle.

Beyond collaborative needs analysis, this study contributes new pedagogical strategies to task-based instruction by systematically integrating SCT-informed practices into a cohesive framework. These include the use of SCOBAs to support learner exploration and conceptual development, the design of collaborative writing activities to facilitate dialogic meaning-making and peer mediation, the systematic use of graduated corrective feedback to scaffold individualised learner development, and the incorporation of learner-selected task tools to promote autonomy and personal relevance. While each of these elements has been explored in prior studies, their intentional combination within a single pedagogical model represents a novel contribution to TBLT. Together, these practices offer structured but flexible ways to enhance learner engagement, support cognitive and linguistic growth, and foster a sense of agency and voice. Thus, by providing detailed procedures for task design, mediation integration, and learner involvement, the TMLT framework enhances the practical usability of task-based instruction, making it more accessible and actionable for teachers seeking to support learner development through socially mediated interaction. In doing so, this study expands the pedagogical repertoire of task-based instruction, offering a theoretically grounded and empirically informed framework that balances structure and learner agency, mediation, and meaning-making.

Conceptually, this study contributes to the field by offering a reconceptualisation of two key concepts, task and mediation, through the lens of SCT. In mainstream TBLT, tasks are typically understood as meaning-focused activities designed to promote communicative language use, often conceptualised as workplan (Ellis et al., 2020) or input-output (Long, 2015; Long & Ahmadian, 2021) mechanism that elicits learner production. However, drawing on SCT, this study can forward an argument for an enriched conceptualisation that views tasks as both pre-designed workplans and mediated process. In this view, tasks are sites where mediation occurs via tools, peers, or teachers, and at the same time, they are mediational themselves, which means learners learn how to perform the task by performing it, and through this process, internalise both its procedural structure and its conceptual demands.

This study further shows that tasks are not context-free. Their structure, interactional norms, and communicative expectations are shaped by broader social contexts. Take the task of English email writing in this study for example. Learners were not only expected to convey information clearly and concisely, but also to conform to genre-specific conventions such as the use of polite forms, hedging, and indirectness. For many learners, engaging with such tasks required more than linguistic competence, and it also demanded an understanding of the rhetorical expectations.

Methodologically, this study contributes by developing a three-cycle iterative CS-AR framework, tailored for contexts where rapid cohort turnover prevents the use of traditional longitudinal action research designs. Building on earlier studies that have combined case study and action research, such as Bates (2008) and Sáez Bondía and Cortés Gracia (2022), this study further refined this integration by applying it to the iterative development of an instructional framework in the field of language education. In particular, the CS-AR design employed in this study treated each research cycle with a different cohort as a bounded case within a collective case study, while embedding action research process of planning, acting, observing, and reflecting within each case. In doing so, it offered a methodological solution to the tension between the need for in-depth, contextualised understanding, as prioritised in case study research and the demand for iterative improvement, as emphasised in action research. Moreover, maintaining consistent research questions and methods across cycles, while allowing minor adaptations to data collection tools (e.g., slight modifications to interview questions), the CS-AR framework ensured both comparability and flexibility throughout the project. This methodological design offered a coherent and adaptable model for course-level instructional development where participant groups change over time.

6.3. Reflection as a Teacher-Researcher

Engaging in this study as a teacher-researcher offered me a rare opportunity to examine my own professional practice from both pedagogical and research perspectives. By assuming the dual role enabled me to trial the TMLT framework in authentic classroom contexts and promoted a fundamental shift in how I conceptualise teaching and professional learning. Through iterative cycles of practice and reflection, I began to see classroom teaching not merely as a site of delivery, but as a set of inquiry. In this section, I reflect on the evolving nature of my teaching and researching identities, drawing attention to the ways in which adjustment, reflection, and emotional engagement converged to shape my growth as both a teacher and a researcher. I conclude by positioning teacher professional learning as a process driven not solely by formal training, but by experiential learning grounded in an inquiry-based stance (Burns, 2009; Hayes, 2019).

At the beginning of this study, I approached teaching with a strong inclination toward structure, predictability, and control. These preferences were rooted in my prior experience with traditional teaching methods and the structured demands of online course delivery. I initially assumed that careful planning and well-prepared materials would ensure smooth classroom execution. However, the implementation of the TMLT framework quickly change this belief. As the framework encouraged learner agency, collaborative engagement, and scaffolded interaction, the classroom became inherently dynamic and less predictable. I encountered a range of situations in which tasks took longer

than expected, students responded in unanticipated ways, and planned sequences had to be modified or abandoned altogether. At first, these moments were perceived as disruptions or challenges. Yet over time, I began to recognise that this unpredictability was not a sign of poor planning, but rather an inherent feature of dialogic, learner-centred instruction grounded in SCT.

This realisation prompted a fundamental transformation in how I viewed my role as a teacher. Rather than acting as a controller of knowledge transmission, I increasingly saw myself as a facilitator of learning, someone who must continuously attend to and respond to students' evolving needs. This shift was particularly evident in the delivery of graduated CF, where real-time responsiveness to learner uptake required constant adjustment in the explicitness and type of feedback provided. Similarly, I found myself modifying lesson content, group size, and instructional materials both during and between lessons. These adjustments were not deviations from the plan, but pedagogically necessary responses to the emergent realities of the classrooms. They reflected a deeper understanding of the principles underpinning the TMLT framework, particularly the view that instruction must be provided within learners' ZPD and tailored to their specific trajectories of development.

This transformation was not limited to my conception of teaching, but also extended to my view of professional learning. Through the course of this project, I came to realise that effective teaching cannot be fully planned in advance or perfected through theoretical knowledge alone. Instead, it must be constructed interactively through cycles of action and reflection (Farrell, 2022). This understanding led me embrace what I now consider a foundational tenet of professional development that teachers learn by doing. That is, professional expertise is not passively acquired through one-off training sessions or theoretical lectures but actively developed through meaningful engagement with real classrooms (Hayes, 2019). This insight became particularly salient when I reviewed existing literature on teacher perceptions of TBLT and noticed that many teachers reported implementation difficulties due to lack of training, time constraints, and inadequate materials (Dao et al., 2024; Hasnain & Halder, 2023). While these concerns are not unfounded, my experience led me to question whether such challenges are sometimes used, consciously or unconsciously, as justifications to avoid deeper pedagogical shifts. I argue that teaching innovations like TBLT and TMLT are not simply difficult because of practical constraints, but because they demand a mindset change. They require teachers to give up some control, to accept uncertainty, and to remain open to constant learning by doing. This mindset shift, I think, is what many so-called "implementation challenges" actually reflect.

Central to this process of learning by doing was reflective practice. In line with Farrell (2018)'s conceptualisation of reflection-in-action, reflection-on-action, and reflection-for-action, my teaching

practice was continually shaped by reflective engagement before, during and after instruction. Reflection-in-action was most evident in moments where I had to make real-time decisions in response to students' reactions. For example, switching from implicit to more explicit CF when learners showed signs of confusion. Reflection-on-action emerged in my post-lesson analyses, where I considered how students had interacted with tasks or responded to group dynamics, leading to modifications such as shifting from group to pair work. Reflection-for-action was evident in course planning and material development, where I anticipated future learning needs based on prior learner behaviour, such as introducing new post-task activities based on observed benefits of SCOPA adaptation. Collectively, these reflections were not isolated moments but part of an integrated, ongoing cycle that positioned reflection as both the means and the outcome of professional learning.

Emotions also played a pivotal role in sustaining this reflective process. Throughout the three research cycles, I experienced a wide range of positive emotions, including satisfaction, pride, and confidence, when I observed students' progress, witnessed their engagement, or saw the impact of a well-timed instructional adjustment. These emotions reinforced my commitment to continuous improvement and served as motivational drivers for sustained pedagogical innovation. As noted by Fredrickson (2001, 2004)'s Broaden-and-Build Theory and echoed by Swain (2013), positive emotions can expand cognitive repertoires, making teachers more open to experimentation, risk-taking, and sustained reflection. In my case, the emotional reward of seeing learners respond meaningfully to instruction often reinforced my confidence in the adjustments I made and encouraged further inquiry into what worked, for whom, and under what conditions.

Alongside this pedagogical transformation, I also experienced a parallel evolution in my identity as a researcher. Balancing the dual role of teacher and researcher required me to engage in continuous reflexivity, not only about my classroom decisions but also about my assumptions, biases, and interpretations during data analysis. There were moments when my emotional investment in teaching made it difficult to maintain analytical distance, particularly when evaluating the effectiveness of a particular strategy or interpreting learner feedback. However, rather than viewing this as a limitation, I began to appreciate the value of my insider perspective. As an embedded participant, I was able to capture nuanced insights into learner interactions, task dynamics, and classroom culture that might have eluded an external observer. This reflexive awareness enabled me to embrace a more interpretivist approach to data, where meaning was co-constructed through my engagement with learners, tasks, and context.

This dual engagement in teaching and research ultimately led me to a deeper conviction: that good teaching is, in itself, a form of research. Teachers, even those not involved in formal research project,

should approach their classrooms with an inquiry mindset. Rather than relying solely on fixed curricula or replicating prescribed methods, they should continually observe, question, experiment, and reflect on their practice. This stance, I argue, is essential for navigating the complex, ever-evolving nature of language classrooms, especially those grounded in dialogic and sociocultural principles like TMLT. It also reframes the narrative around teacher development. Instead of seeing professional learning as something that occurs only through external training, we must recognise that it is also cultivated through situated experimentation and reflexive engagement with real learners in real contexts.

6.4. Limitations of the Study

While this study offers valuable insights into the development and evaluation of the TMLT framework, several limitations must be acknowledged. As a qualitative inquiry rooted in case study and action research, the study prioritises depth and context-specific understanding over broad generalization. Nonetheless, it is important to recognise factors that may affect the transferability and scope of the findings.

First, the small sample size and context-specific nature of the study limit the extent to which findings can be transferred to other educational contexts. Each research cycle involved only five to six learners from a private language training centre in China, as constrained by the centre's standard practice of maintaining small class sizes for its courses. Although this allowed for rich, in-depth data collection and analysis, it inevitably constrained the demographic and contextual diversity represented in the study. The findings, therefore, should be understood as contextually situated rather than universally generalisable. Future studies could build on this foundation by extending investigation of the TMLT framework to more diverse contexts and larger cohorts.

Second, the variability of learner cohorts across the three research cycles presents a further limitation. As each cycle involved a different group of learners, direct comparisons across cycles must be interpreted with caution. Although the iterative design allowed for the refinement of the TMLT framework based on evolving learner needs and feedback, the absence of a stable cohort across all cycles means that developmental trends are observed at the framework level rather than the individual learner level over time. Moreover, during the research process, a small number of participants dropped out due to personal reasons, resulting in further instability within cohorts. This participant attrition may have further limited the diversity and representativeness of the data collected within each cycle. However, this limitation is difficult to avoid in the present context, because the centre's courses were short-term, freely available electives, and learners often withdrew for personal reasons. Future research conducted in more stable settings, for example, within university cohorts that

remain intact across semesters, could allow the same group of learners to be followed through multiple cycles of action research, providing richer insights into longitudinal development.

Third, this study deliberately focused on L2 writing to develop and evaluate a writing-specific pedagogical framework. However, the choice of email writing tasks as the primary genre may cause contain limitations. Email writing typically requires concise, direct, and functional language, rather than a wide range of sophisticated vocabulary. This feature may have constrained opportunities for extensive lexical development, as reflected in some learners' responses that their vocabulary range did not noticeably expand. Nevertheless, engaging in email writing tasks contributed to greater accuracy in vocabulary use and heightened learners' awareness of lexical choices, thereby fostering a deeper understanding of vocabulary development. Future research might address this limitation by extending the TMLT framework to other genres such as essays or reports, which afford broader opportunities for syntactic and lexical development.

Finally, the study did not conduct long-term follow-up to investigate whether learners' language development was sustained after the course. While positive learning trajectories were observed during the course and reported by the learners, it remains unknown whether gains in self-regulation, linguistic and pragmatic competences, and learner agency would be maintained over time. Longitudinal studies would therefore be valuable to examine the durability of the outcomes observed in this research. Such studies could also explore whether repeated engagement with TMLT-based courses leads to cumulative benefits.

Despite these limitations, they highlight the contextual and methodological trade-offs inherent in small-scale, context-specific qualitative studies. The study should therefore be understood not as offering universal prescriptions, but as providing situated insights into how a task-mediated framework can be developed, enacted, and refined within the realities of private language education in China. These insights lay the groundwork for future research and instructional practice in L2 writing.

6.5. Implications for Future Research

This study opens several promising directions for future research on the TMLT framework. While the current study focused on learner development and learning process within a specific context, future research may broaden the scope by examining the application of this framework from instructional, longitudinal, and cross-contextual perspectives.

First, future studies could explore how teachers experience, interpret, and evaluate the implementation of the TMLT framework in their own classrooms. As this study adopted a learner-focused lens, the teaching dimension of the framework remains underexplored. Although I took on

the dual role of teacher and researcher in this study, the only perspective on teaching was my own. This means that the study did not capture a broader range of teacher experiences with the framework. Investigating how other teachers understand and enact the principles of TMLT in practice would offer valuable insights into how the framework is enacted and valued in diverse language teaching classrooms. Such studies could shed light on how different teachers approach task design, mediation strategies, and learner-directedness. This would help identify what challenges teachers might face or what conditions would support its use in different instructional settings.

Second, while this study adopted a qualitative approach to understand learners' development trajectories and perceptions, future research could benefit from employing mixed-method or quantitative designs to evaluate the effectiveness of the TMLT framework. Quantitative measures, such as CALF (Complexity, Accuracy, Lexis, and Fluency), could be used to measure improvements in learners' L2 performance across writing tasks, offering complementary evidence to the rich qualitative insights generated in this study. A mixed-method approach could further deepen understanding by linking measurable outcomes to learners' experiences, providing a more holistic picture of how TMLT functions as a pedagogical intervention. Such studies would help strengthen the empirical foundation of the framework. Besides, it can also support its comparison with other instructional frameworks, such as TBLT, TSLT, and CBI in writing instruction, thereby clarifying TMLT's distinctive contribution to L2 writing instruction.

Third, future research would benefit from adopting more longitudinal designs to capture the extended developmental impact of TMLT. The present study, while iterative across three research cycles, was conducted within the relatively short instructional periods of an intensive course, with each cycle spanning five weeks. Although meaningful trajectories of linguistic and pragmatic development were observed within this timeframe, longer-term studies would allow researchers to examine how deeply learners internalised the mediational means and whether the gains are sustained beyond the immediate course context.

Fourth, future research could explore the application of the TMLT framework in other instructional contexts, particularly in English for Academic Purposes (EAP) settings. Academic writing tasks, such as essays and reports require learners to engage in extended, purposeful communication to meet authentic academic demands. This aligns closely with the TMLT framework's emphasis on authentic tasks mediated by tools, peer collaborative, and teacher scaffolding. Investigating how TMLT principles operate in EAP contexts would provide valuable insights into the framework's adaptability when applied to longer, more structured writing genres. It would also shed light on how mediation strategies,

task design, and the fostering of learner agency may need to be refined to meet more complex rhetorical demands and social conventions of academic discourse.

Finally, although the TMLT framework was developed specifically for L2 writing instruction, future studies could investigate the potential to extend its core principles, particularly task-mediated learning, graduated support, and learner-directedness, to teaching other language skills, such as reading, listening, and speaking. Given that mediation, co-regulation, and learner agency are not skill-specific but rather fundamental to the learning process itself, it is feasible that adapted versions of TMLT could support the development of these receptive and productive skills. Research in these areas would help explore the extent to which TMLT's mediational and agentive orientation can be effectively applied to different communicative modalities, potentially leading to the creation of a broader family of task-mediated approaches to L2 instruction.

6.6. Final Thoughts

As this study comes to an end, what remains most significant for me is not only the construction of the TMLT framework but the broader re-envisioning of what it means to teach, learn, and inquire into language education. Through its integration of SCT and TBLT, this research has shown that effective teaching is not a pre-scripted act but a mediated, evolving process of meaning-making. Tasks, within this understanding, become spaces of transformation, where language, cognition, and social relations converge to create opportunities for development.

Equally, this project has reaffirmed that educational research is not the pursuit of certainty but an engagement with complexity. The iterative, practice-based methodology adopted in this research has revealed inquiry as an inherently dialogic process, which evolves through tension, reflection, and responsiveness to context. Rather than offering definitive answers, such inquiry values interpretive depth and the recognition that understanding is always partial and situated.

In closing, this thesis affirms a simple yet enduring insight that teaching, learning, and researching are not separate enterprises but interwoven acts of participation in a larger process of human meaning-making. To engage in language education, then, is to remain open, to change, to dialogue, and to the continual re-shaping of understanding. In this openness lies both the challenge and the enduring promise of language education.

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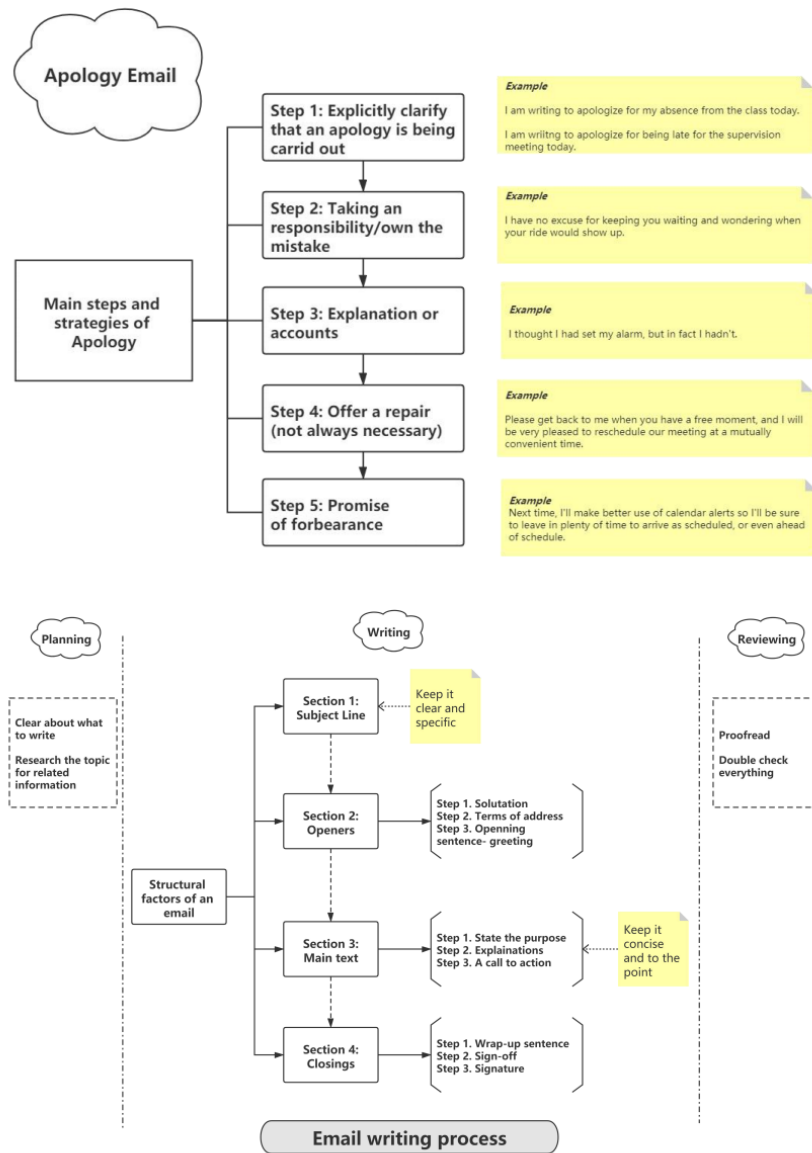
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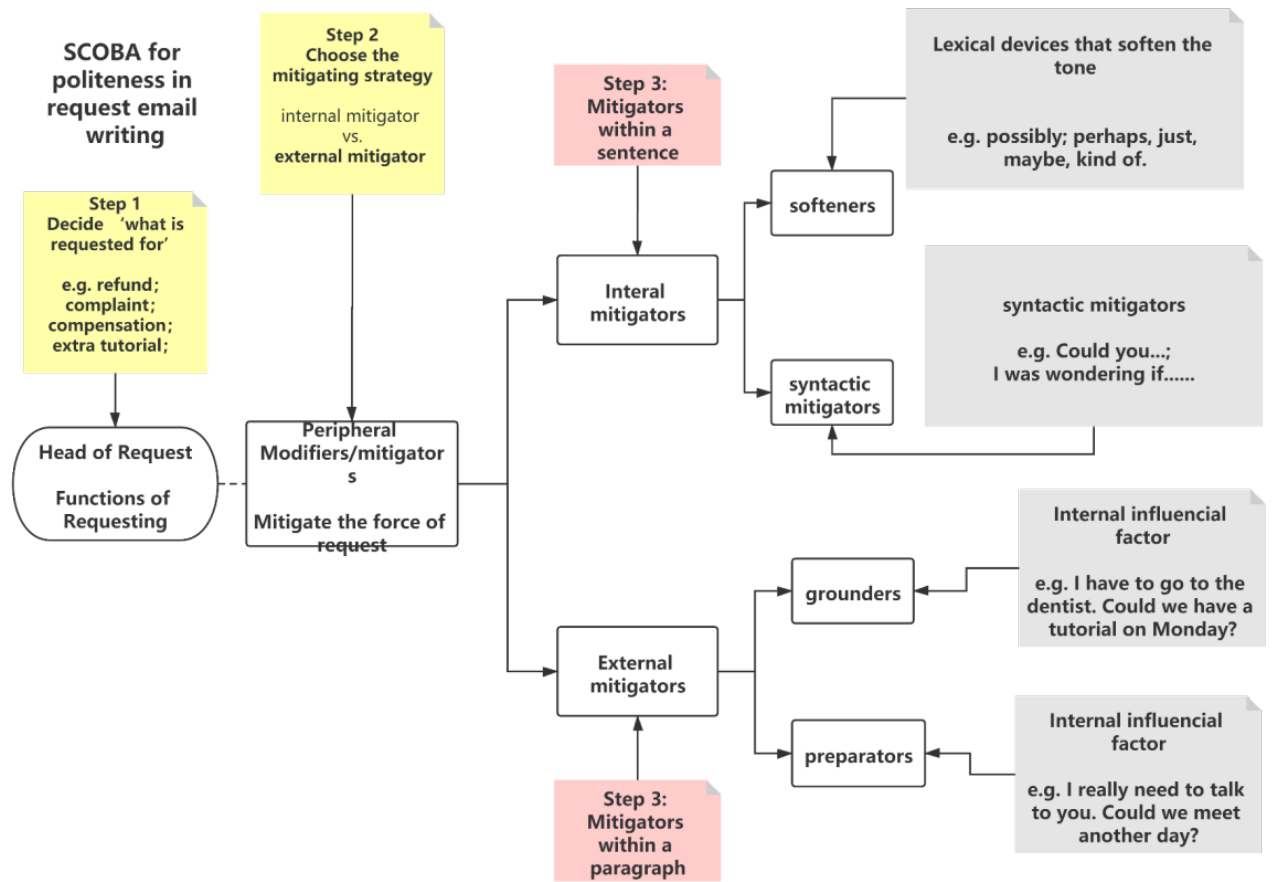
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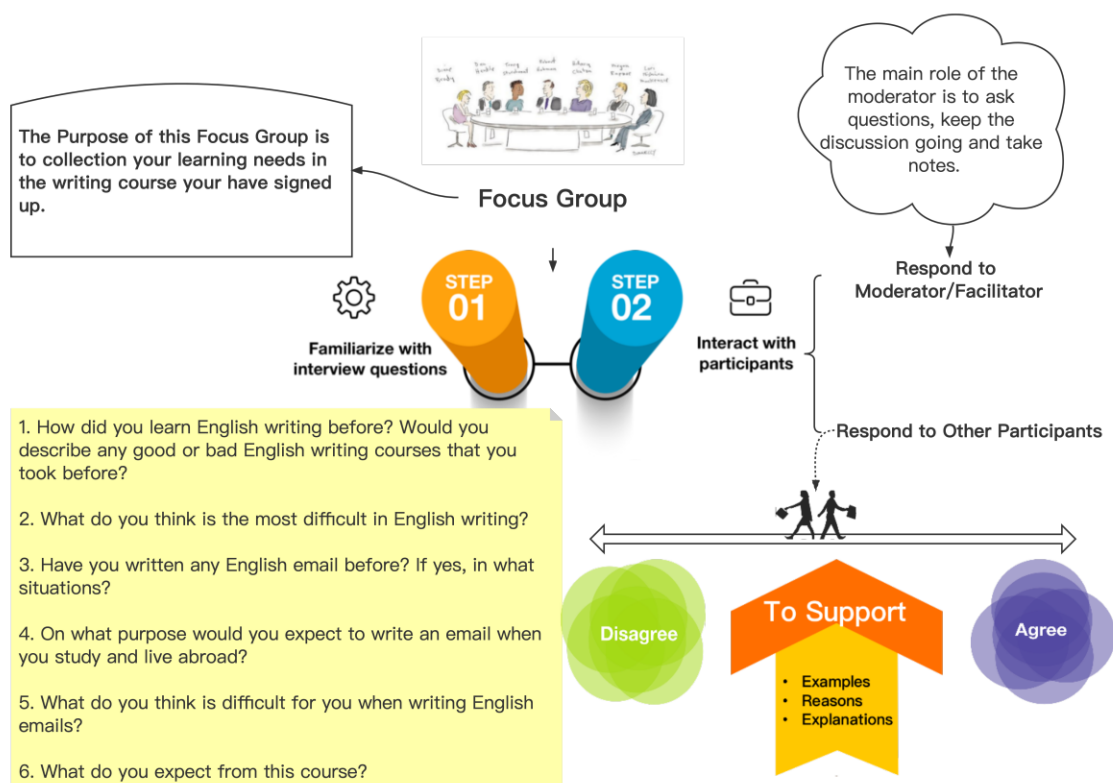
Appendix 1 Sample of SCOBAs used in the online writing course



Appendix 2 Sample SCOPA in Pilot Study



Appendix 3 SCOPA of focus group participation



Appendix 4 Sample of grammatical SCOBAs used in the online writing course

SCOPA of Present perfect simple tense

The present perfect simple can be used to talk about the past in a number of different ways.

- To give new information or news: Hi! I **have arrived** in London! My plane landed five minutes ago.
- To talk about repeated actions that continues to happen over a period of time: I **have visited** California every summer since I was 18.
- To talk about an event that started in the past is still happening now: Olivia **has gone** on a trip to Egypt.

HOW TO FORM

SUBJECT + HAVE/HAS + PAST PARTICIPLE + REST OF SENTENCE

I have arrived in London.

Note: "Has" is used for "He", "She" and "It".

The present perfect simple vs. the past simple

A specific date, 2010, is given, so the past simple is used.

Have you ever been to France? Yes, I **visited** Paris in 2010.

There's no specific date, so the present perfect is used.

Yes, I **have visited** Paris many times.

FURTHER EXAMPLES

PAST SIMPLE	PRESENT PERFECT
I saw a great movie last week.	I haven't seen that movie.
Jo didn't climb Mount Fuji last year.	Saki has climbed Mount Fuji twice.
Madison ate too much last night.	Jack hasn't eaten curry before.

The past perfect simple

When talking about two events that happened at different times in the past, the past simple describes the event that is closest to the time of speaking. The past perfect describes an event further back in the past.

HOW TO FORM

Use "had" followed by the past participle to form the past perfect.

SUBJECT + HAD + PAST PARTICIPLE + REST OF SENTENCE

The train **had left** before we arrived at the station.

Note: "Had" does not change with the subject. The past participle represents the action in the past.

The present perfect simple vs. the past perfect simple

PRESENT PERFECT SIMPLE

The present perfect is used to talk about an action that took place in the recent past and is still relevant to the present moment.

I'm so excited. I **have just passed** my driving test.

PAST PERFECT SIMPLE

The past perfect is used to talk about an action that took place before another moment in the past.

I was so excited. I **had just passed** my driving test.