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Enacting Sociocultural Learning in Classroom Practice: A Qualitative Study of Teacher-Learner Interaction and Mediation in Basic School Classrooms

Naah Anna Mwinbuabu 

Offinso College of Education
Offinso, Ghana

Valentina Osei-Himah 

Atebubu College of Education
Atebubu, Ghana

Abstract. This study examines how sociocultural principles of learning are enacted in classroom practice. While the sociocultural theory (SCT) of learning emphasises the role of social interaction and cultural mediation in learning, empirical evidence on how these principles operate in everyday classroom practice within basic school contexts remains limited. Guided by Vygotsky's SCT, the study employed a qualitative interpretivist design to examine key sociocultural practices, including teacher-learner interaction, scaffolding, and culturally mediated peer collaboration. Participants included six (6) classroom teachers and 48 learners drawn from four basic school classrooms, selected through purposive sampling. Data were collected through classroom observations, semi-structured teacher interviews, learner focus group discussions, and document analysis. Thematic analysis was conducted using a hybrid -inductive coding approach. Findings indicate that sociocultural practices are present in classroom interaction; however, they are largely implicit and uneven. Teachers demonstrated intuitive scaffolding and mediation strategies, yet limited theoretical awareness and institutional constraints – such as curriculum demands and examination-oriented assessment – restricted the systematic implementation of sociocultural pedagogy. The study contributes to scholarship by providing context-sensitive insights into the enactment of sociocultural learning in classroom settings. It highlights the need to strengthen teacher education, curriculum alignment, and institutional support for socially mediated learning.

Keywords: sociocultural learning; scaffolding; classroom interaction; mediation; culturally responsive pedagogy

* Corresponding email: *Osei-Himah Valentina, oseiimah@gmail.com*

1. Introduction

Learning is increasingly recognised as a socially and culturally situated process impacted by interaction, discourse, and involvement within community contexts rather than as an individual as well as a socially and culturally situated process shaped by interaction, discourse, and involvement within community contexts rather than as an individual, isolated cognitive activity. Contemporary educational research highlights that learners actively develop knowledge through interaction with their teachers, peers, and culturally embedded practices rather than through the passive reception of information (Schunk, 2020; Vygotsky, 1987). This viewpoint has regained significance as educational systems aim to foster profound comprehension, critical analysis, and learner autonomy in response to the requirements of twenty-first-century education (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development [OECD], 2021). Vygotsky's SCT of learning posits that higher mental functions develop first through social interaction before becoming internalised, providing a framework for understanding how learning develops through social mediation. The essential tenet of this theory is that social interaction is the source of higher mental functions, which people then internalise (Vygotsky, 1987). Learning thus occurs first at the inter-psychological level through dialogue and collaboration before becoming intra-psychological. Recent empirical studies continue to affirm the relevance of this perspective, demonstrating that instructional practices grounded in social interaction and guided participation enhance learner engagement and conceptual understanding across subject areas (Dewi & Oktapiani, 2024; Wibowo et al., 2025).

The zone of proximal development (ZPD) is a crucial concept in the SCT of learning, defined as the gap between what learners can do on their own and what they can do with assistance or cooperation (Chaiklin, 2003). Instruction that is responsive to learners' ZPD enables teachers to provide appropriate scaffolding, gradually transferring responsibility to learners as competence develops (Li et al., 2024). Recent research highlights that ZPD-oriented instruction, particularly when combined with formative feedback and peer collaboration, leads to improved learning outcomes and greater learner autonomy (Chen, 2025; McLeod, 2022). The SCT of learning highlights the mediating function of cultural tools, such as language, symbols, artefacts, and locally situated knowledge systems, in addition to social interaction and scaffolding (Lei & Bakar, 2025; Wertsch, 2008). These tools shape how learners think, reason, and solve problems. Current studies on culturally responsive pedagogy indicate that integrating learners' cultural experiences into instruction enhances relevance, motivation, and conceptual understanding, especially in diverse and multilingual classrooms (Bowden, 2025; Gay, 2018; UNESCO, 2023). Such findings underscore the importance of aligning classroom practices with learners' sociocultural realities.

Despite strong theoretical and empirical support for sociocultural approaches, classroom practice in many educational contexts remains dominated by teacher-centred instruction and assessment systems that prioritise individual performance and standardised testing (OECD, 2021; Schunk, 2020). These practices often limit opportunities for meaningful dialogue, collaborative learning, and mediated instruction. Recent classroom-based studies reveal that

while teachers may recognise the value of collaborative and culturally responsive teaching, structural constraints such as large class sizes, rigid curricula, and examination-driven assessment continue to hinder effective implementation (Gee, 2008). Recent studies have reinforced the relevance of sociocultural and constructivist perspectives in addressing these challenges. For example, Wibowo et al. (2025) demonstrated that instruction grounded in Vygotskian principles supports differentiated learning and enhances learner participation in primary school contexts. However, there remains a need for further empirical research examining how sociocultural principles are enacted in everyday classroom practice, particularly with respect to teacher mediation, peer interaction, and assessment aligned with learners' developmental potential.

Although the SCT of learning has been widely acknowledged in educational research, much of the existing literature focuses on theoretical discussions or controlled instructional interventions rather than examining how sociocultural principles are enacted in everyday classroom practice, particularly within African educational contexts. Empirical studies that explore how teachers operationalise scaffolding, mediation, and collaborative learning in real classroom environments remain relatively limited. Moreover, there is insufficient evidence on how institutional factors, such as curriculum structures and assessment practices, influence the implementation of sociocultural pedagogy. Addressing this gap is important for understanding how learning theories translate into practice within diverse sociocultural settings. Against this backdrop, the present study adopts Vygotsky's SCT of learning as its theoretical framework to examine how social interaction, peer collaboration, and culturally mediated instructional practices influence learners' cognitive engagement and development. The study aims to add to the current conversation on bridging the gap between learning theory and classroom practice by examining classroom activities through a sociocultural perspective.

Using Vygotsky's SCT of learning as the analytical framework, this study aims to investigate how learning is mediated by tools and guided instructional techniques in classroom settings. Specifically, the study concentrates on how teacher-learner interactions, peer collaboration, and culturally responsive instructional strategies support learners' cognitive development within their zones of proximal development (ZPD). By emphasising education as a socially situated process, the study seeks to illuminate the mechanisms through which learners internalise knowledge and develop higher mental functions through mediated activity (Vygotsky, 1987; Wertsch, 2008). The study further focuses on teachers as *more knowledgeable others* who facilitate learning through scaffolding, modelling, and dialogic engagement. Recent research suggests that instructional practices that deliberately align with learners' developmental readiness and sociocultural contexts foster deeper understanding and learner autonomy (Chen, 2025; McLeod, 2022; Tsakeni et al., 2025). Accordingly, this study examines how teachers diagnose learners' current levels of understanding, designing learning experiences that stretch learners beyond their independent capabilities while providing appropriate support.

In addition, the study focuses on peer interaction as a critical mediating factor in learning. Sociocultural theorists argue that collaborative learning environments enable learners to co-construct meaning, negotiate understanding, and internalise shared knowledge (Chaiklin, 2003; Dewi & Oktapiani, 2024). This study therefore explores how structured group work, dialogue, and peer assistance contribute to learners' engagement and conceptual development. Finally, the study foregrounds the use of cultural artefacts, language, and locally situated knowledge as mediational tools in teaching and learning. Contemporary scholarship emphasises that culturally relevant pedagogy enhances the meaningfulness of learning by connecting new concepts to learners' lived experiences (Gay, 2018; UNESCO, 2023). By examining classroom practices through this lens, the study aims to generate insights into how sociocultural principles are enacted in everyday instructional contexts and how these practices align with learner development and educational goals.

While the SCT of learning provides the primary framework for this study, related perspectives such as constructivist learning theory and dialogic pedagogy further illuminate how knowledge is co-constructed through interaction. Constructivist scholars argue that learners actively build understanding through engagement with experiences and collaborative problem solving (Schunk, 2020). Similarly, dialogic learning perspectives emphasise the role of classroom discourse in shaping thinking and conceptual development. These complementary perspectives reinforce the sociocultural view that learning emerges through participation in socially mediated activities. This study investigates how sociocultural principles of learning are enacted in classroom practice, focusing on teacher-learner interaction, scaffolding, peer collaboration, and the use of cultural tools in supporting learners' cognitive development. Anchored in Vygotsky's SCT, the study examines how teachers function as more knowledgeable others by mediating learning through strategies such as scaffolding, modelling, and dialogic engagement within learners' ZPDs. In addition, the study explores how peer collaboration and culturally responsive instructional practices contribute to learners' cognitive engagement, conceptual development, and the internalisation of knowledge through socially mediated learning processes.

Research Questions

To achieve the stated objectives, the study was guided by the following research questions:

1. How do teacher-learner interactions facilitate learning within learners' ZPDs?
2. In what ways do teachers enact scaffolding and mediation as more knowledgeable others during classroom instruction?
3. How does peer collaboration contribute to learners' cognitive engagement and conceptual development?
4. How are cultural tools, language, and learners' lived experiences integrated into classroom teaching and learning processes?
5. What contextual factors support or constrain the effective implementation of sociocultural instructional practices?

2. Methodology

This study investigated how sociocultural learning concepts are implemented in classroom practice grounded in an interpretivist epistemological position (Patton, 2015). The qualitative approach was deemed appropriate because the study sought to understand meanings, interactions, and learning processes as they naturally occur in classroom settings rather than measuring predetermined variables (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The study was anchored in Vygotsky's SCT of learning, which conceptualises learning as a socially mediated process shaped by interaction, language, and cultural resources. This approach aligns with the SCT of learning by allowing in-depth exploration of socially mediated learning processes. The interpretivist orientation allowed for an in-depth exploration of how teachers and learners construct meaning through classroom interactions, particularly within learners' ZPDs. The study was conducted in four basic school classrooms within a public school district characterised by culturally diverse learners and examination-oriented instructional practices. The context was characterised by teacher-led instruction complemented by group activities, peer interaction, and the use of instructional materials. The classrooms provided a suitable setting for examining sociocultural processes such as mediation, scaffolding, and collaborative learning, as learners regularly engaged with both teachers and peers during instructional activities.

The study population consisted of teachers and learners in basic school classrooms within the selected educational district. The study involved six classroom teachers and forty-eight learners from four intact classrooms. Preserving intact classrooms helped maintain natural social interactions that are central to sociocultural learning processes. A total of eight observation sessions were conducted across four classrooms, covering subjects such as science and social studies. Each observation lasted approximately 40-60 minutes, corresponding to the regular lesson duration. Purposive sampling was employed to select teachers with interactive or learner-centred pedagogical practices and who were willing to engage in reflective dialogue about their instructional approaches. This sampling strategy was justified in that such teachers were more likely to provide information-rich cases relevant to sociocultural learning processes. This approach aligns with the SCT of learning, which emphasises learning as a collective and relational activity rather than an individual phenomenon.

To capture the complexity of classroom learning, multiple qualitative data collection methods were employed to ensure methodological triangulation (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Data collection was conducted in three phases. First, classroom observations were carried out to document naturally occurring instructional interactions. Second, semi-structured interviews were conducted with teachers to explore their instructional practices. Third, learner focus group discussions were organised to capture learners' perspectives on classroom interaction and collaborative learning. Document analysis was conducted to examine instructional planning and assessment practices. The observation guide consisted of 12 indicators derived from sociocultural constructs, including scaffolding, mediation, peer collaboration, and the use of cultural tools. These

indicators enabled systematic documentation of teacher mediation, learner engagement, and interaction patterns during classroom instruction. The semi-structured interview protocol comprised eight open-ended questions exploring teachers' instructional strategies, perceptions of learner development, and approaches to scaffolding and collaborative learning. Learner focus group discussions were guided by six prompts with teacher support, peer interaction, and classroom participation. To enhance validity, the instruments were reviewed by two experts in educational research and piloted in a comparable classroom context. Feedback from the pilot study informed minor revisions to ensure clarity and relevance. Instruments were reviewed for clarity, relevance, and alignment with sociocultural constructs, and minor revisions were made based on pilot feedback.

2.1 Classroom Observations

Non-participant classroom observations were conducted to document teacher-learner interactions, peer collaboration, scaffolding strategies, and the use of cultural and instructional artefacts. An observation guide informed by sociocultural constructs such as mediation, ZPD, and internalisation was used to ensure theoretical consistency. A total of eight observation sessions were conducted across four classrooms, covering subjects such as science and social studies.

2.2 Semi-Structured Interviews with Teachers

The teachers' perspectives on learner development, instructional aims, and knowledge of sociocultural teaching approaches were investigated through semi-structured interviews. The flexible interview format allowed teachers to elaborate on their experiences while ensuring alignment with the study's research questions.

2.3 Discussions in Learner Focus Groups

Focus groups with learners were conducted to determine assistance, support, and collaborative learning. These discussions provided valuable perspectives on how learners perceived scaffolding and peer interaction.

2.4 Document Analysis

Relevant instructional documents, including lesson plans, teaching materials, and assessment tasks, were analysed using a document analysis checklist consisting of six indicators: alignment with lesson objectives, evidence of scaffolding strategies, collaborative learning activities, integration of cultural references, formative assessment practices, and learner engagement strategies.

2.5 Data Saturation

Data collection continued until thematic saturation was reached; until no substantially new patterns emerged across interviews, observations, or focus group discussions.

2.6 Data Analysis Procedures

The data were analysed using thematic analysis in accordance with the six-phase framework proposed by Braun and Clarke (2006). Developing preliminary codes,

searching for themes, assessing themes, defining and labelling themes, and producing the final analytical narrative were all part of the analysis process. A hybrid deductive-inductive method was used to code. From the SCT of learning, deductive codes were developed (e.g., scaffolding, mediation, ZPD, cultural tools), while inductive codes emerged from participants' accounts and observed classroom practices. This approach ensured both theoretical sensitivity and openness to context-specific insights.

2.7 Trustworthiness and Ethical Considerations

Trustworthiness was ensured through methodological triangulation across classroom observations, teacher interviews, learner focus group discussions, and document analysis. Member checking was conducted by sharing summaries of key interpretations with participating teachers to confirm the accuracy of the findings (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). An audit trail of field notes, observation records, and coded transcripts was maintained to enhance dependability. Peer debriefing with two educational researchers further strengthened the analysis.

3. Results and Discussion

Drawing on Vygotsky's SCT of learning, a hybrid deductive-inductive method was used to analyse the data thematically. To maintain conceptual consistency and clarity, the discussion was organised in accordance with the study's research questions.

3.1 Research Question 1

3.1.1 Teacher-Learner Interaction as a Mediation Mechanism for Learning

Observational data teacher-learner interactions were central to instructional practice. The teachers engaged learners frequently through questioning, explanations, demonstrations, and feedback. These interactions often involved breaking complex tasks into smaller, manageable steps and guiding learners progressively toward task completion. For instance, teachers modelled procedures before inviting learners to attempt similar tasks, offering prompts and cues when learners encountered difficulty. This corroborates the findings of Mudzamiri (2019), who notes that modelling is one of the strategies that helps learners acquire intellectual knowledge and skills. During a science lesson, the teacher first modelled the problem-solving steps on the board before inviting learners to attempt similar tasks in groups while providing prompts when needed. Interview data indicated that teachers repeatedly adjusted their instructional support in response to learners' responses during lessons. Teachers testified that "watching learners carefully" and "helping when they struggle," suggesting an intuitive awareness of learners' developmental readiness. However, few teachers explicitly articulated the concept of the ZPD or described systematic strategies for diagnosing learners' current and potential levels of understanding.

During classroom observations, teachers frequently guided learners through questioning and step-by-step explanations when learners encountered difficulties. For example, in one observed lesson, the teacher demonstrated the

procedure for solving a task on the board before inviting learners to attempt similar problems independently while providing prompts when needed.

This practice was also confirmed during teacher interviews. One teacher explained: *“When I notice that learners are struggling with a concept, I break the task into smaller steps and guide them until they understand how to do it themselves.”* (Teacher Asana, Interview)

In another classroom, the teacher paused during a group activity to re-explain key steps and encouraged learners to discuss possible solutions with their peers before proceeding. Similarly, another teacher described using a comparable strategy to support learners’ understanding: *“Sometimes the learners cannot follow the whole process at once, so I explain it step by step and ask questions to check if they are following. When they begin to understand, I allow them to continue the task on their own.”* (Teacher Simon, Interview)

These accounts illustrate how teachers provided graduated support to learners during classroom activities, enabling them to engage with tasks that might otherwise be difficult to accomplish independently. Learner focus group discussions further confirmed the importance of teacher guidance. Learners described feeling more confident when teachers “explained again,” “showed us how,” or “helped step by step,” particularly when encountering challenging concepts. Learners also acknowledged the importance of teacher guidance during lessons. One learner explained: *“When the teacher explains the steps slowly, it helps us understand the work better.”* (Boni, Learner Focus Group)

These findings demonstrate that teacher–learner interaction functioned as a primary mechanism through which learning occurred within learners’ ZPDs. This is consistent with Vygotsky’s SCT of learning, which posits that learning initially develops through social interaction before being internalised by individual learners. Teachers acted as mediators learners to engage with tasks beyond their independent capabilities. However, the facilitation of learning within the ZPD was largely implicit and uneven. While teachers provided support responsive to learners’ needs, the absence of explicit theoretical grounding limited the intentional design of ZPD-oriented instruction. This suggests that sociocultural principles were enacted more as intuitive teaching practices rather than as consciously applied pedagogical strategies. Consequently, opportunities for optimising learner development through systematic ZPD-based instruction were not fully realised.

3.2 Research Question 2

3.2.1 Scaffolding and Teacher Mediation in Classroom Practice

Observation data showed that teachers enacted scaffolding through a range of mediational strategies, including modelling solutions, asking guiding questions, rephrasing learners’ responses, providing hints, and offering corrective feedback. Teachers often shifted between whole-class explanations and individual support, particularly when learners encountered difficulty.

Teacher interviews revealed that scaffolding was not explicitly planned but emerged spontaneously during instruction. Teachers viewed their role as “guiding,” “assisting,” or “supporting” learners, yet most did not explicitly identify these actions as scaffolding or mediation within a sociocultural framework. Lesson plans and instructional documents rarely included explicit scaffolding strategies or differentiation aligned with learners’ developmental levels. Teachers themselves described similar strategies during interviews. One participant explained: *“I try to guide them instead of giving them the answer immediately. I ask questions that make them think about what they should do next.”* (Teacher Ben, Interview)

Another teacher emphasised the gradual withdrawal of support as learners gained confidence: *“At the beginning, I assist them closely, but when they begin to understand, I step back and allow them to complete the task by themselves.”* (Teacher Kwabena, Interview)

Learners confirmed that such instructional support helped them develop independence: *“The teacher first shows us how to do it, and later we try it ourselves.”* (Adoley, Learner Focus Group)

The findings indicate that teachers functioned as more knowledgeable others by mediating learning through graduated support. These mediational practices enabled learners to make sense of new concepts and gradually assume greater responsibility for learning, consistent with Vygotsky’s assertion that higher mental functions develop through social mediation. This supports McLeod’s (2022) view that learning occurs through cooperative conversations with more experienced members of society and that human development is a socially mediated process. Nevertheless, the effectiveness of scaffolding was constrained by limited theoretical articulation and institutional pressures. Without deliberate planning for scaffolding and gradual withdrawal of support, mediation often remained at surface level. This reduced its transformative potential to foster learner autonomy and deeper conceptual understanding. The findings therefore highlight the need for professional development that strengthens teachers’ pedagogical content knowledge in sociocultural teaching approaches.

3.3 Research Question 3

3.3.1 Peer Collaboration and Shared Knowledge Construction

Data from classroom observations and learner focus group discussions revealed frequent peer interaction during group work and collaborative activities. Learners engaged in explaining concepts to one another, sharing ideas, negotiating meanings, and jointly solving problems. More knowledgeable learners often assisted peers who were struggling, particularly during practical tasks and discussion-based lessons. Learners reported that working with peers helped them “understand better,” “remember faster,” and “gain confidence.” However, observations indicated that peer collaboration was often loosely structured, with limited teacher guidance to deepen discussion or ensure equitable participation. Learners themselves emphasised the benefits of collaborative learning.

One participant explained: *“When we work together, someone in the group usually understands the question and explains it to the rest of us.”* (Bismarck, Learner Focus Group)

Another learner noted: *“Working with friends helps because we share ideas and correct each other when someone makes a mistake.”* (Akosua, Learner Focus Group)

Teachers also recognised the value of peer interaction in supporting learning: *“Sometimes learners understand better when their classmates explain it to them.”* (Teacher Arthur, Interview)

Peer collaboration emerged as a recurring theme across observational and focus group data, indicating its importance in facilitating learner engagement and shared meaning-making. These interactions illustrate Vygotsky’s claim that learning is socially distributed and that higher mental functions originate in collective activity (Chaiklin, 2003). Through dialogue and shared problem-solving, learners co-constructed knowledge and internalised understanding. The findings corroborate recent research indicating that collaborative learning enhances engagement, confidence, and conceptual understanding (Wibowo et al., 2025). However, the inconsistent structuring of collaborative activities limited their potential impact. When peer collaboration lacked clear roles or guiding prompts, interactions tended to remain superficial. This suggests that while peer collaboration is a powerful sociocultural tool, its effectiveness depends on intentional design and teachers.

3.4 Research Question 4

3.4.1 Cultural Tools and Contextualised Meaning-Making

Classroom observations showed that teachers frequently used familiar examples, everyday language, and locally relevant artefacts to explain abstract concepts. Teachers drew on learners’ daily experiences, community practices, and local contexts to make instruction more relatable. Learners confirmed during focus group discussions that such examples helped them understand lessons more easily. Learners confirmed the usefulness of these culturally relevant explanations.

One learner stated: *“When the teacher uses examples from our community, it becomes easier to understand the lesson.”* (John, Learner Focus Group)

Another learner commented: *“Sometimes the examples remind us of things we see at home or in the market.”* (Gifty, Learner Focus Group)

Teachers also recognised the importance of connecting lessons to learners’ lived experiences: *“If I use examples that they already know from their daily lives, they understand the topic faster.”* (Teacher Asana, Interview)

However, document analysis revealed limited evidence of systematic integration of cultural tools in lesson planning or assessment tasks. The use of cultural resources was often spontaneous and dependent on individual teacher initiative. The integration of cultural tools and learners’ lived experiences enhanced meaning-making and internalisation. Language and familiar artefacts acted as psychological tools that bridged prior knowledge with new concepts, supporting

culturally responsive pedagogy. This finding supports the growing body of literature on culturally responsive pedagogy, which argues that learning is most effective when instruction resonates with learners' sociocultural realities (Gay, 2018; UNESCO, 2023). Despite these benefits, the lack of formal planning and alignment with assessment limited the sustained impact of culturally mediated instruction. This finding underscores the need to embed cultural relevance in instructional delivery and also in curriculum design and assessment practices.

3.5 Research Question 5

3.5.1 Contextual Constraints on Sociocultural Pedagogy

Teachers identified several contextual constraints, including large class sizes, limited instructional time, rigid curricula, and examination-oriented assessment systems. Observations confirmed that these factors restricted opportunities for extended dialogue, individualised scaffolding, and formative assessment. These challenges mirror concerns raised in international education research regarding the misalignment between sociocultural pedagogy and traditional assessment regimes (OECD, 2021). Despite these challenges, teachers demonstrated adaptive strategies such as group work, peer support, and whole-class questioning constraints. However, such strategies were often insufficient pedagogy.

One teacher explained: *"With a large class, it becomes difficult to attend to every learner who needs help."* (Teacher Kwame, Interview)

Another teacher highlighted the influence of examination-oriented assessment systems: *"Sometimes we focus more on preparing learners for exams, so there is less time for discussion activities."* (Teacher Abena, Interview)

Learners also recognised these constraints: *"Sometimes the lesson moves quickly because there is a lot to cover."* (Kojo, Learner Focus Group)

The findings reveal a significant misalignment between sociocultural learning principles and institutional structures. While classroom practices reflected elements of SCT of learning, systemic constraints limited their consistent and effective implementation. This tension highlights the need for systemic reforms that support interaction-rich, developmentally responsive teaching approaches. These findings align with previous studies showing that teacher mediation and collaborative dialogue significantly enhance conceptual understanding (Chen, 2025; Wibowo et al., 2025). However, unlike studies conducted in well-resourced contexts where scaffolding strategies are systematically planned, the present study found that such practices often occur intuitively rather than through explicit pedagogical design. This divergence highlights the influence of contextual constraints on the implementation of sociocultural pedagogy. In summary, the expanded analysis demonstrates that sociocultural principles of learning are clearly present in classroom practice. Teacher mediation, scaffolding, peer collaboration, and cultural mediation all contributed positively to learning, yet their full potential was constrained by limited theoretical grounding and structural challenges. These findings reinforce the relevance of Vygotsky's SCT of learning while highlighting the aligning teacher education, curriculum design, and assessment systems with sociocultural perspectives on learning.

4. Conclusion and Recommendations

This study aimed to investigate classroom instruction, with particular attention to the roles of social interaction, mediation, and culturally situated instructional practices in supporting learners' cognitive development. The findings provide compelling evidence that knowledge acquisition is fundamentally a socially embedded process in which learning develops through guided participation, dialogue, and collaboration. Teacher–learner interactions, peer engagement, and the strategic use of cultural tools were shown to be central mechanisms through which learners progressed within their ZPDs.

4.1 Conclusion

The study demonstrates that teachers play a pivotal role as being *more knowledgeable others* by diagnosing learners' current levels of understanding and providing scaffolding that enables them to engage meaningfully with learning tasks beyond their independent capabilities. Such mediation was most effective when it was responsive, dialogic, and gradually withdrawn as learners gained competence. This finding reinforces Vygotsky's assertion that higher mental functions develop first at the social level before being internalised at the individual level. Furthermore, it highlights the pedagogical value of instruction that is attuned to learners' developmental readiness rather than fixed curricular pacing. Peer collaboration emerged as an equally important contributor to learning, as learners co-constructed understanding through discussion, explanation, and shared problem-solving. These social interactions fostered active engagement, confidence, and deeper conceptual understanding, affirming the sociocultural view that cognition is distributed across individuals and mediated by social relations. The study further illustrates that learning becomes more meaningful and accessible when instruction draws on learners' cultural experiences, language, and locally relevant artefacts. Such culturally mediated practices functioned as psychological tools that bridged prior knowledge with new concepts, thereby enhancing internalisation and sustained understanding. Despite these positive outcomes, the study also reveals persistent challenges that constrain the consistent application of sociocultural pedagogy in classroom practice. Structural elements and assessment systems dominated by summative evaluation restricted opportunities for sustained interaction and individualised scaffolding. These constraints underscore the need for systemic support if sociocultural approaches are to be fully realised in educational practice.

4.2 Implications of the Study

In general, this work affirms the continued relevance of Vygotsky's SCT of learning in contemporary education. The study closes the gap between theory and practice by offering empirically supported insights into how sociocultural ideas are implemented in typical classroom settings. The findings suggest that learning environments that prioritise interaction, mediation, and cultural relevance are better positioned to support learners' cognitive growth and meaningful engagement. Consequently, educators, teacher educators, and policymakers are encouraged to rethink instructional and assessment practices in ways that foreground learners' social, cultural, and developmental realities as central to effective teaching and learning.

4.3 Recommendations

It is recommended that teachers intentionally design learning activities that encourage dialogue, collaboration, and guided participation, with explicit attention to learners' ZPD. Teacher education programmes should strengthen training in sociocultural pedagogy, including scaffolding strategies, formative assessment, and culturally responsive teaching. Furthermore, schools should balance summative assessment with formative approaches that capture learners' potential development and learning processes. Policy makers should address structural constraints, such as class size and instructional resources, to enable the effective implementation of sociocultural teaching approaches. Further research using mixed-methods or longitudinal designs is recommended to examine the sustained impact of sociocultural instructional practices across different educational contexts.

4.4 Limitations of the Study

This study is limited by its qualitative design and relatively small sample of classrooms, which may restrict the generalisability of the findings. In addition, the study relied primarily on observations and self-reported teacher perspectives, which may not fully capture all dimensions of classroom practice. Future studies employing mixed-methods or longitudinal designs could provide deeper insights into the sustained impact of sociocultural instructional strategies.

4.5 Ethical Considerations

Ethical approval was obtained in accordance with institutional requirements. Participants were informed about the right to withdraw at any time without repercussions, and their right to participate willingly. Informed consent was obtained from teachers and relevant school authorities, and assent procedures were followed for learners. Anonymity and confidentiality were maintained through the use of pseudonyms and secure data storage.

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