Research Article

Developing the Speaking Ability of EFL Learners through Scaffolding

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ABSTRACT

Introduction: The role of productive skills in social interactions is becoming more and more evident in modern communities. This study aimed to determine the effect of scaffolding on EFL learners' speaking skills.

Methodology: A total of 60 EFL students were recruited in the current study. The subjects were divided into two equal groups, namely experimental and control. Teaching speaking in the experimental group was centered on activities that offered the most aid to the students. To enhance their motivation, they were given tunes, a casual setting, and the opportunity to converse while taking turns and waiting. The control group attended a regular speaking class.

Results: After conducting the pre-tests and post-tests, it was found that scaffolding could significantly improve EFL learners' foreign language speaking skills. Scaffolding was beneficial to language learning as it aided the learning process by providing learners with linguistic support in genuine circumstances, linking their prior knowledge to the texts, and promoting interaction among learners.

Conclusion: Based on the findings, EFL teachers are encouraged to employ digital games in a flipped instruction mode to enhance EFL learners' willingness to communicate.

1. Introduction

Nowadays, the ability to communicate in a foreign language has turned into a necessity rather than simply a need. An appropriate command of language skills is now considered a key to achieving many accomplishments in various sections, such as commerce, research, education, literature, and technology, to name a few.

Considering English as the lingua franca and the language through which a vast body of information is transferred, proper command of this language is important to many individuals. Taking non-native English speakers into account, who are more eager to develop their speaking skills than the other skills, writing, reading, and listening, developing a well-established approach to teaching them how to become efficient foreign language speakers has occupied EFL/ESL researchers' minds for so long. In this regard, despite the availability of several techniques for language teaching, English learners have occasionally grumbled about the load and difficulty of language acquisition. Language learners, for example, do not appear to be content with the approaches presented to them so far (Olshtain & Celce-Murcia, 2001). As a result, the absence of another technique to assist learners in becoming more effective language learners is truly felt.

The term scaffolding was first introduced to educational contexts by Wood et al. (1976) when they tried to explain the way adults help infants learn to solve problems. Later, Vygotsky (1978) outlined scaffolding as a tool for growth by relying on the concept of the zone of proximal development (ZPD). According to Vygotsky (1978), a learner's developmental level is divided into two parts, namely the actual developmental level and the potential developmental level. Therefore, ZPD is defined as "the distance between actual developmental levels as measured by autonomous issue solving and prospective developmental levels as indicated by problem-solving under adult supervision or in partnership with more capable peers" (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 86). It may alternatively be defined as the gap between what a student can achieve on his or her alone and what can be accomplished with the assistance of a 'more knowledgeable other' adult or peer.

Although there is a rising interest in employing scaffolding in their studies, researchers disagree on the definition and scope of the phrase. Hence, it is generally used loosely (Hammond & Gibbons, 2001). Scaffolding studies had varying findings, but the majority showed that scaffolding helps improve student learning. The majority of

research that evaluated the use and non-use of scaffolding in language education found that scaffolding can help learners with a variety of learning goals (Chang et al., 2001; Ge & Land, 2003; King, 1991; Salmon et al., 1989). Previous research looked at the effect of educational scaffolding on learning and motivation (Rebolled-Mendez et al., 2006; Rodrigo et al., 2008; Tuckman, 2007). Rahmah (2016) identified three characteristics of an effective language-speaking classroom. First, in such sessions, students learn as much as they can in the allotted time during the activity and participation. Second, the conversation is not directed by a small group of active participants, but everyone has an equal opportunity to engage. Third, the learners' motivation can be such that they are all eager to speak.

Chang et al. (2001) examined two computer-based concept-mapping approaches, construct-on-scaffold and construct-by-self. While in the construct-on-scaffolding, the students created idea maps using computer software that provided evaluation results and feedback; they were given an unfinished expert concept map with nodes and links, as well as criticism. The findings revealed that construct-on-scaffolding was more helpful in assisting students in constructing idea maps. Chi (2007) investigated the use of scaffolding strategies by two EFL teachers during the teaching process. The findings revealed that using an efficient scaffolding strategy during the instructional process improved students' reading comprehension. Berenji and Saeidi (2017) investigated the impact of technology-based training on cognitive scaffolding, academic achievement, and motivation. The critical ethnography technique was used to assess the degree of cognitive scaffolding. The course interest survey was used to assess the learners' motivation. The findings showed that technology-based instruction via cognitive scaffolding increased learners' motivation and academic achievement.

Ahmad et al. (2019) evaluated the impact of scaffolding in a social setting on student progress. They worked using a framework created by Jumaat and Tasir (2016) that focuses on two primary scaffolding mechanisms of supporting reflective writing (MS3) and guiding students to focus on the learning process (MS4). Initially, a survey was sent to students regarding their impressions of utilizing Facebook as a medium for instructor scaffolding. Following the mediation from scaffolding, student learning improvements were further evaluated. This study included 23 undergraduate students participating in a telecommunications and networking course. The questionnaire, online chat transcripts on Facebook, and a performance test were used to collect data. The findings revealed that Facebook could be a platform for teacher scaffolding since they thought it allowed them to communicate at their leisure and regularly with their professor. The findings also demonstrated a substantial difference in student performance before and after scaffolding mediation.

Valencia-Vallejo et al. (2019) investigated the effects of scaffolding on metacognition, academic self-efficacy, and learning accomplishment in students with various cognitive styles when studying arithmetic content in an e-learning environment. The study included 67 higher education students from a public institution in Bogotá, Colombia. The study used an experimental design that included two groups and a post-test. One sample of students interacted with an e-learning environment that contained metacognitive scaffolding in its design. The other group engaged in an environment that was devoid of scaffolding. Scaffolding creates substantial variations in metacognitive ability, academic self-efficacy, and learning accomplishment, according to the findings. Similarly, findings suggest that children with various cognitive types have comparable learning outcomes.

Scaffolding assists learners in regaining control of their learning. Panadero and Järvelä (2015) advocated for research into the characteristics and situations that promote socially shared metacognition. Therefore, paying attention to different forms of scaffolding, as well as researching their impact on EFL learners' language ability, will become a need for language learning. As a result, the current study was centered on the impact of educational scaffolds and metacognitive exercises advocated by Belland et al. (2013) on the speaking capacity of Iranian English language learners. According to their framework, scaffolding can play a significant role in maintaining and promoting learners' perception of the optimal challenge as it can help students increase their expectations for success, understand the task value, monitor their learning process, and perceive belongingness (Belland et al., 2013). In this regard, scaffolding plays a significant role in enhancing learners' motivation (Belland et al., 2013; Tuckman, 2007). With this in mind, the present study attempted to fill a research gap in the scaffolding domain by assessing the impact of scaffolding on the speaking skills of EFL learners.

2. Methodology

2.1. Participants

For the purposes of this study, 60 intermediate EFL students were selected based on convenient sampling. They were learning English in a language institute located in the city of Zahedan, Iran. They were of intermediate-level English language proficiency since they had passed the institute placement test or completed the prior courses successfully. The participants included female students aged 18 to 28, with Persian as their native language. The participants were randomly assigned to two equal groups of experimental and control.

2.2. Instruments

The instrument of this study includes the Preliminary English Test (PET), functioning as a pre-test and post-test.

PET's speaking segment is divided into four sections. Each contender has a conversation with the interlocutor. The interlocutor uses standardized questions to ask the applicants questions in turn. The questions need the speaker to provide factual and personal information. Candidates react to questions regarding their current

situation, prior experiences, and future plans. Candidates interact with one another in the second task. The applicants are provided with visual stimuli to overcome the conversation challenge. The exercise is put up by the interlocutor using a defined rubric. In the third activity, each applicant is given a color image and instructed to comment on it for up to a minute. Both images are about the same subject. The general conversation is the fourth job. The candidates engage with one another. The topic of the dialogue expands on the concept introduced in the third exercise. The exercise was put up by the interlocutor using a defined rubric. This exam was piloted on 20 EFL learners who shared the same characteristics as the target population.

2.3. Procedure

The pre-test was administered as the study's initial phase. The pre-test assessed participants' knowledge of public speaking before treatment sessions. The pre-test was given to individuals from all groups. Two raters separately assessed participants' speaking abilities using the PET rating scale.

Speaking teaching in the scaffolding group was focused on exercises that boosted learners' motivation. The researcher chose a topic and offered students 5 minutes to think about it and brainstorm. The chairs for the pupils were placed in a U form. It was done to create a friendly and comfortable classroom atmosphere, allowing the students to walk around the room and make their dialogues more participatory. They talked about it together. Furthermore, the researcher was close to most students, allowing her to assist them as needed. In each session, the students were required to talk while performing exercises, such as categorizing concerns, assessing them, and sequencing events. These exercises challenged learners to engage in varying degrees of cognitive participation and wait-time techniques in their interactions. Songs and rhymes were also employed to inspire and stimulate the participants. Songs may aid in language acquisition because their repeated nature may improve learners' usage of turn-taking when speaking and

simple English structures (Arfaei Zarandi & Rahbar, 2014). The researcher let the students choose the next speaker in the classroom debates. It might help students build confidence in employing turn-taking in talks. The instructor offered opportunities for students to use their knowledge, abilities, and methods in various situations and for various goals.

The control group attended a typical speaking session using standard teaching approaches and procedures. By showing the pupils a piece of recent news and a video episode of recent events, the teacher employed authentic language as it is used in a real situation. The teachers gave the students the essential instructions. The goal was to focus more on the communication process rather than turn-taking and wait-time techniques. In addition to their replies to the exercises, the students were given the opportunity to share their views and opinions. For all groups of the study, each session took 90 minutes.

Descriptive and inferential statistics were used to analyze data. Independent samples t-tests were used to find the differences between the control and experimental groups concerning their performance on the pre-test and post-test.

3. Results

The pre-test scores for both experimental and control groups were calculated and considered in this study. Table 1 provides this information.

To ensure no significant difference between the groups regarding their speaking, an independent samples t-test was performed. The results are provided in Table 2.

The results showed no significant difference among the participants on the pre-test (t = .95, p > .05). The descriptive statistics of the participants' performance on the post-test are shown in Table 3.

An independent sample t-test was conducted to find the significant difference between the control and experimental groups. The results are tabulated in Table 4.

The results revealed a significant difference between the experimental and control speaking ability in that the experimental group outperformed the control group

Table 1.
Descriptive statistics of the Experimental and Control Groups on the Pre-test

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Sum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Experimental (Pretest)	30	8	15	338	11.27	2.196
Control (Pretest)	30	8	15	355	11.83	2.394
Valid N (listwise)	30					

Table 2.
Independent T-test between the Pre-test of the Experimental and Control Groups

Independent Samples Test										
		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means						
		F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
									Lower	Upper
Pre-test	Equal variances assumed	.927	.340	-.95	58	.343	-.567	.593	-1.754	.621

Table 3.
Descriptive Statistics of the Experimental and Control Groups on the Post-test

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation	Skewness			Kurtosis		
						Statistic	Std. Error	Ratio	Statistic	Std. Error	Ratio
Experimental (Posttest)	30	24	51	38.17	7.777	.036	.512	0.07	-.589	.992	-0.59
Control (Posttest)	30	21	35	28.10	4.521	-.112	.512	-0.22	-.975	.992	-0.98

Table 4.
Independent Sample T-test between the Groups' Speaking Ability

		Independent Samples Test								
		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means						
		F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
									Lower	Upper
Posttest	Equal variances assumed	8.092	.006	6.129	58	.000	10.067	1.642	6.779	13.354

(t = 6.12, p < .05). In other words, scaffolding has a significant impact on Iranian EFL learners' speaking ability. Therefore, the research question of the study was verified.

4. Discussion

The present study was designed to explore the effectiveness of the scaffolding tasks on Iranian EFL learners' speaking ability. The result of the independent samples t-tests showed that scaffolding enhanced the performance of EFL learners' speaking ability. One reason can be scaffolding produces an interactive learning environment, lowering learners' obstacles to engaging in communicative activities, increasing confidence, and removing shame. Gagné and Parks (2013) investigated scaffolding in cooperative learning tasks by ESL learners using sociocultural theory and discovered that scaffolded cooperative tasks could engage in language learning. Pearson (1996) validated this by demonstrating that the success of scaffolding arises when learners collaboratively grasp and control the elements of the tasks, locate tasks as a whole, and supply the challenge. Moreover, scaffolding strategies can guide learners' attention to monitor and control their learning. As Valencia-Vallejo et al. (2019) reported, scaffolding paves the way for novice learners by developing activities in an organized way and using efficient strategies with regard to their learning style.

The findings of the current study are in line with the constructivist approach concentrating on the role of scaffolding in the classroom environment. As reported by many constructivist researchers, scaffolding can create an atmosphere that significantly improves learners' engagement and interaction in the class, consequently enhancing their motivation (Anwer, 2019; Cook, 2000; Korur & Eryilmaz, 2018; Zhao Xiaohong, 1998). In the same vein, students in the current study appropriately attended to the strategic use of their talk and conversational features in the classroom, which can imply their heightened motivation but needs further examination.

The obtained results of the present study corroborate those of Ginaya et al. (2018), who investigated the impact of scaffolding on learners' speaking abilities. The findings revealed that trainees' speaking abilities had improved. The learners' progress is further encouraged by the fact that the use of scaffolding may boost students' learning so that they can participate actively throughout the learning process. Similarly, Hasan (2018) found that scaffolding techniques could positively affect language learners' performance, especially their writing ability. Hasan also reported that scaffolding in the form of positive feedback could function as an incentive to students and consequently improve learners' motivation.

5. Conclusion

It is clear that learning is a creative process and that after the pupils have acquired the abilities, they may be able to apply what they have learned in other similar circumstances. The prior scaffolding procedures may have enabled them to give scaffolding to their friends in a variety of comparable or wholly unique scenarios. As the obtained results suggested, scaffolding can be of benefit for improving EFL learners' speaking ability. The findings can, therefore, support previous studies and enrich the literature in this area although a relatively small sample size was investigated in this study. As a result, the findings can help language teachers reduce or limit the negative impact of traditional approaches and strategies on EFL learners' behavior and learning. Teachers may develop more cooperative learners who can be more efficient and successful social members using various scaffolding techniques.

Declarations

Competing interests

I confirm that I have read, understand, and agreed to the submission guidelines, policies, and submission declaration of the journal. No conflict of interest is to be declared.

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