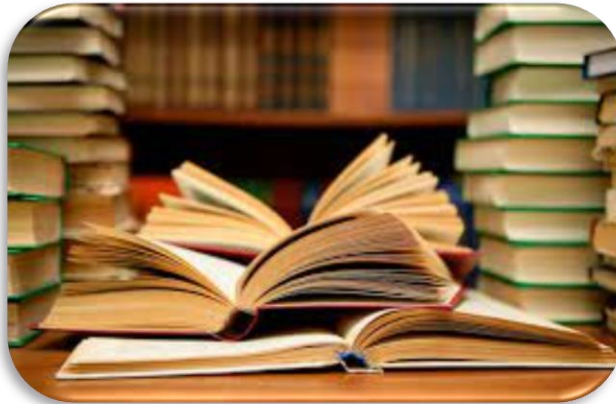




Research Paper



Implementation of Reciprocal-scaffolding Treatment in Virtual Learning Context: Iranian EFL Learners' Listening and Speaking Skills

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ABSTRACT

This study was an endeavor to implement and investigate reciprocal-scaffolding treatment in virtual EFL learning context. More specifically, it analyzed the effect of reciprocal-scaffolding online treatment on Iranian EFL learners' oral skills. After running placement test, 36 students formed the sample and they were randomly classified into two groups of experimental (EG=18) that received the mentioned treatment and control (CG=18) that were instructed using traditional teaching procedures. The data gathering tools included a homogeneity test, pretests and posttests in listening and speaking skills. The study was conducted in 16 sessions and the experimental group members received reciprocal-scaffolding strategies instruction in their speaking and listening courses, while the control group members practiced these two skills devoid of such instruction. The results of independent samples t-tests and paired t-tests performed on pretests and posttests revealed that the learners in the treatment group outperformed those in control group in both oral language skills. The study can offer some pedagogical implications for EFL teachers and learners in using reciprocal scaffolding strategies in EFL context.

Keywords: Reciprocal-scaffolding Treatment, Virtual Learning, Listening, Speaking

اجرای روش حمایتی (داربستی) متقابل در محیط یادگیری مجازی: مهارت های شنیداری و گفتاری زبان آموزان ایرانی زبان انگلیسی
این پژوهش تلاشی برای اجرا و بررسی روش حمایتی متقابل در محیط یادگیری مجازی زبان انگلیسی داشته است. به طور خاص، این تحقیق
تأثیر روش آنلاین حمایتی متقابل بر مهارت های شنیداری و گفتاری زبان آموزان ایرانی را مورد تجزیه و تحلیل قرار داد. پس از اجرای آزمون
تعیین سطح، 36 زبان آموز نمونه تحقیق را تشکیل دادند و به طور تصادفی به دو گروه آزمایشی (EG=18) که با روش مذکور و گروه کنترل
(CG=18) که با استفاده از روش های آموزشی سنتی آموزش داده شدند، طبقه بندی شدند. ابزارهای گردآوری داده ها شامل آزمون همگن سازی،
پیش آزمون و پس آزمون در مهارت های شنیداری و گفتاری بود. این تحقیق در 16 جلسه انجام شد و اعضای گروه آزمایش در دوره های شنیداری
و گفتاری خود آموزش راهبردهای روش حمایتی متقابل را دریافت کردند، در حالی که اعضای گروه کنترل این دو مهارت را بدون چنین آموزشی
تمرین کردند. نتایج آزمون های تی نمونه های مستقل و آزمون های تی زوجی انجام شده در پیش آزمون و پس آزمون نشان داد که زبان آموزان گروه
آزمایش در هر دو مهارت زبان از گروه کنترل بهتر عمل کردند.

واژگان کلیدی: روش حمایتی (داربستی) متقابل، یادگیری مجازی، مهارت شنیداری، مهارت گفتاری

INTRODUCTION

Effective communication, which has its own important role in any target language, is the main purpose of learning a foreign language. Effective communication skills in English are essential for people all over the world because English is one of the most widely used languages in terms of culture, politics, economics, and science (Tsai, 2022). The acquisition of various abilities in an appropriate manner seems to be important in order to communicate thoughts and knowledge, and prior research have shown that education using various teaching styles has an impact on learning in the English classes. Reciprocal scaffolding teaching strategies can be one of such instructional activities. Reciprocal teaching and scaffolding are different in meanings. Reciprocal teaching refers to an instructional activity in which students become the teacher in small groups. Teachers model, then help students learn to guide group discussions using four strategies of summarizing, question generating, clarifying, and predicting. Once students have learned the strategies, they take turns assuming the role of teacher in leading a dialogue about what has been learned (Yawisah, 2017).

Scaffolding, however, is referred to as a "setting up" procedure by Bruner (1983). It is a method in which the teacher supports a student to work just beyond the level he could achieve on his own (Zuhra, Muslem, & Daud, 2022). It speaks of a circumstance that enables the learner to select the resources they need in order to control the process of language acquisition. Additionally, the educational environment which is virtual, can reveal how well oral skills such as speaking and listening, are presented and practiced in English classes. The four strategies that students use to understand a text are predicting, questioning, clarifying, and summarizing. These strategies have the potential to be applied in oral skills improvement as well. These four strategies form the basis of the Reciprocal Teaching Technique (RTT), (Yawisah, 2017). Since scaffolding requires students to study at their own pace, it can be difficult for teachers to implement. It takes a lot of time; therefore, teachers might not have enough time to finish the entire lesson using scaffolding strategies (Van de Pol, Volman, & Beishuizen, 2010). As a result, the students may become frustrated and their learning motivation may gradually weaken (Hashey & Connors, 2003). Another challenge, as stated, is that teachers must receive professional training in order to manage learners in scaffolding lessons. In order for the pupils to learn from their mistakes, the teacher must use this teaching strategy.

The reciprocal teaching strategy is a great way to teach students how to summarize information and develop ideas while simultaneously reviewing terminology (Herlina, 2017). Researchers offer a number of arguments for why teachers should use reciprocal scaffolding as a suitable instructional strategy to aid students improve in language skills (e.g., Zuhra, Muslem, & Daud, 2022). Regardless of the subject matter taught in a specific session, reciprocal teaching enables the students to keep track of their development and take full responsibility for their own learning (Slater & Horstman, 2002). Due to the fact that all students can engage in group discussions and are expected to do so, reciprocal teaching significantly raises the level of discourse in the class (Hashey & Connors, 2003). Macintyre and Gardner (1991) claimed that dealing with a passive class, when students are unresponsive and avoid engagement with the teacher, is a regular challenge for EFL teachers. This is particularly true when a teacher wants interaction during a dialogue between the teacher and the class, such as when the teacher asks the class a question and expects at least one student to respond. Even though they may comprehend the questions



and wish to participate, students are frequently given insufficient time or options to express their opinions.

The use of reciprocal teaching has been shown to be advantageous in teaching students in a variety of disciplines and levels regardless of their ability (Myers, 2006); assisting struggling learners to improve their vocabulary and comprehension skills (Todd & Tracey, 2006); raising test scores of the learners and enhancing students' higher order thinking (Hacker & Tenent, 2002). Although most researchers focused on the effects of reciprocal teaching on reading comprehension, there are few studies conducted on speaking and listening as oral skills (Arif, 2016). Furthermore, it seems that adding an extra variable such as self-efficacy and examining it in a class where the learners are exposed to reciprocal teaching strategy may produce a different result. Educational systems in most of EFL contexts like Iran have ignored listening skill and EFL learners do not have the essential opportunities to access aural input, therefore it is regarded as a passive skill (Safa & Rozati, 2017). One of the conditions in which Iranian EFL learners can learn listening is in language institutes using various strategies. Large number of studies have been performed on effective methods of teaching listening (Talebinejad & Akhgar, 2015). Many studies have aimed at finding solutions to deal with students' weaknesses in accomplishing listening comprehension assignments through strategy training (Rajabi, Mahmoodi, & Hosseini, 2021), however, it is an under-researched area. Moreover, except listening, speaking (as the other oral skill) is in urgent need of due attention in Iranian context (Razaghi, Bagheri, & Yamini, 2019). Based on the mentioned issues, the current study was an attempt to investigate the effect of reciprocal-scaffolding treatment on EFL learners' oral skills in virtual context of learning and the following research questions have been formed:

Does reciprocal-scaffolding online treatment have any significant effect on Iranian EFL learners' listening skill?

Does reciprocal-scaffolding online treatment have any significant effect on Iranian EFL learners' speaking skill?

LITRATURE REVIEW

In a more recent study, Munawir, Khair, and Putriani (2022) looked into the impact of the reciprocal teaching strategy on students' reading comprehension. A pretest and a posttest were utilized in the pre-experimental design by the investigator. According to the data analysis, the pre-test mean for the students was 59.29, while the post-test mean was 77.62. It was found that students' reading comprehension increased as a result of receiving Reciprocal Teaching therapy. Similarly, Badakhshan et al. (2021) investigated reflective reciprocal teaching approach on the reading comprehension skills of EFL learners. 100 EFL first-year students were chosen and divided into three groups using convenience and random sampling methods: reflective reciprocal teaching (RRT), reciprocal teaching (RT), and control. The results showed that the RRT group fared better than the control group in terms of reading comprehension, but the RT instruction had little effect on this problem. Accordingly, the results of the qualitative data analysis showed that the RRT instruction model had a substantial impact on the learners' capacity to read comprehension by increasing their self-regulated learning, perceived competence, metacognitive awareness, confidence, and intrinsic drive.



Taka (2020) sought to determine whether teaching reading to Indonesian EFL students using the reciprocal teaching technique was effective. There were 25 students in all who were sampled. Pre-experimental methodology with pre- and post-test designs were employed in the study. The pre-test was administered to determine the students' fundamental reading skills, and the post-test was administered to determine whether the students had improved after receiving the reciprocal teaching method therapy. The results demonstrated that teaching reading to Indonesian EFL students using the reciprocal teaching method is beneficial. In the same year, Kula and Budack (2020) attempted to evaluate the benefits of reciprocal teaching on reading comprehension abilities, learning retention, and self-efficacy perception of reading comprehension. The research employed an experimental methodology, and qualitative information was used to support the conclusions. The experimental group outperformed the control group in terms of reading comprehension accomplishment levels and retention scores when the traditional teaching method was used to teach the class. In terms of self-efficacy levels, there was no discernible difference between the groups. The students in the experimental group said they were happy to have the chance to lead their classmates and to have a say in the direction of the lesson. They also said that this strategy helped them better grasp the texts they read and gave them a chance to work in a group.

Talebi (2018) aimed to find out the effects of reciprocal teaching on the English reading comprehension and metacognitive reading strategies of Iranian pre-university learners in a reading comprehension classroom. 60 female junior high school students were randomly assigned into two experimental and control groups each consisting of 30 learners. The experimental group was taught through reciprocal teaching while the control group was taught through traditional teaching method. The results indicated that reciprocal teaching had a significantly positive effect on the English reading comprehension and usage of the four main metacognitive reading strategies of the students. However, less proficient learners reported high favor of the reciprocal strategy compared to the learners with higher level of proficiency.

In another study, Ahmadi (2016) tried to investigate the effectiveness of the reciprocal teaching procedure on reading comprehension of intermediate Iranian EFL learners in Iran. Two intact groups were chosen non-randomly, one as the control group and the other as the experimental group. The experimental group received treatment, they were taught reading by applying RTP as an instructional strategy, but the control group was taught reading through the conventional method. The results showed that reciprocal teaching can improve reading comprehension of Iranian EFL learners.

Izadi and Nowruzi (2015) aimed at exploring the effect of reciprocal reading strategies instruction on reading comprehension of EFL learners. Emotional intelligence, another variable of interest, was assessed to indicate whether it plays a role in learners' comprehension. In a pre- and post-test study, 42 learners went through a reciprocal reading strategy instruction. High- and low-level readers' performances at two levels of emotional intelligence, high and low, were compared. Results of data analysis showed that all learners outperformed in their post-test performances except low level readers in high emotional intelligent group. Moreover, reciprocal instruction significantly improved learners' reading comprehension and emotional intelligence did not reveal meaningful correlation with reciprocal strategy instruction as far as learners' reading comprehension was concerned. In addition, Ahmadi and Gilakjani (2012) analyzed reciprocal teaching strategies and their impacts on English reading comprehension. They tried to explain the models of reading process, review reading process and reading



strategies, discuss cognitive and metacognitive strategies and reading comprehension, elaborate reciprocal teaching and its theoretical framework, mention the related research on reciprocal teaching, and state relationship between reciprocal teaching and reading comprehension. The findings indicated that reciprocal teaching had a significantly positive effect on the English reading comprehension and usage of the four main metacognitive reading strategies of EFL students.

METHODOLOGY

The present study was an attempt to investigate the effect of reciprocal scaffolding strategy (independent variable) and its impact on the EFL learners' oral skills improvement (dependent variables). To this end, quasi-experimental research was employed. In experimental studies, researchers deliberately manipulate independent variables to determine the effect on dependent variable. This manipulation is usually described as a treatment and the researcher's goal is to determine if there is any causal relationship. The research used both control and experimental (treatment) group and applied a non-random selection of participants. At the beginning of the study, 48 EFL students at the Mahan Airsa Language Institute in Kerman were chosen. After running placement test, 12 participants were removed and the remaining 36 subjects formed the sample. Then, they were randomly classified into two groups of experimental (EG=18) that received the treatment and control (CG=18) that were instructed using traditional teaching procedures. The study was conducted in 16 sessions and reciprocal-scaffolding teaching methods was done in EG as the students were exposed to online teaching procedures.

In the next step, listening and speaking pretests were administered to the study groups. The speaking and listening skills were practiced in each session, but in two different times. The teacher encouraged the students of a particular group to select a topic in speaking; She created a dialogue on the subject. The teacher used structured dialogues to demonstrate every phase of the process; She provided examples of effective discussion techniques such as word prediction, questioning, clarifying, and summarizing (Palincsar & Brown, 1984). After presenting the effective strategies to structure the dialogues, the teacher motivated the students to speak to start speaking and expand it through conversations between the teacher and students. In this case, the students experienced independence from the teacher and they assumed more accountability for carrying out the entire procedure. For this reason, the teacher tried to gradually decline the leadership and scaffolding responsibilities. Moreover, the teacher designed the students in groups of four and five. Then she distributed one note card to each member of the group identifying each person's unique role that could be considered as Summarizer, Questioner, Clarifier, and Predictor. The students listened to a listening extract about how to skate. Encouraging the groups to use note-taking strategies such as selective underlining or sticky-notes to help them better prepare for their role in the discussion. At the given stopping point, the Summarizer highlighted the key ideas in the listening sections.

The difference between control and experimental groups was in the application of strategies in the online context. The learners in the CG were instructed using the traditional teaching procedures in terms of word and dialogue memorization, topic discussion, reading and writing activates that were done at home and checked by the teacher online. The activities were limited to the methods that were mostly teacher-centered and controlled by the teacher. Enough attention was not given to the role of the learners



as independent agents and their support was limited to the teaching-learning activities that were selected by the teacher. In the last session, the identical exams were used in both groups as posttests. The data of this study was collected and analyzed via SPSS version 23. After data collection, the means of two groups based on their scores in pre and posttests were compared through independent samples t-tests as well as paired t-test to answer the research questions. The descriptive statistics, the mean comparisons, the normality of the tests and the independent t-test were the statistics that were used in this study. The difference between the means could reveal the relative progress among each group.

RESULTS

The first research question aimed to investigate the significant effect of the reciprocal-scaffolding treatment on EFL learners' listening skill. To answer the question, a pre- and posttest in listening was used to investigate the EFL students' knowledge in listening. The results of descriptive statistics of both tests in listening are represented at Table 1.

Table 1

Descriptive Statistics of Listening Tests

Tests		Mean	N	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
	Pre- listening for CG	10.2778	18	2.65254	.62521
	Post- listening for CG	11.3111	18	2.27231	.53559
	Pre- listening for EG	10.0556	18	2.04284	.48150
	Post- listening for EG	14.7222	18	1.84089	.43390

According to the results, the pre-test given at the start of the course revealed no differences between the students in the two groups, proving the homogeneity of the groups. For the listening posttest, the aforementioned process was repeated. The posttest of listening in control group is 11.3 and the posttest of listening in treatment group is 14.7. The results show differences between two groups. After the mentioned procedure, an independent samples t-test was run to estimate two groups performance in listening posttest. The results are shown in Table 2.

Table 2

Independent Samples Test on Listening (CG-EG)

		Paired Differences	T	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
		95% Confidence Interval of the Difference Upper			
Pair 1	Pre-listening for CG & EG	1.74359	.308	17	.762
Pair 2	Post-listening for CG & EG	-.12277	-2.284	17	.016

The information in Table 2 reveals that the pretest's initial t value was .308 at 17 degrees of freedom and its p value was $.762 > .05$. According to the p value, there was no discernible difference between the two groups' means at the start of the course. However, by looking at the posttest data, it can be concluded that the effect of treatment turned to be meaningful, $p = .016 < .05$. In other words, it can be claimed that after the instruction, the means of two groups in listening were meaningful. As for the equal variances,



the results showed that the significant level of 0.01 was less than 0.05. Therefore, the results showed that the learners in the RT scaffolding group as the treatment group outperformed the learners in the control group, hence, the null hypothesis was rejected. It can be evinced that there was a significant difference between the two groups regarding their scores in listening. Hence, it is concluded that the EFL learners who received listening instruction via RT scaffolding in LMS outperformed the group who received traditional listening instruction in LMS. Moreover, the results of Table 4.4 and Table 4.6 show the means of pretest and posttests for the groups. As it is clear, the mean for the listening pretest in RT group is calculated to be 10 and it changed to 14 for the posttest of the same group. The difference between the means of pre and posttest shows the degree of listening improvement for the EG in comparison to the CG.

The second research question aimed to investigate the significant effect of the reciprocal-scaffolding treatment on EFL learners' speaking skill. To answer this question, a pre- and posttest of speaking was used to investigate the EFL students' knowledge in speaking and the results of descriptive statistics of both tests are represented at Table 3.

Table 3

Descriptive Statistics of Speaking Tests

	Mean	N	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Pre-speaking for CG	11.3789	18	2.27086	.53525
Post-speaking for CG	12.2561	18	1.89453	.44655
Pre-speaking for EG	11.1461	18	1.50347	.35437
Post-speaking for EG	14.4417	18	1.33833	.31545

As it is clear, the mean for the speaking pretest of control group is calculated to be 11.37 and it changed to 12.25 for the posttest of the same group. Based on the given data, the mean for the speaking pretest of the treatment group was calculated to be 11.14 and it changed to 14.441 for the posttest of the same group. Moreover, a t-test can be run to investigate the difference between the groups after treatment and their speaking scores. Table 4 indicates the results of t-test in speaking.

Table 4

Independent Samples Test on Speaking (CG-EG)

		Paired Differences	T	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
		95% Confidence Interval of the Difference Upper			
Pair 1	Pre-speaking for CG & EG	2.1179	1.367	17	.189
Pair 2	Post-speaking for CG & EG	.06041	-2.008	17	.041

The data in Table 4 clearly shows that initially the t value for the pre speaking test for both groups was 1.367 at 17 degree of freedom and the $p=.189>.05$. The p value tells us that at the end of the course and after receiving the treatment by each group, no meaningful difference could be observed between



the means of the two groups. However, by looking at the posttest data, it can be concluded that the differences turned to be meaningful, $t = -2.008$ and $p = .01 < .05$. In other words, it can be claimed that the after a period of instruction via RT scaffolding treatment in the virtual context, the speaking means for the two groups became meaningful.

DISCUSSION

To test the first and second research questions, the posttest scores of EG and CG were compared using an independent-samples *t* test. The statistical analysis of the results indicated that RS were effective and listening and speaking abilities of the learners were improved. To improve oral skills, Vera (2004) suggests a modified Reciprocal Teaching (RT) version. According to him, RT is a useful method for boosting student speaking time in L2 classes and enhancing communicative proficiency. A reciprocal teaching method is one that demonstrates to students how to apply metacognitive thinking while deriving meaning from a text (Munawir et al., 2022). The RT strategy's effectiveness is justified by the fact that it is an interactive teaching strategy in which EFL students engage with the learning environment as their prior experience is activated and increases their motivation and interest. It is a method that encourages interaction between students and their teachers or between students and other students. After the teacher has modeled the procedure, the students switch roles and use the reciprocal teaching method to teach one another. In addition, this activation is used before, during, and after any class period. This instructional strategy enables an instructor to model and give the students enough practice to interact and construct a dialogue or activity through sub-sections of reciprocal teaching strategy. This kind of guided teaching can be used by the entire class to enhance a deeper comprehension of the text (Stricklin, 2011).

Findings of this study are in line with those conducted by Spivey and Curhbert (2006). The intervention using this technique could help low verbal college students boost their listening comprehension scores and increase their capacity to comprehend oral information. Spivey and Curhbert (2006) investigate and promote how the reciprocal teaching approach might influence students' views on speaking up in class and engaging actively, not just among school-age children but also among adults. Students that use RT can improve their academic performance. The majority of studies on reciprocal teaching involved kids (e.g., Dokur, 2017; Kula & Budak, 2020). In another study, Hart and Speece (1998) investigated how community college students' reading comprehension skills were impacted by reciprocal instruction. According to their findings, the reciprocal teaching group greatly outperformed the comparison group on reading comprehension assessments. The results are also support findings of Ahmadi and Gilakjani (2012) who analyzed reciprocal teaching strategies and their impacts on English reading comprehension. They concluded that reciprocal teaching had a significantly positive effect on the English reading comprehension and usage of the four main metacognitive reading strategies of EFL students.

CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS

The integration of scaffolding and RT effectively in oral language lessons has the potential to significantly affect the learners' linguistic intake. The speaking and listening exams' findings indicated that the learners in the experimental group had made satisfactory progress in both listening and speaking. The study's findings also suggested that the students' attempts to learn more efficiently and



collaboratively were impacted by the incorporation of RT and scaffolding in a virtual learning context. The approach that encouraged teamwork helped the students devote more time and energy to language learning, according to the study's qualitative findings. It seems that students had more reasonable expectations and felt more capable of accomplishing their objectives. The use of methods that indicated and supported learners-based classrooms in virtual environments where teachers operate as an organizer, facilitator, and chancellor was a significant addition of this study. By overemphasizing the role that is given to the students, the teacher's role is thereby compromised. The participants of such learning context move from a teacher-centered to a learner-centered approach. They can rely on both their own and their classmates' abilities during the teaching process.

The implementation of RT and scaffolding, which are deliberately and consciously chosen by the teacher, can assist the learners in improving both their language abilities and their attitudes toward learning. By offering a variety of stimulating activities to the EFL students, teachers need to establish an input-rich environment both within and outside the classroom. According to the research, there should be a transition from teacher-centered to learner-centered approaches, and incorporating additional sources that students can rely on is a crucial contribution that teachers should suggest and implement in their language classrooms. The instructor in the classroom must function as a facilitator who motivates students to actively engage in the learning process and assists students in developing the information, skills, and competences necessary to assume ownership of their own learning. The necessity to give EFL students more opportunity to employ a variety of tactics in order to increase learners' understanding of the need of building their language competence is a significant implication of this study. Moreover, language teachers should promote students' knowledge of the advantages and usefulness of accessing outside sources and collaboration in virtual learning environment as they try their best to do so in order to encourage EFL learners to do so.

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