Journal of Studies in Learning
and Teaching English
Volume. 9, Issue. 2, Ser. 18, (2020), 71-99

The Impact of Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development Through Scaffolding and Iranian EFL Learners' Gender on their Speaking Task

Najmeh Bagheri*
Ph.D candidate in TEFL
Department of English Language
Islamic Azad University, Shiraz Branch
Email: bagherinajme1370@gmail.com

Firooz Sadighi
Professor of English Language and Linguistics
Department of English Language
Islamic Azad University, Shiraz Branch
Email: firoozsadighi@yahoo.com

Abstract. This study investigated the impact of scaffolding and learners? gender on their speaking tasks at the Sobhan Language Institute in Shiraz, Iran. Towards this aim, the Mean Length of Utterance (MLU), and the Mean Length of Sentence (MLS) produced by the participants were measured. In this way, the researchers tried to determine if there would be any speech development using scaffolding within the ZPD. The SPSS 24 (statistical package for the social sciences) was run to analyze the collected data. A Paired-samples t-test and an independent samples t-test were used to calculate and to investigate the impact of scaffolding on the participants' speaking development. The independent samples t-test was utilized to calculate the difference between the participants' speaking tasks and gender. The findings indicated that scaffolding affected their speaking tasks development. By getting cooperation from the instructor or other students, the students could produce more sentences by providing words needed to describe the pictures. However, the results indicated that there was no significant difference between males and females in terms of the development of their speaking tasks. Implications of the results are elaborated as well.

Keywords: Zone of proximal development, scaffolding, gender, speaking task, EFL learners

Received: March 2020; Accepted: April 2020
*Corresponding author

Introduction

Instructors at all levels of teaching have become more interested in knowing how they can encourage their learners in learning and using forms of spoken language. Scaffolding is a useful technique for encouraging learners to speak. Vygotsky's (1920) concept in his sociocultural ideology of human learning and progress through communication left a significant influence on learning and teaching. Harris and Hodges (1996) explain scaffolding in learning as the piecemeal requisition of adults. An instructor, for example, can encourage learners through instruction, modeling, questioning, feedback for a child's accomplishment through successive commitments. Thereby conveying more independence to the child. An increasing number of educators and scholars have utilized the concept of scaffolding as a metaphor to explain the role of adults or more knowledgeable peers in helping children's learning and improvement (Stone 1998; Wells 1999; Hammond,2002:Daniels,2001).

Vygotsky's (1962,1978), the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), is at the center of scaffolding. The ways that the ZPD concept supports the theoretical conceptualization of scaffolding have been conceived differently. Moreover, the concept of the ZPD itself has been defined and analyzed differently because of the initial ambiguity in its definition (Miller 1993).

Considering the role played by scaffolding in teaching and learning English as a foreign/second language, in countries such as Iran in which English is used as a foreign language and is rarely applied in the community or multimedia, it is of utmost importance to pay more attention to its crucial presence and application in foreign contexts. Although English is used as the medium of instruction to teach EFL learners, the results are not promising, and many learners cannot speak, write, listen, and read in English. It is evident that through communication, people can express their opinions and to know other‘ ideas as well. Without speech, we cannot interact with others. We use language in different situations to satisfy our needs and daily activities. This situation warrants the correct and appropriate use of language in order to interact with one another.

The speakers of a language require to be intentionally instructed in the skill of speaking to become proficient speakers. A learner requires to have mastery in each of the four language skills, such as listening, speaking, reading, and writing. The ability to communicate skillfully supplies the speaker with several distinct advantages. Speaking skills are necessary for career success, but certainly not narrowed down to one's professional aspirations. Speaking skills can also improve one's personal life.

At present, the concept of scaffolding has become a hot topic of psychological research in recent years. This study tried to explore the possible impact that the ZPD, scaffolding, and the learners' gender can exert on the development of our EFL learners' speaking tasks. The population selected for this research was language learners studying English at the Sobhan Language Institute in Shiraz. Understanding the findings of this study can also help language teachers take scaffolding seriously, resulting in the possible progress of their students' speaking tasks. The present study can have significant implications, both theoretically and pedagogically as well.

Theoretically, the findings can be utilized to realize the influential role of scaffolding and learners? gender in their speaking tasks. Pedagogically, the present research can inform researchers, teachers, professors, and students to pay close attention to scaffolding and the role of learners? gender in their speaking abilities.

Statement of the Problem and Objective of the Study

For some learners, attending a second/foreign language learning class is a challenging and even horrifying task. As time passes, they keep looking at their watches to know when the class will be off. Some other language learners, on the other hand, have such a sense of flow and involvement that they lose track of time when they are in a language learning class. Also, the rate of learning a second language and its level of difficulty differ enormously in second/foreign language learners. Before the advent of communicative language teaching, the primary goal of language learning was to focus on linguistic competence and master the language's structure. However, in recent decades, the aim of teaching English has shifted from the mastery of structures to the ability to use

language for communicative purposes. Therefore, the communication aspect of teaching English has received more attention.

However, in teaching speaking, teachers might face some reluctant students who prefer not to speak and interact with each other communicatively. Many empirical studies have endorsed implementing scaffolding to develop students‘ proficiency level in different language skills (Al-Yami, 2008). However, scaffolding, as it influences speaking tasks, remains under-researched in the Iran context. To the best of the researchers' knowledge, no studies have been done about the impact of scaffolding and learners‘ gender on the speaking tasks in the selected context and situation of the current study.

Initially, Vygotsky (1978) proposed the ZPD (Zone of Proximal Development), which describes it as “the distance between the actual development level as determined by independent problem solving and capable peers” (p.86). In 1976, Wood et al. defined the scaffolding as the support provided by an expert, an instructor, or an adult, a child or a beginner through instruction and interaction in a cheerful situation; therefore, the child feels independent and self-governing.

Based on such contentions, the researchers of this study have embarked on the application of scaffolding within Vygotsky's ZPD to support the EFL learners by their teacher to examine its impact on their speaking ability development and the mediating role of gender of the participants. Scaffolding has been found to perform on two presuppositions. The first deals with scaffolding or reinforcing students' ability to acquire a skill with a supportive tutor who works as a scaffold until students are comfortable doing it on their own. The teacher may delete scaffolding when they are ensured the students have acquired proficiency in a specific concept or skill. The second presupposition involves Vygotsky‘s zone of proximal development, which considers that the acquisition of a skill is often beyond the students‘ learning level or potentiality even if a reinforcement or scaffold is provided. As a routine, English teachers try to provide their students with the best techniques to reach their ultimate aim, which is to enhance their students' communicative ability. Thus, the current study has attempted to recognize and bring to light such scaffolding deployed by teachers in their classrooms to assist

their students in developing their speaking skills to become proficient enough to communicate in an EFL context as expected. More details of the scope and aims of the current study are delineated in the following research questions.

Research Questions

RQ1: Does scaffolding have an impact on our Iranian EFL learners' speaking task development?

RQ2: Is there any significant difference between males and females in terms of speaking proficiency as a result of the application of scaffolding among EFL learners?

Research Hypotheses

H01: Scaffolding does not have an impact on our Iranian EFL learners' speaking task development.

H02: There is no significant difference between males and females in terms of their speaking proficiency and the application of scaffolding.

Significance of the study

The following considerations show the significance of the present study. This study seeks to investigate a recent new teaching practice, a scaffolding that promises to prepare learners for external support in developing speaking skills. This study boosts the concept of learners' autonomy as a vital concern of new trends in education, which promotes student-center learning. Likewise, it prepares teachers with a better understanding of scaffolding to adapt it to their teaching. It also helps students become better speakers and attain positive attitudes towards their speaking skills.

The results of this study on scaffolding as a technique to develop speaking language skills may emphasize the need to reformulate the widely-used teaching techniques in those educational institutions, which wish the promotion of learner autonomy in the acquisition of speaking skills.

Review of the Related

Literature A brief history of the idea of scaffolding and ZPD
Scaffolding is significantly conceived in SLA research as a conversational process organized asymmetrically (i.e., by interactants of unequal status) via contextual; intellectual encourage cooperation or instruction from one interactant to another to achieve new tasks or activities (e.g., Applebee and Langer 1983; Baily 2006; Littlewood 2004; Mercer2001; Solon,2001; Van Lier 2001). The process is claimed to happen through what Scolon (1976)refers to as vertical constructions? or what Donato (1994) defines as collective scaffolding, which shows how interactants can jointly make knowledge (Van Lier 2004). Although the recent characterizations concentrate more on the balanced representation of scaffolding, the overriding assumptions underlying Vygotsky's ZPD centers around an asymmetrical conception of the scaffolding, although it happens through interactions. Scaffolding takes its origin from physical architecture (Van Lier 2004), where everything begins through physical, concrete operations, and later, came in the, and then L2, acquisition research, which was imagined to let for cognitive and social/ecological operations.

Kublin et al. (1998) state that "Vygotsky defined learning as being embedded by social events and happening as a child communicates with people and objects and milieu"(p.287). The typical approach to SLA stresses the causal relationship between social interaction and cognitive development, such as language learning. The main emphasis of SCT is social context(Vygotsky,1978).

According to Vygotsky (1962,1978) and Bruner (1975,1983), learning happens through interaction with more experienced guides who can encourage novice learners. Moreover, language is used as a symbolic tool to clear new knowledge, with learners who are highly dependent on the discussions with the experts. When the new language is more internalized, the more learners utilize language to present on what they have realized. Then learning moves from inter-psychological to the intra-psychological. Language, as a symbolic device that intercedes interpersonal and intrapersonal activity, has an influential role via ZPD (Walsh,

S.2006).

Lantolf (2000: 17, cited in Walsh, S., 2006) claimed that the ZPD should be regarded as a metaphor for observing and understanding how mediated tools are adapted, and internalized. He defined the ZPD as the collaborative construction of opportunity for individuals to make their mental abilities.

Various researchers are having studied both expert-novice interactions as well as novice-novice interactions. Many studies adjusted the micro-genetic method involving a detailed analysis of sequences of interactions to document the shift towards self-regulation happening within them(Ellis 2008,p.272).

Other studies have also investigated an experimental design, including pretest and posttests. Working with micro-genetic analysis by an experimental design, Nassaji and Swain's (2000, cited in Ellis 2008) studied a native-speaking tutor? s oral feedback on the written compositions of two Korean learners of English (expert-novice interactions). The results demonstrate that providing non-random feedback and the learner ?s ZPD was useful in some ways as enabling the learner to reach at the right form while using feedback sessions. This process of feedback continued with much less explicit assistance in subsequent sessions to enable the learner to utilize the right form in a posttest, including a cloze version of the composition she had written previously. The findings of Nassaji and Swain ?s study demonstrated that random feedback did not always succeed in providing the learner to recognize the right forms and was much less effective in promoting unassisted use of the right form in the posttests. The results of this research are in line with the claim when scaffolding works to make a ZPD for a learner, the learning of the issues under investigation takes place. Swain, Brooks, and Tocalli-Beller?s (2003) review of peer-peer dialogue in which, learners could work simultaneously as experts and novices and encourage learning via questioning, proposing solutions, disagreement, repeating and handling activities and behaviors show that the cooperative dialogues in which peers are engaged in as they work together on writing, listening, and reading activities mediates second language learning.

There is a large body of study in the field of language and gen-

der, which offers that male and female conversational styles are quite different (see, for instance, Coates 199.1. Maltz and Broker, 1982; Tannen,1990. Thwaite, 199.1). These lines of research characterize the female conversational style as collaborative, cooperative, symmetrical, and supportive, while its male equivalent is portrayed as controlling, uncooperative, asymmetrical, and unsupportive.

In her book Women, Men, and Language, Jennifer Coates (199.1: 140) argues that women and men seem to vary in terms of their communicative competence in so far as they "have different sets of norms for conversational interaction." Therefore, she concludes, "women and men may constitute distinct speech communities." Such claims may have severe implications for language testing since they point that the construct of communicative competence is not gender-neutral.

Khosravi (2017) conducted a study to investigate the effect of symmetrical scaffolding on the reading comprehension of Iranian EFL learners. Research findings show that symmetrical scaffolding has a significant effect on learners‘ performance in reading comprehension. Hasan (2019) conducted a study to discover the impact of motivational scaffolding on acquiring writing skills in an L2 situation. The findings show that both teachers and the learners follow similar patterns in understanding the scaffolding technique in the acquisition of writing skills.

Akhgar and Talebinejad (2015) studied the impact of teacher scaffolding on Iranian intermediate EFL learner's listening comprehension achievement. The results confirmed the significant impact of teacher scaffolding on listening achievement in males and females EFL learners. Al Eissa and Al-Bargi (2017) investigated the impact of scaffolding strategies in enhancing the reading comprehension skills of university students in a Saudi context. The results of the study indicated a statistically significant difference between the pretest and the posttest of the experimental group in favor of the posttest. Furthermore, students showed a positive attitude towards the scaffolding technique as a motivation factor to their learning.

Shooshtari and Mir (2014) carried out a study to discover the impact of peer scaffolding in writing strategies application. The results of the posttest writing task and the analysis of strategy application

records during the treatment and in the posttest showed that the participants with peers' and tutor's non-random scaffolding made remarkable progress in both writing quality and strategy application.

Methodology

Design of the study

This research had an experimental quantitative research design in nature. The researchers focused on the study of variables that captured these standard features. They were quantified by counting, scaling, or by assigning values to categorical data. The survey had a pretest, a post-test, and some treatment sessions to help the students through applying to the scaffold. Random-sampling was also utilized to select the participating subjects.

Participants

The population of this study comprised 90 Iranian Intermediate EFL students from three intact classes, each with 30 male and female subjects, from the Sobhan language Institute located in Shiraz, Iran. The total number of female students was 47, and the male ones were 43. The first names of the 47 females were arranged alphabetically in Persian, and then we selected the first 30 numbers to be included in our second-round choice. The same procedure was utilized for the 43 males, and the first 30 numbers were chosen. In this way, we came up with 60 male and female students. The 60 male and female subjects‘ first names in Persian were arranged alphabetically and separately. The first 30 female names out of 47 (1-30) and the other 30 male names out of 43 (13-43) became the actual participants. Again these 60 students?first names were ordered alphabetically in Persian. Eventually, the first 30 subjects out of 60 were randomly selected and assigned to the experimental and the second ones for the control group. In this way, all the participants? selected processes were carried out randomly, and each group contained an equal number of males and females (15 each). Each group had 30 students with an average age of 26. Both males and females participated in the present study since the difference of gender in their speaking

development were under investigation. The study was done in Shiraz in 2020.

Instruments

The students' speaking development was measured by establishing the Mean Length of Utterance (MLU), and the Mean Length of Sentence (MLS) in their oral speeches. To find out whether or not there is speech development as a result of scaffolding within the ZPD, both of these two means (MLU) and (MLS) were used. The Mean Length of Utterance (MLU) needs that all speeches are clear. When one vocabulary in that speech is not realized, the speech has to be omitted. Before the calculation of utterances, to count the number of morphemes in each utterance is mandatory. Then, calculating the Mean Length of Sentence (MLS), it is needed to add the number of morphemes for all the speeches and measure this total with the number of speeches obtained in the MLU calculation.

The MLS is a worth index of language development. In this study, it was used to calculate the speeches and realize the effects of language scaffolding on the adults' sentence length. The pictures selected to bring the free narrative speech were utilized from the English File book (2020). This book consisting of a diversity of colorful pictures and posters were utilized as the instrument for this study. It was adopted since it consisted of a large number of drawings and graphics. The use of pictures acted as scaffolding for learners to participate well in the classroom.

Data collection procedure

The class was held two times a week. Each session lasted about 90 minutes. The vocal performance was recorded and then translated into a written format. The first researcher observed the class in which the teacher helped learners in different tasks. They helped learners by using the pictures and by facilitating questions, phrases, and words such as "what are they going?"; Then"; After that ; Finally, during each scaffolding session, the teacher discussed meaning by asking some questions to verify and clarify the description of pictures, drawings, and illustrations. In order to calculate the Mean Length of Utterance

(MLU), and the Mean Length of Utterance (MLS), all the utterances were recorded. Besides, the teacher gave them some hints or demonstrations during the scaffolding phase.

Data analysis procedure

For analyzing the collected data, the SPSS 24 (statistical package for the social sciences) was run. The paired-samples t-test and an independent samples t-test were used to examine the impact of scaffolding on the students' speaking development. The independent samples t-test was employed to calculate the difference between the subjects' speaking task development and gender. Both descriptive statistics and inferential statistics were applied to analyze the data collected during the data collection processing.

Results of the study

In this section of the present study, the findings obtained through the statistical analyses of the collected data taking into account the two research questions, are presented and clarified in different tables followed by their proper discussions. Table 1 shows the descriptive statistics of the pretest of the experimental group. 30 students participated in the pre-experimental group. The minimum score is 30, and the maximum score is 82.

Table 1: Descriptive statistics of the pretest, experimental group

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Pre-experimental	30	30.00	82.00	55.8333	16.90967
Valid N (listwise)	30				

Table 2 illustrates the descriptive statistics of the posttest, experimental group. It shows the number of participants, the minimum, and the maximum of the experimental? group's posttest scores.

Table 2: Descriptive statistics of the posttest, experimental group

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Post-experimental	30	60.00	100.00	88.7667	8.39410
Valid N (listwise)	30				

As table 2 shows the descriptive statistics of the posttest of the experimental group. Like the pretest of the experimental group, there are 30 participants in the posttest of the experimental group. The minimum score is 60, and the maximum score is 100 for the experimental group posttest. The mean score is 88.766.

Table 3 reveals descriptive statistics of the pretest, control group. It shows the number of participants, the minimum, and the maximum of pre-control?s test scores.

Table 3: Descriptive statistics of the pretest, control group

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Pre-control	30	30.00	82.00	54.5000	16.44374
Valid N (listwise)	30				

Table 3 shows the number of participants in the pretest of the control group and also the minimum and the maximum scores of the participants. As table 3 shows, the minimum score is 30, and the maximum score is 82 for the control group's pretest. Table 4 displays descriptive statistics of the post-test, control group. It reveals the number of participants, the minimum, and the maximum of post-control's test scores.

Table 4: Descriptive statistics of the posttest, control group

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Post-control	30	30.00	82.00	54.2000	16.70515
Valid N (listwise)	30				

Table 4 shows the mean, the minimum, and the maximum scores of the posttest of the control group, 54.2, 30, and 82, respectively. The number of participants for the posttest of the control group is 30.

Table 5 illustrates the descriptive statistics of the pre-and posttests of the experimental group and the students' gender. It also shows the number of males and females who participated in the pre-experimental and post-experimental group.

Table 5: Descriptive statistics of the pre- and posttests of the experimental group and the students' gender

Gender		N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Male	Pre-experimental	15	30.00	80.00	54.5333	16.28262
	Post-experimental	15	80.00	100.00	91.0000	6.30193
	Valid N (listwise)	15				
Female	Pre-experimental	15	30.00	82.00	57.1333	17.98756
	Post-experimental	15	60.00	98.00	86.5333	9.77509
	Valid N (listwise)	15				

Table 5 shows there are 15 males and 15 females in the experimental group's pre- and post-tests. The mean, the minimum and the maximum scores of the pretest of the male students are 54.53, 30, and 80, respectively. While those of the posttest scores of this group are 91, 80, and 100, respectively. Likewise, the mean, the minimum, and the maximum scores of the females' pretest of the experimental group are 57.13, 30, and 82, respectively, while those of their posttest scores are 86.53, 60, and 98, respectively.

Table 6 reveals descriptive statistics of the pre-and posttests of the control group and the students' gender. It also shows the number of participants, the minimum, the maximum, and the mean of males and females in the pre-and posttests of the control group.

Table 6: Descriptive statistics of the pre- and posttests of the control group and the students' gender

Gender		N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Male	Pre-control	15	30.00	80.00	54.1333	15.80175
	Post-control	15	30.00	80.00	53.7333	16.34217
	Valid N (listwise)	15				
Female	Pre-control	15	31.00	82.00	54.8667	17.61033
	Post-control	15	30.00	82.00	54.6667	17.62169
	Valid N (listwise)	15				

As shown in Table 6, there are 15 males and 15 females in the control group's pre- and posttests. The mean, the minimum and the maximum scores of the pretest of the male students are 54.13, 30, and 80, respectively. While those of the posttest scores of this group are 53.73, 30, and 80, respectively. Likewise, the mean, the minimum, and the maximum scores of the females' pretest of the control group are 54.86, 31, and 82, respectively, while those of their posttest scores are 54.86, 30, and 82, respectively.

Paired-samples t-test and an independent samples t-test for the impact of scaffolding on speaking task

To determine whether scaffolding had an impact on the participants' speaking tasks, a paired-samples t-test, and an independent samples t-test were run. In order to find out the main research question, which was, "Does scaffolding have an impact on the students' speaking task development?" These two tests were applied to the data. The results are shown in Tables 7 to 12.

Table 7 illustrates Paired samples statistics for the pre- and posttests of the experimental group. It also reveals the number of participants and the mean in the pre- and posttests of the experimental group.

Table 7: Paired Samples Statistics for the pre- and posttests of the experimental group

		Mean	N	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Pair 1	Pre-experimental	55.8333	30	16.90967	3.08727
	Post-experimental	88.7667	30	8.39410	1.53255

As Table 7 shows, the mean for the pretest of the experimental group is 55.833, and the posttest is 88.766. The number of participants for the experimental group's pre- and posttests is 30.

The Paired-samples t-test was used to calculate the difference between pre-experimental and post-experimental group's speaking test scores.

Table 8: Paired samples test for the pre and post-tests of the experimental group

		Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference Lower	Upper	T	Df	Sig. (2-tailed)
Pair 1	Pre-experimental – Post-experimental	-32.93333	13.23249	2.41591	-37.87443	-27.99224	13.632	29	.000

As displayed in Table 8, Sig. (2-tailed) is .000. Since it is less than .05, we can conclude that there was a significant difference in the students' speaking task development between pre- and posttests of the experimental group's obtained scores. Our treatment through scaffolding had an impact on our subjects'speaking development in the post-experimental group. The t value is 13.63, and the mean difference in the two scores are -32.933 with a 95 percent confidence interval stretching from a Lower bound of -37.87 to an Upper bound of -27.99.

Table 9 illustrates Paired samples statistics for the pre- and posttests of the control group. It also reveals the number of participants and the mean in the pre- and posttests of the control group.

Table 9: Paired samples statistics for pre-control and post control

		Mean	N	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Pair 1	Pre-control	54.5000	30	16.44374	3.00220
	Post-control	54.2000	30	16.70515	3.04993

Table 9 shows the mean and number of participants in the pre and posttests of the control group. The mean for the pretest is 54.5, and the mean for the posttest is 54.20. There are 30 participants in each of the pre- and posttests of the control group.

The Paired-samples t-test was used to calculate the difference between pre-and posttests of the control group's speaking test scores.

Table 10: Paired samples test for pre-control and post-control Paired Differences

		Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference Lower	Upper	T	Df	Sig. (2-tailed)
Pair 1	Pre-control – post-control	.30000	.95231	.17387	-.05560	.65560	1.725	29	.095

As Table 10 shows, Sig (2-tailed) is .095. Since it is more than .05, we could realize that there was no significant difference in the speaking scores between pre- and post-tests of the control group. The t value is 1.72, and the mean difference in the two scores is .30000 with a 95 % confidence interval stretching from a Lower bound of -.05560 to an Upper bound of .65560.

Table 11 demonstrates group statistics for the posttest of the control and the experimental group's speaking scores. It also displays the mean and the number of participants for the two groups' post scores.

Table 11: Group statistics for speaking ,post-control ,and post-experimental

Instruction		N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
speaking	Post-experimental	30	88.7667	8.39410	1.53255
	Post-control	30	54.2000	16.70515	3.04993

As Table 11 shows, there are 30 participants in the control group's pre- and posttests each. The mean for the posttest of the experimental group is 88.76, and that of the control group is 54.20. In order to answer the first research question, "Does scaffolding have an impact on our Iranian EFL learners' speaking tasks development?" An independent samples t-test was run.

Table 12: Independent samples test for speaking,post-experimental, and post-control

		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means						
						Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
		F	Sig.	T	Df				Lower	Upper
Speaking	Equal variances assumed	14.073	.000	10.127	58	.000	34.56667	3.41332	27.73416	41.39917
	Equal variances not assumed			10.127	42.767	.000	34.56667	3.41332	27.68196	41.45137

As displayed in Table 12, Sig. (2-tailed) is .00. Because it is less than.05, the null hypothesis is rejected. We can understand that scaffolding impacted on the experimental group's speaking obtained scores. There was a significant difference in speaking tasks between post- experimental and post- control groups. The t value is 10.127, and the mean difference in the two scores is 34.56, with a 95 percent confidence interval stretching from a Lower bound 27.73416 to an Upper bound of 41.39917.

Independent samples t-test for gender regarding the participants' speaking task development is elaborated.

In order to determine whether there was any significant difference between the speaking task development of males and females, an independent sample t-test was run. The findings are presented in Tables 13-22.

Table 13 shows group statistics for the pretest scores of the experimental group and gender. It also reveals the mean and the number of males and females who participated in the pretest of the experimental group.

Table 13: Group statistics for pre-experimental test scores and gender

Gender		N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Pre-experimental	Male	15	54.5333	16.28262	4.20416
	Female	15	57.1333	17.98756	4.64437

As Table 13 displays, there are 15 males and 15 females in the pretest of the experimental group, and the mean scores of males and females are 54.53 and 57.13, respectively.

To answer the second research question, whether there was any significant difference between speaking task development of males and females, an independent samples t-test was run to check if there was existed any significant difference between the pre-experimental scores and gender.

Table 14: Independent samples test for males' and females' pre-experimental scores and gender

		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means						
									95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
		F	Sig.	T	Df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	Lower	Upper
Pre-experimental	Equal variances assumed	.287	.596	-.415	28	.681	-2.60000	6.26459	-15.43243	10.23243
	Equal variances not assumed			-.415	27.727	.681	-2.60000	6.26459	-15.43813	10.23813

Table 14 shows the difference between males and females in the experimental group's pretest scores. Since Sig. (2-tailed) is .68 more than .05, there was not a significant difference for males and females test scores among the pre-experimental group.

Table 15 demonstrates the mean and the number of males and females who participated in the experimental group's posttest.

Table 15: Group statistics for post-experimental and gender

Gender		N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Post-experimental	Male	15	91.0000	6.30193	1.62715
	Female	15	86.5333	9.77509	2.52392

As Table 15 displayed, there are 15 males and 15 females in the posttest of the experimental group, and the males' and females' mean scores are 91and 86.53, respectively.

Another independent samples t-test was used to examine whether there was any significant difference between the speaking task development in the posttest scores of the experimental group and the students' gender.

Table 16: Independent samples test for post-experimental test scores and gender

		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means						
									95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
		F	Sig.	T	Df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	Lower	Upper
Post-experimental	Equal variances assumed	1.871	.182	1.487	28	.148	4.46667	3.00296	-1.68462	10.61795
	Equal variances not assumed			1.487	23.923	.150	4.46667	3.00296	-1.73219	10.66553

As displayed in Table 16, since Sig. (2-tailed) (.14) is more than .05, we could realize that there was no significant difference in the post-experimental test scores and gender. It means that no difference in the males' and females' test scores in the post-experimental group's test is observed. The t value is 1.487, and the mean difference in the two scores are 4.4666 with a 95 percent confidence interval stretching from a Lower bound of -1.6846 to an Upper bound of 10.617.

Table 17 shows group statistics for pretest scores of the control group and the participants' gender. It shows the number of males and females who participated in the pretest of the control group.

Table 17: Group statistics for pre-control test scores of the control and gender

Gender		N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Pre-control	Male	15	54.1333	15.80175	4.07999
	Female	15	54.8667	17.61033	4.54697

The result shown in Table 17 indicates that there are 15 males and 15 females with means of 54.13 and 54.86 for the control group's pretest scores, respectively. In order to realize whether any significant difference

between males and females of the control group's pretest scores exists, another independent samples t-test was utilized.

Table 18: Independent samples test for the pre-control test scores and gender

		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means						
									95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
		F	Sig.	T	Df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	Lower	Upper
Pre-control	Equal variances assumed	.033	.856	-.120	28	.905	-.73333	6.10911	-13.24729	11.78062
	Equal variances not assumed			-.120	27.678	.905	-.73333	6.10911	-13.25386	11.78719

Table 18 indicates that Sig. (2-tailed) is .905, and because it is more than .05, there was no significant difference in the control group's pretest scores of males and females. In other words, regardless of the gender distinction of the participating subjects, they enjoy the same level of L2 knowledge.

Table 19 shows group statistics for the control group's posttest scores and gender. It shows the number of males and females who participated in the posttest.

Table 19: Group statistics for post-control and gender

Gender		N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Post control	Male	15	53.7333	16.34217	4.21953
	Female	15	54.6667	17.62169	4.54990

The result shown in Table 19 reveals that the two groups of males and females (15 in each) in the control group are almost at the same level of test achievement with the means of 53.73 and 54.66, respectively.

In order to determine whether any significant difference between the speaking scores of the control group's posttest and gender shows up, another independent samples t-test was utilized.

Table 20: Independent samples test for post -control and gender

		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means						
									95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
		F	Sig.	T	Df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	Lower	Upper
Postcontrol	Equal variances assumed	.002	.963	-.150	28	.882	-.93333	6.20532	-13.64436	11.77769
	Equal variances not assumed			-.150	27.842	.882	-.93333	6.20532	-13.64760	11.78094

As displayed in Table 20, Sig. (2-tailed) is .88. Since it is more than p-value (.05), there was no significant difference in the post-control for males and females. We can conclude that no matter of gender distinction, there was no difference between the post-control groups' obtained test scores.

Table 21 reveals group statistics for the post-test mean scores of the control and experimental groups and the subjects' gender. It shows the number of males and females who participated in the posttest of the two groups.

Table 21: Group statistics for post-control ,post-experimental

Gender		N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Speaking	Male	30	72.3667	22.52276	4.11207
	Female	30	70.6000	21.41640	3.91008

Table 21 shows that there are 30 males in the experimental and control groups. Also, there are 30 females in the two groups' posttests. The mean for males in the experimental and control groups' post-tests scores is 72.366, and that of the females is 70.60.

In order to answer the second question, "Is there any significant difference between males and females in terms of speaking proficiency among EFL learners?" An independent samples- t-test was applied to the data.

Table 22: Independent samples test for speaking and gender

		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means						
									95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
		F	Sig.	T	Df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	Lower	Upper
Speaking	Equal variances assumed	.005	.946	.311	58	.757	1.76667	5.67432	-9.59172	13.12505
	Equal variances not assumed			.311	57.853	.757	1.76667	5.67432	-9.59233	13.12566

As Table 22 illustrates, Sig. (2-tailed) is .75, and it is more than the p-value (.05), then we can conclude that there was not a significant difference between the speaking tasks of males and females. Thus, the null hypothesis was accepted because there was no significant difference between the two genders regarding their speaking tasks development.

Discussion

Based on the results of this study elaborated in the previous parts, the discussion of these findings with the two experimental and control groups' speaking performance follows. Their development in the speaking tasks before and after the treatment, exerting scaffolding to the experimental group and no treatment for the control and their gender distinction, is elaborated by referring to the findings of the survey. Likewise, the results of other studies reviewed above in line with what we did to investigate the effect of scaffolding within the domain of ZPD on various aspects of language acquisition will be taken into consideration to examine their convergence or divergence with ours. The result of convergence may provide us with a reliable platform in support of the theoretical force of Vygotsky's notion of scaffolding to assist SL/FL language learners in achieving their goal. The obtained results in table 14 above indicated an increase in the post-speaking scores, which most probably could be attributed to the contribution of scaffolding in the ZPD, resulting in their speaking tasks enhancement. By getting cooperation

from the instructor or peers, the students could produce more sentences about the pictures by providing words needed to describe them. The results of our study are in line with those of Le's (2007) study. His findings showed that expert-novice group work made more learning opportunities for learners than unassisted group work. They also give rise to the importance of purposeful interaction in making language scaffolding a useful tool for language development among foreign language learners. Our results also endorse other researchers like Barnard,2002: Gibbons,2002; and McDonough, 2004 who manifested that L2 students working in pairs or groups can enhance and expand their present state of competence through scaffolding in the form of more cooperation and interaction in their daily and classroom activities with the peers and teachers.

The reasons for finding scaffolding as a useful tool for language speaking among EFL learners may be valid since scaffolding needs 1) the teacher to be engaged in the learners' learning process.2) the learner to be active and energetic, and 3) the learning task to be challenging, which needs support from the teacher in order for the learner to accomplish the task. When the language teacher is more active in his/her classroom, he/she can guide the learners to progress better in the language learning class. When it comes to a productive language skills such as speaking, the effect might become more illuminating. The results of these studies showed that scaffolding affected the performance score of learners after the treatment. Shooshtari & Mir (2014) who investigated the impact of scaffolding on writing strategies application in the posttest writing task and the analysis of strategy application records during the treatment and in the posttest indicated that the participants with peers? and tutor ?s non-random scaffolding made remarkable development in both writing quality and strategy application. The study results are also in line with Khosravi?s (2017) findings of the effect of symmetrical scaffolding on the reading comprehension of Iranian EFL learners. Research findings show that symmetrical scaffolding has a significant effect on learners' performance in reading comprehension. Besides, Hasan (2019) conducted a study to discover the impact of motivational scaffolding on the acquisition of writing skills in an L2 situation. The findings evidence

how both teachers and learners follow similar patterns in understanding the scaffolding technique in the acquisition of writing skills.

The results of the present research are also in line with a study by Akhgar and Talebinejad (2015), who studied the impact of teacher scaffolding on Iranian intermediate EFL learners' listening comprehension achievement. The results confirmed the significant impact of teacher scaffolding on listening achievement in males and females EFL learners. Al Eissa and Al-Bargi (2017) also investigated the impact of scaffolding strategies on enhancing the reading comprehension skills of university students in a Saudi context. The results of the study indicated that there was a statistically significant difference between the pretest and the posttest of the experimental group in favor of the posttest. Furthermore, students showed a positive attitude towards the scaffolding technique as a motivation factor to their learning. Moreover, Khaliliaqdam (2014) investigated scaffolding in listening development. The result showed that scaffolding within ZPD has its share in listening development, one of the four language skills.

As far as the reviewed findings manifest, no study has ever shown a negative relationship between the application of scaffolding and the learners' language learning development in different language skills studies. Moreover, all of these studies, including ours employing assistance in the form of scaffolding and the development of EFL learners' various language skills, have shed more light on the importance and impact that scaffolding can exert on the EFL participants' language learning development. In general, it can be claimed that the theoretical and the practical force of Vygotsky's theory undoubtedly would be highly substantiated as a useful technique to be utilized by language teachers to help their students to get to an acceptable level of language performance interactively and cooperatively. Finally, the result of the second research question of our present survey dealt with the two groups' gender distinction and their speaking development before and after the treatment. We observed that their gender difference played no influential role for the two groups, experimental and control, while they were getting help through scaffolding employed by their teacher and peers. The outcome of our study is in line with Swain and Lapkin (1998), who came to the same

conclusion. This being the case in our EFL context, it can be said that EFL teachers can conduct their teaching activities by combining their teaching methods with the scaffolding technique in their EFL classes on a par with both genders and at the same pace. Therefore, EFL learners can benefit equally well and feel at home, ignoring their gender diversity.

Conclusion and Implication

Considering the results of the present study mentioned above and due to the results of the studies as mentioned earlier, it can be concluded that scaffolding in the ZPD could be a useful tool for language development among foreign language learners. Moreover, it can be concluded that gender does not affect the speaking achievement of Iranian EFL learners when they are taught using teacher scaffolding techniques. The findings of the study can also establish conception for university language professors by showing the role of one of the techniques applied in a speaking class, namely, scaffolding. In sum, it can be concluded that the proposed scaffolding interactive activities were instrumental in developing the speaking skills of intermediate learners at the Sobhan language institute in Shiraz.

Swain and Lapkin (1998) debate that teacher feedback and assistance on the recorded oral dialogue generated by a task or the written product of the task were required to eliminate learner uncertainty and to draw attention to incorrect solutions to linguistic problems. They investigated the impact of the learners' gender on their speaking tasks. The findings indicated there was no significant difference between the two genders' speaking development, males and females. The result of their study corroborates our findings related to the effect that gender distinction may bring about learners' speaking development discrepancy, which was found not to be true.

Likewise, the present study results can have some practical implications for language teachers, EFL students, and managers of English language institutes. Hopefully, the results are advantageous to various individuals and organizations, as they can benefit from the findings of this piece of research and those of others.

1. Local ELT textbook writers should work along communicative lines.

2. Students should work in pairs and groups to promote their speaking skills and other skills, reading, writing, and listening through scaffolding.

3. Language policymakers are expected to include programs to encourage scaffolding and speaking tasks.

4. Teachers are expected to consider scaffolding to have more cooperation with their EFLlearners in the classroom.

Suggestions for further research and limitations

The results of the current study suggest that the use of scaffolding strategies is beneficial for students‘ development of language skills. The findings of this study also suggest that teachers could benefit in the form of professional development opportunities by focusing on the use of scaffolding strategies as a linguistic intervention in the teaching process.

They also recommend that language scaffolding in the ZPD can be a useful tool for language development among adult foreign language learners. Language scaffolding could bring as a bridging means for an adult to learn a foreign language more effectively and efficiently, as shown in this study and the like. Some studies show that peer mediation is not always practical; occasions can arise when expert mediation is required.

Like all experimental studies, the present study has some limitations: The scope of the study was restricted to advanced level due to class availability and supervisor?s permission.

This study is limited to speaking skill development, to a small sample size of participants, and the period of treatment. Furthermore, this study could be expanded to other language skills such as listening, reading, and writing. Although the treatment group improved, a more extended period and a larger sample could have shown the significant impact of scaffolding on students.

References

Al Eissa, A. and Al-Bargi, A. (2017). The impact of scaffolding strategies in enhancing the reading comprehension skills of university students in a Saudi context. *International Journal of Linguistics, 9*(5).

Applebee, A. N. and Langer, J. (1983). Instructional scaffolding: Reading and writing as natural language activities. *Language Arts, 60*(2), 168-175.

Arikunto, S. (2013). *Prosedur penelitian: Suatu pendekatan praktik.* Jakarta: Rinekacipta.

Al-Yami, S. A. (2008). *The effectiveness of scaffolding interactive activities in developing the English listening comprehension skills of the sixth-grade elementary school girls in Jeddah.* Online Submission.

Bailey, K. M. (2006). *Language teacher supervision: A case-based approach.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Barnard, R. (2002). Peer tutoring in the primary classroom: A sociocultural interpretation of classroom interaction. *New Zealand Journal of Educational Studies, 37* (1),57-72.

Daniels, H. (2001). *Vygotsky and Pedagogy.* NY: Routledge/Falmer.

Donato, R. (1994). Collective scaffolding in second language learning. *In J. Lantolf & G. Appel (Eds.), Vygotskian approaches to second language research, 1* (5), 162-167.

Gibbons, P. (2002). *Scaffolding language, scaffolding learning: teaching second language learners in the mainstream classroom.* Portsmouth, NH.

Hammond, J. (Ed.) (2002). *Scaffolding teaching and learning in language and literacy education.* Newtown, Australia: PETA Heinemann. http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.system.2004.01.003.

Hasan, M. (2018). Impact of motivational scaffolding on the acquisition of writing skills in L2 situation. *Humanities and Social Science Invention,7* (12),39-45.

Khaliliaqdam, S.(2014). ZPD scaffolding and basic speech development in the EFL context. *Social and Behavioral Sciences, 98,* 891-897.

Khosravi, S. (2017). The effect of symmetrical scaffolding on the reading comprehension of Iranian EFL learners. *Psychology and Brain Sciences, 2* (4), 95-99.

Kublin, K. S., Wetherby, A. M., Crais, E. R., and Prizant, B. M. (1989). *Pre-linguistic dynamic assessment: A transactional perspective.* In A. M. Wetherby, S. F.

Warren, J.(2007). *Transitions in pre-linguistic communication* (pp. 285-312). Baltimore, MD: Paul H. Brookes.

Lantolf, J. P. (2000). *Introducing sociocultural theory.* In: Lantolf, J. P. (Ed.) Sociocultural theory and second language learning. Oxford University Press, (pp. 1- 26).

Le, P. H. H. (2007). The more knowledgeable peer, target language use, and group participation. *The Canadian Modern Language Review, 64* (2), 333-354.

Littlewood, W. (2004). *Second language learning.* In A. Davies & C. Elder (Eds.), The handbook of applied linguistics (pp. 501- 524). Oxford: Blackwell. https://doi.org/10.1002/9780470757000.

McDonough, K. (2004). Learner-learner interaction during pair and small group activities in a Thai EFL context. *System, 32*(2), 207-224.

Mercer, N. (2001). *Language for teaching a language.* In C. N. Candlin & N. Merce, (Eds.) English language teaching in its social context: (pp.243-257).

Miller, P. (1993). *Theories of developmental psychology.* 3rd Ed. New York: WH Freeman and Company.

Nassaji, H. and Cumming, A. (2000). What's in a ZPD? A case study of a young ESL student and teacher interacting through dialogue. *Language Teaching Research, 4,* 2 (2000), 95-121.

Scollon, R. (2001). *Cross-cultural learning and other catastrophes.* In C. Kramsch (Ed.), Language acquisition and language socialization: Ecological perspectives (pp. 121-139). London: Continuum.
https://doi.org/10.1017/S0272263100005337.

Shooshtari, G. and Mir, F. (2014). ZPD, tutor; peer scaffolding: Sociocultural theory in writing strategies application. *Social and Behavioral Sciences, 98,* 1771-1776. Speaking. New York, NY: Plenum Press.

Stone, A. (1998) The metaphor of scaffolding: Its utility for the field of learning disabilities. *Journal of Learning Disabilities, 3* (4),344-364. *Studies, 37*(1), 57-72.

Swain, M. and Lapkin, S. (1998). Interaction and second language learning: Two adolescent French immersion students working together. *The Modern Language Journal, 82*(3), 320-337.
https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1540-4781.1998.tb01209.

Talebinejad, M. R. and Akhgar, F. (2015). The impact of teacher scaffolding on Iranian intermediate EFL learner's listening comprehension achievement. *Theory and Practice in Language Studies, 5*(5), 1101-1105.

Van Lier, L. (2001). *Constraints and resources in classroom talk: Issues of equality and symmetry.* In C. N. Candlin & N. Mercer (Eds.), English language teaching in its social context: A reader (pp. 90-109). London, New York: The Routledge. https://doi.org/10.2307/3588440.

Van Lier, L. (2004). The ecology and semiotics of language learning: A sociocultural perspective. Boston: Kuhler. https://doi.org/10. 1007/1-4020-7912-5.

Vygotsky, L (1987). *The collected works of L.S Vygotsky.* Volume 1-6. Thinking and Speech.

Wells, G. (1999). *Dialogic inquiry: Towards a sociocultural practice and theory of education.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Wood, J., Bruner J. S., and Ross, G. (1976). The role of tutoring in problem Solving. *Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry, 17* (2), 89-100.