

The Impact of Teacher Scaffolding on Iranian Intermediate EFL Learner's Listening Comprehension Achievement

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Abstract—Among various aspects of effective instruction, scaffolding is an important concept that helps language teachers to consider the context of language learning. Teachers need to focus on strategies that are appropriate to different kinds of listening techniques and to consider the proficiency level of their students. The current investigation attempted to determine the impact of teacher scaffolding on listening comprehension of Iranian EFL learners. To this end, 60 intermediate learners (including 30 male and 30 female) were chosen from a language institute and divided in two groups. Hogan and Pressley's (1997) guidelines were used in order to incorporate scaffolding techniques throughout their lessons. The results confirmed the significant impact of teacher scaffolding on listening achievement in male and female EFL learners. Additionally, by considering gender, it was shown that there was no relationship between gender and listening achievement through teacher scaffolding.

Index Terms—teacher scaffolding, listening comprehension, gender

I. INTRODUCTION

Among the four skills in English language learning, listening plays the most important role in communication in real life: According to Feyten (1991), listening provides more than 45% of our total communication ability. However, in a foreign language (FL) context, learners do not sufficiently observe this foreign language. More effective teaching techniques are necessary.

When instructors design listening tasks, they have to consider how to enable learners to be more conscious of their listening comprehension. Rost (2002) claims that "if language instructors can successfully incorporate clear noticing steps into tasks, learners can then accelerate their learning and make breakthroughs in listening ability" (p.21-22). Thus, it is necessary for instructors to design activities that enhance language awareness via listening strategies and good support.

Various researches suggest that good language learners have an awareness of strategies and are also aware of more strategies than less successful learners (Goh, 2008; Mmendelson, 1998). Effective listeners listen more selectively: they use background knowledge and look for answers to specific questions.

Some researchers argue that it can be effective to use a direct or explicit teaching technique that raises learner awareness such as introducing strategies individually, while others (e.g., Field, 2008) argue that this approach demands more time than is generally available in classrooms. However, teaching strategies is still considered an important part of a listening program (Flowerdew & Miller, 2005). According to Vandergrift and Goh, (2012), "the lack of guidance on how learners can self-direct and evaluate their efforts to improve their listening makes problem for learners" (p. 5).

Scaffolding is an instructional technique that teachers can use in order to make the context of learning more understandable to the learners. As Maybin, Mercer & Stierer (1992) believes, scaffolding is to help a child to do a task which they cannot do lonely. In classrooms, EFL students need support structure that provides them with opportunities to learn English in meaningful contexts.

The role of the teacher is very important, as the teacher not only guides the students through the stages of listening, but also motivates them to feel autonomy in learning by scaffolding techniques.

Considering significance of the above-mentioned discussion on scaffolding and its significance in terms of providing opportunities for meaningful learning, in the present study, the researcher tried to adopt some teacher's support principles underlying scaffolding techniques as a guide for the help or support in the course of three phases (pre-while-post) of listening provided to intermediate EFL learners in Iran during the process of developing their listening comprehension skills. Accordingly, the following research questions were formulated in order to be answered:

1. Are there any meaningful differences between listening comprehension achievement of Iranian Intermediate EFL learners who are taught through scaffolding and those who are taught without any scaffolding?

2. Does gender have any significant effect on listening comprehension achievement through teacher scaffolding among Iranian EFL learners?

Due to the nature of the research questions of this study, the formal statements of the hypotheses were provided as the following:

1. Teacher scaffolding has no significant effect on listening comprehension of Iranian Intermediate EFL learners.
2. Gender has no meaningful effect on listening comprehension achievement via teacher scaffolding among Iranian Intermediate EFL learners.

II. BACKGROUND

As has been earlier claimed, more than 50 percent of the students' time in a language class, is allocated to listening (Nunan, 1998). In spite of this, listening is usually not paid enough attention to, and it is usually ignored.

More recently, both psychologists and educationalists have suggested the use scaffolding strategy by teachers so that sensitive and active support will be provided for learners during the process of learning. According to Mercer (1995, p. 75) scaffolding, requires "the provision of guidance and support which is increased or withdrawn in response to the developing competence of the learner". It appears that scaffolding requires 1) the teacher's involvement in the learner's learning, 2) an active learner, and 3) a challenging learning task which requires particular support from the teacher in order for the learner to complete the task. Scaffolding and its significance can be discussed from different aspects, namely psychological, cognitive, and pedagogical aspects. From the psychological perspective, when learners understand that they can do a task without help, their self-confidence enhances.

From the other cognitive perspective, when students can not solve a problem without support on the part of teacher, Cognitive Scaffolding provides the necessary support. It can also have some pedagogical value, as Hammond (2001, p. 60) describes it, in terms of helping teachers to "know when and how to intervene and take an informed and active role in guiding students' learning as they come to terms with new ideas and concepts". The above-mentioned needs the teacher to provide a plan at different levels. Teachers can take advantage of scaffolding from different perspectives while they are helping their students to do tasks in any of the four skills.

In spite of the fact that listening is a basic skill in first language acquisition and is crucial in English as Second/ Foreign Language learning, using the special strategies to teach listening strategies by the learners, and applying these techniques by the teachers, is ignored. Not much research has been conducted on the impact of scaffolding on listening comprehension. However, research about peer scaffolding in L2 writing constitutes the greatest amount of research in the field of EFL teaching and learning. (De Guerrero & Villamil, 2000; Storch, 2002, 2005, 2007; Shehadeh, 2011).

Gerakopoulou (2011) investigated the instances of scaffolding strategies applied in the CLIL. The findings revealed that teachers tend to use different forms of body language and contextualizing to support their instruction especially with the younger learners. Another significant result of this research was that students' participation is encouraged and the teachers try to lead students to the production of the output mainly through the technique of elicitation.

In another study, Yami and Ahmed (2008) investigated the impact of scaffolding interactive activities in developing the English listening comprehension skills of sixth grade elementary schoolgirls in Jeddah. The results showed that the scaffolded activities can have a positive impact on listening comprehension of six graders in Jeddah.

Bruch (2007) investigated the scaffolding techniques among ten students in reading and writing. The study revealed that scaffolding was an effective means to help students become confident and independent.

The above studies emphasize that using scaffolding in teaching in general and in teaching English as a foreign in particular was very useful. The present study is meant to be another emphasis to be put on the utilization of scaffolding in teaching listening comprehension tasks. To the knowledge of the researcher of the study at hand, not many studies to date have been conducted to measure the degree to which teacher scaffolding activities in view of gender differences affect listening comprehension achievement by Iranian EFL learners. Thus, this study was an attempt to contribute to the existing body of knowledge in this field and fill this gap. Based on these assumptions, the present research is an attempt to investigate the impact of teacher's scaffolding techniques on the listening comprehension.

III. METHOD

A. Participants

A sample of 60 out of 100 male and female intermediate EFL students studying at Daneshpajooan Higher Education Institute was selected non-randomly by applying an Oxford Quick Placement Test (OQPT). Based on the test scoring level chart, those whose scores in the test were between 30 and 46 were considered as the intermediate-level participants of this study. Then they were divided into two groups, one as experimental group ($n=30$ 15 male & 15 female) and the other one as control group ($n=30$ 15 male & 15 female).

B. Instruments

The instruments which were used in this study, included an Oxford Quick Placement Test (OQPT), the learner's course book *Developing Tactics for listening* (Richards 2005) accompanied with the test booklet *Developing tactics for listening test booklet*, Hutchins and Richards (2004), scaffolding techniques based on Hogan and Pressley general

guidelines and a listening test developed by researcher based on the final listening test which exists in teacher's book, accessible for teachers and test booklet (Developing tactics for listening test booklet, second edition). This test served as pre-test and post-test (with a change in item arrangement). Data for pre-test and post-test was collected over an eight-week span.

Two experienced co-workers and a supervisor proved the content validity of the listening comprehension test. Besides, since this test was developed as the final test of the book, it must be valid and reliable. The test was piloted studied on 20 language learners to determine the reliability of the tests. The results of Cronbach's alpha analysis showed that the test was reliable ($r = 0.68$).

C. Procedure

The experimental group was presented with scaffolding activities in class by the instructor while the control group was taught with no scaffolding help on the part of the instructor.

The collected data were coded into and analyzed by SPSS (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences version 16). In order to test the homogeneity of the participants in terms of their listening comprehension, an independent sample t-test was run. Then, to check the possible role of gender, a one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) was utilized.

IV. DATA ANALYSIS

A. The Differences in the Scores of the Scaffolded and Non-scaffolded Learners

After twenty sessions of treatment on the control group, the post-test was given and the following results were obtained:

TABLE 1.
DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICS OF THE LISTENING POST-TEST BETWEEN CONTROL AND EXPERIMENTAL GROUP

VAR0001	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
1	30	61.6000	19.44151	3.54952
2	30	72.0000	19.35156	3.53309

Based on the descriptive statistics presented in table 1, in the post- test the mean score for difference for experimental group is 72 and that of control group is 61. That is a mean difference of 11 which is significant.

B. The Effect on Listening Comprehension Achievement through Teacher Scaffolding

According to the second hypothesis of the present research gender has no significant effect on improving listening comprehension of Iranian EFL learners through teacher scaffolding. The means results of the pre and post-tests for the participants of control and experimental groups are summarized based on their gender in table 2.

TABLE 2.
DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICS OF THE PARTICIPANTS PERFORMANCE IN LISTENING POST TEST BASED ON THEIR GENDER
VAR00002

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error	95% Confidence Interval for Mean		Minimum	Maximum
					Lower Bound	Upper Bound		
CGF	15	56.5333	23.26821	6.00783	43.6478	69.4188	18.00	87.00
CGM	15	66.6667	13.65737	3.52632	59.1035	74.2299	46.00	86.00
EGF	15	66.7333	22.89250	5.91082	54.0559	79.4108	29.00	96.00
EGM	15	77.2667	13.86396	3.57966	69.5891	84.9443	56.00	98.00
Total	60	66.8000	19.93362	2.57342	61.6506	71.9494	18.00	98.00

(CGF= Control Group Female)
(CGM= Control Group Male)
(EGF= Experimental Group Female)
(EGM= Experimental Group, Males)

As table 2 displays, posttest means in experimental group for males is 77.26 and for females equals 66.73. The mean score for males in control group is 66.66 and that for females in control group is 56.53. So a difference in posttest means of both males and females in experimental group is obvious.

At this point, in order to compare the performance of both genders in both groups and to see if the difference between them is statistically significant or not, a one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) was run on the results of the post-test. Table 3 represents the results.

TABLE 3.
ONE-WAY ANALYSIS OF VARIANCE ON THE POST-TEST OF MALES AND FEMALES OF EXPERIMENTAL AND CONTROL GROUP

VAR00002	Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	3224.667	3	1074.889	2.977	.039
Within groups	20218.933	56	361.052		
Total	23443.600	59			

As it can be seen, the significant value is smaller than .05 ($.039 < .05$), so it can be claimed that the mean scores of the post-tests for the four sub groups were significantly different. However, due to the fact that an ANOVA gives inferential statistics only about whether or not the groups differ; the source or place of the difference is still unknown. To find out where the difference had occurred, a post-hoc test on the results of ANOVA was run. Table 3 depicts the results of the post-hoc test as far as the source of difference is concerned.

V. DISCUSSION

Research question 1: *Are there any differences between listening comprehension achievement of the scaffolded and non-scaffolded learners?*

According to the data obtained from this study and the statistics and based on the treatment administered to the participants, it is obviously clear that teaching listening comprehension via teacher scaffolding techniques has a significant positive effect on enhancing listening ability of Iranian intermediate EFL learners.

The reason for such findings may be due to the fact that scaffolding requires 1) the teacher to be involved the learning process of the learners. 2) the learner to be active, and 3) the learning task to be challenging which requires particular support from the teacher in order for the learner to complete the task. More active language teachers in class lead the learners to get along better in language learning classes. While it comes to a productive language skill such as writing, the influence becomes even more.

The results of this study support the study by O'Malley et al. (1985b). Also this study lends support to Thompson and Rubin's (1996) research.

The results of the present study are also in line with Chang and Read's (2007) findings about the impact of different types of listening support on low-level proficiency learners in EFL learning in Taiwan. The study found that input repetition was the most effective listening support, followed by visuals and text aids as supports.

In addition, Cross (2009) investigated the impact of listening strategies on EFL advance-level Japanese learners' comprehension in Australia. The results correspond with the findings of this study with regard to the positive relationship found between scaffolding techniques and listening comprehension.

As far as the researcher knows, no study has ever shown a negative relationship between scaffolding and the general outcomes of EFL classes. The justification for this may originate from the nature of scaffolding. Since scaffolding, as the name suggests, provides some kind of help to the learners, scaffolding instruction should be included into the EFL syllabus, teachers should try to match their teaching techniques with the students' zones of proximal development.

The results of the present research also are in line with a study that was run by Mehdian (2009) in which he exposed them to eight-week intervention (35 hours) after which they all sat for a posttest. The comparison between the The learners performed better on the posttest.

Research Question 2: *Does gender have any significant effect on listening comprehension achievement through teacher scaffolding among Iranian EFL learners?*

The second question of the current study shed light on the significant role that gender may have on listening comprehension achievement through teacher scaffolding on Iranian EFL learners. The post hoc test was utilized to locate the difference within and between groups. As the results suggested, the difference between males and females in their performance in listening tests, was not significant. Therefore it can be concluded that although the scaffolding techniques are an efficient way of teaching listening comprehension, both males and females do approximately the same in listening tests when they have been taught via scaffolding techniques.

Regarding gender, it should be taken into account that even though males in experimental and control groups outperformed their female counterparts, the difference between females and males was not so much significant. This means that planting teacher scaffolding techniques and practices in listening classes is an effective way for improving listening skill of Iranian EFL learners, regardless of gender and that improving listening achievement is not gender specific. Thus, it can be concluded that there was no meaningful interaction between gender, teacher scaffolding and listening ability of Iranian EFL learners.

Among few studies conducted in this regard is the study done by Yami and Ahmed (2008). In this study they investigated the impact of scaffolding interactive activities in developing the English listening comprehension skills of sixth grade elementary schoolgirls in Jeddah.

Finally, considering the above mentioned results of the present study and due to the results of the aforementioned studies, it can be concluded that, even though males in both groups of the study at hand represented a better results comparing to females, gender has no effect on listening achievement of Iranian EFL learners when they are taught using

the techniques of teacher scaffolding, and any observed difference may be related to the population under this experiment.

The findings of the study can also provide insights for university language professors by demonstrating the role of one of the techniques used in listening classes, namely, scaffolding. This way the Iranian professors may come to know how to teach the instructional materials relating listening, and how to improve listening ability of students who have majored in English and are of dichotomous genders, as the present study has made a distinction among male and female students.

At the end he concluded that the proposed scaffolded interactive activities were very effective in developing the listening comprehension skills of sixth grade elementary schoolgirls in Jeddah.

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