Utilizing Scaffolding Strategies to Improve Iranian Intermediate EFL Students' Grammatical Knowledge

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Abstract

Teaching grammar has always created some challenges for EFL teachers. Therefore, this study explored the effect of four scaffolding strategies as contextualizing, modeling, metacognitive scaffolding, and bridging on Iranian EFL students' grammatical knowledge. Moreover, this study examined Iranian EFL learners' attitudes towards scaffolding strategies. To fulfil the purpose of this study, 40 language learners were chosen based on convenience sampling as the participants of this study. They were both males and females between 20 to 30 years old divided into two groups as the control and experimental groups. After assuring the homogeneity of the students in terms of their English proficiency in general and grammatical knowledge in particular, a parallel achievement test was administered to both groups as the pre-test. Following that, as the treatment, scaffolding strategies were applied for the experimental group to teach grammar and a traditional way of teaching grammar for the control group. After running the classes, a parallel achievement test was administered to both control and experimental groups as the posttest. The data analysis revealed that the experimental group that received scaffolding strategies significantly outperformed in the grammar part compared to the control group which received a conventional way of teaching grammar. It is believed that utilizing scaffolding strategies can motivate learners and facilitate the tough task of grammar learning and thereby make teachers aware of their ability to obtain success in their teaching process.

Keywords: Bridging; Contextualizing; Grammatical Knowledge; Intermediate EFL learners; Metacognitive scaffolding; Modeling; Scaffolding Strategies

1. Introduction

In the process of learning a second language, grammar is an important element and is considered to be an essential part of both spoken and written language. In other words, considering the fact that learning grammar and improving grammatical knowledge, compared to other dimensions of language learning, has proved to be more challenging, providing appropriate scaffolding strategies becomes a crucial issue that can make a difference between success and failure in learning grammar. However, learners usually have difficulties in learning grammar. It is believed that grammar cannot be understood easily especially if it is taught traditionally. Despite a multitude number of research in grammar, still there are many problems and difficulties in learners' grammatical knowledge. It seems that it is because of either the insufficiency of the theories underlying these studies or the inappropriateness of the methods of study. Moreover, it's been proven that conventional and so-called traditional grammar-teaching strategies adopted by teachers may, even to a great extent, halt grammar learning processes in students.

However, because of the change in teaching methods towards student learning, professionals are constantly seeking for implementing teaching methods to improve the efficacy of teaching grammar. Among various techniques and strategies, in this respect, scaffolding strategies were used.

Scaffolding is characterized as the role of educators and others in assisting and supporting the learners' improvement and giving support patterns to instruct students to the next stage or level (Raymond, 2000). In scaffolding instruction, someone being more knowledgeable gives scaffolds or supports to simplify the learners' development. The scaffolds which are being provided are tasks that stimulate learner's concern related to the task, facilitate the task to make it easier and achievable for the learners, provide some advice to enable the learners to concentrate on accomplishing the goal, simply demonstrates distinctions between the learners' work and the ideal or requested outcome, diminish frustrations and risks, model and simply clarify the goals of the activities to be achieved.

The first and most prominent objective of this study was to shed some light on the effect of employing scaffolding strategies to improve Iranian EFL students' grammatical knowledge which has long been an area in need of further improvement. Moreover, in this teachers could check the attitudes of students towards scaffolding strategies for grammar learning.

In the TEFL context, educators and teachers were long searching for appropriate teaching techniques to enhance second language learners' grammatical knowledge. Thus, teachers who are accustomed to traditional methods need to adjust to new and ongoing techniques and approaches in teaching

grammar. Data obtained from this study concerning the useful effects of scaffolding on Iranian intermediate EFL learners' grammatical knowledge can contribute to education. The other contribution is that the knowledge can help English teachers in implementing and improving the effectual use of scaffolding within the instruction to improve students' grammatical knowledge.

By shedding some light on the nature of improving the grammatical knowledge process as a socially embedded task, language learners will also find appropriate ways and techniques to regulate their grammatical knowledge. They would be able to increase their available repertoire in grammar learning by using more collaborative and social strategies. Therefore, their grammatical knowledge will improve as they learn to scaffold each other in the process.

2. Literature Review

Even though Vygotsky (1978) did not use the term scaffolding himself, it is usually understood as deriving from his viewpoint on development, learning, and education. Vygotsky believed that learners with the particular restriction that deterred learning through the normal modality, then the instructor could learn ways to fix it by delivering a variety of means to simplify the learning. It is the responsibility of the instructor to help find a possible way to fulfill learning outcomes.

Vygotsky (1978) defined scaffolding instruction as the "role of teachers and others in supporting the learner's development and providing support structures to get to that next stage or level" (Raymond, 2000, p.176). Being temporary is a significant facet of scaffolding instruction.

By the learners' increasing abilities, the scaffolding instructions delivered by teachers or instructors are increasingly removed.

The purpose of the educators, when they use the scaffolding strategies, is for the learners to become autonomous and self-regulating who can solve problems on their own. (Hartman, 2002).

Theoretically, the procedure of scaffolding, according to van Lier (1996), happens in six phases. Firstly, there is a contextual assistance phase. In this step, a comfortable but challenging setting is given to the novice and he could make errors as part of the learning process. Secondly, there appears continuity where sequences of actions and interactions offset the method of the scaffolding strategy. In the next step, two people oblige themselves to commit to interacting with each other. Then, inflow, the interaction that has been commenced formerly gets on guilelessly without any force. After that, in the contingency phase, which is regarded as the main part of scaffolding, the aid to the learner is shown in

response to the learner's answer. The help and assistance could be done several times, altered, and even removed. Eventually, the task is delivered to the student.

In terms of features of scaffolding, Wells (1999) views three major characteristics for scaffolding then other aspects are derived out of them. The features are naturally comprised in other features to be cited further. Wells argues that first of all, the scaffolding features and strategies are dialogic discourse, out of which knowledge is born. Secondly, the viewpoint of scaffolding in any task is how any patterns of knowing are extensively embedded. Ultimately, to know is to underline the role of language to moderate the process of understanding.

Afterward, it should be noted that some circumstances are needed for scaffolding to be useful and effective. Baleghizadeh et al. (2011) acknowledge that scaffolding is inaccurately intertwined with the position of the instructor. Nevertheless, it is opposed to Mercer (1994). There are other people in the academic setting, learners primarily, to give scaffolding for other students who need support. Furthermore, scaffolding requires mediation. It is associated with the indirect relationship cognitive functioning has with the outer world. Hence, most usually scaffolding is required to be indirect. Nassaji and Swain (2000) examined the contingent phase of scaffolding. They assume that the process of scaffolding should be negotiated and the scaffolding strategy has to be carried out structurally. Ultimately, the researchers found that scaffolding couldn't be that much efficient when it was highly structured. Baleghizadeh et al. (2011) that examined the distinction between high structured scaffolding and low structured scaffolding determined that the help and support should be minimized to have effective and practical scaffolding.

To make scaffolding more practical and provide appropriate assistance to learners in the process of learning new knowledge, some strategies have been provided for the implementation of scaffolding. These strategies which could scaffold learners' learning are classified as contextualizing, modeling as a scaffolding technique, metacognitive scaffolding, and bridging.

In respect to conceptualizing, it can be said that teaching grammar in a de-contextualized way was regarded as the major drawback of conventional grammar elements in which grammatical rules are taught and practiced out of a meaningful context. (Petrovitz, 1997). Hence, Hinkel and Fotos (2002) focused mainly on contextual grammar and recommended contextualized teaching of grammar as related elements and grammatical structures to be instructed. Contextual using grammar gives learners the ability to understand how to construct meaning which differs depending on the context in which meaning occurs through different activity types such as writing, speaking, reading, or listening.

Considering modeling, it should be mentioned it is regarded as an effective way to learn new skills or knowledge (Bandura, 1986). When a teacher uses a modeling strategy, a new concept is demonstrated, and learning could happen by students' observing. In other words, in modeling learning doesn't occur through direct experience or trial-and-error efforts. (Holland & Kobasigawa, 1980).

Metacognitive scaffolding supports facilitates problem-solving procedures. For instance, Ge and Land (2003) found that students who were provided with metacognitive question prompt by far and away had a better performance compared to students who did not receive question prompts in all four problem-solving processes, including problem representation, producing solutions, creating justification, and monitoring and evaluation. Metacognitive scaffolding is a strategy that facilitates students' knowledge construction and content learning as well as metacognitive processes.

In terms of bridging, learning occurs in case students can make a connection between new materials they just learn and concepts that they have already learned. New concepts need to be built on previous knowledge and understanding. Researches have shown that new knowledge could be learned effectively when they are compared and contrasted with the former knowledge where students develop understanding through interactions and different methods. Teachers need to know that learners may not have developed and completed conceptual frameworks (Kober, 2015). In conclusion, it would take time to find out how to chunk knowledge into related, retrievable classifications, develop large conceptual ideas, and interconnect ideas. They may additionally harbor misconceptions or inaccurate ways of thinking that could restrict or reduce connections with new knowledge. (Ambrose, et al, 2010).

Over the past decade, there has been a rising concern in investigating the concept of scaffolding in the procedure of students' learning primary because teachers have shifted their attention to the quality of adult or knowledgeable peer mediations on students' learning. For example, Naibaho (2019) examined the effect of the scaffolding method on students' speaking achievement and it attempted to realize the usefulness of the scaffolding on students' speaking skills. The result of the study showed that scaffolding is effective in developing students' speaking achievement.

In the Iranian context, Jafari et al. (2021) investigated the effect of technology-, motivational-, and metacognitive-based scaffolding on boosting Iranian grown-up advanced EFL learners' speaking. The findings of their study revealed that combining scaffolding into various language learning techniques could have a positive effect on learning.

In another study Kaur et al. (2020) carried out a study to assess the scaffolding models and modules for instructing writing skills especially to weak learners of English. The results of the study have revealed that scaffolding had beneficial and favorable effects on the teaching and learning of writing among weak ESL learners. The efficacy of the model was observed in the techniques which were used by the instructors.

Bigdeli and Rahimi (2015) investigated whether scaffolding had any considerable impact on the complexity and accuracy of Iranian EFL learners' narrative writing. The treatment was employed for one semester and throughout this time the participants wrote some narrative writings based on what they've learned in their coursebook. Their writings were graded in terms of grammatical complexity and accuracy. The results of the study revealed that scaffolding had a considerable impact on the complexity and accuracy of Iranian EFL learners' narrative writing.

Abune (2019) examined the effect of peer scaffolding on students' grammar proficiency improvement. This study confirmed the effectiveness of peer scaffolding mediation as a reasonable means to improve grammar proficiency improvement. In another study. However, Istiaque (2020) mentioned that students do not want to be controlled by the teacher in the class as they think that the teacher will play the role of a facilitator in the class. Students have their identity and they want to express their ideas in the class. So, student-centered learning will facilitate the teaching and learning more effectively, engaging and time befitting for the learners.

Since in the process of learning a second language, grammar is an important element and is considered an essential part of both spoken and written language, in this study, we aimed to find the effect of four scaffolding strategies as contextualizing, modeling, metacognitive scaffolding, and bridging on students' grammatical knowledge. It should be noted that most studies have been conducted on the effect of scaffolding strategies on four skills like reading, writing, and speaking which means the role of these strategies on grammatical knowledge has not been studied a lot so far. Therefore, in order to fulfill the objectives of the present study the following research questions were formed:

1. Does employing scaffolding strategies have any significant effects on improving grammatical knowledge of Iranian intermediate EFL students?

2. What are the attitudes of Iranian intermediate EFL students towards employing scaffolding strategies to improve their grammatical knowledge?

3. Methodology

3.1. Design and Context of the Study

This study was quantitative in nature and the design of the study was quasi-experimental based on the pre-test, post-test, and treatment. The quantitative paradigm was used because the approach of the study was analytic; that is, it focused on specific details and there was no holistic view on the phenomena. Then the purpose of the study was confirmatory (deductive) as it was hypothesis-driven; that is, it was already hypothesized that employing scaffolding strategies could have some effects on students' grammatical knowledge, and also because it was a partial replication of previous research to consolidate already discovered facts and relations among facts. Moreover, in this study, there were a high control and manipulation on the independent variable which was utilizing scaffolding strategies for the experimental group to examine whether there was any significant difference between those who were provided scaffolding strategies in the experimental group and those who were not in the control group in terms of their grammatical knowledge. The sampling procedure was carried out in the Avaye-Mehrvarzan language institute located in Isfahan, Iran during the summer of 2021.

3.2. Participants

For this study, 40 intermediate EFL learners were selected based on their performance on the Oxford Placement Test from a wider sample of 72 students studying in Avaye-Mehrvarzan language institute in Isfahan, Iran. The selected participants were randomly selected as the experimental and control group. Each group included 20 learners. As is shown in Table 1 both genders whose ages ranged from 20 to 30 were included. The participants' native language was Persian. All the participants were learning English as their foreign language and were enrolled in the 2021 summer English courses.

Table 1

Demographic Background of the Participants

Population	Iranian EFL learners
Target population	Learners of Avaye-Mehrvaezan institute in Esfahan (72)
Number of participants	40
Gender	20 Females & 20 males

Average age	25
MT	Persian
TL	English
Level of proficiency	Intermediate
Background knowledge	North Star 3
Status	Student

3.3. Materials

North Star is a five-level integrated skill series for language learning. The series consists of two strands: listening/speaking and reading/writing and each strand include five books from elementary to advanced level. The two strands at each level cover various aspects of similar current topics. In each book, language learning skills are practiced through high-interest thematic content. It should be noted that each book consists of eight units and four units of each book account for one term. The fourth edition of North Star 3, Reading and Writing, was covered in this research study.

3.4. Research Instruments

3.4.1. Oxford Placement Test

The first data collection instrument was Oxford Placement Test (OPT). In this study, the homogeneity of the participants was a crucial issue as they were expected to be at an intermediate level. Therefore, it was decided that OPT will be used as it is a standardized test that is continually validated to ensure it delivers results you can trust. This standardized test consists of 93 multiple-choice items, including 36 grammar items, 24 everyday English items, 18 vocabulary questions, and 15 items for reading comprehension.

3.4.2. Pre-test

The pre-test in this study was an achievement test that was applied to gather information in terms of the participants' grammatical knowledge before receiving the treatment. This parallel achievement test included 36 items consisting of 3 categories: 26 grammar items, 5 vocabulary items as cloze-test, and 5 listening questions.

3.4.3. Post-test

At the end of the treatment, a post-test was administered which was the same as the pre-test but the arrangements of the items were different. The post-test was applied to gather information about the participants' grammatical knowledge after the treatment. To check the reliability of the post-test, which was designed by the researcher, the same steps as steps of the pretest were taken.

The reliability of the pretest and posttest of grammatical knowledge was computed using the KR-21 formula which were.72 and.73 respectively.

3.4.4. Attitude Questionnaire

To check participants' attitudes towards scaffolding strategies, a set of questions were distributed among the subjects of the experimental group. The learners' scaffolding attitude scale was developed to determine its validity and reliability, and it was a Likert-type scale including 14 items to be rated in 5 levels (strongly disagree, disagree, neutral, agree, strongly agree). In addition to that, Cronbach's alpha reliability index was computed for the attitude questionnaire. The questionnaire enjoyed a reliability index of.76.

3.5. Treatment

3.5.1. During Contextualizing Stage

Here teachers established the purpose of the grammar. For instance, in teaching past perfect tense, the students in the experimental group were given a text. They were required to think about its content silently and individually. Then, the content of the text was discussed to ensure their understanding of meaning entailing the use of this tense. This phase continued until a complete understanding of the dialogue's meaning by all the students in this group was insured. Next, the enhanced input part of the instruction was provided for the students in the subjects. That is, a second copy of the text was given to the students in which the key parts relating to the usage of the past perfect had been highlighted by underlining or in boldface so that the teacher could draw students' attention to those tenses either when a student asked a question or when the teacher explained or asked a question about them.

3.5.2. During Modelling Stage

During the modelling stage, the teacher presented examples and familiarized students with salient language features by introducing different activities. Therefore, learners paid attention to the structure and language of the grammar through the various phases of language scaffolding tasks. In other words, tasks

helped learners to learn grammar in the context of relevant and purposeful teacher-directed activities.

3.5.3. During Metacognitive Scaffolding

In metacognitive scaffolding, the main purpose was to help learners through problem-solving activists. Therefore, after presenting the grammar, the teacher gave participants a problem-solving task to complete and the participants in the experimental group were given a task on superlatives and were asked to complete it autonomously using metacognitive strategies.

3.5.4. During Bridging Stage

In bridging as students are supposed to learn by making a connection between new knowledge and concepts that they already know, for any new price of grammar, the teacher built them on learners' previous knowledge and understanding instead of teaching the materials without referring to what they already know. For example, in teaching modals of advice, the teacher started comparing that with those morals that they had already learned and explained how different they would be and connected them to make learners have a better grasp of the concept of modals of advice.

3.6. Data Collection Procedure

Concerning practical and beneficial findings of the study, the managers of the Aaye-Mehrvarzan language institute were encouraged to cooperate with the researcher to conduct the study. As the participants' level of proficiency was essential to be considered, and intermediate participants were the main focus of the study, the total possible number of participants was set and required instruments were prepared.

As the first step, a convenience sample comprising 72 learners was chosen from the population of the study in an English language Institute. Oxford Placement Test was applied to ensure homogeneity level of the participants. Then forty intermediate learners were selected according to their language knowledge and divided into two groups, the experimental group, and the control group. Each group consisted of 20 participants.

To make a comparison between the study groups' grammatical knowledge, the link of the teacher-made achievement test was shared with all the participants who were required to take part in this pre-test before the treatment sessions via Skype platform. Therefore, one week before starting the online classes on Skype, the 36-item pre-test was administrated to both groups and they were required to answer in 45 minutes.

As for the treatment, the scaffolding strategies were employed to teach grammatical structures to the experimental group and a conventional technique was applied to the control group. As a result, for the experimental group after teaching any piece of grammar, scaffolding strategies including contextualizing, modelling, metacognitive scaffolding, and bridging were employed.

After implementing the treatments, a post-test was used to detect the possible changes in the grammatical knowledge of the participants. The link of the post-test was sent to the learners who were required to take part in the test and 45 minutes was allocated for completing the post-test. Finally, the results of pre-test and post-test were analyzed to investigate the effectiveness of scaffolding strategies.

At the end of the study, attitude questionnaires were given to the participants in the experimental group. A sufficient explanation about the traits mentioned in the questionnaire and how to rate them was presented to the participants. The questionnaire was distributed to check the learners' attitude towards the scaffolding strategies that consists of 14 questions, and they were asked to be honest.

3.7. Data Analysis Procedure

After collecting the data, each pamphlet, containing tests and questionnaires, was coded for each participant and the achievement tests were corrected and two test scores for each participant were defined. With regard to the questionnaires, they were checked and arranged as well.

The coded data were put into SPSS software version 27 to follow the statistical procedure. In line with the aim of the study and research questions in finding the effect of utilizing scaffolding strategies on participants' grammatical knowledge and the specific design of the sample whereas each participant obtained two scores, matched t-test was identified as the best statistical method to analyze the data. The matched t-test is used when the scores on two variables are obtained from one group and that is every participant has taken two tests. In addition, as two attitudinal questionnaires were taken from each participant had to be compared, matched t-test was the best method to do so.

After analyzing the data using matched t-test, mean scores were used to compare two sets of achievement scores and investigated the effect of scaffolding strategies on participants' grammatical knowledge. About the attitudinal questionnaire, the results of the questionnaire and checklist were analyzed quantitatively and descriptive analyses including frequency, percentage, means, and standard deviation were run.

3.8. Ethical Issues

Throughout the whole data collection procedure, it was ensured that ethical issues associated with the participants involved were carefully observed. To make the participants trust and cooperate throughout the study, the participants were provided with the purposes, methods, and required outcomes of the study which revealed information that would create an obvious and reasonable working framework. In addition, the identity of the participants was protected by holding it unknown. Moreover, it was clarified that the participants were free to refuse participation at any time in case they didn't wish to.

4. Results

For the first research hypothesis which was concerned with the effect of scaffolding strategies on students' grammatical knowledge, as displayed in Table 2., the non-significant results of the Levene's test (F =.724, p >.05) indicated that the two groups were homogenous in terms of their variances on the pretest of grammatical knowledge. That was why the first row of Table 2.; i.e. "Equal variances assumed" was reported.

The results of independent samples t-test; (t (38) =.496, p >.05, r =.080 representing a weak effect size, 95% CI [-2.15, 3.55]) indicated that there was not any significant difference between the two groups' means on the pretest of grammatical knowledge. Thus it can be concluded that the two groups were homogeneous in terms of their grammatical knowledge before the administration of the treatment.

Table 2

Independent-Samples t-test; Pretest of Grammatical Knowledge by Groups

	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
Equal variances assumed	.724	.400	.496	38	.623	.700	1.411		-2.157	3.557

Equal variances not assumed	.496	37.110	.623	.700	1.411	-2.159	3.559

Then independent-samples t-test was run to compare the experimental and control groups' means on posttest grammatical knowledge to probe the first research question. Table 3. displays the results of the descriptive statistics for the two groups on the posttest of grammatical knowledge. The results indicated that the experimental group (M = 20.50, SD = 3.73) had a higher mean than the control group (M = 16.85, SD = 3.91) on the posttest of grammatical knowledge.

Table 3

Descriptive Statistics; Posttest of Grammatical Knowledge by Groups

	Group	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Posttest	Experimental	20	20.50	3.735	.835
	Control	20	16.85	3.911	.874

Table 4 displays the results of the independent-samples t-test. Before discussing the results, it should be noted that the assumption of homogeneity of variances was retained on the posttest of grammatical knowledge. As displayed in Table 4 the non-significant results of the Levene's test (F =.009, p >.05) indicated that the two groups were homogenous in terms of their variances on the posttest of grammatical knowledge. That was why the first row of Table 4.; i.e. equal variances assumed was reported.

The results of independent samples t-test; (t (38) = 3.019, p <.05, r =.440 representing a moderate effect size, 95% CI [1.20, 6.09]) indicated that the experimental group, after receiving scaffolding strategies, significantly outperformed the control group on posttest of grammatical knowledge. Thus; it can be concluded that the first null hypothesis as "employing scaffolding strategies did not have any significant effects on the grammatical knowledge of Iranian Intermediate EFL Students" was rejected.

Table 4

Independent-Samples t-test; Posttest of Grammatical Knowledge by Groups

	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
Equal variances assumed	.009	.925	3.019	38	.005	3.650	1.209		1.202	6.098
Equal variances not assumed			3.019	37.920	.005	3.650	1.209		1.202	6.098

In terms of the second research question which was concerned with the attitudes of Iranian intermediate EFL students towards employing scaffolding strategies to improve their grammatical knowledge, the EFL learners in the experimental group filled a questionnaire including 14 items to explore their attitude towards employing scaffolding strategies. Table 5. displays the frequencies and percentages for the experimental group's attitude towards the scaffolding indicated that more than 91 percent of responses strongly agreed and agreed with employing scaffolding strategies; while 8.18 percent of responses were neutral. The percentages for the "disagree" and "strongly disagree" options were negligible.

Table 5

Frequencies and Percentages of Attitude towards Employing Scaffolding Strategies

	Frequency	Percent
Strongly Disagree	0	0.000
Disagree	2	0.712
Neutral	23	8.184

Agree	128	45.552
Strongly Agree	128	45.552
Total	281	100.00

5. Discussion

The problems of students with grammar learning begins this research program. In this study, the idea of creative strategy which was using Vygotsky's (1978) theory known as scaffolding strategies was brought into concentration. Therefore, the present study examined the role of scaffolding strategies on students' grammatical knowledge. In addition, the attitudes of students towards scaffolding strategies in their grammatical improvement were examined. Therefore, a null hypothesis was proposed to discover whether utilizing scaffolding strategies would have any significant effect on the participants' grammatical knowledge or not. It was assumed that the participants' grammatical performance might be improved in the experimental group in comparison to those in the control group who were not given any treatment.

Based on the findings of the analysis of the data it was revealed that after the experimental group was provided with scaffolding strategies, they significantly exceeded the control group on the posttest of grammatical knowledge as through statistics a major difference between the mean scores of the two groups was observed. Therefore, the first null hypothesis was rejected.

Considering the second research question which was concerned with the attitude of learners towards scaffolding strategies, the results indicated that more than 91 percent of responses strongly agreed and agreed with employing scaffolding strategies; while 8.18 percent of responses were neutral. The percentages for the "disagree" and "strongly disagree" options were negligible. Therefore, it was concluded that the learners had a positive attitude towards scaffolding strategies and found it practical for improving their grammatical knowledge.

The findings of this study provide practical support for the efficacy of scaffolds constructed to structure learners' comprehension. The findings are in line with the initial theories of scaffolding. In this regard, it was found that the results of the present study were in line with most of the related literature. For example, Abune (2019) found the effectiveness of peer scaffolding as a practical means to improve grammar proficiency improvement.

The present study also confirms with Kaur et al. (2020) that found the positive effects of scaffolding on the teaching and learning of writing among weak ESL learners due to the scaffolding strategies used by the teachers. The findings of the study are also consistent with the findings of Jafari et al.'s (2021) study, which showed the positive effect of technology-, motivational-, and metacognitive-based scaffolding on Iranian adult advanced EFL learners' speaking.

6. Conclusion

One of the most positive aspects of scaffolding instruction is its emphasis on the nature of the supports that are given to learners to move in their zone of proximal development and reach a higher level in learning. In this regard, teachers should be aware of the learners' needs and by assessing the current level of the students' ZPD, provide appropriate assistance in instructing the new materials. The most important thing is that the learners should be taken into consideration and teachers should know how to assist the learners effectively. They should also be aware of socio-cultural theory. Additionally, they should know what scaffolding strategies to use in the classroom. The use of appropriate scaffolding techniques on the part of teachers can enhance learners' ability to understand and use grammatical structures via the teacher's support. Also, enhance learners' self-regulation and provides a sense of independent learning. Therefore, they will be independent learners in the future. (Zimmerman, 2002)

The results revealed that those participants who were provided with scaffolding principles significantly outperformed those who did not receive scaffolding strategies. In fact, effective grammar learning is considered to be one of the most crucial aspects for EFL learners. Given the fact that the results of the study revealed a significant relationship between employing scaffolding strategies and EFL learners' grammatical knowledge, the scaffolding principles were used as the treatment for the experimental group. The participants in the experimental group were significantly more engaged in the educational process than those in the control group. On the contrary, most of the participants of the control group played a passive role and pursued conventional structures in completing tasks. As an ultimate point, through statistical analysis, it was revealed that scaffolding had a considerable effect on the EFL learner's grammatical knowledge.

However, this study suffered from certain limitations. Firstly, considering the fact that in the institute where the study was conducted there was a co-educational system, students were not exactly at the same age or the same gender. Second, as the number of students in each class was insufficient, there should be 4 classes to have an adequate sample size. Therefore, classes couldn't be held at the same time and the result of the study might have been adversely affected. Moreover, this study was investigated among intermediate Iranian EFL students because the

numbers of intermediate students at the time of the research were more than other levels in the institute.

Like any research study, this study also gives hints to some directions and recommendations for future researchers. The present study investigated the effect of utilizing scaffolding strategies on students' grammatical knowledge. Therefore, based on the result of this study, the following suggestions for further research can be offered. The present study was carried out on female and male participants. Firstly, this study can be replicated on males or females with gender as a moderator variable. Secondly, scaffolding grammar has many different strategies. Four strategies have been utilized in this study. Other researches can focus on other strategies or a combination of them to investigate their effect on the grammatical knowledge of EFL learners. Finally, in the current study, the effect of scaffolding on grammatical knowledge was investigated. It is also possible to investigate the impact of these strategies on other sub-skills such as vocabulary and pronunciation.

To conclude, scaffolding can benefit learners in several ways. It will give students a feeling of achievement and self-confidence. Also, it makes students highly motivated and the learners try to participate actively in the classroom. Furthermore, the teacher's support and assistance eliminate any kind of affective filter on part of learners. It is believed that by teacher scaffolding, learners are ready to take risks in doing the activities. It is noteworthy to say that teacher-scaffolding is supposed to be extremely effective in enhancing learners' retention over a prolonged period. The findings presented in this study provided further evidence that grammar development occurs in a social context which is in line with sociocultural theory.

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