*Research Article*

# A Look at Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory (SCT): The Effectiveness of Scaffolding Method on EFL Learners' Speaking Achievement

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Speaking is an English ability that learners should acquire. Nevertheless, learners had several speaking difficulties, one of which was a fear of making errors when speaking in English. Therefore, this study investigated the effects of the scaffolding method on enhancing Iranian EFL learners' speaking achievement. To meet this end, a sample of 61 Iranian EFL learners were chosen from a total of 87 participants based on their Oxford Placement Test's (OPT, 2007) performance. They were picked out of a private English language school. Their English proficiency was at the intermediate level. The target participants were then randomly divided into two groups: one control group (conventional group) and one experimental group (scaffolding group). Intermediate proficiency level was the primary criterion that had to be met for the learners to be chosen as respondents in this study. Their speaking competence was calculated by speaking section of PET as pretest. This pretest speaking contained different parts like interviews. In the next phase, the treatment was administered. For the scaffolding group, the instructor offered flexible occasions to exercise their skills, knowledge, and learning methods in diverse settings and for different targets. Carrying out the dialogs and designing questions from the texts, making conversations based on the picture and the question cards, were applied as scaffolding techniques. The control group, on the other hand, took part in typical speaking courses using customary methods of instruction. The teacher provided the pupils with a piece of recent news and a video episode of recent events in order to employ authentic language—language as it is used in a real situation. Finally, the two groups' performances were posttested by PET speaking section. The performance of the two groups was compared, also the results of their pretest and posttest were contrasted. The inferential statistics including independent samples $t$-test and paired samples $t$-tests findings showed that there was a substantial difference between the experimental groups and the control group posttests. The results indicated that the experimental group significantly outperformed the control group ($p < 0.05$) in the speaking posttest, showing that applying scaffolding to experimental group was effective. The study has several educational implications that are highlighted.

## 1. Introduction

The use of scaffolding in teaching and learning has gained popularity over the past few decades. In fact, a theoretical concept in the realm of education, and specifically in the teaching of languages, has been given the term of scaffolding. This term has, however, been used more broadly for any supportive instruction. Initially, the notion of scaffolding

was associated with construction. The emergence of various learning theories has had an impact on language instruction, which has encouraged EFL or ESL teachers to embrace some innovations in their instruction [1, 2].

The sociocultural theory (SCT) of mind, created by Vygotsky [3], is one of the most important theories in learning and has had a significant impact on language instruction. From the standpoint of SCT, learning and development are viewed as interacting processes that mediate language acquisition. According to Vygotsky, a kid will perform better when given help from others to complete a task than while working alone. This potential performance is described by Vygotsky's idea of scaffolding in the ZPD. ZPD usually happens during an interactive activity when a novice and an expert work together to accomplish the desired result [4, 5]. The expert passes on his or her expertise to the novice in this way. In order for the beginner to advance from his/her present developmental level to their prospective developmental level, the expert ascertains their existing degree of competence with regard to the tasks and transfers new information [6, 7].

From a constructivist perspective, moving pupils from a lower level to a higher level is typically only achievable under supervision or in partnership with a more competent individual. Scaffolding is the Vygotskian phrase for this direction or supervision. The helper might be a professional, like an instructor, or a learner who is either somewhat more competent than or on par with the intended learner. Such helpers serve as a mediator between the learners and the knowledge they are seeking to comprehend, and they eventually help the learner achieve objectives that are unlikely to be attained by the learner alone. This knowledge provision may take the form of several methods, including cooperative learning, hands-on learning, visuals, graphics, and instructor modeling, which provide context for meaning through the use of simplified language [8–10]. Therefore, these provisions may all be thought of as various scaffolding tools.

ZPD includes scaffolding rooted in interactions between an expert and a novice. SCT proponents emphasize the roles that other individuals play in students' lives, particularly those who act like mediators to guide them to successive zones [11–13]. ZPD emphasizes the interdependence of persons and the critical importance of social processes in the development of all types of knowledge, including language [14–17]. According to Vygotsky [18], if we want to comprehend the true relationships between the development process and learning ability, we can identify at least two developmental levels: the level of actual development and the level of prospective development. In contrast, the former characterizes capabilities that have previously developed, i.e., the final product of development. To put it another way, one is the kid's capacity for problem-solving on their own, and the other specifies those abilities that have not yet formed but are in the process of growing, capabilities that will bloom tomorrow but are today in an undeveloped condition. Or to put it another way, those are tasks that the child can only accomplish when assisted [19, 20].

The concept of ZPD has been subject to several literary interpretations. According to some academics, there must always be an expert and a beginner involved in interaction in the ZPD [21–24]. Some offer equal peer cooperation, like group or pair work [25–28]. All the authors have concurred on the fundamental elements of the ZPD despite their varied interpretations. In other words, there is a problem, a task, and an individual who, using mediated support in the ZPD, can accomplish better than when unsupported. In playful settings, one-on-one instructional interactions between an adult or an expert and a kid or beginner are referred to as scaffolding in Wood et al.'s [29] work. For a while, the expert let the kid work on a task that was above his or her current capabilities but within reach, and only intervened when the kid encountered difficulties and need help. To the extent feasible, the adult or expert wanted to let the child "pace the task for himself [29–31]." As a result, scaffolding supplied by an adult or expert helps the kid or beginner to solve a problem, complete a task, or accomplish a goal that would be beyond his unaided efforts.

Wood et al. [29] proposed six features of effective scaffolding, including (1) arouse the learners' interest in the activity; (2) lessen the task's degree of flexibility to get it more adaptable for the learner; (3) keeping the goal direction; (4) highlighting important details; (5) managing anxiety; and (6) modeling possible resolutions. He continues by stating that scaffolding may ultimately lead to "the learners developing task competence at a speed that would outpace their unassisted efforts."

Since its emergence, the term "scaffolding" has undergone a number of different interpretations and operationalizations in a variety of settings, including formal courses, child–parent contact, adult instruction, conventional education, and second/foreign teaching. The relevance of scaffolding has grown to the point where it is no longer relevant to ask "who" supplies scaffolding since the emphasis is shifting to "expertise" rather than "experts" [25]. Its application is not limited to direct communication between an expert or adult and a kid or novice. For instance, many studies now see teacher–student contact and peer collaboration in a classroom setting as scaffolding [32–34].

With its introduction in the early 1980s, communicative language teaching (CLT) can also be seen as an innovative approach in language teaching and learning paradigm. In the EFL classroom, this approach prioritized pair and group projects and interactive practice exercises. When properly organized and managed, pair and group work, according to Tong-Fredericks [35], can support language development. The development of speaking ability, therefore, underwent certain alterations under the influence of CLT in a way that represented the tenets of a communicative approach. As a result, language instructors looked for innovative approaches to improve the growth of speaking ability in English classes [36–38].

Speaking is the purposeful articulation of words to convey meaning. It is "an interactive process of generating meaning that incorporates information production, reception, and processing" [39, 40]. Despite being "frequently spontaneous, open-ended, and changing," it is not entirely unpredictable. For individual language learners, speaking in

a second or foreign language has tremendous value since speaking ability is a productive skill that is frequently used to gauge language learning performance. As Richards [41] claims, speaking, which serves as a medium to actualize competency in other language abilities and subskills, is the fundamental skill for assessing a course's effectiveness. According to Huang [42], nonnative learners consider speaking in the foreign/second language to be one of the most challenging tasks in daily life. According to McDonough and Shaw [43], L2 speakers who speak the language effectively and deliver well-formed utterances can achieve specific purposes in the communication process. To put it another way, their ability to communicate verbally gives them the capacity to express their thoughts, desires, or opinions as well as to negotiate and work through communication issues. Additionally, utilizing spoken language to communicate is necessary to develop or sustain social relationships. Speaking, based on Cameron [44], is the active expression of meanings via language such that other people may understand them. They can interact with people and express themselves through speech. Students are taught how to structure their ideas, use proper pronunciation, and emphasize keywords when speaking. They also learn how to use language appropriately for the situation in which they talk. ZPD was identified as having the ability to improve linguistic abilities together with the previous scenario. According to Doolittle [45], the incorporation of CLT logic in the L2 classroom is well supported by Vygotsky's thesis on the ZPD. According to this hypothesis, ZPD-oriented courses have been recommended as a successful method to help language students get over emotional obstacles and to develop their speaking abilities.

By employing scaffolding in the classroom to instruct speaking, teachers may potentially provide learners more opportunity to be creative and engaged in the classroom. The research findings were predicted to be valuable for English teachers in Iranian English language institutions, particularly in teaching speaking, where the instructor may control classroom activities conversationally by employing scaffolding. Furthermore, this study is meant to give readers with expertise regarding teaching speaking. The researcher believed that the findings would benefit readers, particularly those worried about teaching English. All in all, the English teacher uses scaffolding method in teaching and learning speaking as an effort to speak English. This study aimed to check if scaffolding methods have any significant effect on Iranian EFL students' speaking achievement

## 2. Review of the Related Literature

The term scaffolding was first used in the context of education in the 1970s. Lev Vygotsky, a psychologist, is frequently linked to scaffolding, and it was his work that inspired the creation of this approach. However, Bruner and Sherwood [46], who examined mother–child contact during the peekaboo game, employed the English term. To characterize the mother's involvement in the game, they adopted the phrase "scaffold." Wood et al.'s [29] research is the second one that is usually credited with popularizing the word "scaffolding"

in education. This term was used to define the function of parents while helping their children to solve problems. Scaffolding was first used to describe a type of just-in-time adult support that enables a kid or beginner to fix a problem, perform a task, or attain a goal that would be beyond his unsupported efforts [29]. Scaffolding was strongly related to Vygotsky's SCT, notably with his notion of ZPD, and was based on groundbreaking researches by Bruner and Sherwood [46] and Wood et al. [29]. In actuality, scaffolding's core is the ZPD. The actual level and the potential level are the two developmental stages identified by Vygotsky. The ZPD stands for the difference between the degree of prospective development and the level of actual development as determined by the ability to solve problems independently or in collaboration with a more experienced peer [18, 47, 48].

Scaffolding, in this sense, points to the support that is part of the ZPD. In other words, scaffolding in teaching and related contexts, connected to SCT, is not a permanent structure but a flexible support carefully adjusted to the kids' advancement, with the goal of assisting the kid in being independent, in contrast to the notion of scaffolding in the field of construction, where a fixed structure can be used to build identical buildings [29].

The scaffolding metaphor was applied to interactions between teachers and students in the 1980s and late 1970s, as well as parent–child relationships. When the term "scaffolding" is used in educational settings, it means the mediation teachers or instructors make within a learners' ZPD to support their learning and to advance their existing abilities [49, 50].

The "scaffolding" terminology has been used so widely in instructional research and now refers to any kind of assistance that teachers provide to their pupils. Similar to how it occurred in other domains, the scaffolding approach quickly gained academic attention in the second language (L2) research following its introduction to the literature. It has been thoroughly researched the possibility of scaffolded aid in L2 situations for the ZPD. The integration of scaffolding into language teaching methods has also been the subject of research in L2 teacher education [51–53].

Up till the early 1990s, scholars studying L2 often concentrated on the scaffolding from the viewpoint of a proficient speaker (the instructor) engaging with a less proficient one (the pupil). Nevertheless, scaffolding may also take place between symmetrical (equal-level) duos, such as two learners working on a cooperative problem-solving activity, as well as in asymmetrical (expert–novice) duos. Symmetrical scaffolding has a different character so the expert's role is bilateral in such scaffolding. For these kinds of collaborative circumstances, Donato and McCormick [54] developed the term collective scaffolding. As a result, collective scaffolding incorporated the component of learner cooperation into the scaffolding approach.

Researchers have demonstrated that scaffolding may take place in peer (novice–novice) interactions during pair or group activities [55]. Collective scaffolding allows students to develop ZPDs for one another and achieve accomplishments that are superior to what they could have achieved on

their own. Van Lier [56] also popularized the self-scaffolding idea, in that students work independently to acquire practices, test out new approaches, and experiment with various tactics. That is, in order to make up for gaps in their own abilities and knowledge, learners primarily turn to internal sources.

Scaffolding is an element of successful teaching that may be used in language acquisition. Although instructors may be excited about the concept, it is important to remember that scaffolding is more than just teacher assistance. Scaffolding is a specialized just-in-time support that provides pupils with the pedagogical motivation they need to work more actively. Indeed, a number of socioculturally oriented researchers have shown that L2 students are more likely to triumph when their instructors and peers offer targeted help when appropriate [53, 57, 58].

Contextualizing, modeling, bridging, constructing schema, representing texts, and fostering metacognition are some of the most important instructional scaffolding strategies [53]. In modeling, pupils are given representations of what is required of them, providing them with explicit guidelines. Along with activities or tasks, teachers can provide examples of appropriate language usage and words that students would require to perform tasks. Teachers use bridging approaches to develop students' skills by drawing on their past knowledge. Bridging also creates a personal connection with students by establishing links between their experiences and the subject matter. In contrast to daily language use, academic language is typically situation-independent and decontextualized. However, using a variety of verbal and nonverbal tools including images, films, and analogies, teachers may contextualize the language acquisition process. Teachers assist students in making connections between new knowledge and pre-existing structures using the scaffolding approach known as schema construction.

Students could be requested to preview the material by concentrating on the title, the images, the charts, etc., before starting to read. In doing so, learners' schemata can be reactivated and prepared to incorporate new knowledge into their current body of knowledge. Representing texts to students is another scaffolding approach. Students participate in this strategy by transforming linguistic elements from one type into another (e.g., changing a poem into a narrative). The last sort of scaffolding is establishing metacognition that promotes students' metacognition and autonomy via the use of instructor modeling techniques including think-aloud and self-evaluation activities. Through the use of such scaffolding strategies, English language learners may be given tasks requiring competence of higher levels.

The use of scaffolding approaches in language learning settings, however, can be difficult since teachers must have a great deal of expertise and planning in order to provide pupils the precise assistance they want. However, employing such methods does not always mean that scaffolding has been successfully supplied. In reality, while employing a scaffolding strategy, teachers should bear in mind a few important scaffolding qualities.

Collaborativeness, contingency, fading, and the transfer of responsibility are the key characteristics of scaffolding. The interaction must be collaborative, which is the first and most crucial need. Not the whole forms of collaborative support, nevertheless, are seen as scaffolding. Only when necessary, scaffolding should be offered, and it must be tailored to the learner's level of comprehension. Teachers should act conditionally rather than immediately offering assistance. Thus, scaffolding must happen in the pupil's ZPD; to put it differently, scaffolders and instructors must ascertain the pupil's comprehension level and work at that level or a little bit higher. As a result, it is critical for instructors to gather data on their learners' proficiency level. Teachers require these data in order to decide whether to enhance or reduce the level of help offered.

Additionally, assessing learners' comprehension is just as crucial as having solid subject matter knowledge. Deep knowledge of the subject or task in question is necessary for a successful scaffolding intervention. Furthermore, given that not all learners react to scaffolded support, in the same manner, teachers may employ a diversity of approaches to tap various learning methods and styles. Another crucial aspect of scaffolding is that it should "fade," or be gradually removed over time as the learner gains greater proficiency. The pupil's performance level determines the rate of fading. Transfer of responsibility and fading is closely connected concepts. As a student's responsibility for completing a task increases, so does their abilities and confidence. In other words, it is important for kids to feel that they have some control over their learning.

While scaffolding is a complicated process that can take more time than usual help, it is nevertheless a successful educational strategy since it gives students individualized support while also fully recognizing their potential. Although given autonomy, pupils are never left to their own devices. Being receptive to a student and supporting him or her within the ZPD are qualities of effective teaching that are reflected in scaffolding. In English classrooms, more effective scaffolding interventions can be made if teachers are aware of the basic components of scaffolding (such as, contingency, fading over time, and transfer of responsibility).

Speaking fundamentally refers to one's ability to convey ideas or thoughts to others orally. Speaking appears to be the most crucial of the four language acquisition skills (listening, speaking, reading, and writing). As it entails developing and methodically delivering ideas and messages to the interlocutor, it becomes important for a portion of the second and foreign language learning and instruction. As a crucial tool for communication, speaking is a skill that students studying English must acquire. Speaking, according to Christopher [59], is the most natural way to express ideas since it is the fastest way for ideas to flow from one mind to another. Lado [60] defined speaking as having the capability to articulate oneself in a variety of situations, as well as the capacity to describe events or circumstances, to communicate, or to smoothly express a series of thoughts.

Speaking may also be seen as a means of interacting with other people, exchanging information, expressing thoughts or feelings, or asking someone a question. Likewise, speaking is a verbal act, according to Thornbury [61]. We take speaking for granted since it is such a fundamental aspect of daily

existence. The typical human creates tens of thousands of words everyday, while some individuals may possibly produce more. All in all, the primary goal of speaking is to convey a message to another person or to be able to discuss a subject in a way that is understood by a listener.

The importance of scaffolding for language development in learners has been the subject of several researches. For example, Aljaafreh and Lantolf [62] looked at how giving corrective feedback to students during instructor–learner exchanges might help them develop their learning. Their study findings suggested that various ZPDs may be required for various students. In a research done in 2016, Arfaei Zarandi and Rahbar demonstrated that intervening scaffolding methods were helpful in boosting EFL students' speaking skills. In their study, Numpaque and Rojas [63] identified a number of benefits of ZPD, including improving learners' recall of the words, exposing them to enough cases of the target language, fostering accuracy and fluency development concurrently, encouraging a positive outlook toward the L2, and reducing pupils' anxiety in the course of the oral performance.

The scaffolding technique used by two EFL students to work together to improve a written piece in a ZPD environment was examined by Guerrero and Vilamil [28]. The research revealed that the writer had a remarkable propensity to receiving assistance throughout the revision process, and both pupils developed a common focus attitude toward the text revision. They suggested that peer interaction might guide students toward the mechanism of writing assignments in a ZPD-activated setting. In a similar vein, Mohana [64] aimed to conceptually examine the potential impacts of the ZPD-based approach on students' oral communication skills. The participants in her research went through many stages in order to get the necessary degree of proficiency (assisted performance, self-assisted performance, developed performance, and recursion). Mohana concluded that the ZPD-based approach would be particularly useful to the development of oral skills if the environment is supportive and pair/group work is used well with both strong and poor learners. Huong's [65] survey on the usage of group work in vocabulary learning in Vietnam found that students learned new words, used collective memory, and got assistance from other group members in learning and using the new words in both "unassisted" group work and "assisted" group work student from a higher class. However, compared to the unsupported group, the group that received assistance from a more competent peer employed more target language in the conversation. Similarly, his findings showed that novice–expert group work produced more learning occasions than unassisted group work.

Similar to this, Storch [55] looked into the dynamics of interaction among 10 pairs of adult ESL learners while they were doing three unlike language tasks: a brief writing assignment, a text editing task, and a text reconstruction task. According to Storch's research, pupils who worked in pairs could share their cognitive resources and so "scaffold each other's performance." Ohta's [26] study provided another illustration of how peer scaffolding may be used in the L2 setting. It found that when learners collaborated to perform a task, their weaknesses and strengths were combined, resulting in a higher ZPD for the group as a whole than for any individual student.

According to Basco et al. [66], instructional scaffolding can help students' speaking abilities. They advised continuing to teach all language skills via scaffolding. In particular, it is advisable to continue and promote the use of question cards for speaking assessments and exercises. Additionally, more time should be allotted to vocabulary instruction in ESL classrooms.

Based on Naibaho [67], the scaffolding approach is an excellent strategy to be utilized in speaking classes, and lecturers are advised to apply it while instructing speaking in the classroom.

In their study on the usage of scaffolding strategies, Padmadewi and Artini [68] found that students' attitudes and interests had clearly improved in addition to the writing quality. The findings suggested that the scaffolding's quality had a positive impact on learners' writing performance. Additionally, Poorahmadi [69] came to the conclusion that scaffolding enhances EFL language learners' general competency and reading skills.

The acquisition of speaking skills is one of the more challenging areas for most language learners. Students frequently struggle to understand the speaking exercises and patterns included in textbooks. The task of deriving meaning from the information is one they must overcome. Furthermore, the absence of social interaction and communication among language learners has a negative influence on their ability to acquire the language, as well as their confidence. Iranian students' communication skills are still seen as being below average even after nearly 6 years of English instruction. It is evident from learners' performance in the classroom, where the majority of them find it challenging to share their thoughts with other students or with instructors. When speaking in front of the class, some pupils manage to utter limited speech or simply remain silent.

Moreover, since they are unable to acquire adequate knowledge of language skills or subjects, many students find that understanding and applying traditional methods of language education are the most irritating and challenging components of their language learning experience. Teachers, on the other hand, are concerned with creating settings that reduce their speaking and enhance students' conversation. Due to the curriculum schedule, teachers are compelled to deliver a lot of instruction. Students may feel under pressure, lose motivation, and experience growth barriers as a result.

Considering all the issues mentioned, this study aimed to improve Iranian students' speaking skills by using the scaffolding method. The overall aim was to offer recommendation to related parties based on each pupil's situation and to suggest alternative teaching methods to advance students' language skills, particularly their English-speaking abilities. In other words, the impact of scaffolding methods on the improvement of Iranian EFL learners' speaking skill was examined in this study. The subsequent question was formulated to address the following research objectives:

(RQ1) Do scaffolding methods have any substantial effect on Iranian EFL students' speaking achievement?

Related to the aforementioned question, the next null hypotheses were proposed in this study:

(H01) Scaffolding methods do not have any significant effect on Iranian EFL students' speaking achievement.

## 3. Methodology

3.1. The Research Design. This study used a quasi-experimental pretest-treatment–posttest design. The independent variable was scaffolding methods which was hypothesized to have effects on the speaking achievement as the dependent variable.

3.2. Participants. A sample of 61 Iranian EFL learners was chosen for this study from a total of 87 participants according to their Oxford Placement Test (OPT) [70] performance. They were between the ages of 19 and 21. They spoke Persian as their mother tongue. Gender was not considered in this study. They were picked out of a private English language school. Their English proficiency was at the intermediate level. The target participants were then randomly divided into two groups: one control group (conventional group) and one experimental group (scaffolding group). Intermediate proficiency level was the primary criterion that had to be met for the learners to be chosen as respondents in this study. It should be noted that, prior to running the main study, the participants who were willing to participate in the study signed written consent and submitted it to the researchers.

3.3. Instruments. OPT and the speaking section of the Preliminary English Test (PET), which served as the pre- and post-tests, were the instruments used in the current study. The detailed analysis of these instruments is shown below.

The participants' language skills were evaluated using the OPT. Additionally, it helped the researcher better determine what level (e.g., elementary, preintermediate, or intermediate) each participant was at. Among the 70 items on this exam are 50 multiple-choice language usage questions, 10 reading multiple-choice and true-false questions, and 10 writing items. The 50 multiple-choice questions must be answered within 45 min, along with the reading assignment. The writing assignment must be completed within around 20 min.

The second instrument used was Preliminary English Assessment (PET). We administered a PET exam that was taken from the book PET practice test in order to homogenize the subjects' general English skills [71]. Only the test's reading, grammar, and vocabulary components were employed in this study due to various restrictions. We administered the exam to the second identical group as a pilot and gave them 60 min to complete it. Some English specialists recognized its reliability, and it was 91. It is worth mentioning that the validity of the instruments was verified by a panel of English experts who were five university professors taught English for more than 15 years.

3.4. Procedures. First, 87 EFL students took OPT [70]. A sample of 61 EFL learners was chosen for this study based on their performance on the OPT. The subjects were then randomly divided to two equal groups of control ($n = 30$) and experimental ($n = 31$). Their speaking level was calculated through speaking section of PET as pretest. This pretest speaking contained different parts. Each subject was interviewed by the interviewer. They were asked standardized questions, including personal and factual kinds of information. The participants were asked to share information about their current situation, their prior experiences, and their plans for the future. Participants interacted with one another during the second task. To aid with the discussion, several images were given to the participants. In the third task, participants were each given a color image and instructed to discuss it for 1 min. The images all dealt with the same subject. General discussion was the fourth task. Based on the theme of the discussion they started in the third task, the participants engaged in conversation with one another. The outcomes demonstrated that the test reliability was 0.93.

In the next phase, the treatment was administered. In the scaffolding group, the instructor offered flexible chances for students to apply their knowledge, abilities, and methods in various situations and for various goals. The researcher started with what the students already learned and could accomplish, then scaffolded them to attain the objective quickly, to encourage shy kids to participate, to be aware of the moment when they should withdraw, and to support them in being autonomous while performing the task.

Bringing the conversations to a close and posing the passage's questions and making conversations based on the picture and the question cards were applied as scaffolding techniques. To ensure that the students properly understood the lesson, a number of examples were finally given to them. While the pupils were completing their assignments, the teacher wandered around to check if they were doing it correctly and to offer support and further directions.

On the other side, the control group took part in a typical speaking course using usual methods of instruction. By showing the pupils a piece of latest news headlines and a video episode of events, the teacher employed authentic language, or the language that is utilized in a real situation. The instructors gave the students the guidance they needed. After being requested to anticipate the sentences in episodes, the students came up with several formats. Instead of emphasizing language competence, the emphasis was on the communication process. In addition to responding to the exercises, the students were given the chance to share their thoughts and opinions. Errors made by the learners were tolerated and considered as a normal part of language use in conversation.

Finally, the PET's speaking section evaluated the groups' performances. The performance of the two groups was compared, also their performance on the posttests was contrasted with their performance on the pretest.

TABLE 1: One-sample Kolmogorov–Smirnov test.

| | | Con pre | Con post | Ex pre | Ex post |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| $N$ | | 30 | 30 | 31 | 31 |
| Normal parameters | Mean | 12.10 | 13.63 | 12.74 | 19.64 |
| | Std. deviation | 2.04 | 1.71 | 2.09 | 9.57 |
| Most extreme differences | Absolute | 0.14 | 0.18 | 0.17 | 0.45 |
| | Positive | 0.14 | 0.12 | 0.13 | 0.49 |
| | Negative | −0.13 | −0.18 | −0.17 | −0.35 |
| Test statistic | | 0.14 | 0.18 | 0.17 | 0.49 |
| Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed) | | 0.09 | 0.09 | 0.14 | 0.11 |

TABLE 2: Groups' mean scores on the speaking pretest.

| | Groups | $N$ | Mean | Std. deviation | Std. error mean |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Scores | Control | 30 | 12.10 | 2.04 | 0.37 |
| | Experimental | 31 | 12.74 | 2.09 | 0.37 |

TABLE 3: Independent samples $t$-test of speaking pretest.

| | | Levene's test for equality of variances | | $t$-test for equality of means | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | $F$ | Sig. | $t$ | $df$ | Sig. (2-tailed) | Mean difference | Std. error difference |
| Scores | Equal variances assumed | 0.08 | 0.77 | −1.21 | 59 | 0.23 | −0.64 | 0.52 |
| | Equal variances not assumed | | | −1.21 | 58.99 | 0.23 | −0.64 | 0.52 |

TABLE 4: Groups' mean scores on the speaking posttest.

| | Groups | $N$ | Mean | Std. deviation | Std. error mean |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Scores | Con | 30 | 13.63 | 1.71 | 0.31 |
| | Ex | 31 | 19.64 | 9.57 | 1.71 |

*3.5. Data Analysis.* The gathered data by the abovementioned procedures received statistical analyses based on the research purpose. To check the normality, the Kolmogorov–Smirnov (K–S) test was administered. Second, the descriptive statistics including standard deviation and mean score were measured. Third, inferential statistics including independent samples $t$-test and paired samples $t$-tests were implemented to analyze the data.

## 4. Results

In the result division, both descriptive statistics and inferential statistics related to the speaking achievement were reported. The results and statistics are presented in Table 1.

Table 1 indicates that the score distribution of the pretest and the posttest are normal. Consequently, the parametric statistics like paired samples $t$-test were employed for analyzing the rest of the data.

Table 2 shows the descriptive statistics of two groups on the speaking pretest. The means of both groups are almost the same. The mean score of the experimental group is 12.74 and that of the control group is 12.10. This means that both groups are almost at the same level of speaking ability before the treatment.

Table 3 shows both groups score on the speaking pretest. As Sig. (0.23) is more than 0.05, it means that the difference among these groups is not significant at $p < 0.05$. In fact, they had the same level of speaking before taking the treatment.

Table 4 shows the descriptive statistics of two groups on the speaking posttest. The means of these groups are different. The mean score of the experimental group is 19.64, and the control group's mean score is 13.63. This means that the experimental group exceeded the control group on the posttest.

Table 5 demonstrates that the difference between the two groups is substantial at $p < 0.05$. In fact, the experimental group had higher achievement than the control group in the posttest of speaking.

In Table 6, paired samples $t$-test is applied for comparing the speaking pre- and post-tests of groups. Since Sig. (0.00) is

TABLE 5: Independent samples *t*-test of speaking posttest.

| | | Levene's test for equality of variances | | *t*-test for equality of means | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | F | Sig. | t | df | Sig. (2-tailed) | Mean difference | Std. error difference | Eta squared |
| Scores | Equal variances assumed | 1.331 | 0.25 | −3.38 | 59 | 0.00 | −6.01 | 0.06 | 0.87 |
| | Equal variances not assumed | | | −3.44 | 31.97 | 0.00 | −6.01 | 1.74 | |

TABLE 6: Paired samples test (posttests of each group).

| | | Paired differences | | | | | t | df | Sig. (2-tailed) |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | Mean | Std. deviation | Std. error mean | 95% confidence interval of the difference | | | | |
| | | | | | Lower | Upper | | | |
| Pair 1 | Con pre–con post | −1.53 | 1.85 | 0.33 | −2.22 | −0.84 | −4.53 | 29 | 0.00 |
| Pair 2 | Expre–expost | −6.90 | 9.31 | 1.67 | −10.31 | −3.48 | −4.12 | 30 | 0.00 |

lower than 0.05, it implies that the differences between the speaking posttest and the pretest of the control group are not noteworthy but the difference between the speaking posttest and the pretest of the experimental group is significant. This difference shows that applying scaffolding to the experimental group was effective.

## 5. Discussion and Conclusion

The results of this study showed that teaching EFL students how to apply scaffolding tactics considerably enhanced their speaking skills. The current study addressed a gap regarding the efficiency of two scaffolding instructional methodologies for speaking. With the help of this interactive pedagogy, EFL students may interact with language in a more conversational context and practice various language forms. Interactive and intervening scaffolding tactics are found to be the most effective means of assisting EFL learners in improving their speaking skills.

In this specific study, the speaking abilities of the EFL students improved through the instructional scaffolding. Implementing such activities is made easier by providing the students with enough orientation and detailed instructions. They will be encouraged to engage and provide their best effort if the instructors help them to grasp the advantages of completing the activities to enhance their speaking ability.

The fact that pupils feel supported by one another makes pairing and grouping successful learning strategies. Their mate or group members are there to catch them if they fall, and they feel as though they belong. The group's interactions help reduce language-speaking anxiety.

The monotony of the typical approach and pattern of their speaking is broken by encouraging pupils to be creative, humorous, and not so serious with their topics and performance. They are given some autonomy to communicate more of themselves and their beliefs. Additionally, being close to or sitting next to the children while providing the scaffolds helped them feel the support they required and created a sense of connection.

In other words, the presence of a qualified person who does not make the kids feel threatened or intimidated helps them complete the work. The manner in which this study was conducted was the teacher sitting next to the students, listening to their chats, providing feedback, and encouraging additional discussion. The pupils will feel more at ease and will communicate with less anxiety in a friendly, relaxed environment.

Giving comments to groups is another powerful tool for drawing students' attention. According to the relevant literature, the goal of instructional scaffolding is to help students complete a particular activity in their ZPD. The findings of this study indicated that practically all pupils had improved speaking exam scores.

The current findings endorse the findings of Padmadewi and Artini [68] whose survey suggested that the scaffolding's quality had a positive impact on learners' writing performance. Also, our study lends support to Basco et al. [66] who found that instructional scaffolding can help students' speaking abilities. Also, these findings are supported by Poorahmadi [69] that concluded scaffolding enhances EFL language learners' general competency and reading skills. Furthermore, the results of the study are consistent with Arfaei Zarandi and Rahbar [72]. Their study revealed that intervening scaffolding methods were helpful in boosting EFL learners' speaking skills. Moreover, the outcomes of this study are compliable with Mohana [64]. Mohana concluded that the ZPD-based approach would be particularly useful to the development of oral skills.

Furthermore, the findings of this study are consistent with Mohammed Qadir and Yousofi [73], who looked into the impact of scaffolding instruction on the critical thinking skills of Iranian EFL learners and deduced that scaffolding instruction was more efficient than implicit instruction in

improving the critical thinking skills of EFL learners. Although students in both groups improved their speaking skills, the scaffolding instruction group improved more. The results are in line with Vygotsky's ZPD developmental paradigm. According to Vygotsky [74], students' talents are not developed by independent performance. He claimed that if scaffolding education is used in class, the students' talents will be shown. He also believes that scaffolding training can assist students to recognize their talents and cope with language learning challenges. Students receive implicit feedback initially, as per Vygotsky's [75] ZPD. If students who get implicit feedback are unable to cope with their language challenges, they are given less implicit and more explicit feedback to help them deal with their language difficulties. Vygotsky's [75] ZPD is based on the premise that less competent people are given the aforementioned progressive feedback by more capable people. That is, more competent teachers and the learners offer the necessary mediations or feedback to the less capable learners so that the less capable students can deal with the situation. In keeping with the findings of this study, Van de Pol and Elbers [76] proposed that the use of scaffolding by teachers is generally considered to be fairly beneficial in fostering student learning. In addition, Adoniou and Macken-Horarik [77] claimed that scaffolding instruction is suitable for the teaching of the English language, which can be compatible with the findings of the present study. Instructors, who themselves are more capable individuals, are in a position to assist students, who themselves are less capable individuals, in achieving their ZPD. According to Vygotsky [74], the psychological processes originated from the initial production that took place in social contact. In addition, he thinks that learning takes place through interaction.

In addition, the scaffolding instruction follows learner-centered techniques. That is, learners are involved in different activities with other learners to improve their skills and abilities. In line with the present study, Okolie et al. [78] claimed that learner-centered approaches and teaching strategies can improve speaking skills effectively.

This research produces some instructional implications for students, EFL lecturers, and also syllabus designers. It is strongly advised to apply instructional scaffolding in EFL classrooms, which also emphasizes writing, reading, and listening in addition to speaking.

Grouping and pairing exercises should be used in class since students can take scaffolding from their classmates as well as the teachers. The time it took to complete this investigation was rather brief. Additional sessions with the kids might be conducted if more time was available. It would be advisable to set aside some class time for vocabulary study because a student's limited vocabulary is one of the main barriers to their ability to communicate. Learners would then practice using their newly learned vocabulary to construct sentences. It has been demonstrated that giving students more practical issues to which they can relate would encourage them to be more imaginative in their presentations. A follow-up research for instructional scaffolding including more classes is also advised. A greater breadth of

implementation requires planning and preparation. It follows that extra time will be required to make the next investigation feasible.

The study's findings were persuasive enough to be effectively adapted to similar circumstances. However, being familiar with the fundamental ideas of scaffolding may assist teachers ascertain whether or not their students are actively involved in the process of learning. It is advised that instructors change the emphasis of their training to the kind of instruction in which students jointly work on completing tasks and receive enough aid from competent individuals.

The results of the present study, hence, endorse the theoretical considerations regarding the effectiveness of contingent scaffolds which are gradually dismantled and make possible the transfer of responsibility in promoting learning. The results, in other words, echo theoretical postulations regarding the effect of contingency and fading of assistance on the acquisition [79]. Besides, the results corroborate Aljaafreh and Lantolf's [62] principles dominating the way feedback can be of use to learners. They argued that feedback must be dialogic, graduated, and contingent. The fact that the dialogic contingent and gradually dismantled scaffolds exploited in this study was found to be effective in promoting speaking skills confirms Aljaafreh and Lantolf's proposal. The dynamic assessment of ZPD and providing contingent feedback in the present study have proved to positively contribute to the quality of learning in this study.

The outcomes are consistent with the findings of earlier study that reported the beneficial benefits of scaffolding on an individual's level of speaking ability. These results are consistent with those obtained by Arfaei and Rahbar [72], who investigated the efficacy of interactive ways of scaffolding on a group of students' speaking abilities. The experimental group in their study was given interactive strategies of scaffolding, while the control group went through 10 sessions of standard speaking instruction. Both groups participated in the study. The participants were tested in pairs by two different examiners, and the findings of a paired-samples $t$-test revealed that interactive scaffolding tactics were helpful in improving the speaking skills of EFL learners. The findings are also consistent with the findings of Mulyana [80], who demonstrated that the utilization of activities such as working in pairs, gesture, verifying, and clarifying participants' comprehension, inspiring, error corrections, model construction, drilling, clarifying, and doing elaboration as scaffolding methodologies are advantageous in speaking classes.

Students need to have solid speaking abilities if they are going to participate in speaking learning. Because of this, the process of learning how to speak is supposed to take place in an environment that is dialogical, interactive, entertaining, and fun, so that students will be more inspired to continue the process of learning. In addition, students must engage in rigorous practice of their speaking skills in order to fully develop their potential and achieve the highest possible level of fluency. Speaking abilities can be mastered more quickly through practice; hence, when speaking, it is best for the teacher to provide students with several opportunities to

practice, and students should practice either directly with the teacher or with a buddy. One thing that the instructor may do to help students enhance these skills is to implement an intensive learning design, namely, one that makes use of the scaffolding method.

Learners are provided by their educators with a wide range of strategies and activities in order to facilitate this strategy. These techniques and activities are able to provide a large number of opportunities for students to practice speaking contextually, thereby making the process more enjoyable and easier to learn. As has been mentioned, teachers require strategies that are applicable to their specific context and have objectives that are meaningful for the kinds of learners they have in their classes. On the other hand, teachers require the stimulation of a new strategy or approach every once in a while, to encourage them to take part in a variety of activities that take place in the classroom. It should also be mentioned that scaffolding is a method that makes it possible for a youngster or a novice to solve a problem, carry out a task, or accomplish a goal that would be beyond his ability to do so without assistance. Using the scaffolding approach, students are given the option to work on their own to find a solution to a problem presented by the teacher in order to accomplish certain academic objectives.

It is possible that instructors who use scaffolding in their education as an impactful technique to build speaking abilities in their students would be able to grow their students' learning in a more effective manner. In particular, it is suggested that instructors of English as a foreign language (EFL) implement techniques known as scaffolding in order to more efficiently advance the speaking skills of L2 learners. This is because the development of speaking skills is considered to be a crucial educational objective [81]. Learners of English as a foreign language (EFL), particularly learners with less ability, can benefit from the findings of the present study. The more proficient EFL learners can act as scaffolding for the speaking abilities of the learners with less capability, allowing those learners to obtain their ZPD. It is possible for more capable students or teachers to be the ones to initially provide less capable students with speaking skills mediations. If the least capable students are unable to solve the speaking problem using the implicit mediations they have received, the teacher or the more capable learners can provide less implicit or more explicit speaking mediations to aid the less capable students in reaching their ZPD in speaking skills. This will help the least capable students succeed in their ZPD.

According to the findings of this research, the application of scaffolding leads to increased student accomplishment in speaking-related learning. Although we tried to do a flawless research, the limitations and the drawbacks are unavoidable. The first limitation refers to the small sample of the study which the future studies are recommended to involve more participants. The other limitation is that only pretest and posttest were used for the data collection. It is suggested that future studies employ other instruments to gather more reliable qualitative data, to give greater insight into how students regard scaffolding learning. This study could

work only on speaking achievement, so the upcoming studies are advised to inspect the effects of different approaches on other skills and subskills. Also, this study investigated the intermediate level students, other research works are expected to examine other levels as well.

## Data Availability

The data that support the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request.

## Ethical Approval

The studies involving human participants were reviewed and approved by the staff of Ethical Committee of Iranian English Language Institutes and the Ethical approval number was 31/08/796128.

## Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare that they have no conflicts of interest.

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