ZPD Theory and Scaffolding Teaching Strategy: Iranian EFL Learners' Views and Reading Achievement of Short Stories as a Way of Literature Incorporation within Learning Procedure

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Abstract

The present study, through considering Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) theory and scaffolding strategy, investigates the use of scaffolding strategy in a language institute and explores the effectiveness of this method on EFL learners' reading achievement of short stories. The researchers adopted a quasi-experimental research design, and the sample of the study consisted of 60 EFL learners. Including 30 students, the experimental group benefited an implementation of scaffolding strategy and related techniques. The control group (including 30 students) benefited from no implementation of scaffolding strategy and related techniques. An interactive communicative language method of teaching was used for the control group. Moreover, a related questionnaire was used to explore the EFL learners' attitude of the experimental group on the mentioned strategy. The reading achievement was measured using a pre-test and a post-test for both the experimental and control groups. The obtained results were analyzed descriptively, the statistical manifestation of which is presented in figures. Items are elaborated separately through tables, and two independent sample t-tests were carried out for the revelation of the result. The data were analyzed using t-test, eta square, and one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA). This study concluded that the employment of scaffolding teaching strategy had a significant impact on the improvement of Iranian EFL learners' reading achievement of short stories and the students' attitude towards the mentioned strategy was completely positive. Also, the findings revealed that there was not a significant difference between the male and female students' performance.

1. Introduction

Reading plays a significant role in improving readers' language proficiency, especially in a foreign language setting. If the comprehension in reading failed, students would need to repair their comprehension (Souhila 2014). According to

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Hamouda (El Kahlout 4), most teachers conduct methods of teaching which mainly depend on memorizing rules and structures. In some Iranian educational systems, students are not given the chance to acquire language skills or to use language effectively. Teachers are thus in need of new strategies and techniques that interpret language not only as sentences, vocabulary or structure but also as a practice of thoughts and culture. Based on the study by (Aila 2015), the weak performance of teenagers in some skills, especially reading comprehension was proved. The researcher found out that the problem originates from students' weak performance in reading comprehension tasks and seeks to develop students' reading comprehension skills. He also mentioned that the more the English learners step forward in reading comprehension, the more they indicate significant weakness. Although they learn from the early primary cycle, intermediate learners still encounter serious problems in reading comprehension (Aila 2015). On the other place, Chiramanee (2002) proposed that a low level of learners' reading comprehension ability could be resulted from inappropriate teaching methods and using outdated teaching techniques, which failed to help the learners understand the content of the reading materials. In order to improve students' reading comprehension skills which are considered as a very important factor in the learning of English, the teacher needs to use a new method like short stories (Sultan et al. 2016). They noted that using short stories in the classroom is a very useful way to improve students' reading comprehension skills; they increase students' awareness and motivation, enrich their cultural understanding, enable them to know the sounds of the words and how to pronounce them correctly. Also in their views, because of the difficulties that learners of English as a foreign language face in the reading comprehension skills and the low achievement of learners' reading ability, examining the new methods like short stories can be valuable.

In the Iranian educational setting, students are occasionally given reading quizzes each week, mid-term exams, including a reading section, and a proficiency exam, including reading questions at the end of the term. In all these examinations, students are supposed to apply the knowledge and skills which they acquire during reading lessons. Due to time mismanagement, teachers usually neglect the development of effective reading skills. As a result, learners may see themselves as responsible for developing their own reading expertise. If teachers are informed and encouraged about using scaffolding learning activities in reading lessons, they may be able to both follow the schedule and promote effective reading instruction by empowering students in the reading process. In a nutshell, most EFL learners can read, but unfortunately, they always failed in the achievement of comprehension in reading, owing to the fact that they are

unable to do the reading comprehension tasks alone. Due to little attention that has been given to the mentioned method and its implications especially in the language classes in Iran, it is not known if the implementation of the mentioned strategy has a significant effect on reading achievement of short stories as well as the effectiveness and practicality of this method from EFL learners' attitude. Therefore, the present research has been designed to study the effectiveness of ZPD theory and scaffolding strategy on the improvement of reading achievement of short stories as they relate to learning outcomes at the language institutes. It is important to conduct such a study as a step towards improving students' achievement short stories and enhancing their performance through implementing scaffolding strategy.

The overall objective of this study was to assess and explore the role of ZPD theory and scaffolding strategy teaching on reading comprehension. More specifically, this study was an attempt to identify the effect of scaffolding strategy on EFL learners' reading achievement of short stories. Also, it investigated the students' attitude towards the mentioned strategy in the language learning process. Besides, the difference between the male and female learners' performance was regarded in the current study.

The study aimed at seeking suitable answers for the proposed research questions:

1. Does scaffolding strategy have any significant effect on the EFL learners' reading achievement?
2. Does scaffolding strategy have any significant effect on the attitudes of EFL learners?
3. Is there a statistically significant difference between the performance of the male and female learners' reading achievement of short stories?

2. Literature Review

The following section investigates some of the related literature on the effect of scaffolding on EFL students' different language abilities. Zarandi and Rahbar (2014) addressed the effectiveness of interactive strategies of scaffolding on English as a foreign language (EFL) learners' speaking ability. A sample of 60 Iranian EFL learners was selected based on a result of their performance on the Oxford Placement Test. Afterward, they took a speaking pretest, and they were randomly assigned to one experimental and one control group. Interactive strategies of scaffolding were given to the experimental group. The control group received routine speaking instruction in ten sessions. Finally, the groups' performance was tested by speaking post-test. The participants were examined in pairs by two examiners. The inter-rater reliability of the examiners was calculated. The results of paired-samples t-test indicated that interactive

scaffolding strategies were effective in enhancing EFL learners' speaking ability. The findings of this study provided insights for teachers in a way that they found scaffolding provided the teachers both with the learners' actual level of performance and with their learning potential. They could prescribe different individual learning plans for learners with different learning needs. Monica and Olatubosun (2013) assessed the effects of using the scaffolding strategy on the academic achievement of students in integrated science in the Junior Secondary School (JSS). Four hundred and fifty (450) students in JSS 2 were randomly selected from four Junior Secondary Schools in two Local government Areas of Ekiti State respectively. The sample was divided into two groups, two schools serving as a group. The first group was taught using scaffolding strategy, while the second group was taught using the traditional chalk and talk method. The result of the analysis of hypothesis 1 revealed that students taught with scaffolding strategy performed better than their counterparts taught with chalk and talk method. It was observed that students in urban locations were more self-reliant than their counterparts in a rural location. In the same year, Samana (2013) examined the scaffolding interaction and the learning development resulting from the interaction in a classroom while students were doing pair work. It presented only the scaffolding provided by the teacher of the classroom and by classmates. As the participants were EFL university students with low English proficiency, they enrolled in an English course. They were seven females and five males (18-19 years old). The research compared the scaffolding strategies used by the teacher to by the classmates. The participants were given collaborative pairs tasks; each task was audio recorded. The scaffolding interactions were counted and analyzed. In addition, the participants were interviewed to give reflections on their interactions. The data in the study was based on audio recordings collected while the participants were pairing up to do eight (8) tasks at the end of each classroom session. The findings of the study were; not only the teacher can scaffold students, students with low level of English proficiency can also successfully scaffold their peers; scaffolded assistance can be from the teacher and the students. The interview showed that they wanted to try by themselves before getting the teacher's support. It was found that the students with low level of proficiency tended to request help from the teacher (58%) more than from their classmates (41%). The data further revealed that out of the teacher's scaffolded assistance, (87%) led to positive outcomes. Out of students' scaffolded assistance, (49%) led to positive outcomes.

Safadi and Rababah (2012) implemented a scaffolding instruction program, which lasted for 9 weeks, to find out its impact on 11th grade Jordanian EFL learners' reading comprehension skills. The control group comprised 55 students

(2 classes), while the experimental group comprised 52 students (2 classes). Using scaffolding instruction, the experimental group was taught three units selected from the participants' English textbook, while the control group was taught the same units with no scaffolding. The pre- and post-test procedure was used to measure the impact of the scaffolding program on the students' achievement. One-way analysis of covariance (ANCOVA) was used to measure any statistically significant differences in the mean scores of both groups. Multivariate analysis of covariance (MANCOVA) was also used to find any significant differences in their posttest mean scores. Results of the study showed that there are significant differences in the subjects' achievement in reading comprehension skills, in favor of the experimental group.

Riazi and Rezaii (2011) investigated the effect of scaffolding on EFL students' writing ability. The study intended to find out whether teacher- or peer scaffolding was more successful in helping students improve their English texts. To this end, two groups of university students who enrolled in a general English course were provided with teacher- and peer scaffolding in the process of revising their writings. Pre- and post-writing tasks were collected from the students to check their writing improvement. Results of t-tests showed that teacher scaffolding appeared to be more successful in improving students' writing in this particular EFL context. The study was conducted with 25 Iranian university students (20-23 years old). The two groups were randomly assigned to experimental with teacher-scaffolding approach and control group with peer-scaffolding mode. The students of the second group formed five pairs so that a more experienced student worked with the student in need of help. The same teacher taught both groups and all teacher-student and peer interactions in both classes were audio-recorded and transcribed for analysis. The students of the two groups were asked to write an essay right at the beginning of the term and one at the end of the term, both on the same topic, to be used as their pre-and post-test writing task. The composition Profile Scale was used to score students' essays. This scale has five components including content, organization, vocabulary, language use, and mechanics. Findings of the study showed that students in the teacher-scaffolding group performed better on their post writing test. In addition, Huggins and Edwards (2011) evaluated the effectiveness of utilizing instructional scaffolding in reading and writing courses on the college level. The purpose was to determine if instructional scaffolding would make an impact on students' reading and writing performance. Results show that the scaffolding tools in the classroom can help to improve reading comprehension. Instructional scaffolding activities included giving students a graphic organizer so they could organize their thoughts, reading the poem aloud, engaging

students in a dialog as the students defined terms, asking probing questions, making a few interpretive remarks, and having students to re-read the poem and record facts and conclusions on the graphic organizer. In summary, students gained a better understanding of the poem. The graphic organizer, a type of scaffold, encouraged students to think about information in new ways. Results show that graphic organizers, as scaffolding tools in the classroom, can help to improve reading comprehension, and students can benefit in several ways when teachers scaffold the process of writing a research paper. The research suggested that providing assistance and support to students through instructional scaffolding optimizes student learning.

Sukyadi and Hasanah (2010) tried to investigate the effectiveness of using think-aloud instructional scaffolding in teaching reading to the first-year students of a Senior High School in Indonesia. The study employed a quantitative method, with a quasi-experimental design called a non-equivalent control group. The data were obtained from pretest, posttest, and questionnaire, and were analyzed using t-test, eta square, and one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA). In addition, a qualitative interview was used to triangulate the data and elaborate the results. The findings revealed that despite some limitations, the teaching program was successful. The two groups started from a similar level in the pretest, however, the experimental group performed better on reading comprehension than the control group did in the post-test, indicating that think-aloud improved students' reading comprehension better than the standard teaching strategy. The questionnaire addressed to the experimental group also showed that the respondents used reading strategies better after the implementation of think-aloud. Mehdian (2009) exposed seventeen secondary school leavers, who were attending a language school to improve their English language, to an eight-week intervention (35 hours) after which they all sat for a posttest. The participant teacher used modeling and carefully prepared scaffolding strategies. He offered personalized scaffolding, in addition to guided practice for pair and group work. The students made use of the second level of apprenticeship by working together, by thinking together and by making their thinking process visible to themselves and the other students as well. Think-aloud process, cueing, prompting, and group discussions were also applied. Gradually, the students were offered more reading tasks and were asked to try their best to perform them independently. Data were collected using observation field notes, students' reflections, insights from the final interview and the overall feedback obtained from the peer observation sessions. The comparison between the pre and post-test scores of all students revealed better performance on the post-test. It was also found that the scaffolding provided was effective in terms

of building self-confidence, better students' reflections, and better reading and comprehension.

3. Method

3.1. Design of the Study

According to Mackey (2005), quantitative research starts with an experimental design in which a hypothesis is followed by the quantification of data and some sort of numerical analysis is carried out. In the present study, the effectiveness of the scaffolding technique was analyzed through scores on students' performance in terms of numerical data. The study is an experimental one, therefore, the quantitative method was chosen for the design of this research to answer the research questions.

3.2. Participants

The participants of this study were Iranian EFL learners who were studying English at Kish Air language institute where the researcher was teaching there. Therefore, it would be more convenient for the researcher to employ the quantitative method. 60 English upper-intermediate learners were the participants of this study. They were teenagers of genders, male and female whose age ranges from 16 to 19, and had already studied English for three years at the institute. A sample is the "group of participants whom the researcher examines to determine the result of any particular study" (Dörnyei 96). At first, four intact classes of upper-intermediate students were taken as a sample of study and they participated in placement tests for being sure that all are homogenized. After homogenizing them, they were assigned to the experimental and control groups by random sampling. All of the participants had received English for 4.5 hours a week and there were no opportunities for actual English use outside the classroom.

3.3. Instrumentation

In order to gather data, three instruments were employed in this study; the Nelson placement test, pre and post-test of reading comprehension texts, and the questionnaire. Before the treatment session began, all participants participated in Nelson Placement Test. It is the standardized, reliable, and valid test. It was used to check the homogeneity of the group in terms of their reading comprehension level. The test was comprised of 20 reading comprehension questions. Out of 64 students, 60 participants whose scores on the language proficiency test fell within ±1 standard deviation of the mean score, attended the present project. The validity and reliability of the Nelson test have been estimated several times before by other researchers and it is considered as a highly valid and reliable test of English proficiency (Shahivand and Pazhakh 18).

To achieve the purpose of the study, the researcher used to read comprehension text of some short stories as the instrument to collect the data. A pre and post-tests were administered for both the experimental and control groups to investigate their reading achievement of short stories. Both of them (pre and post-test) were extracted from the short stories that were teaching in the institute for upper-intermediate students. In other words, the purpose of the pre-test was to identify the two groups' levels before using the treatment, and the post-test aimed to compare the results of the pre-test with the results of the post-test after the experiment (implementing scaffolding strategy).

After carrying out the treatment, a standardized questionnaire adopted from Reichard (in Klingner et al. 29) was distributed to the experimental class. It consists of 20 items on the Likert scale and was used to investigate the students' attitudes towards the scaffolding strategy teaching. The questionnaire was made valid and reliable by Reichard. Also, it was made valid and reliable by the researcher. Besides, the original English questionnaire was translated into Persian to ensure that the participants easily follow its items, and then it was translated back into English to ascertain that the translated one had the same interpretation.

3.4. Data Collection Procedures

For conducting this study, at first, four intact classes of the upper-intermediate level were chosen as the participants of this study from the language institute where he was teaching English for five years. Then, the students participated in the Nelson Placement Test for being sure that all are homogenized. The maximum test score is 20; the test takers who scored within the range of 16-18 were considered to be upper-intermediate learners. Regarding the obtained scores, among 64 EFL learners, 60 of them were chosen. After that, the researcher randomly put them in two groups as the control and experimental groups. One week after implementing the Placement Test, a pre-test was administered to all learners. That is to say, all of the students participated in the pre-test, and writing their names was necessary. The test included some parts of reading comprehension texts of short stories. The papers were corrected and the scores were recorded by the researcher. Treatment as the third and one of the most important steps of the research procedure started after the completion of the pre-test. The treatment was conducted in 12 sessions and the timing of each session was 90 minutes. The experimental group, including 30 students, benefited from scaffolding techniques. The researcher modeled the strategies for the students of the experimental group and gave them enough practice on how to use them for

reading comprehension. The other group which consisted of 30 students, regarded as the control group and received no treatments, and the researcher followed the ordinary reading comprehension teaching in this group. Fortunately, none of the students were absent during the treatment, and this factor would increase the reliability of the results.

For the research procedures, at first, the pronunciation of difficult words and the meaning of the unknown vocabularies were taught by a teacher and previewed the text. Then, the teacher utilized passage reading procedures that provided adequate reading practice. He taught some strategies that could be applied to passage reading, and asked appropriate questions while they were reading. Also, he applied graphic organizers to enhance students' comprehension. After reading the text, the teacher (researcher) engaged students in discussion and provided explicit instruction on comprehension. He also provided engaging vocabulary practice. Eventually, he asked them to answer comprehension questions, and at the end students should have written the summary of the text. As mentioned above, the other group was regarded as the control group and received no treatments, but they participated in pre and post-reading comprehension tests. However, in this group, the researcher followed the ordinary reading comprehension appearing in their textbook.

The final phase of the present research was conducting a post-test. All of the students participated in it and they had to write their names. The format of the post-test was similar to the pre-test, including reading comprehension texts. By finishing the exams, all the papers were corrected and the scores were written next to the pre-test scores for analyzing and identifying the possible differences between the two tests (pre and post-tests). The translated questionnaires were addressed to the experimental group to investigate their attitudes to this strategy and all the data were gathered for analyzing and interpreting.

4. Results

Descriptive statistics analysis was conducted in order to evaluate the items of the questionnaire related to the use of scaffolding strategy teaching method in reading comprehension skill. The frequency and percentage of each item were used in order to investigate every question, and the results are presented in the form of tables and figures. Furthermore, the mean score and standard deviation of all the items were calculated and displayed by the related table.

Table 1. Data Analysis of Item 1					
Items	**Strongly disagree**	**Disagree**	**Neutral**	**Agree**	**Strongly agree**
1. Scaffolding strategy offers me with more opportunities to interact with my teacher and peers.	2	4	4	6	14
Percentage	6.67%	13.33%	13.33%	20.00%	46.67%
Count	**Sum**	**Minimum**	**Maximum**	**Mean**	**SD**	**Confidence Level (95.0%)**
10	30	1	7	3	2.3452	2.91196

The first item examined the interaction between teacher and students by scaffolding strategy. As the above table indicates, 66.67% of the students agreed that this strategy offered them more opportunities to interact with their teacher and peers. While, 20% of them disagreed or strongly disagreed on the mentioned item, and 3.33% indicated their neutral ideas toward this item.

Table 2. Data Analysis of Item 2					
Items	**Strongly disagree**	**Disagree**	**Neutral**	**Agree**	**Strongly agree**
2. Scaffolding strategy gives passive students a chance to participate comfortably in the class.	2	4	4	14	6
Percentage	6.67%	13.33%	13.33%	46.67%	20.00%
Count	**Sum**	**Minimum**	**Maximum**	**Mean**	**SD**	**Confidence Level (95.0%)**
10	30	1	7	3	2.345	2.911

The second item analyzed the students' participation. In table 2, descriptive analysis illustrated that 66.67% of students highlighted that scaffolding strategy gave passive students a chance to participate comfortably in the class. Whereas 20% of them disagreed or strongly disagreed with it, and 13.33% indicated their neutral ideas.

Table 3. Data Analysis of Item 3						
Items	**Strongly disagree**	**Disagree**	**Neutral**	**Agree**	**Strongly agree**	
3. Scaffolding strategy helps me to practice my language skills through conversations.	2	2	0	6	20	
Percentage	0.00%	13.33%	0.00%	26.67%	60.00%	
Count	**Sum**	**Minimum**	**Maximum**	**Mean**	**SD**	**Confidence Level (95.0%)**
10	30	0	9	3	3.741	4.645

The third item of the questionnaire examined the improvement of language skills by scaffolding strategy. As the above table demonstrated, nearly 87% of them agreed or strongly agreed that this strategy helps them to practice their language skills through conversations. While about 13% of them uttered their disagreements on the mentioned item and nobody had a neutral opinion.

Table 4. Data Analysis of Item 4						
Items	**Strongly disagree**	**Disagree**	**Neutral**	**Agree**	**Strongly agree**	
4. Scaffolding strategy helps me to acquire new English vocabulary easily.	0	4	0	8	18	
Percentage	0.00%	13.33%	0.00%	26.67%	60.00%	
Count	**Sum**	**Minimum**	**Maximum**	**Mean**	**SD**	**Confidence Level (95.0%)**
10	30	0	9	3	3.741	4.645

As the above table and figure revealed, a great percentage (86.67%) of them declared that scaffolding strategy helped them to acquire new English vocabulary easily. However, 13.33% disagreed and nobody had a neutral idea towards the mentioned item.

Table 5. Data Analysis of Item 5					
Items	**Strongly disagree**	**Disagree**	**Neutral**	**Agree**	**Strongly agree**
5. Scaffolding Strategy can complement classroom teaching and learning.	8	4	0	6	12
Percentage	26.67%	13.33%	0.00%	20.00%	40.00%

Count	**Sum**	**Minimum**	**Maximum**	**Mean**	**SD**	**Confidence Level (95.0%)**
10	30	0	6	3	2.236	2.776

The above item examined classroom teaching and learning by scaffolding strategy. Based on table 4.7, exactly 60% of the students agreed that scaffolding strategy can complement classroom teaching and learning. 40% of the students disagreed and nobody had a neutral idea on the mentioned item.

Table 6. Data Analysis of Item 6					
Items	**Strongly disagree**	**Disagree**	**Neutral**	**Agree**	**Strongly agree**
6. Scaffolding strategy helps me in developing my reading comprehension.	0	2	4	12	12
Percentage	0.00%	6.67%	13.33%	40.00%	40.00%

Count	**Sum**	**Minimum**	**Maximum**	**Mean**	**SD**	**Confidence Level (95.0%)**
10	30	0	6	3	2.828	3.511

This item of the questionnaire evaluated the development of the students' reading comprehension through scaffolding strategy. As the related table showed, a great percentage of the participants of the experimental group (80%) uttered that scaffolding strategy helped them in developing their reading comprehension. however, a low percentage of the learners (6.67%) and 13.33% had a neutral opinion on the mentioned item.

Table 7. Data Analysis of Item 7						
Items		**Strongly disagree**	**Disagree**	**Neutral**	**Agree**	**Strongly agree**
7. Group member treat us nicely.		2	2	2	8	16
Percentage		6.67%	6.67%	6.67%	26.67%	53.33%
Count	**Sum**	**Minimum**	**Maximum**	**Mean**	**SD**	**Confidence Level (95.0%)**
10	30	1	8	3	3.082	3.827

To analyze the above item, 80% agreed or strongly agreed with the idea that group members treat the students nicely. In other words, only 13.34% disagreed or strongly disagreed with the group activities.

Table 8. Data Analysis of Item 8						
Item		**Strongly disagree**	**Disagree**	**Neutral**	**Agree**	**Strongly agree**
8. By scaffolding strategy I can use the ideas of others.		0	2	4	16	8
Percentage		0.00%	6.67%	13.33%	53.33%	26.67%
Count	**Sum**	**Minimum**	**Maximum**	**Mean**	**SD**	**Confidence Level (95.0%)**
10	30	0	8	3	3.162	3.926

Table 8 examined the use of others' ideas by scaffolding strategy. Accordingly, the analysis showed that most of the EFL learners (80%) agreed or strongly agreed that they could use the ideas of others, while 6.67% disagreed and 13.33% had a neutral idea on the mentioned item.

Table 9. Data Analysis of Item 9					
Items	**Strongly disagree**	**Disagree**	**Neutral**	**Agree**	**Strongly agree**
9. Scaffolding strategy makes me free to talk and make suggestions.	4	6	6	10	4
Percentage	13.33%	20.00%	20.00%	33.33%	13.33%
Count	**Sum**	**Minimum**	**Maximum**	**Mean**	**SD**	**Confidence Level (95.0%)**
10	30	2	5	3	1.224	1.520

According to the table, 46.66% of respondents stated that scaffolding strategy makes them free to talk and make suggestions, while 33.33% believed that they were not free to talk and make suggestions and 20% of them showed their neutral opinion.

Table 10. Data Analysis of Item 10					
Items	**Strongly disagree**	**Disagree**	**Neutral**	**Agree**	**Strongly agree**
10. Creativity is facilitated by scaffolding strategy.	4	2	8	8	8
Percentage	13.33%	6.67%	26.67%	26.67%	26.67%
Count	**Sum**	**Minimum**	**Maximum**	**Mean**	**SD**	**Confidence Level (95.0%)**
10	30	1	4	3	1.414	1.755

As seen in the table, data analysis highlighted that 53.34% of respondents displayed their agreement on the creativity that was facilitated by scaffolding strategy. Whereas, 20% of them demonstrated their disagreements on the mentioned item and 26.67% had a neutral opinion.

Table 11. Data Analysis of Item 11						
Items	**Strongly disagree**	**Disagree**	**Neutral**	**Agree**	**Strongly agree**	
11. Using scaffolding strategy in the class strategy enables me to discuss well.	6	6	4	10	4	
Percentage	20.00%	20.00%	13.33%	33.33%	13.33%	
Count	**Sum**	**Minimum**	**Maximum**	**Mean**	**SD**	**Confidence Level (95.0%)**
10	30	2	5	3	1.224	1.52

Based on the above table, about 47% of the students considered that using scaffolding strategy in the class strategy enabled them to discuss well. However, 40% of them showed their disagreements toward this item, and 13.33% of them had neutral ideas toward the item.

Table 12. Data Analysis of Item 12						
Items	**Strongly disagree**	**Disagree**	**Neutral**	**Agree**	**Strongly agree**	
12. My work is better organized when by using scaffolding strategy.	6	2	0	6	16	
Percentage	20.00%	6.67%	0.00%	20.00%	53.33%	
Count	**Sum**	**Minimum**	**Maximum**	**Mean**	**SD**	**Confidence Level (95.0%)**
10	30	0	8	3	3.0822	3.827065

The questionnaire analyzed the students' work by scaffolding strategy. Most of the students (73.33%) claimed that their work was better organized when using scaffolding strategy. Only, 26.67% of members highlighted their disagreements on this item.

Table 13. Data Analysis of Item 13						
Items	**Strongly disagree**	**Disagree**	**Neutral**	**Agree**	**Strongly agree**	
13. I have more confidence to try problems when I work in a group.	2	6	4	10	8	
Percentage	6.67%	20.00%	13.33%	33.33%	26.67%	
Count	**Sum**	**Minimum**	**Maximum**	**Mean**	**SD**	**Confidence Level (95.0%)**
10	30	1	5	3	1.581	1.963

Descriptive analysis of the above table illustrated that 60% of students mentioned that they had more confidence to try problems when they work in a group, and a low percentage of them (26.67%) did not mention it.

Table 14. Data Analysis of Item 14						
Items	**Strongly disagree**	**Disagree**	**Neutral**	**Agree**	**Strongly agree**	
14. Group learning environment promotes more responsible students.	6	4	4	8	8	
Percentage	20.00%	13.33%	13.33%	26.67%	26.67%	
Count	**Sum**	**Minimum**	**Maximum**	**Mean**	**SD**	**Confidence Level (95.0%)**
10	30	2	4	3	1	1.241

The table above reflects the attitudes of the participants on the students' responsibility. As it can be seen, more than half of them (53.34%) stated that group learning environment promoted more responsible students. however, 13.33% disagreed and 13.33% had a neutral opinion on the mentioned item.

Table 15. Data Analysis of Item 15						
Items		**Strongly disagree**	**Disagree**	**Neutral**	**Agree**	**Strongly agree**
15. Group discussion enhances good working relationships among students.		0	0	2	12	16
Percentage		0.00%	0.00%	6.67%	40.00%	53.33%
Count	**Sum**	**Minimum**	**Maximum**	**Mean**	**SD**	**Confidence Level (95.0%)**
10	30	0	8	3	3.741	4.645

The results of the table highlighted that a great percentage of the participants (93.33%) believed that group discussion enhanced good working relationships among them. surprisingly, nobody disagreed on the mentioned item and a small percentage (6.67%) had neutral ideas on the mentioned item.

Table 16. Data Analysis of Item 16						
Items		**Strongly disagree**	**Disagree**	**Neutral**	**Agree**	**Strongly agree**
16. Group activities make the learning experience easier.		8	6	0	4	12
Percentage		26.67%	20.00%	0.00%	13.33%	40.00%
Count	**Sum**	**Minimum**	**Maximum**	**Mean**	**SD**	**Confidence Level (95.0%)**
10	30	0	6	3	2.236	2.776

The results of the table highlighted that more than half of the participants (53.33%) declared that group activities made the learning experience easier. Whereas, less than half of them (46.67%) had a negative perception towards the mentioned item and nobody had neutral ideas.

Table 17. Data Analysis of Item 17					
Items	**Strongly disagree**	**Disagree**	**Neutral**	**Agree**	**Strongly agree**
17. I like role assigning for each student in group discussion.	4	4	0	4	18
Percentage	13.33%	13.33%	0.00%	13.33%	60.00%
Count	**Sum**	**Minimum**	**Maximum**	**Mean**	**SD**	**Confidence Level (95.0%)**
10	30	0	9	3	3.464	4.301

The results of the table highlighted that a great percentage of the participants (73.33%) declared that they liked role assigning in group discussion. Whereas, a small percentage of them (26.66%) had negative perceptions toward the mentioned item and nobody had neutral ideas.

Table 18. Data Analysis of Item 18					
Items	**Strongly disagree**	**Disagree**	**Neutral**	**Agree**	**Strongly agree**
18. I cannot discuss well because my friend does not play their role as expected.	8	10	2	6	4
Percentage	26.67%	33.33%	6.67%	20.00%	13.33%
Count	**Sum**	**Minimum**	**Maximum**	**Mean**	**SD**	**Confidence Level (95.0%)**
10	30	1	5	3	1.581	1.963

The results of the table highlighted that most of the students (60%) disagreed that they could not discuss well because their friends did not play their role as expected. 33.33% of the students disagreed and 6.67% had neutral ideas towards the mentioned item.

Table 19. Data Analysis of Item 19					
Items	**Strongly disagree**	**Disagree**	**Neutral**	**Agree**	**Strongly agree**
19. I get frustrated with using scaffolding strategy in learning English.	16	12	2	0	0
Percentage	53.33%	40.00%	6.67%	00.00%	00.00%

Count	**Sum**	**Minimum**	**Maximum**	**Mean**	**SD**	**Confidence Level (95.0%)**
10	15	0	8	3	3.741	4.645

The above item examined if students got frustrated with using scaffolding strategy in learning English. Based on the table, a great percentage of the students (93.33%) disagreed on the fifth mentioned item. Surprisingly, none of the students disagreed and had neutral ideas on the mentioned item.

Table 20. Data Analysis of Item 20					
Items	**Strongly disagree**	**Disagree**	**Neutral**	**Agree**	**Strongly agree**
20. I find it difficult to use scaffolding strategy in reading comprehension skill.	10	14	0	2	4
Percentage	46.67%	33.33%	0.00%	6.67%	13.33%

Count	**Sum**	**Minimum**	**Maximum**	**Mean**	**SD**	**Confidence Level (95.0%)**
10	30	0	7	3	2.915	3.620

The last item of the questionnaire evaluated the difficulty to use the scaffolding strategy. As it can be understood from the table, a high majority of responded (80%) stated that it was not difficult to use scaffolding strategy in reading comprehension skills. 20% of the student agreed and nobody had neutral ideas on the mentioned item.

Both groups participated in the pre and post-test. After their gathering, the scores, independent sample t-tests were run to analyze the effect of scaffolding strategy and ZPD theory on reading achievement of short stories. That is to say, the difference between the mean scores in the first examination and then the difference of the second examination were measured. The null hypothesis for testing two independent samples, show the equality of means, and the opposite assumptions infer the inequality of the means. The significance level was considered to be 0.05. If the p-value is less than 0.05, it means there is a significant difference between the mean scores of two tests in the control and experimental groups. The following table examined the difference between the students' performance of the control group in the pretest and post. As the table indicates, the mean score of the pre-test is 15.35 and the mean of the post-test is 15.73.

Table 21. Descriptive Statistics of pre and Tests of Control Group

Descriptive Statistics			
	Mean	Standard Deviation	Number
Pre-test	15.3567	1. 76266	30
Post-test	15.7367	1. 74944	30

The following table presented the difference between the students' performance of the experimental group in the pretest and post. As the table shows, the mean score of the pre-test is 15.32 and the mean of the post-test is 16.86.

Table 22. Descriptive Statistics of pre and Tests of Experimental Group

Descriptive Statistics			
	Mean	Standard Deviation	Number
Pre-test	15.3233	1.64172	30
Post-test	16.8667	2.13363	30

Additionally, the following table displayed the numbers, mean, and standard deviation of all the scores of two groups, control and experimental. In other words, the difference between the means of the pre and post-test in the experimental group is obvious. In fact, the mean of the post-test has increased.

Table 23. The Results of Pre and Post- Test					
Descriptive Statistics					
	Test	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Control	Pretest	30	15.3567	1. 76266	.37374
Experimental	Posttest	30	15.7367	1. 74944	.43058
	Pretest	30	15.3233	1.64172	.42389

Based on the received data, there is not a great difference between the mean scores of the control group. However, a difference between the mean scores and standard deviation of the experimental group is observable. In fact, the mean of the post-test in the experimental group is more than the control group (16.86 >15.73). Therefore, the scores of the post-test in the experimental group have increased.

Table 24. Paired Sample T-test									
		Paired Differences							
		Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference		t	df	P-Value
					Lower	Upper			
Control group	Pretest & posttest	-0.38	0.82808	0.21381	-0.05857	0.85857	1.871	29	0.082
Experimental group	Pretest & posttest	-1.5434	1.04654	0.27021	-1.91289	-0.75378	-4.934	29	0

The table illustrates the results of the two independent sample t-test. After implementing the scaffolding strategy in the experimental group, the scores of the tests in two groups (experimental and control) demonstrated the different means. In other words, the means of pre-test and post-test in the control group are 15.35 and 15.73 respectively. The difference between the two means is .38, which indicates a slight difference between the two means. However, the difference between means of the experimental group is observable. Based on the careful analysis, the mean of the pre-test was 15.32, and the mean of the post-test was 16.86 in the experimental group. Accordingly, a remarkable difference between them is clear, which is 1.54. Furthermore, the p-value in the control group is more than 0.05, but in the experimental group is 0.00 that illustrates the

mean scores of the experimental group have changed. Eventually, to evaluate the difference between the Iranian male and female performance of the study, a correlation test was done. As the following table highlights, the p-value or Sig (2-tailed) is reported as 0.95 which is more than 0.05. Due to the amount of Sig which is more than 0.05 (Sig=0.95>0.05), it can be concluded that there is not any difference between male and female's performance regarding learners' reading achievement of short stories.

Table 25. Correlation Test			Scores	Gender
Test	Scores	Correlation Coefficient	1.000	.001
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.	.95
		N	60	60
	Gender	Correlation Coefficient	0.00	1.00
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.95	.
		N	60	60

5. Discussion

Three research questions followed by three null hypotheses were considered according to the objectives of the study which examined in the following part.

The first null hypothesis:

H01. Scaffolding strategy does not affect EFL learners' reading achievement of short stories. Stahl (2005) noted that the scaffolding method improves students' academic skills by encouraging them to interact, ask and answer questions of each other, solve problems, and make decisions. In the reading courses, the participants had great opportunities to interact with each other. Moreover, based on Huggins and Edwards (2011), organizing the group work, improving students' social skills, taking responsibility in their learning, handling the problem in a manner that respected all team members' opinions, are some important benefits of scaffolding strategy. Descriptive statistics illustrated the students' improvement in reading comprehension of short stories by implementing a scaffolding strategy. Based on the related table in the control group, the means of students' scores are 15.35 and 15.73 in pre-test and post-test respectively. However, in the experimental group, the mean of the pre-test is 15.32 and the post-test mean score is 16.86. In other words, the EFL students of the experimental group had better performance in the post-test (16.86 > 15.73). The findings of the first hypothesis proved that there were statistically significant

differences between the mean scores of the experimental group in the pre and post-tests. Due to the careful analysis, it can be concluded that the first null hypothesis is completely rejected here because the scaffolding strategy does not affect EFL learners' reading achievement of short stories. These findings are in line with the previous studies which proved that scaffolding reading comprehension helps to improve students' reading comprehension (for example, Vethamani and Nair, 2007; Mehdian, 2009; Sukyadi and Hasanah, 2010; Pishghadam and Ghadiri 2011; Safadi and Rababah 2012). They indicated a positive effect of using scaffolding strategy on students' achievemen

The second null hypothesis:

H02. Scaffolding strategy has no positive effect on learners' attitude in the language learning process. The second null hypothesis of the study highlighted the EFL learners' attitude towards applying scaffolding strategy in the language learning process. Descriptive statistics indicated the students' perceptions of 20 items on the effectiveness of this method. In their views, scaffolding strategy offered students more opportunities to interact with their teacher and peers, and also offered them more opportunities to interact with their teacher and peers. Also, scaffolding strategy gave passive students a chance to participate comfortably in the class and helped them to practice their language skills and acquire new English vocabulary easily. Moreover, the students thought that scaffolding strategy could complement classroom teaching and learning, and developed their reading comprehension. Additionally, the students' attitudes on group working were achieved. Most of the participants said that group members treat them nicely, and they could use the ideas of others. Furthermore, this method made them free to talk, and also creativity is facilitated by scaffolding strategy. Moreover, using this method enabled them to discuss well, and their work was better organized by this strategy. The students felt more confident to try problems when they work in a group, and the group learning environment promoted more responsible students. On top of that, they agreed that group activities made the learning experience easier, enhanced good working relationships, and they liked role assigning for each student in group discussion. However, most of the participants revealed their disagreement that they could not discuss well, and they did not get frustrated by using this method. In their views, this strategy was not difficult in reading comprehension skills. All in all, due to the descriptive analysis, it was found that using scaffolding strategy in the language learning process had a positive effect on EFL students' attitudes. Accordingly, the second null hypothesis "Scaffolding strategy has no positive effect on learners' attitude in the language learning process" is completely rejected based on descriptive analysis results. It is worth mentioning that the

results of the current study are supported the findings of the study done by (Kareva and Echevarri 2013). Participants of the study expressed their high satisfaction with the scaffolding strategy applied in the class. In the other study, Koura and Zahran (2017) stated that the scaffolding model was very motivating for students and offered them opportunities to make decisions and be creative.

The third null hypothesis:

H03. There is no statistically significant difference between the performance of the male and female learners' reading achievement of short stories. Additionally, the present study compared the male and female students' performance reading achievement of short stories. To do this, the correlation between male and female students' performance and their reading achievement of short stories was investigated. Considering the significant level of this test, P-Value or Sig is 0.95 which is more than 0.05 (α=0.05), no difference was found between the mean scores of the male and female learners' reading comprehension test. Due to the amount of Sig which is more than 0.05 (sig=0.95>0.05), it can be concluded that there is not any difference between male and female's performance regarding reading achievement of short stories. Thus, the third null hypothesis "There is no statistically significant difference between the performance of the male and female learners' reading achievement of short stories" cannot be accepted in the present study.

6. Conclusion and Implications

Scaffolding is an effective strategy for reading instruction that assists the students who cannot comprehend what they read. It is just one of the many techniques available for exploitation but it has a significant role in supporting learners to progress within the ZPD. The main aspiration of scaffolding within the ZPD is to see students being actively engaged in their learning with the prospect of becoming self-directed, lifelong learners. The outcomes of this research also provide the educational value of the scaffolding instruction in EFL classrooms. Since reading comprehension is one of the most essential skills for EFL learners, the results highlighted that teachers should integrate scaffolding into students' English learning settings to promote their reading comprehension (Aila 2015). Scaffolding exhibited advantages over the ordinary method in improving reading comprehension skills. Analysis of the data in the previous chapter illustrated that this difference was due to the strategy since the researcher previously controlled all extraneous variables. This large effect can be attributed to instructional scaffolding activities, techniques, and teaching aids which aimed at developing EFL learners' reading achievement of short stories. Furthermore, these differences were because scaffolding emphasized group and pair work and

the teacher's assistance which was removed gradually. Moreover, the result was also attributed to the positive interaction and participation of the students themselves who showed motivation and because they were given enough assistance and support by the teacher at the beginning stages until they proved mastery.

The findings of the study indicated that using scaffolding strategy had a significant impact on the students' levels of reading achievement of short stories in the experimental group, who were taught according to this strategy, compared with the control group which was taught according to the ordinary method. Returning to the research hypotheses, the statistical analysis of the data obtained from the students' performance proved that there is a remarkable amount of achievement on short stories. These findings are supported the previous studies which proved that the scaffolding strategy teaching method enhanced students' reading comprehension (for example, Chi 2007; Mehdian 2009; Sukyadi and Hasanah 2010; Attarzadeh 2011; Pishghadam and Ghadiri 2011; Bassiri 2012). They indicated a positive effect of using scaffolding strategy on students' achievement. Besides, O'Neal et al. (2009), Batt (2010) and Echevarria et al. (2011) supported the findings of this project as they indicated that in scaffolded lessons and classes; there is a high level of student engagement and interaction with teachers, peers, and text that lead to elaborate discourse and higher-order thinking. Students are explicitly taught functional language skills as well, such as how to negotiate to mean, ask for clarification, confirm information, argue, persuade, and disagree. Through instructional conversations and meaningful activities, students practice and apply their new language and content knowledge.

Scaffolding strategy proves to be a key feature of effective teaching especially teaching reading comprehension skills. Therefore, teachers are invited to reconsider the ordinary methods and adopt new ones that depend on support and assistance. Providing assistance and support to students through instructional scaffolding optimizes student learning and enhance reading comprehension skills. It is one of the principles of effective instruction that enables teachers to accommodate individual students' needs, and it is very motivating, supportive, and attractive for low achievers who like the idea of being active participants. Additionally, this strategy develops cooperative learning within the group members. Group work techniques in the reading lessons help students to exchange their ideas and help each other and stimulates students towards an independent practice of the English language.

The researcher assessed the students' attitude towards the implementation of scaffolding strategy in the language learning process. These findings may be

applied to redesign the reading courses at language institutes, schools, universities, and other educational settings. Besides, the findings of the project can suggest teachers employ scaffolding strategy teaching in their classes since participants' attitudes were positive towards participating in this method. Despite the possible problems, the researcher's experience about the use of this method in the future may serve as an important example for other teachers in educational centers. It is worth mentioning that an effective teacher is the one who provides explicit explanations, modelings, and scaffoldings to assist his/her students to construct a clear understanding of the text content. Such a teacher meets the requirements of a scaffolding teacher that learners should receive support and assistance from the teacher, so they will be able to perform certain tasks and move to more complex ones successfully. More importantly, the interaction between the teacher and the learner should be collaborative. Scaffolding can help language teachers to benefit from it and its content while teaching reading comprehension skills.

As Açıkgöz (2002) stated, when traditional methods such as lecture and dictation are used in educational systems, students easily forget what they have learned during lectures. The reason for this problem is referred to the roles of the teacher and the student in the class. In traditional teaching classes, the teacher is the expert and the decision-maker, whereas students are passive listeners and note-takers. Generally, students memorize and review the presented materials by the teachers, but they forget them after the examination. In classes where scaffolding strategy is used, teachers are facilitators and students are discoverers and investigators. They ask questions, make predictions, analyze, discuss, assess their strengths and weaknesses, interact, and try to learn. For teachers and students in Iran, changing these roles might be challenging where traditional whole-class methods have been used for several years. Knowing the possible challenges related to adjusting the new roles may help teachers who plan to use scaffolding activities in their instruction. To prevent some problems which may result from the difficulties in adapting to new roles, both teachers and students should be trained on this strategy.

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