

Iranian EFL Learners' Perceptions of the Effect of Different Types of Scaffolding on Their Listening Comprehension Performance, Metacognitive Awareness, and Listening Anxiety**Abstract****Article Type:****Original Research****Authors:****Maryam Neshaeemoghaddam¹**ORCID: [0009-0005-8812-3914](#)**Mehrshad Ahmadian²**ORCID: [0000-0002-2105-6818](#)**Ebrahim Fakhri Alamdari³**ORCID: [0000-0001-5075-3703](#)**Article History:****Received:** 2025.10.19**Accepted:** 2026.02.07**Published:** 2026.03.10

This study explored Iranian learners' perceptions of the effect of context, cognitive, metacognitive, procedural and motivational scaffolding on their listening comprehension, listening anxiety and metacognitive awareness. To this end, a grounded theory design was used using a semi-structured interview to collect the data. The participants consisted of 25 Iranian female intermediate EFL learners who were voluntarily selected from a language institute. Data analysis was conducted through thematic analysis of the interview data. According to the results, the following themes were extracted for the effect of context scaffolding: Reducing Listening Anxiety, Increasing Willingness to Learn Listening, and Enhancing Listening Skill. Moreover, Making Listening Learning Quicker, Increasing Control over Listening, and Increasing Attention were extracted for the effect of cognitive scaffolding. Further, for the effect of metacognitive scaffolding, the following themes were extracted: Increasing Self-Confidence, Increasing Autonomy, and Increasing Enjoyment. Additionally, the themes related to the effect of procedural scaffolding were Enhancing Teacher-Students Relations, Enhancing Problem-Solving Ability, and Enhancing Reflective Behavior. Finally, Increasing Motivation, Increasing Learner Interest, and Increasing Learner Engagement were extracted for the effect of motivational scaffolding. The results have some implications for EFL teachers, learners and curriculum planners.

Key Words: Listening anxiety; Listening comprehension performance; Metacognitive awareness; Scaffoldings

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1. Introduction

Learning English as a foreign language (EFL), as a must in today's World, has been shown to be under the effect of different strategies among which scaffolding strategies can be referred to (Yawisah, 2017). Scaffolding is defined as a "setting up" procedure by Bruner (1983). It is a method of teaching in which the teacher helps a learner to work just beyond his/her independent achievement (Zuhra et al., 2022). In this condition, learners are empowered to select the resources required for controlling language learning.

Scaffolding is conducted within the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD). It implies that learners are assisted by others to do more than they could have done independently. According to Wood (1988), scaffolding is a collaborative, interactive, and contingent teaching activity. Further, it involves the mutually engaging activity of two or more people (Puntambekar, 2022). Scaffolding has been found to be effective on different English skills (Maspuhah, 2019) including listening (e.g., Ahmadi Safa & Motaghi, 2021; Ahmadi Safa & Rozati, 2016; Al-Yami, 2008; Ashraf et al., 2016; Shabani, 2014). However, listening cannot be imagined without listening anxiety as a kind of anxiety sensed by learners in the process of listening (Alsowat, 2016; Wang, 2010)).

So far, it has been argued that listening anxiety affects listening comprehension. But the fact is that listening comprehension is also affected by other variables including metacognitive awareness (Al-Jarrah et al., 2018). This also adds to the complexity of listening comprehension (Rost, 2014). Accordingly, EFL learners experience many problems when learning listening comprehension (Goh, 2010; Tran & Duong, 2020). To cope with these problems, some learners may resort to metacognitive awareness strategies (Alameen & Levis, 2015). This is why metacognitive awareness is worth investigation in listening comprehension research.

Metacognitive awareness, a central concept in educational psychology, has a significant role in language learning/teaching. It refers to an individual's awareness and regulation of their cognitive processes, including the ability to plan, monitor, analyze and evaluate one's learning strategies and outcomes (Haukås et al., 2018). In language learning, metacognitive awareness aids learners to consciously reflect on how they learn, and identify effective strategies. Metacognitive awareness is a factor which is influential on listening comprehension (Wallace, 2022). This implies that if learners' meta-cognitive awareness is positively manipulated by different strategies, their listening comprehension will improve.

Without listening, learners cannot effectively show themselves and receive attentions from speakers which is effective communication. More importantly, listening is one part of the L2

learning that nearly most of L2 learners face and have problems in it (Bagheri Masoudzade, 2022). With a view to the above arguments, it appears that listening comprehension is under the impact of scaffolding strategies. Therefore, it is probable that listening anxiety and metacognitive awareness that are closely tied to listening comprehension are also influenced by scaffolding strategies. Investigating this issue may help learners in learning listening comprehension. But, a main problem in this regard is that listening comprehension and its related factors including listening anxiety and metacognitive awareness is a neglected skill in the context of Iran, in spite of the fact that many Iranian learners have problem with this skill. In this situation, the volume of studies on the effect of different strategies including scaffolding strategies is low. These issues encouraged the researchers to see how Iranian EFL learners perceive the effect of different types of scaffolding including context, cognitive, metacognitive, procedural, and motivational scaffolding on their listening comprehension performance, metacognitive awareness, and listening anxiety.

According to Wu (2010), cognitive scaffolding refers to a type of scaffolding in which teacher uses some examples to help learning process, guides students to relate the new knowledge to what they know, and gives hints to them in order to correct their errors. Context scaffolding refers to a type of scaffolding in which teacher explains the concepts using pictures, charts, conceptual maps, PowerPoint, and films. Metacognitive scaffolding refers to a type of scaffolding in which teacher helps students to set their goals for studying, guides them to use appropriate learning procedures, and provides opportunities for them to ask some questions. Motivational scaffolding refers to a type of scaffolding in which teacher tells some stories and interesting events to increase students' interest, persuades them to increase their motivation, and guides them to insure them that they can learn. Procedural scaffolding refers to a type of scaffolding in which teacher proposes an order for the materials in order to help students understand them, gives some solutions and proposes some ways to help students comprehend the materials, and helps students to find the meaning of the word by dividing the words into understandable parts. To achieve this study's objectives, the following research questions were put forth:

RQ1. What are Iranian EFL learners' perceptions of the effect of context scaffolding on their listening comprehension performance, metacognitive awareness, and listening anxiety?

RQ2. What are Iranian EFL learners' perceptions of the effect of cognitive scaffolding on their listening comprehension performance, metacognitive awareness, and listening anxiety?

RQ3. What are Iranian EFL learners' perceptions of the effect of metacognitive scaffolding on their listening comprehension performance, metacognitive awareness, and listening anxiety?

RQ4. What are Iranian EFL learners' perceptions of the effect of procedural scaffolding on their listening comprehension performance, metacognitive awareness, and listening anxiety?

RQ5. What are Iranian EFL learners' perceptions of the effect of motivational scaffolding on their listening comprehension performance, metacognitive awareness, and listening anxiety?

2. Review of the Related Literature

2.1. Theoretical Framework

Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) constitutes the theoretical framework of this study. It is an important concept in educational psychology, particularly in language learning fields including EFL teaching/learning. The ZPD refers to the gap between what a learner can achieve independently and what they can accomplish with guidance from a more knowledgeable individual, such as a teacher or a peer (Sage, 2022; Vygotsky, 1978). This concept shows the dynamic and collaborative nature of learning, where social interaction impacts the development of cognitive abilities (Zaretsky, 2021). In this study, Vygotsky's ZPD is as a theoretical framework for investigating how different scaffolding methods impact Iranian EFL learners' listening comprehension, metacognitive awareness, and listening anxiety. According to Scaffolding, defined as the temporary support provided to learners to help them reach a higher level of understanding and skill, is intrinsically linked to the principles of ZPD (Margolis, 2020). Utilizing scaffolding helps learners accomplish tasks they would otherwise find difficult to advance within their ZPD and improve their language proficiency.

Vygotsky's theory places significant emphasis on social interaction and collaborative learning and explains that learners are most effective when engaged in activities slightly beyond their current capabilities, with the assistance of a more skilled peer or teachers (Ghavifekr, 2020). This collaborative process encourages the development of higher-order cognitive functions, such as problem-solving, and metacognitive awareness, all essential components for successful language learning. According to Ahmadi Safa and Motaghi (2021), in EFL settings, particularly in

listening comprehension, appropriately scaffolded activities that challenge learners within their ZPD can lead to substantial improvements.

The practical application of ZPD in language learning becomes evident through the strategic use of scaffolding. In scaffolding, initially, teachers provide extensive guidance and modeling which are necessary. As learners gain proficiency, the support is gradually withdrawn to encourage them to take greater responsibility for their learning (Gonulal & Loewen, 2018). This process, known as fading, is crucial for training independent learners who are capable of self-regulation and possess strong metacognitive awareness (Shabani et al., 2010). In EFL listening comprehension, this might involve guiding students through complex listening exercises which offer strategies to decode and interpret spoken language, and progressively reduce assistance as they gain confidence and expertise. Additionally, Vygotsky's ZPD is closely connected with the concept of metacognition, which involves a learner's awareness and control over their cognitive processes (Zhang & Zhang, 2019). Metacognitive strategies, such as monitoring, and evaluating one's learning are vital for language learning, especially in listening comprehension where active engagement with spoken input is required (Chou, 2016). Scaffolding within the ZPD can enhance learners' metacognitive awareness through prompting them to reflect on their listening strategies and identify areas for improvement. This way, students can develop more effective approaches to processing spoken language (Taheri & Hedayat Zade, 2018).

2.2. Empirical Studies

In a most recent study, Neshaeemoghaddam et al. (2025) investigated the impact of various scaffolding techniques on EFL learners' listening performance, metacognitive awareness, and listening anxiety. The findings revealed that the scaffolding strategies—procedural, metacognitive, cognitive, contextual, and motivational—exerted varying and significant effects on learners' listening comprehension, alleviation of listening anxiety, and improvement of metacognitive knowledge. The results also showed the educational significance of scaffolding as a theoretical framework comprising multiple elements that can aid cognitive processing, promote learner independence, and address emotional obstacles to foreign language listening. In another recent study, Ghonchepour et al. (2024) analyzed the impact of peer scaffolding in L1 vs. L2 on Iranian EFL learner's writing development. Careful analysis indicated that there was no significant difference between applications of the two languages in peer scaffolding writing. Moreover, there was a significant relationship between peer-scaffolding and student's writing scores.

Munawir et al. (2022) looked into the impact of scaffolding on students' reading comprehension. A pretest and a posttest were utilized in the pre-experimental design by the

investigator. It was found that students' reading comprehension increased as a result of receiving scaffolding. Likewise, Tajadini et al. (2022) aimed to inquire whether the integration of reciprocal and sheltered teaching approaches would influence students' performance in writing and find out if the approach could impress the learners' self-efficacy as well. The results revealed the positive effect of integration of reciprocal and sheltered approaches on the writing performance of the subjects in the experimental group. Moreover, the selected procedures could lead to learners' self-efficacy development. Finally, the achievements contributed to an understanding of the type of teaching approach which is most appropriate for pre-intermediate students.

Ahmadi Safa and Motaghi (2021) conducted a study to evaluate the relative effectiveness of cognitive and metacognitive scaffolding strategies in enhancing the listening comprehension skills of EFL learners. The results of the study indicated that metacognitive scaffolding strategies significantly outperformed cognitive scaffolding strategies and non-scaffolded instruction in improving EFL learners' listening skills. Moreover, the analysis revealed that the learners generally preferred the metacognitive scaffolding approach, considering it to be more instructive, innovative, and effective in identifying problems, enhancing comprehension, and increasing their preparedness for listening tasks. In the same year, Taghizadeh and Saadatjoo (2021) conducted a study with three primary objectives: (a) to identify the scaffolding needs of Engineering students in academic listening, (b) to compare these needs with their performance on an academic listening test, and (c) to evaluate the effectiveness of two listening instructors in applying scaffolding strategies in their classes. The findings revealed a difference between the two classes in terms of student satisfaction and the scaffolding strategies employed. In one class, where 96% of the students expressed satisfaction, the most frequently employed strategies were repeating whole or part of a task for the students if needed and waiting for them to answer the questions. In contrast, the other class, with only 30% student satisfaction, saw the strategy providing a comfortable atmosphere for the students to listen to the tasks as the most frequently used, with little variation in the strategies applied. Additionally, the results showed that two scaffolding strategies, namely providing clues and directions to help students find the correct answer and correcting tasks or the students' answers were statistically significant in addressing the needs of students who scored the lowest on the academic listening test. This suggested that meeting specific scaffolding needs in listening classes can significantly enhance students' satisfaction and potentially improve their performance.

Kula and Budack (2020) attempted to evaluate the benefits of scaffolding for reading comprehension abilities, learning retention, and self-efficacy perception of reading

comprehension. Students in the experimental group where scaffolding technique was used and students in the control group showed a substantial difference, according to the study's findings. The experimental group outperformed the control group in terms of reading comprehension accomplishment levels and retention scores when the traditional teaching method was used to teach the class. In terms of self-efficacy levels, there was no discernible difference between the groups. The students in the experimental group said they were happy to have the chance to lead their classmates and to have a say in the direction of the lesson. They also said that this strategy helped them better grasp the texts they read and gave them a chance to work in a group. In the same vein, Taka (2020) sought to determine whether teaching reading to Indonesian English as a Foreign Language (EFL) students using scaffolding technique was effective. This study's major inquiry was whether scaffolding is effective for teaching children to read. The results demonstrated that teaching reading to Indonesian EFL students using scaffolding is beneficial. Karimi et al. (2020) investigated the impact of instructional scaffolding techniques, specifically graphic organizers, on listening comprehension and incidental vocabulary acquisition among L2 learners. The results demonstrated that the experimental group significantly outperformed the control group in both listening comprehension and vocabulary acquisition. Furthermore, data gathered from interviews indicated that the learners in the experimental group had positive attitudes towards the use of graphic organizers as part of their instruction.

The gap in research is particularly observed in studies that differentiate between types of scaffolding. While general scaffolding approaches have been discussed in the literature, the distinct impacts of different types of scaffolding strategies on listening comprehension, metacognitive awareness, and listening anxiety in Iranian EFL context have not been sufficiently explained. For instance, research could explore the effects of interactive scaffolding, where teachers provide ongoing feedback and support during listening tasks, versus more structured pre-listening scaffolding, which might involve teaching specific listening strategies or providing contextual background before listening. To sum up these research gaps, it can be noted that while the potential benefits of scaffolding in language learning are well-acknowledged, there is a critical need for more focused research on how different types of scaffolding may influence listening comprehension performance, metacognitive awareness, and listening anxiety among Iranian EFL learners. Addressing these gaps could provide useful findings to optimize language teaching/learning in Iran, ultimately supporting learners in overcoming the linguistic, cognitive, cultural and emotional barriers to effective listening comprehension.

3. Method

3.1. Design

In the current study, a grounded theory design was used as an appropriate option for extracting the participants' perceptions based on the qualitative data.

3.2. Participants

Twenty-five intermediate female EFL learners from a private language institute in Sari, Iran were voluntarily selected to take part in this study so that their perceptions of the scaffolding strategies could be uncovered. They were already exposed to different types of scaffolding, i.e., five learners were already exposed to cognitive scaffolding, five to context scaffolding, five to motivational scaffolding, five to procedural scaffolding, and five to metacognitive scaffolding. Data saturation was achieved with this sample size. This is the point where no new finding was achieved with collecting more data. The native language of the sample was Farsi. Their age range was between 16 and 18.

3.3. Instrument

3.3.1. Semi-Structured Interview

A semi-structured interview was used to explore the participants' perceptions of the effect of scaffolding strategies on their listening comprehension performance, metacognitive awareness and listening anxiety. The participants were asked to reflect on their overall perceptions of the effect of scaffolding strategies on their listening comprehension performance, metacognitive awareness and listening anxiety including the advantages, disadvantages, challenges, etc. They were also required to give reasons for their answers.

Drawing on the previous studies in the related literature, a semi-structured interview was designed by the researchers for the students who participated in the study in order to investigate their perspectives towards the effect of different types of scaffolding, e.g., context, cognitive, metacognitive, procedural, and motivational scaffolding on their listening comprehension performance, metacognitive awareness, and listening anxiety. It should be noted that the initial set of questions was reviewed by two experts in applied linguistics and TEFL to ensure content validity and clarity. Based on their feedback, the questions were refined, simplified, or reordered. Moreover, the semi-structured format allowed flexibility, enabling follow-up questions to be asked during the interviews so that participants could elaborate on their experiences and provide rich, in-depth data.

Finally, the semi-structured framework consisted of five questions which provided flexibility and spontaneity in the discussion. This allowed participants to expand on their comments and contribute insights based on their perspectives and experiences (Appendix). This qualitative data collection started wherein 5 students were voluntarily selected from each experimental group (T=25 students) to take part in a semi-structured interview. With consent, the interviews were taken in one-to-one format and audio-recorded. Next, the audio-recorded files were transcribed verbatim to be exposed to coding procedures which are explained in the section on data analysis. Credibility and dependability of the data was checked through member checking and low inference descriptors. Low-inference descriptors involved presenting quotations from the interviewees when presenting the results. To do member checking, interpretations of the interviews were checked with the interviewees to ensure that the interviews have been interpreted accurately.

3.4. Data Collection and Data Analysis Procedures

To collect the data, twenty-five learners (5 in each scaffolding group) with the above characteristics were voluntarily selected to take part in a semi-structured interview. In adherence to ethical guidelines, explicit consent was secured from the participants, ensuring their voluntary participation in the study. After that, the interviews were conducted individually and face to face lasting around 30 minutes, aiming to gather detailed information on each individual's unique experiences. The protocol included open-ended inquiries and prompts designed to elicit comprehensive answers. The protocol covered key subjects, such as study's introduction and objectives. Then, the audio-recorded interviews were transcribed verbatim to be exposed to coding procedures.

Data analysis involved doing open, axial and selective coding on the interview data. Open coding involved breaking the data down into some analysis units (i.e., key terms, phrases, and sentences) to classify similar concepts into categories according to their thematic content. Axial coding involved recognizing the connection, associations and ties between the categories and their sub-categories. Selective coding involved extracting a core category from the identified categories as an explanatory whole.

4. Results

Before proceeding to discuss the illustrative quotations, it is important to explain the reasons for reporting selected quotations from the data. Although 25 participants were interviewed, and

all interviews were fully transcribed and analyzed, only selected illustrative quotations are reported in this section. This is because, owing to the word limit of the journal and the high degree of convergence of the data after data saturation, reporting excerpts from all 25 students would have resulted in redundancy rather than analytical enrichment. More importantly, the aim of reporting selected excerpts was to provide depth and clarity of interpretation rather than to report all the interview data.

Considering the presented themes, it is worthy to point out that the categories “context scaffolding,” “cognitive scaffolding,” “metacognitive scaffolding,” “procedural scaffolding,” and “motivational scaffolding” were analytical categories employed by the researchers in the process of coding the data. The categories were actually referred to by the participants themselves in terms of particular classroom practices (e.g., use of pictures, group discussions, prediction exercises, reflection activities).

With regard to the first qualitative research question ‘What are Iranian EFL learners’ perceptions of the effect of context scaffolding on their listening comprehension performance, metacognitive awareness, and listening anxiety?’, the following themes were extracted:

Theme 1. Reducing Listening Anxiety

The first theme emerged from the data was “Reducing Listening Anxiety”. This theme revolves around the notable reduction in participants' listening anxiety as a direct result of their engagement with context scaffolding.

This theme is supported by quotations from the participants, reinforcing the idea of the positive impact of context scaffolding on listening anxiety. For example, Participant 1 (P1) articulated this effect, stating, *“Context scaffolding was very interesting for me. It stimulated me to feel less anxious in listening. I think this made me more relaxed in listening. I should say that using PowerPoint slides and background information helped me relax before listening.”* P1's testimony highlights the way in which engaging in context scaffolding contributed to lower listening anxiety.

Additionally, Participant 3 (P3) emphasized the effect of context scaffolding on listening stress: *“Context scaffolding has caused reduction in my listening stress. I feel that my listening stress has been reduced as a result of context scaffolding. I can say when the teacher showed pictures and explained the topic before playing the audio, I felt less anxious.”* This statement underscores the tangible reduction in listening stress attributed to context scaffolding. In the same

way, Participant 4 (P4) stated: *"Before, I was stressed because I did not know what the listening would be about. When we discussed the topic first, my stress decreased."*

Furthermore, Participant 5 (P5) stressed the role of context scaffolding in enhancing anxiety control, stating, *"Anxiety control is very influenced by context scaffolding. The role of this kind of scaffolding was very important in the enhancement of my ability to cope with my anxiety"*. P5's comment highlights the importance of context scaffolding in facilitating anxiety control.

Theme 2. Increasing Willingness to Learn Listening

The second theme emerged from the analysis was "Increasing Willingness to Learn Listening". This theme revolves around the transformative effect of context scaffolding on participants' willingness to learn listening.

This theme is substantiated by quotations from the participants, providing insights into their heightened willingness to learn listening skill. For instance, Participant 2 (P2) emphasized the role of context scaffolding in promoting tendency to listening learning, stating, *"To me, context scaffolding encouraged us to learn English listening. It was interesting and exciting for us. It increased my tendency to learn how to learn listening"*. P2's testimonial underscores the captivating impact of context scaffolding on their inclination to learn English listening skill. Participant 3 (P3) also mentioned: *"When the teacher used slides and examples before listening, the class became interesting. I was encouraged to pay more attention."*

Participant 4 (P4) also acknowledged the increased eagerness for listening learning, crediting context scaffolding: *"I am now more eager about listening learning, and this is due to context scaffolding. My interest and excitement towards listening have been increased"*. P4's statement highlights the heightened enthusiasm and interest generated by context scaffolding, making the learning of listening more appealing. Furthermore, Participant 5 (P5) discussed a significant shift in attitude towards learning English listening, explaining, *"My attitude concerning learning English listening has changed very much after using context scaffolding. I believed that listening is useless. But now I try to pay attention to this skill more than before"*. P5's perspective showcases a remarkable transformation from skepticism to active engagement in listening learning, brought about by context scaffolding.

Theme 3. Enhancing Listening Skill

The third theme emerged from the data was "Enhancing Listening Skill". This theme revolves around the role of context scaffolding in enhancing listening skill among learners.

This theme is corroborated by direct quotations from the participants, providing valuable insights into how context scaffolding positively affects their listening skill. Participant 1 (P1) described a notable improvement in listening related to using context scaffolding, stating, *"I was always anxious about situations in which I had to perform listening skill. With the role of context scaffolding, my listening skill has been enhanced. I found this skill more comfortable"*. P1's testimony highlights how context scaffolding contributes to higher listening skill for learners.

Participant 4 (P4) attested to the positive effect of context scaffolding on learning listening, expressing, *"Context scaffolding makes me more capable in learning listening. I am at ease with this method"*. P4's perspective underscores that context scaffolding fosters listening skill.

Participant 3 (P3) emphasized the effectiveness of context scaffolding in listening skill control, attributing it to the teacher's support: *"Context scaffolding is effective in listening skill control. The teacher behaves friendly, guides students, and helps them. All these play a role in helping students learn listening positively"*. P3's statement underscores the importance of context scaffolding in helping learners learn listening skill more easily.

Concerning the second qualitative research question 'What are Iranian EFL learners' perceptions of the effect of cognitive scaffolding on their listening comprehension performance, metacognitive awareness, and listening anxiety?', the following themes were extracted:

Theme 1. Making Listening Learning Quicker

The theme "Making Listening Learning Quicker" highlights the increased pace of learning listening experienced by participants through the use of cognitive scaffolding. Participant 1 (P1) noted the remarkable speed at which she could grasp listened materials when utilizing cognitive scaffolding, expressing, *"Learning listening is quicker when cognitive scaffolding is employed. Indeed, when I was asked to predict answers, take notes, and summarize the audio step by step, I understood the listening faster. So, it appears to me that I could absorb listened content more quickly within the cognitive scaffolding-based classroom"*.

Participant 3 (P3) echoed this sentiment, indicating that cognitive scaffolding made the process of learning listening quicker compared to traditional teaching method: *"I find that I grasp listening more quickly through cognitive scaffolding. In fact, it demands less time to learn listening via cognitive scaffolding, especially in contrast to traditional classroom approaches"*.

Participant 5 (P5) highlighted the specific aspect of quicker acquisition of listening skill through cognitive scaffolding: *"Cognitive scaffolding contributes to a rapid learning process for*

listening. In essence, when cognitive scaffolding is implemented, the acquisition of listening skill occurs more rapidly".

Theme 2. Increasing Control over Listening

The theme "Increasing Control over Listening" emphasizes the shift towards higher control over listening when utilizing cognitive scaffolding. Participant 5 (P5) highlighted the greater degree of control learners have over listening in the cognitive scaffolding approach, emphasizing that the teacher is not the sole authority in the classroom: *"We have more control over listening in the cognitive scaffolding. That is to say, the teacher is not the most important person in the class when cognitive scaffolding is implemented. We ourselves should actively engage in learning listening"*.

Participant 3 (P3) stressed the increased control students have in cognitive scaffolding settings over listening: *"The control of listening rests more on students' shoulders than on teachers in cognitive scaffolding. It demands active cooperation from students. Consequently, students are required to control listening process"*.

Participant 4 (P4) described the dominant role of students in cognitive scaffolding, emphasizing that learners are tasked with various responsibilities: *"The role of students takes on a more dominant position in cognitive scaffolding. We are expected to perform a variety of tasks in this method"*.

Theme 3. Increasing Attention

The theme "Increasing Attention" underscores the transformative impact of cognitive scaffolding on learners' attention to the learning of listening. Participant 1 (P1) shared how the cognitive scaffolding rekindled their attention to listening learning: *"By using cognitive scaffolding, I found myself more attentive to learn listening. I had grown weary of the traditional approach to learning English listening"*.

Participant 4 (P4) linked the increase in students' focus on learning listening to the cognitive scaffolding: *"Students' focus on learning listening is invigorated by cognitive scaffolding. Previous methods offer nothing new. Through cognitive scaffolding, my concentration is enhanced"*.

Participant 2 (P2) acknowledged how cognitive scaffolding ignited their concentration on learning listening: *"Concentration serves as a significant catalyst in learning listening, a subject that has been challenging for me. When I participated in cognitive scaffolding, my concentration on learning surged. I feel more concentrated"*.

As far as the third qualitative research question 'What are Iranian EFL learners' perceptions of the effect of metacognitive scaffolding on their listening comprehension performance, metacognitive awareness, and listening anxiety?', is concerned, the following themes were recognized in the data:

Theme 1. Increasing Self-Confidence

The theme "Increasing Self-Confidence" emphasizes the transformative effect of metacognitive scaffolding on learners' self-assurance in their ability to excel in the learning of listening.

Participant 4 (P4) described a boost in self-confidence when metacognitive scaffolding was employed, expressing a belief in their capability to master listening: *"I have greater confidence in my ability when metacognitive scaffolding is used. I feel that I am capable of learning listening"*.

Participant 2 (P2) noted an increase in self-confidence attributed to their active participation in metacognitive scaffolding: *"I engage in English classes with the metacognitive scaffolding method with greater self-confidence. This might be attributed to the fact that I have a more active role in the cognitive scaffolding classroom"*.

Participant 3 (P3) echoed a similar sentiment, mentioning heightened confidence in their abilities within metacognitive scaffolding environments: *"I have greater confidence in my ability when metacognitive scaffolding is used. I should state that when the teacher asked the class to plan how to listen, monitor their understanding, and evaluate their performance after the task, I felt more confident about my listening ability. In fact, I sense that I have the ability to learn English listening when classes are metacognitive scaffolding-based"*.

Theme 2. Increasing Autonomy

The recurring theme "Increasing Autonomy" underscores the transformation of learners into more independent persons within the context of metacognitive scaffolding instruction. Participant 4 (P4) expressed an enhanced sense of independence when engaging in metacognitive scaffolding-oriented classes: *"I feel more independent in classes where the metacognitive scaffolding method is used. The process of metacognitive scaffolding makes me better prepared and more self-reliant"*.

Participant 2 (P2) shared that metacognitive scaffolding provided her with a taste of autonomy, allowing for more independent learning: *"Metacognitive scaffolding imparts a sense of autonomy. I can engage in more independent learning when dynamic instruction is employed"*.

Participant 3 (P3) noted that one of the characteristics of metacognitive scaffolding is its enhancement of independence, resulting in reduced reliance on the teacher: *"A notable characteristic of metacognitive scaffolding is the enhancement of independence. It leads to reduced reliance on the teacher. We are encouraged to try more and learn in our own way".*

Theme 3. Increasing Enjoyment

The common theme, "Increasing Enjoyment" highlights the positive impact of metacognitive scaffolding on the enjoyment levels of learners during the process of listening learning. Participant 5 (P5) expressed a heightened sense of enjoyment associated with the metacognitive scaffolding approach: *"I experience more enjoyment with the metacognitive scaffolding approach. Listening learning becomes less monotonous with this teaching method, and I find greater enjoyment in listening learning".*

Participant 1 (P1) conveyed her preference for metacognitive scaffolding due to the enjoyable and interesting activities it offers: *"I am fond of metacognitive scaffolding because its activities are more enjoyable and interesting. There is a high level of enjoyment in learning listening through metacognitive scaffolding".*

Participant 3 (P3) characterized the metacognitive scaffolding method as exciting, noting the novelty of the approach and her enjoyment of learning listening through this method: *"I found the metacognitive scaffolding method to be exciting. It is genuinely interesting, and I derive enjoyment from learning listening through this method".*

With regard to the fourth qualitative research question 'What are Iranian EFL learners' perceptions of the effect of procedural scaffolding on their listening comprehension performance, metacognitive awareness, and listening anxiety?', the themes extracted are as follows:

Theme 1. Enhancing Teacher-Students Relations

The recurring theme "Enhancing Teacher-Students Relations" highlights how procedural scaffolding fosters stronger relations between teacher and students within learning environment. Participant 4 (P4) noted that procedural scaffolding method provides students with the opportunity to share knowledge with their teacher and classmates, facilitating increased relationships: *"In the procedural scaffolding method, students have the chance to exchange knowledge and participate in activities with their teacher and peers, leading to enhanced relations".*

Participant 3 (P3) emphasized the importance of students being in contact with their teacher in procedural scaffolding-based classes: *"Procedural scaffolding-based classes are structured in*

a way that encourages students to connect with their teacher and learn from her experiences. I derive valuable insights from teacher's hints". As Participant 6 (P6) also reported: *"Group discussions and teacher guidance made our relationship stronger."* Besides, Participant 7 (P7) stated that the exchange of ideas with classmates enhanced the classroom environment.

Participant 2 (P2) discussed the inherent need for students to be interconnected in the procedural scaffolding method, where collaboration and discussions are encouraged: *"In the procedural scaffolding method, it is imperative for us to be connected with one another. We are taught to support one another, engage in discussions, and collaborate"*. Participant 8 (P8) also emphasized the supportive role of teacher hints in doing activities.

Theme 2. Enhancing Problem-Solving Ability

The recurring theme "Enhancing Problem-Solving Ability" shows that procedural scaffolding improves learners' ability in solving problems. Participant 5 (P5) expressed that procedural scaffolding helps her find new ways to solve learning problems: *"Procedural scaffolding helps me solve learning problems more easily. It exposes me to new solutions for old problems"*.

Participant 1 (P1) noted the role of procedural scaffolding in enhancement of her problem-solving skill: *"Procedural scaffolding opens new paths for problem-solving. It empowers me in solving the challenges"*. Participant 3 (P3) also commented that: *"Working with classmates helped me find new solutions."* Moreover, Participant 6 (P6) emphasized that organized procedures helped her to overcome listening problems.

Theme 3. Enhancing Reflective Behavior

The theme "Enhancing Reflective Behavior" highlights how procedural scaffolding encourages learners to behave reflectively. Participant 5 (P5) remarked that procedural scaffolding stimulates students to act reflectively: *"I noticed how procedural scaffolding helped me to act reflectively. I learned reflection on my learning and reflective learning"*.

Participant 2 (P2) observed the role of procedural scaffolding in triggering reflective activities in her, expressing: *"Procedural scaffolding is a key to reflectivity and reflective practice. I think that I have become more reflective than before now and this is due to procedural scaffolding"*.

Participant 1 (P1) stated the reflective orientation induced in her after acquaintance with procedural scaffolding: *"With procedural scaffolding, a feeling of reflective thought was induced in me which was strange to me. I believe that procedural scaffolding is well associated with critical orientation"*. Besides, Participant 4 (P4) noted: *"After discussions, I began to think about my*

mistakes." Participant 7 (P7) also explained the development of a habit to reflect upon performance.

Finally, on the fifth qualitative research question 'What are Iranian EFL learners' perceptions of the effect of motivational scaffolding on their listening comprehension performance, metacognitive awareness, and listening anxiety?', the outcome of thematic analysis was the following themes:

Theme 1. Increasing Motivation

The recurring theme "Increasing Motivation" shows how motivational scaffolding increases students' motivation and motivates them to learn listening. Participant 3 (P3) expressed that motivational scaffolding was a useful strategy in motivating her when learning listening: *"Motivational scaffolding, to me, was a useful strategy for motivating me during learning listening comprehension. This strategy targets motivation of students"*.

Participant 2 (P2) felt a higher level of motivation as a result of being exposed to motivational scaffolding: *"Being exposed to motivational scaffolding had an outstanding achievement for me and that was a higher level of motivation. I found myself more motivated and eager than before"*.

Participant 5 (P5) referred to her heightened level of motivation after being provided with motivational scaffolding: *"I was not that much motivated to learn listening and considered it useless. The outcome of motivational scaffolding was my heightened motivation level"*.

Participant 6 (P6) said: *"Encouragement from the teacher helped me to become more motivated."* Participant 6 (P7) also reflected: *"Positive feedback helped me to feel that I could improve"*. Moreover, in one of the Participant's view, positive comments helped her to change her attitude towards listening.

Theme 2. Increasing Learner Interest

The theme "Increasing Learner Interest" signals enhanced interest of learners in learning listening as a consequence of being taught with motivational scaffolding. Participant 4 (P4) approved that her interest in learning listening was enhanced with motivational scaffolding: *"Motivational scaffolding enhanced my interest in learning listening. Listening is now an interesting thing to be learned for me"*.

Participant 1 (P1) admitted the positive influence of motivational scaffolding on her interest in listening: *"The positive effect of motivational scaffolding on my interest in listening is remarkable. I can sense it clearly. I attribute this to motivational scaffolding"*.

Participant 5 (P5) noticed how motivational scaffolding helped her have interest in listening: *"Motivational scaffolding made me interested in motivational scaffolding. It increased my interest in listening very well"*.

Theme 3. Increasing Learner Engagement

The theme "Increasing Learner Engagement" indicates an increase in learners' engagement due to motivational scaffolding. Participant 3 (P3) conceived that she has been more engaged in learning listening because of motivational scaffolding: *"This technique has led to my engagement in learning listening. I engage more in class tasks and activities. I like to participate in class activities"*.

Participant 2 (P2) perceived that motivational scaffolding improved her engagement in learning process: *"Motivational scaffolding truly improved my engagement in learning process. I am involved in learning. Through motivational scaffolding, my involvement has been improved"*.

Participant 4 (P4) touched motivational scaffolding as a catalyst for enhancement of her engagement: *"The best description I can present for motivational scaffolding is a catalyst. It is a catalyst for enhancement of my engagement. It stimulates my participation in listening activities"*.

Table 1 shows the frequency and percentage of the extracted themes:

Table 1.

Frequency and Percentage of the Themes in the Interviews

Theme	Frequency	Percentage
Reducing Listening Anxiety	4	80%
Increasing Willingness to Learn Listening	3	60%
Enhancing Listening Skill	4	80%
Making Listening Learning Quicker	3	60%
Increasing Control over Listening	3	65%
Increasing Attention	4	80%
Increasing Self-Confidence	3	60%
Increasing Autonomy	5	100%
Increasing Enjoyment	3	60%
Enhancing Teacher-Students Relations	4	80%
Enhancing Problem-Solving Ability	3	60%
Enhancing Reflective Behavior	3	60%
Increasing Motivation	3	60%
Increasing Learner Interest	4	80%
Increasing Learner Engagement	3	60%

As illustrated in the Table 1, all the themes were expressed by more than 50% of the participants.

5. Discussion

This study explored Iranian learners' perceptions of the effect of context, cognitive, metacognitive, procedural and motivational scaffolding on their listening comprehension, listening anxiety and metacognitive awareness. According to the results, the following themes were extracted for the effect of context scaffolding: Reducing Listening Anxiety, Increasing Willingness to Learn Listening, and Enhancing Listening Skill. Moreover, Making Listening Learning Quicker, Increasing Control over Listening, and Increasing Attention were extracted for the effect of cognitive scaffolding. Further, for the effect of metacognitive scaffolding, the following themes were extracted: Increasing Self-Confidence, Increasing Autonomy, and Increasing Enjoyment. Additionally, the themes related to the effect of procedural scaffolding were Enhancing Teacher-Students Relations, Enhancing Problem-Solving Ability, and Enhancing Reflective Behavior. Finally, Increasing Motivation, Increasing Learner Interest, and Increasing Learner Engagement were extracted for the effect of motivational scaffolding.

These findings are consistent with the studies by Neshaeemoghaddam et al. (2025), Ahmadi Safa and Motaghi (2021), and Karimi et al. (2020) wherein different scaffolding strategies proved to be effective in enhancing the listening comprehension skills of EFL learners. To interpret these results, potentially, learners prefer scaffolding strategies and regard them instructive, innovative, and effective in identifying problems, enhancing comprehension, increasing their preparedness for listening tasks, and improvement of metacognitive knowledge. Moreover, scaffolding enhances learners' self-efficacy and self-confidence (Tajadini et al., 2022) and this may contribute to significant improvements in their listening comprehension. Additionally, probably, learners' listening anxiety has been reduced under the effect of scaffolding. An outcome of this reduction can be enhancement of listening comprehension. Furthermore, scaffolding has the potential to increase learners' attention and motivation both of which can positively affect listening comprehension.

It is worth noting that in spite of research scarcity on the effect of scaffolding techniques on listening comprehension, literature is rife with studies which proved the effect of ZPD-based interventions on different language skills including listening skill. Among such studies, those by Ableeva (2010), Ahmed Abdel-Al Ibrahim et al. (2023), Ashraf et al. (2016), Barabadi et al. (2018), and Shabani (2011) can be mentioned. Moreover, congruent with this study, Birjandi et al. (2013), and Zhang and Xi (2022) confirmed the effect of ZPD-laden treatments which are embedded in scaffolding on metacognitive awareness of EFL learners.

To justify the results, it is worth noting that learners' positive attitudes towards the use of scaffolding (Ahmadi Safa & Rozati, 2016) may have mediated the positive effect of scaffolding on their metacognitive awareness. What is more, scaffolding strategies make learning listening quicker. This in turn leads to enhancement of learners' metacognitive awareness. In addition, with the use of different types of scaffolding, learners' control over listening is enhanced. Consequently, their metacognitive awareness improves. Last but not least, using scaffolding leads to a remarkable increase in learners' engagement. This in turn can lead to improvement of their metacognitive awareness.

Finally, the findings resonate with the studies by Bracket et al. (2010) and Mosleh et al. (2022) wherein the positive influence of ZPD-based teaching techniques on anxiety of learners was proved. To account for these results, different kinds of scaffolding increase learners' willingness to learn listening. Willingness is opposite to anxiety. Accordingly, learners' listening anxiety decreases. Besides, as shown above, scaffolding leads to improvement of listening comprehension. When listening comprehension increases, listening anxiety decreases. Moreover, learners' autonomy, interest and enjoyment are enhanced due to exposure to different kinds of scaffolding. This is contrary to anxiety in listening. Also, using scaffolding calls for better teacher-students' relations. This contributes to a considerable reduction in listening anxiety. Finally, scaffolding enhances learners' reflective behavior. When learners reflect more, they become reasonably less anxious.

6. Conclusion

According to the results, it is concluded that Iranian EFL learners perceive that context, cognitive, metacognitive, procedural and motivational scaffolding has positive contribution to their listening comprehension performance, metacognitive awareness and listening anxiety. Therefore, different types of scaffolding are helpful for learners in coping with the problems they have with listening comprehension performance, metacognitive awareness and listening anxiety. Moreover, it is concluded that these types of scaffolding differentially affect Iranian EFL learners' listening comprehension performance, metacognitive awareness and listening anxiety via making learner more willing to learn listening, making them more agent and attentive, making them more self-confident, autonomous, reflective, and engaged. Finally, it is concluded that through different types of scaffolding, learners' interest, enjoyment and motivation is enhanced.

The results of this study may be helpful for EFL teachers in teaching English listening.

They may use scaffolding to provide learners with the ability to use class time to employ collaborative practices and conversation to enhance skills, and encourage increased collaboration amongst them. They may also guide learners' learning and teaching processes via scaffolding. EFL learners may benefit from this study in coping with the problems they have in learning English listening. They can also resort to different types of scaffolding in dealing with their listening anxiety. Moreover, they may focus on more effective types of scaffolding so that their metacognitive awareness is considerably enhanced. EFL researchers may find new research avenues by being inspired by the findings of the present study. They may replicate the present study taking its limitations and delimitations into account. They may also broaden the scope of this study by tackling similar topics. EFL curriculum planners may operationalize the insights taken from this study in developing future curricula in a way that scaffolding strategies are incorporated in them.

On the limitations, the participants could not be selected by random sampling. Therefore, they might not be representative of the target population. Furthermore, the treatment period of the study could not be so long. About the delimitations, the context of the study was a private language institute in Iran. In addition, among different scaffolding strategies, this study was concerned with cognitive, context, metacognitive, procedural and motivational strategies since they have been less investigated than the other strategies. Finally, just female students participated in this study. With a view to these limitations and delimitations, future studies can replicate this study to add to the validity of the findings.

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Appendix

Semi-Structured Interview Prompts

1. What is your idea about the effect of context scaffolding on your listening comprehension, listening anxiety and metacognitive awareness? Please explain about advantages, disadvantages, challenges, etc.
2. What is your idea about the effect of cognitive scaffolding on your listening comprehension, listening anxiety and metacognitive awareness? Please explain about advantages, disadvantages, challenges, etc.
3. What is your idea about the effect of metacognitive scaffolding on your listening comprehension, listening anxiety and metacognitive awareness? Please explain about advantages, disadvantages, challenges, etc.
4. What is your idea about the effect of procedural scaffolding on your listening comprehension, listening anxiety and metacognitive awareness? Please explain about advantages, disadvantages, challenges, etc.
5. What is your idea about the effect of motivational scaffolding on your listening comprehension, listening anxiety and metacognitive awareness? Please explain about advantages, disadvantages, challenges, etc.

